

Customer Care: Make It Personal, Direct

Are you looking for a better way to resolve customer issues such as missed delivery dates, product quality or components damaged in shipment? If your company's typical response is marked by handoffs, delays and miscommunication, there's more at stake than timely resolution. You need to build long-term, collaborative relationships with customers to ensure continuing market success. Folks at Daman Products Company in Mishawaka, IN (manufacturer of manifolds) counsel that personalized attention to an identified problem and resolution creates shared understanding with customers and accountability so that issues are addressed quickly and effectively. "We interact with our customers using CRM (customer relationship management) software about issues that arise," said Neil Henderson, continuous improvement manager. "We can track issues affecting our customers such as materials, damage in shipment, design issues or any other quality issue." The company's manifolds meet customers' quality expectations 99.67 percent of the time; any exception is viewed as an opportunity to improve its processes as it tracks and resolves the issue.

"We are focused on accurate information and rapid resolution of issues," said Thom Sibley, production team leader. He noted that a customer complaint is assigned to a production team leader or whoever is responsible for the quality issue. That individual contacts the customer, documents details about the issue, follows up and tracks resolution, and then contacts the customer about related details. This approach helps internal teams such as inside sales, production and purchasing to be customer-facing, enhancing relationships with customers, according to Henderson.

"Our Salesforce CRM software enables us to document all issues, cross-referencing information about customer name, type of error or other aspects," Sibley said. "Our design team leader is notified if a design issue is involved, for example, so he can handle all of the related issues." Before the CRM implementation in early 2015, "We didn't communicate well among customers, sales, manufacturing, designers and others inside and outside the company," Sibley said. "We were putting out fires. Now we are able to resolve issues more quickly and accurately; this is a more strategic way to communicate about issues every single time with customers and document what's going on."

Corrective actions are tracked and can be accessed at any time. Henderson said the CRM software highlights any recurring issues, enabling Daman to effectively address them. For example, the company recently reviewed and updated its specifications for packing components after multiple issues were logged for damage in shipping.

"By utilizing CRM software, we are gaining visibility. If there is an error on the factory floor or other issues arise, we can do a detailed analysis and customer resolution," said Gordon Weiler, vice president of sales, noting the potential for delays and frustration caused in a more traditional, function-to-function handoff process. "The greatest benefit from this approach is that our customers are hearing about resolution directly from the person who is responsible for quality issues, creating collaboration and partnership with them."

Editor's note: For information about AME regional events focused on people-centric leadership and workforce issues, employee engagement, lean implementation and other topics, check ame.org. Watch for details about tours, presentations, workshops and special interest sessions planned for the AME 2017 "Get Engaged" annual conference in Boston, October 9-13, at www.ame.org/Boston.

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