Ringing success for telco in customer care

StarHub has improved its service quality and gained customer loyalty

BY CHERYL ONG & YEO SAM JO

TWO months ago, StarHub customers who had been anxious to get their hands on the new BlackBerry Storm had the touchscreen phones delivered to their doorsteps – on the very day they were launched.

They were among the first to benefit from a new service launched by the telco this year, which lets customers pre-order the latest phones before they go on sale, and have them delivered to their homes.

This saves customers from having to travel to and queue at the customer service centres to collect the phones.

Such efforts have helped StarHub emerge tops among mobile telecommunications companies in a survey here that measures customer satisfaction levels across various industries.

Respondents to the survey by the Singapore Management University's Institute of Service Excellence (ISES) were asked to rate telcos, on a scale of one to 10, in areas such as the quality of service and how well their expectations were met.

ISES director Marcus Lee said StarHub did very well last year with its score of 69.1 out of 100, beating the national level of customer satisfaction of 67.8. In the eyes of its customers, he said, StarHub had improved on the quality of its service and garnered greater customer loyalty, compared to 2007 when the first survey was done.

It chalked up 3.6 points more for customer loyalty last year than in 2007, while its competitors' scores dipped by about 2.5 points each in the same period.

“StarHub is obviously doing something right to keep its customers,” Mr Lee said. “The results also tell us that to telco customers, the quality of the service or product is more important than the branding or the price that they pay.”

On its high scores, StarHub said it trained its employees about its products and services well, and encouraged them to go the extra mile for their customers.

Some customers agreed.

Product executive Daniel Ng, 24, who has been the telco’s customer for four years, said: “I find the staff approachable and friendly. When I call the hotline, they’re able to diagnose the problem and explain quickly what I should do.”

Housewife Shirley Yeo, 30, said that a StarHub customer service officer helped her to decide on a handset for her sister after comparing features of different business-friendly phones her sister preferred. “He was very helpful. If it weren’t for the explanation, I wouldn’t have been able to choose one,” she said.

But some customers griped about long waiting times over the hotline.

Regional business development manager Clarence Chan, 44, said he preferred to settle his billing inquiries in person at a service centre rather than over the phone because he usually has to wait 15 minutes to 30 minutes before the call is picked up.

StarHub’s head of customer service Diana Lee declined to reveal the average waiting time for hotline callers, but acknowledged there was room for improvement. “We know we have our share of bad customer service too. So we need to always improve on our craft.”

The telco plans to recruit more staff for its hotline and is working on new ways to let customers get what they need without having to wait for calls to be answered.

In 2005, it introduced an automated system that lets customers check their contract expiry dates or other subscription-related queries via the hotline, SMS and the Internet, so that they no longer have to wait for a long time on the hotline just to get a simple question answered.