

Website: Light Reading India

Date: July 31, 2013

Alok Kumar: Chief Service Delivery Officer, Aircel

July 31, 2013

[Danish Khan](#)

Indian telcos are alive to the fact that the market is moving beyond adding subscriber numbers and the focus is now on utilizing new technologies and tools to enhance the service quality and thereby reduce customer churns and switchovers.

In the long run, companies that understand the needs of customers will stay ahead in an increasingly competitive market.

Understanding the new trends, Aircel is gearing up to provide better services to its customers by better leveraging big-data and social media tools.

With 3G spectrum in 13 circles and BWA spectrum in eight circles, Aircel is laying stress on building a 360° framework to manage customer experience and create compelling experiences to enhance customer loyalty by using BI systems to deliver a consistent and branded experience.

In an interaction with *Light Reading India*, Alok Kumar, Chief Service Delivery Officer, Aircel talks at length about the company's strategy to enhance customer experience and lower operational costs along with use of data analytics and big data to perform targeted actions.

How is Aircel building a framework to manage customer experience and to enhance customer loyalty?

At Aircel, customer service delivery works on the philosophy of care, serve and delight where care reflects our attitude, serve reflects our objective and delight reflects the opportunity that stands before us to serve our customers better. It is this philosophy that has laid the bricks of our 360° service strategy.

There are four key elements that we emphasize upon to enhance customer loyalty. The first and the most important one is to become a listening organization. We ensure that we gather continuous feedback through multiple means such as social media and blog monitoring. We also pay attention to the direct customer feedback that we receive via channels such as emails, our call centers and through our website. In line with this, we also recently launched our 'Customer First' program. We believe that

creating a 'Customer Listening' strategy in the organization is a key to organization's long-term survival strategy and there is no better way to do this than spending time engaging with our customers. Therefore, under this program, every manager in the company is mandated to be spending half a day at Aircel Retail partners or POS this year.

Equally important is 'Being Responsive' to the customer feedback. We have customer feedback review committees at circle level, chaired by the circle business heads and centrally we run project LIFE (Let's Improve For Ever) to review and resolve those concerns at our corporate office that require complex solutioning and organization wide changes.

We are also continuously innovating and enhancing service channels to cater to the demands of each customer segment. For instance, we have *vernacular IVRs* to help serve our rural subscriber base and USSD and SMS based Self Help tools that particularly help the semi-urban customers. We also have made available the online self-help tools over web, social media and WAP for our next generation customers. Our segmented service support such as online chat for 3G customers, exclusive helpline and service support for BlackBerry, iPhone and HNI customers have also helped ensure quick, efficient and satisfactory customer service.

In addition, we are also gauging experience improvement through external researches conducted by specialized agencies, business intelligence tools and assurance audits of key service touch points. Internal assurance audits for other business processes and service channels and monthly tracking of customer interaction insights are also undertaken to ensure compelling experiences to enhance customer loyalty.

How important is training of employees to build a robust customer culture for delivering service quality?

It is absolutely imperative to have the employees of an organization contribute to customer service at every instant possible. Training of employees, to align them to customer culture, is paramount across frontline and non-customer interfacing roles. We have a concept of 'internal customer' which aims at creating and ensuring satisfaction at all points of the process delivery to help make Aircel an organization aligned to deliver 'experience' to end customers. Aircel Customer Experience (ACE) is our training program and reward and recognition scheme that inculcates this 'service culture.' Besides ACE, under our 'Customer First' program, every manager in the company is mandated to be spending half a day at our retail partners or POS this year which is helping us to create a 'customer listening' strategy.

How is Aircel making use of data analytics and big data to perform targeted actions?

We have invested in business intelligence systems such as Terradata and Business Objects that help us in mining customer insights through big data analysis. There is monumental real-time data that gets

generated in the telecom industry based on interaction history, usage and location. We have built 'data marts' for various management reporting and insights gathering that help us in focused development of new products, retention tools, and campaigns. These tools have also enabled us to view customer interaction insights at a granular level, which we are now in the process of directly linking customer experience with the KPIs of respective cross-functional teams.

What are Aircel's strategies to deliver a consistent and branded customer experience across various customer touch points and channels?

We are constantly working towards ensuring consistency of experience delivery across our customer base in India. We are doing multiple things to achieve this, such as automation around touch-point processes to remove variability and creating robust SOP for top 30 customer interaction reasons. We have also put in place a framework of quality assurance to periodically audit critical touch-point processes for conformance to defined SOPs. Besides, we have developed various self-help options for consumers to fulfil their service needs making them self-reliant and reducing their dependency on human assistance for service support. However, our customer interfacing staff is provided continental training from time to time which helps us maintain consistency in delivering customer experience.

What are the strategies to lower operational costs while increasing service levels in customer contact centers?

Contact centers' costs are driven by three factors—call volume, handling time and price (commercial contracts with service providers). Therefore, our strategy to ensure cost optimization without affecting service levels involves working on all these factors.

With an aim to reduce call volume, we are continuously enhancing our self-help channels and are focused on driving customer education to reduce dependency on call centers for service support. As a result of our efforts, today more than 80 percent of our customer interactions are handled by self-help channels such as IVR and USSD. With the help of business intelligence tools, we have introduced monthly customer insights to track 'avoidable calls' at our call center, ensuring continuous effort in reducing these calls through focused actions. Multiple projects have been undertaken to reduce 'repeat calls' at centers by creating relevant SOPs, process corrections and education campaigns.

To reduce handling time, we have successfully created SOPs for top 30 call scenarios and have trained all representatives on these to reduce handling time. We have also enabled our knowledge base to push information over SMS to customers to reduce or eliminate the time spent by customer service representatives in dictating information to customers.

And to deal with the cost reduction aspect, our premium and data support call centers have been centralized and are now controlled directly at the corporate level to ensure service standardization at

lower cost. In addition, we are also enhancing our data support capabilities to reduce dependency on high-cost data centers.

-Danish Khan, Correspondent [Light Reading India](#)