

Irish going online for customer queries

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By Ciara O'Brien

Irish consumers are ditching pricey call centres in favour of online access to their accounts, a new survey has revealed.

Rather than being put off by security scare stories, research from IT management firm CA shows 86 percent of Irish consumers are now conducting their business online with at least one commercial organisation, such as a bank or telecommunications provider.

The convenience and cost of online customer service are the two of the main factors luring more and more consumers

to deal with businesses online, with almost 60 percent citing reliability of service as a reason for switching mediums.

And telecoms firms should be on their guard -- the same survey revealed that bad service is enough for 55 percent of consumers to switch providers.

The survey, carried out for CA by Vanson Bourne in Ireland, compared online and call centre customer service experiences.

Some 60 percent of the 222 Irish people interviewed said they dealt solely online with their banks, whilst 32 percent opted to interact with their credit card companies only on the internet.

The figures were equally promising for telecoms and mobile firms, with some 58 percent of people preferring to go online to deal with their service providers.

Furthermore, 32 percent use the internet to interact with leisure and entertainment providers (eg cinemas), while insurance companies account for 22 percent.

"There are now a large number of people who are using online as their sole means of interacting with an organisation," said Frank Kennedy, Ireland Country Manager at CA.

"This is as a result of an increasing number of organisations setting up PRNs (premium rate numbers) and moving away from free phone 1800 services. Consumers now view call centres as a premium service and have high service level expectations associated with them, but call centres are failing to raise the bar."

This opinion is echoed by Bradley de Souza, industry development director for telecoms at CA. "People are much more price sensitive than they were a few years ago," he explained. De Souza said that there was now a modest barrier to entry when it came to call centres.

But the survey also revealed additional problems. A worryingly low 8 percent of people found getting information from call centres on additional products and services a snap. Meanwhile, 69 percent of people have been asked to call back because the provider's systems have been slow or have gone down. With more than half of consumers willing to jump ship to telecoms rivals for bad service, companies would do well to keep an eye on the quality of customer service.

It seems that the government sector also has a lot more work to do, with only 19 percent of



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people choosing to interact solely online with government or public services

De Souza put this low figure down to ease of use. "In general government has a poor record of delivering IT projects to budget and to any great success," he told Electric News.

"I believe the services can be difficult and tricky to use, can fail very often and are not consistent from one government department to another."

This is often more problematic at local government level, he said.

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