



European Guidelines

FOR CUSTOMER CONTACT CENTRES



As part of the European Social Dialogue, the social partners — UNI Europa and the European Telecommunication Network Operators' Association (ETNO) — have made an agreement on guidelines for the operation of customer contact centres in the telecom sector. These Guidelines are contained in the following agreement made by the social partners.

Telecommunications Social Dialogue Committee

Customer Contact Centres are an important part of the telecommunications sector and typically handle a range of activities including sales, service and fault management.

UNI and ETNO, the Social Partners in the sector, aim to work together to develop strategies that encourage Centres to operate to the principles of quality employment and a high standard of customer service.

UNI and ETNO want all stakeholders in the community to share the benefits of the continued growth of customer contact centre operations.

Those Customer Contact Centres that are genuinely committed to the job satisfaction and development of their employees are the future of the business. This commitment will help to provide the high quality of service that customers demand. UNI and ETNO have a common goal in promoting a posi-

tive future for Customer Contact Centre employment. In particular, we have a common interest in encouraging investment in education and skills development.

The work of a customer service professional can be fast paced and demanding. Customer service professionals must have high-levels of communication and problem solving skills. They must be very knowledgeable about the products and services they sell. They have to be able to manipulate a variety of databases that store, organise and collect information, which must be accessed efficiently to provide quality service to the customer.

Experts at navigating online information, these professionals provide significant value to the customer.

Essential to the success of Customer Contact Centres is the commitment to flexibility by both the company and its employees.

Flexibility is essential to respond to customers' requirements and to guarantee the success of the Customer Contact Centres; it is also needed to assure good working conditions for the employees. A flexible approach to resourcing will involve the employment of different demographic groups best suited to different attendance patterns. Additionally, employees who have a feeling of well-being and security are likely to be committed to the customer and to the company.

Therefore companies should consider how to help their employees ease the pressures of balancing work and family responsibilities.

Quality customer service and quality job opportunities depend on investment in the business, including efforts to recruit and retain the best available professional customer service staff and provide ongoing skill development and training, re-training and career opportunities.



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These Guidelines are a set of broad principles relating to the customer contact business. The aim of the Guidelines is to set a high business standard and recognise those Customer Contact Centres that are committed to the key principles embodied in that standard.

We are convinced that those that commit to the Guidelines will be the leaders in the field and as such will be attractive to business partners, potential employees, employment agencies, the community and their customers.

Our objective is to encourage all employers operating Customer Contact Centres to commit to these guidelines.



Key Principles

- ▶ Provision of excellent quality of service to customers in line with demand.
- ▶ Provision of high quality workplace conditions.
- ▶ Contact centre performance targets to be based on an approach including call quality and customer satisfaction as well as quantitative measures on call control and handling time.
- ▶ Access to best practice contact centre systems, knowledge management and technology to enhance the service provided to customers.
- ▶ Priority, where possible, to retaining and re-training existing staff in the event that new technologies or products are introduced that require new skills or qualifications.
- ▶ Excellent standard of people management including regular coaching, appraisals and training and development plans, including training for managers and team leaders in personnel policies and practices, particularly with regards to the effective management of stress.
- ▶ Work organisation that takes account of relevant Works Councils and worker representatives, national legislation and collective agreements to enable communication of changes in company policy and product development prior to implementation.
- ▶ Information and consultation of relevant workers' representatives on customer contact centre strategy and policies.
- ▶ Staffing levels and attendance patterns which provide an effective balance between the needs of customers and the individuals employed in the contact centres.
- ▶ The application of all relevant European Union and national legislation and collective agreements.
- ▶ Respect for core labour standards as set down in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.
- ▶ Customer Contact Centre professionals must be made aware of any performance monitoring arrangements used.
- ▶ Customer Contact Centre professionals have rights to trade union membership, including the right to communicate with and to receive communications from trade unions and works councils, according to relevant laws and collective agreements.



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Benefits

UNI and ETNO believe the implementation of the principles above is both advantageous to customer service professionals and the businesses as a whole as the following table illustrates.

Customer service professionals

- ▶ Gain job satisfaction from providing good service.
- ▶ Receive appropriate training.
- ▶ Receive appropriate career development.
- ▶ Work in a comfortable and safe environment.

Customer Contact Centre

- ▶ Gains a reputation as a provider of reliable and quality service.
- ▶ Has access to a pool of well-trained and professional employees.
- ▶ Retains experienced employees due to reduced staff turnover.

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