maplewave

HOW TO CREATE OUTSTANDING TELCO SALESPEOPLE

Executive Summary

In today's digital world, online channels are more popular than ever. With just a few clicks, shoppers can buy almost anything – from groceries, knickknacks, and services...to even cars.

So, it's not surprising that many consider brick and mortar stores to be obsolete. While it's true that retail is changing, physical stores will always offer the one thing that can't be replicated online: the human experience.

Today's customers want to be inspired by their store visit; they want to interact with items, receive personalized service, and be entertained – all at the same time.

Great salespeople are key to bringing this experience to life, and the stakes are high; the quality of their performance impacts how customers feel about the business, how much money they spend, and whether they will return in the future.

Unfortunately, many telcos struggle to offer a compelling experience. Faced with inexperienced employees, high turnover, and complicated products and systems, it's no wonder that their customer satisfaction lags behind other industries.

To be successful, telcos need to implement a comprehensive retail training strategy. This will help them build top-notch teams that will delight customers and drive profitability for years to come.

In this whitepaper, we will examine:

- What customers expect from their retail experience.
- Why the telco store experience falls short.
- The characteristics of an outstanding telco salesperson.
- How to develop a successful retail training strategy that promotes performance and retains employees.

01

Good Help is Hard to Find

02

Great Salespeople Aren't Born, They're Made

03

Developing a Successful Telco Retail Training Strategy

04

Conclusion

01 Good Help is Hard to Find

In the digital age, customers still crave human interaction; unfortunately, this is where they're let down the most.

The Modern Retail Experience

For years, industry experts have proclaimed **the death of the retail store**. With the explosion of online shopping and other digital channels, there has been an undeniable impact on brick and mortar retail.

According to **NBC**, a record 9,300 stores closed in the United States in 2019, an increase of 63%.

While it's true that online shopping has driven business from some brick and mortar locations, this is due to evolution, not extinction.

The Retail Store's Enduring Role

Physical stores aren't doomed to disappear completely for several reasons:

- **Preference to View/Try Products In-Person:**
  Online shopping's major downside is that products can't be physically touched, inspected, or tried. According to **Bizain**, this factor was the number one reason for shopping in-store, as cited by 56% of respondents. Barring a major advancement in technology, customers who like to "try before they buy" will continue to flock to physical stores for the foreseeable future.

- **Desire for Human Interaction:**
  Despite the explosion of all-things-digital, consumers still crave a personal touch when they shop. According to **PricewaterhouseCoopers**, 82% of U.S. and 74% of non-U.S. consumers value human interaction and want more of it in the future. While online shopping may be convenient, it has a hard time competing with the personal experience of a face-to-face interaction.

- **Stores Are a Key Touchpoint for Many Omnichannel Journeys:**
  Today's consumers want to shop when and where they want. By adopting an omnichannel approach, customers can seamlessly interact with different touchpoints during the sale in a way that's convenient for them. The physical store is a key touchpoint for many omnichannel journeys, such as **click and collect**. According to **Forbes**, 68% of consumers use click and collect, blending the benefits of online shopping with the convenience of immediate in-store pickup. Not only do customers love this way of shopping – it's profitable too. While customers are in store, 85% make an additional purchase. By adopting an omnichannel approach, digital and physical channels complement each other, rather than compete.

80% of Americans say knowledgeable help and friendly service are among the most important elements of a positive customer experience.

– PricewaterhouseCoopers

The Evolving Store Experience

Although brick and mortar stores have staying power, customer expectations are much higher than they used to be. As a result, stores must evolve from 'a place to transact' to 'a place to have an experience'.

Many factors go into a great experience, including supporting technology, eye-popping design, and entertainment. How high are expectations today? Just look at **CNET's tour** of Apple's newly remodeled New York flagship store to see how leading brands are setting the bar for retail experiences.

Glitz and glamour aside, what's often overlooked is that oh-so-important human element: the employees.

PricewaterhouseCoopers found that 80% of American consumers say speed, convenience, knowledgeable help and friendly service are the most important elements of a positive customer experience. And yet only 38% say the employees they interact with understand their needs.

So, despite craving helpful and friendly human interactions, this is the area where retailers let their customers down the most.

And this is especially true in telco.

Telco's Customer Service Problem

Telco has an indisputable customer experience problem. In 2019, **Marketing Week** and market research company MaritzCX benchmarked customer experience across 15 industries in the UK, including telco.

The researchers asked consumers how likely they were to recommend a company to their family or friends. They used the responses to calculate the **Net Promotor Score** (NPS) for each industry by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promotors.

NPS scores can range from -100 to 100. **Retently** classifies these scores as "Needs Improvement" (-100 to 0), "Good" (0 to 30), "Great" (30 to 70), and "Excellent" (70-100).

The telco industry's results were uninspiring with a barely positive NPS of just +2. Water, energy and logistics were the only industries who scored lower. In contrast, the tech industry scored the highest of all the groups with a score of 36.

It's clear that achieving a positive customer experience is a huge challenge, but also represents an incredible opportunity. So why are telcos falling so short?

Why Telco Experience Suffers

No single thing affects customer experience more than the quality of your salespeople. Your employees are the heart of your telco business and the frontline ambassadors of your brand. Their performance dictates how customers feel about your business, how much money they spend, and whether they will return in the future.

But being a good salesperson is not something that always comes naturally. Many telco salespeople have never received formal training and are missing crucial insights that prevent them from reaching their full potential. There are also other business factors at play which further impact the customer experience.

UK Telcos were found to have a Net Promotor Score of just +2; by contrast, the tech industry scored +36.

– Marketing Week

Lack of Experience

Young people are naturally drawn to retail; it's accessible, requires less experience and education than other industries, and its 24/7 schedule is amenable to modern-day demands and life dynamics. For 32% of Americans, a retail job was their first introduction to the workplace, according to the **National Retail Federation**.

Unsurprisingly, this translates into a workforce that is relatively inexperienced, and many employees lack the skills and experience they need to excel on the job.

Reflection:

- How experienced are your staff?

- What are you doing to increase their experience?

- How are you helping them learn from past challenges?

Turnover

Retail-based jobs are often considered as an entry-level position, so the chances of recruiting and retaining brilliant people in the long-term is slim.

According to the National Retail Federation, the **average turnover** in US retail is 60%, compared to 15% for other industries. It's easy to see how losing over half your staff in a single year can be detrimental to the sustainability of good sales practices!

But it's not just high turnover that's problematic. A turnover rate of less than 10% is also concerning, as it might indicate a 'cozy' environment that isn't focused on performance.

Telcos should aspire to a turnover rate of 10-25%; this will ensure they retain their best performers while giving the flexibility to cut ties with underperformers.

Reflection:

- Do you know your turnover rate?

- Is part of your training strategy designed to improve your turnover?

Lack of People & Selling Skills

One of the biggest challenges for telcos and retailers alike is conversion.

Showrooming is real - and is particularly damaging in the telco environment; many telco stores are located across from each other, which makes it extremely easy for your customers to go elsewhere.

It's the salesperson's job to connect with customers and close the sale. This is easier said than done. Selling is just like dating; it requires eye contact, engagement, small talk, questions, positive body language – and skill. People buy from people they like. It's the salesperson's job to be likable, but what 'likable' means will be different for every customer.

The art of conversation doesn't come naturally to everyone, especially younger people who depend on technology for communication. According to the NY Post, 65% of American Millennials don't feel comfortable engaging with someone face-to-face, and 80% prefer conversing digitally.

It's unsurprising that many salespeople also lack these basic skills and do not know how to best approach a customer, build rapport, upsell and close a sale. And many telcos fail to adequately instill these skills into their staff, possibly due to the perceived lost investment cost in the face of high attrition.

Reflection:

- Do your staff have the skills to carry a conversation?

- Do you have a plan for developing good communication skills?

Complex Products

Telco products are more complex than other verticals, which means employees are required to retain a large amount of product knowledge.

Unlike the fashion industry whose products are limited to a set number of materials, sizes, and accessories, telco options are limitless. Employees must keep track of an array of mobile devices from various manufacturers, all with different capabilities, models and prices. And, these prices differ depending on the services attached to them. There are also accessories, Cable TV packages, iPTV services, home broadband, and other products and services to keep track of.

If salespeople fail to stay on top of all this information, tech-savvy customers may see the employee as unhelpful, or worse, incompetent.

Reflection:

- Do you provide timely product information to staff prior to release?

- Do you assess your staff's technical understanding of new products?

- Is product information delivered via paper or digitally?

Complicated Systems

Tendering a telco transaction is not straightforward either. Over the years, these transactions have become increasingly complex. A customer doesn't simply 'buy a phone'; transactions involve plans, SIMs, accessories, quad-play services, and more.

For many telcos, their commerce system is a mishmash of legacy products that more closely resembles Frankenstein's Monster than a POS. The workflows are not optimized for telco, so associates are left to scroll through an endless set of screens and check boxes, and swivel between different components. Because the system doesn't flow naturally, several 'workarounds' must be employed to ensure SIMs and devices are provisioned correctly.

Without the right system, tablet-based tools that help associates sell more effectively are not available, which prevents a modern sales experience:

- Transactions take a long time to complete and are prone to errors.
- Associates spend most of their time on computers, rather than helping the customer.
- Transactions take place at fixed counters, requiring customers to line up for service.

While poor systems are not the fault of the employee, they can tarnish the customer's overall impression of the interaction.

Reflection:

- How many steps are involved in your sales process?
- Have you provided systems training and how to use them in the most efficient manner?
- Do your staff take short cuts with your systems? Is that a training issue or a system issue?

The Cost of a Poor Experience

A lacklustre customer experience can be very costly to telcos:

- **Lost Revenue:** Inexperienced staff may not know how to close the sale or upsell effectively, resulting in lost revenue.

- **Customer Loss:** Poor interactions harm customer loyalty and increase the chance of driving customers to the competition.

- **Recruitment Costs:** Recruiting a new salesperson is expensive and time-consuming. According to **Shift Learning**, rehiring costs represent 12% of a company's expenses, and can be up to 40% for businesses that have a high turnover rate. This is not surprising when you consider the steps of the hiring process:

  - Advertising costs.
  - Senior resources' time for conducting interviews.
  - Dealing with agencies.
  - Running recruitment portals and campaigns with local universities.
  - Extensive classroom, electronic and on-the-job-training on product sets, service features, in-store systems, paperwork and compliance, etc.

- **Lost Investment**: High turnover results in lost investment and drives continual recruitment costs.

The telco industry is very competitive, and it's paramount that telcos find ways to reduce costs and boost profitability.

02 Great Salespeople Aren't Born, They're Made

Salespeople are clearly one of the most important parts of the telco experience. But what makes a great one?

The 5 Essential Skills of a Great Salesperson

In the hyper-competitive telco environment, the following 5 skills are considered essential.

People Skills

The most effective salespeople have great people skills. They are highly perceptive of human behaviour and know how to respond appropriately to a variety of situations.

They recognize what motivates different types of customers, and how to adapt their selling style to help them find the right solution.

They interpret body language to understand the customer's state of mind, and can easily identify customers who are waiting, who are not in the program, who are in a hurry, or who are angry. They use this information to tailor their interactions in a way that encourages a positive outcome.

With the right people skills, salespeople will have a leg up in customer interactions.

Reflection:

- How do you assess your employees' people skills?

- What measures do you have in place to improve these skills?

Self-Awareness

Great salespeople are aware of their strengths and blind spots. They know which selling style works best for them, and how to adapt it to different situations.

They understand what motivates them, as well as how they personally affect the broader retail experience. And they have built the confidence to talk to customers and have the skills to do so effectively.

They also understand the roles of everyone in the store, and where they fit in to the customer journey. They can confidently handover the transaction to other team members, and help manage the customer flow through the store.

Reflection:

- Do you have a clear hierarchy of roles within your store?

- Do your staff know how to work with others to keep the customer engaged and properly serviced?

Can Recognize & Seize Opportunity

Great salespeople recognize that every customer visit is a sales opportunity, even if the customer has a complaint or a service issue. Experienced employees know how to approach every situation in a way that makes the customer open to another purchase.

They listen to the customer to understand their true needs, even if they are understated or poorly communicated, and recommend appropriate products and services. They enquire about the customer's lifestyle and identify ways to entangle them further with the telco's products and services.

By seizing every opportunity to help the customer, great staff are able to build long lasting relationships that also generate profits.

Reflection:

- Does your training program include conflict resolution?

- Have you taught your staff how to turn a complaint into a happy, repeat customer?

Knows How to Sell Effectively

High performers know customers respond to stories, not sales pitches. They learn how to let customers sell themselves by asking the right questions, overcoming objections and closing the sale.

They are teachers at heart. In a few words, they are able to explain a complex topic - and have it make sense.

They know the best way to highlight features, advantages and benefits for every product. And they understand which products and services to upsell and cross-sell.

They know how and when to ask questions, and how to listen to what the customer has to say. They use demonstrations effectively to get customers emotionally invested.

When the customer has an objection, they know how to overcome it and close the sale.

At the end of the interaction, they demonstrate appreciation, and know how to say goodbye in a way that builds customer loyalty.

Reflection:

- Does your onboarding program help new hires develop selling skills?

- Do you continually use roleplaying to help with problem solving?

Industry Knowledge

While soft skills are important, industry knowledge is just as crutial in the ever-changing telco industry.

Great salespeople retain key information about devices and stay current when new ones are released. They can speak to accessories and know which ones to recommend and why. They have mastered the pricing structure and know how certain services affect this. They're experts on the billing and commerce systems and are familiar with how the store operates.

This expertise gives them the tools to enable a great experience.

Reflection:

- How do you keep your staff updated on ever-changing product information?

- Do you provide training on systems and store procedures?

Hiring someone can cost up to 30% of the job's salary.

– Shift Learning

The Importance of Training

Great salespeople aren't born, they're made.

It would be extremely rare to find someone off the street that possessed all of the aforementioned essential skills, let alone half of them. To be successful, businesses need to train, coach and inspire their staff to perform and achieve success in their role.

Despite this fact, many telcos are still not investing in sales training. Even with their superior purchasing power, most telcos do not have a dedicated retail training department, and rarely conduct classroom training.

By pursuing industry-specific sales training, telcos can build a top-notch team that will drive profitability for years to come.

According to research by **Shift Learning**, the benefits of training are undeniable:

Reduces Turnover:

- 70% of respondents indicated that job-related training and development opportunities influenced their decision to stay at their job. For millennials, the number was a staggering 87%.

- 40% of employees who don't receive necessary job training will leave their positions within the first year.

Improves Profitability:

- Companies that offer comprehensive training programs have 218% higher income per employee than companies without formalized training. These companies also enjoy a 24% higher profit margin than those who spend less on training.

- Companies that prioritize employee development enjoy a median revenue of $169,100 per employee; companies that fail to do this yield $82,800 per employee, which is less than half.

- Companies that invest $1,500 on training per employee can see an average of 24% more profit than companies who invest less.

Reduces Costs:

- Hiring a replacement can cost up to 30% of the job's salary; for a role that pays $40,000 a year, this could cost $12,000 to hire someone new.

03 Developing a Successful Telco Retail Training Strategy

In just 5 steps, telcos can create an exceptional retail training strategy that delivers results.

1. Define a Career Path

With its exciting products, flexibility and low barrier to entry, we know that telco retail jobs are particularly attractive to young people. But we also know that the industry suffers from a high turnover rate. It's clear that many don't stay in these jobs for life. But why?

According to **LinkedIn**, a lack of career advancement was the most common reason employees left their previous job, which was cited by 45% of respondents.

By defining a career path that staff can advance through, you will improve your chances of retaining great employees. This involves several steps:

Define Job Descriptions

First, you must start with well laid out job descriptions and determine the hierarchy of roles. These decisions should be made carefully.

It's best to start by thinking of all the tasks that need to be completed. Over the years, there have been varying attitudes towards middle management and hierarchy of positions, so this must be clearly thought through first.

Many telcos refer to their basic job position as "Retail Sales Advisor" or "Customer Sales Representative". Regardless of the name that's used, this so-called basic role is anything but.

45% of employees left their previous job due to a lack of career advancement.

– LinkedIn

Consider the typical tasks:

- Meeting & greeting customers
- Handling general inquiries
- Conducting sales
- Providing customer service
- Handling complaints
- Fielding technical queries
- Managing repairs & returns
- Educating & giving advice
- Managing the point of sale
- Managing stock
- Merchandising & changing store displays
- Cleaning

Some telcos around the world, for cultural reasons, will split some of these tasks into different job roles. The most common are:

- Cashier
- Stock Specialist
- Guru / Genius / Tech Advisor
- Supervisor
- Assistant Manager
- Greeter / Concierge
- Repair Technician

No matter how your market operates, and what the culture demands and expects, it's important to be clear which job roles are useful and needed in your market and define them all clearly.

Define Remuneration

Once the job roles have been established, you must define the remuneration for each. Some may include a commission bonus, and others may be flat rate.

When determining what each role is worth, consider which roles are more difficult to recruit for, and which ones are most vital to your success. This will help determine the level of compensation.

Establish Hierarchy of Roles

Now, put yourself in the shoes of the newest, lowest paid entrant to the team – if they were going to get promoted, where would they be looking to go next? If you repeat this for each role, a promotion path will start to emerge between all the positions.

A typical telco hierarchy might look like this:

Entry Level:
Junior Sales Rep, Trainee, Greeter.

Store Level:
CSR, Tech Advisor, Supervisor, Assistant Manager.

Experienced:
Store Manager, Cluster Store Manager, Area Manager.

Senior:
District Manager, Divisional Head, Trading Manager (HQ), Head of Retail.

Develop A Training Plan

Now that you have a clear path of how employees will ascend through the business, next you must determine the skills that are needed for that to happen. For example, how would someone move from a greeter role to a salesperson role, then tech advisor, then supervisor? This process should be repeated for every step in the advancement path for your organization, all the way up to your head of retail.

To properly prepare staff to advance to new roles, telcos must determine the specific and bespoke training that's needed for each position. Some examples are provided below.

New Hire » Greeter:
People in this role are often young, and don't have as many skills, experience or life knowledge. If you want someone to perform the greeter role well, train them on:

- How to smile and engage customers.

- How to use their body language to move customer traffic from one position in the store to another, or from one person to another.

- How to handover their customer to a colleague as if they were introducing people at a party.

- How to be engaging.

Greeter » Sales Rep:
When the greeter is promoted to sales rep, they will need the following skills to do their job well:

- How to demonstrate a device effectively.

- How to ask the right questions and have a consultative conversation.

- How to propose a set of solutions that meet the customer's lifestyle needs.

Store Supervisor » Store Manager: If your store supervisor is promoted to store manager, there are several topics that they must be trained on:

- How to conduct formal "1-to-1" meetings with staff.

- How to read a P&L statement.

- How to budget.

- How to manage security & keyholders.

- How to make annual plans & and set KPIs.

Store Manager » District Manager:
When an employee moves up to the district manager level, they will be taking charge of a group of approximately 15 stores. They will need to know:

- How to conduct succession planning.

- Advanced recruitment techniques & how to spot talent.

- How to communicate with diverse audiences.

- How to set a positive example and motivate others.

- How to set goals and evaluate success.

Many telcos fail to provide training as employees are promoted, which is reflective of the industry's high turnover rate. To ensure employees are retained once they are promoted, it's imperative to put together a training plan for each position, and ensure it's delivered.

Develop Supportive Policies

The last piece of the puzzle is how your organization supports the growth and personal wellbeing of your employees. Well-designed HR policies and succession plans can really set you apart as an employer of choice. Incentives such as short-term secondments, maternity leave, and others, all work together to create an environment where performance is recognized and rewarded.

The result? Incredible performance and loyalty.

2. Create an Induction Program

An induction program is essential for new hires. It gives them a structured plan for their first 100 days.

According to **Glassdoor**, organizations with a strong onboarding process improve new hire retention by 82% and productivity by over 70%.

Most importantly, it helps new staff avoid the bad behaviour that plagues the industry. For example, **Glance** found that employees only ask for a customer's name 21 percent of the time. With the proper measures in place, that won't happen in your telco store.

An induction program should be very straightforward for telcos to master. After all, it's quite simple: what do you want your new hire to do? How will they do it? And why?

So, what does a good induction scheme look like?

Before Their First Day

A good induction process starts before the new employee joins your team. Ensuring their paperwork is organized in advance goes a long way in building a great first impression and making them feel welcomed.

Another golden touch is arranging a coffee date with the store manager in the week before their start date. This is a great opportunity for them to ask any questions and finalize any last-minute details. On their first day, the employee will already recognize a familiar face, which will help reduce their stress and make it easier to dive into their new role.

During Their First Day

Next, think about their first day. Too often, the new hire has a terrible experience; they either stand around waiting to cash someone out - or are desperately seeking the help of another employee as the manager is often too busy to show them the ropes. For a new hire, this can be an awful experience.

This is where a well-structured induction program can help. Here are some ideas:

- Assign them a buddy who will show them around on their first day.

- Give them a tour of the premises.

- Present their uniform and other branded goodies like pens and notepads, etc.

- Ensure the store manager gives them a personal welcome.

- Give them a chance to ask questions, and then watch them grow in confidence.

- And lastly, but most importantly - present them with an induction workbook.

Organizations with a strong onboarding process improve new hire retention by 82% and productivity by over 70%.

– LinkedIn

The Induction Workbook

An induction workbook is a key tool, even in today's digital age. It outlines the new hire's expectations over the next 100 days and helps then learn the skills they need to master at their own pace.

Induction programs can also be delivered through an e-learning program. Unlike a physical book, it can be more difficult to keep the content top of mind, so if you choose this route, look for programs with structured alerts and reminders.

Whether your program is analog or digital, the induction 'workbook' should cover the following 10 areas at minimum:

1. **Brand & Values:** What does it mean to work for your organization? What are the company's values? What brand standards must be adhered to?

2. **Job Duties:** What is expected in the employee's role? Which tasks do they need to complete?

3. **Products & Services:** What are the key products, services and pricing structures? What makes each unique? What jargon will they encounter? What do they need to know about different lines of business?

4. **Systems:** How do they perform a sale from start to finish? What systems will they use and how do they work together? How should they approach other key tasks?

5. **Customer Skills:** How should they approach customers? How can they recognize a customer's personality? Are there any standards they must adhere to?

6. **Selling Skills:** How do they ask the right questions to effectively handle a sale from start to finish? What are strategies for building rapport, upselling, and overcoming objections?

7. **Service Skills:** How can they recognize and diffuse escalating situations? How can they go the extra mile to delight customers?

8. **The Store Environment:** How should they use the various areas of the store to give the best service possible? What else should they know about certain areas of the store?

9. **Processes:** How should they handle cash and cards? What are the start and end of day procedures?

10. **Their Career Path:** What are the critical values that will enable them to drive their own career trajectory?

The induction workbook should be used for self-learning while on the job. This will help new staff take control of their learning and ensure they are incentivised to seek out the right information in the fastest time possible.

Bonus: This is also a great checklist for managers to use when assessing performance during probationary reviews!

By pairing this approach with a buddy and having the store manager take a weekly role in signing off on their competency, the new employee's first 100 days are guaranteed to set them up for success.

3. Develop Advanced Sales Skills

When new hires have mastered the skills from their induction phase, it doesn't mean that their training is over. Now is the perfect time to embed them with advanced skills.

The art of selling has changed a lot in recent years. Those classic movie scenes that show aggressive, fear-based closing tactics don't apply in today's world. And yet many telco executives still think this way as they don't know any differently.

Adopt a Consultative Approach

A 'hard sell' simply isn't compatible with the modern telco experience. Telcos sell complex lifestyle products with a myriad of service options; aggressively pushing an item without understanding the customer's needs and personality is detrimental to their experience.

To be successful, salespeople need to take a consultative, side-by-side approach that emphasizes both sales and service.

The consultative experience offers many advantages:

Emphasizes Problem Solving: The goal of each visit is to understand the customer's lifestyle and pain points. Product and service recommendations can then be made that will enhance their lifestyle or remedy their problems. For example, a customer who complains of a high bill is likely using an inappropriate plan; a simple plan change recommendation goes a long way in building loyalty.

Builds Rapport: With a consultative approach, rapport is built quickly; the salesperson is able to recognize the complexities of each customer and tailor their approach. In turn, the customer feels that the salesperson has their best interests at heart, which further motivates the salesperson to go the extra mile.

Drives Sales Opportunities: By looking out for the customer's best interests, every visit becomes a sales opportunity, regardless of whether the customer is a walk-in or has an existing service appointment. Upselling is also seen in a positive light as it's clear that recommendations are not arbitrary and are meant to further enhance the customer's experience.

Many telco employees lack the skills and experience to achieve this consultative approach. For this reason, we recommend telco-specific sales training for all staff.

Invest in Advanced Sales Training

Telcos need to invest in an advanced sales/care course to ensure the long-term success of their staff and overall business. Without proper training, they will continue to be plagued by the poor performance and negative NPS scores that are rampant in the industry.

Despite this, very few telco-specific courses actually exist. Some telcos may try to create their own course, but either don't have the expertise to develop the content themselves or find the cost prohibitive to start something from scratch.

At a minimum, all telco retail sales training courses should focus on the following topics:

- Understanding your customer and their needs.
- How to use your environment.
- How to recommend and demonstrate effectively.
- How to delight your customers.
- Overcoming objections and closing the sale.
- How to wow your customer and become their trusted advisor.

Training courses may be delivered in person, or through e-learning. Both have their advantages and drawbacks:

Classroom Training:
In this model, training is delivered in-person using a classroom model.

Pros:
- A large group can be trained in just a few days.
- Ability to roleplay makes it easier to break down complex topics.
- Mix of approaches makes training suitable for different learning styles.

Cons:
- Can be difficult to schedule a large group of learners at the same time.
- Cost tends to be higher.
- Follow up training is more difficult.

E-Learning/Digital Training:
In this model, training is completed through an e-learning program or using other digital delivery methods.

Pros:

- Training can be completed at the learner's own pace.

- Additional content and reminders can be sent to the learner in the future.

- Digital access makes it easy for learners to refresh their knowledge.

- This option is more cost-effective.

- New staff can be trained in a piecemeal fashion when they join the organization.

Cons:

- Some learners do not like the e-learning format.

- Self-paced nature means learning takes longer.

- Some complex topics are not conveyed as well in a digital format.

Blended Approach:
A blended learning model offers the best of both worlds.

- By utilizing both classroom training and e-learning, telcos can combine the benefits of both models.

- Classroom training quickly helps learners digest and apply their new knowledge.

- E-Learning can be used to maintain their knowledge in the future and can also be used to train new employees when they start.

Telcos should look for programs that offer flexible learning models so they can find the best mix for their organization.

4. Continually Refresh Product & Industry Knowledge

Telco is a difficult industry to learn about. As soon as they start, a new hire will be faced with many unfamiliar terms and concepts-from device specs, to tariff structures and technical jargon. And as soon as they have everything mastered, a new device will be released!

There will always be new material to stay current on, so it's essential that telcos plan how to convey product and industry knowledge on a continual basis.

Several strategies are common:

Emailed 'One Pagers'

Some telcos will create a one-page document when there is new information on devices, service plans, accessories, etc. This short document is easy to digest and is distributed to all staff in advance of the release. Unfortunately, these documents are often sent through email, which makes it impossible to track who has read the content.

Hosting via E-Learning

A better approach is to use az telco-specific e-learning platform. By hosting the content on the platform, it's possible to notify employees then have them login and consume the content. It's even possible to track the date, time and location that the information was accessed, which helps telcos understand who has viewed the content, and in which store.

E-Learning Plus Assessments

The best approach is to pair the e-learning content with bi-weekly or monthly assessments. Staff can be prompted to login to the e-learning platform and take a short quiz at a time of their choosing. This will test their retention of the new information, and further enforce the consumption of this key material.

No matter how it's accomplished, promoting continual learning is imperative to the long-term success of your employees.

5. Invest in Better Systems & Solutions

There is one more element that is key to a salesperson's performance that unfortunately is entirely out of their hands: the systems they use to process transactions.

Thinking back to **PricewaterhouseCoopers'** findings on the most important elements of a positive customer experience, speed and convenience were just as important as the quality of service. So even if the salesperson does everything right, a cumbersome checkout process can tarnish the entire experience.

While systems training can help, it can only go so far. Many telcos are handcuffed by their legacy infrastructure. With separate systems for point of sale, billing, inventory and miscellaneous integrations, it's not uncommon for a telco to use up to 30 different systems to process a simple sale. These systems are often poorly integrated, which leads to slow and inaccurate transactions, prevents the use of digital tools, and limits the overall customer experience.

Transaction Speed & Accuracy

Poorly integrated systems do not communicate well with each other. This means salespeople must re-enter information in different systems, as well as 'swivel' between different programs to complete the sale.

Repeatedly entering the same information means mistakes are easier to make, and it can take up to three times longer than it should to process a transaction.

With the proper systems and integrations, the need to enter duplicate information is eliminated. For example, the point of sale may be able to pull information that was entered in the billing system so the salesperson doesn't have to re-enter the details.

Transaction times also fall in line with industry benchmarks; postpaid transactions are completed in under 15 minutes, and pre-paid in less than 5.

A quick win that should be achievable for every telco is to integrate their POS with their payment provider, which will eliminate the need for manual processes.

Tablet-Based Tools

Customers expect more from their retail experience than ever before. While in the past they tolerated long lineups, today they expect an efficient, personalized experience.

Tablet-based tools play an essential role in the modern store environment. Mobile sales tools allow salespeople to complete transactions from end-to-end in any location in the store.

> *It's not uncommon for telcos to use up to 30 different systems to process a simple sale.*
>
> *– Maplewave*

The best solutions can be used to build the customer's order right in front of their eyes, selecting in-stock phones, plans, accessories – and even comparing different offerings. Fully integrated tablets should be able to show live inventory levels, as well as the customer's purchase history, which helps the salesperson recommend the solution that's best for the customer.

Tablets are also essential for controlling store traffic. Store staff can greet customers, ask their reason for visiting, and place them into a virtual queue until another staff member is ready to assist them. This gives customers a personal experience from the moment they enter the store while ensuring they are attended to in a timely manner.

Tablet solutions enhance customer interactions and deliver a more natural, engaging experience. However, these solutions require a seamless connection to the customer database, inventory system and point of sale. If any swivel steps exist between these systems, it's not possible to use these solutions in the store.

Contract Signing

Many telco interactions end with the signing of a contract. In many cases, this is still a paper-based process that is anything but inspiring, let alone the increased costs and security risks from dealing with paper.

By investing in a digital contract solution, telcos can ensure this step becomes the customer's favourite part of their experience. Customers love using digital signature pads and appreciate receiving a copy of their contract by email.

The best digital contract solutions can also be used to manage Walk Out Working (WOW) forms so they appear onscreen after contract signing. This helps ensure salespeople don't forget this important step and the customer leaves with all their questions answered.

Inventory Management & Visibility

Having the proper mix of inventory is paramount to a good experience. A salesperson can't do their job effectively if they don't have the right product to sell, or know how to get it. Many telcos lack adequate inventory management tools, so they speculate how much stock is needed for each location. This increases the risk that certain items are understocked, meaning customers will leave empty handed.

Visibility is the other key piece of the puzzle. With an integrated system, salespeople can see inventory levels across all store locations. If they don't have an item in stock, it's easy to direct the customer to another store.

Omnichannel

Retail stores don't operate in isolation – they also play an important part in the omnichannel experience.

Today's customers want to transact and interact with their telco from anywhere, at any time. An omnichannel approach allows transactions to be seamlessly completed across multiple channels, including the website, store, apps, call centres, and more.

Many omnichannel journeys start, end or involve the physical store. Some common journeys include:

- Placing an order online and picking it up from the store.

- Making an in-store service appointment from a self-service app.

- Viewing a product in-store, then buying it online.

Because customers have the freedom to move between channels during their interaction, there are an infinite number of possible journeys.

Omnichannel is only possible when a common platform is used by all channels. If not, the customer experience will be severely limited, and telcos will struggle to capitalize on new ways of selling.
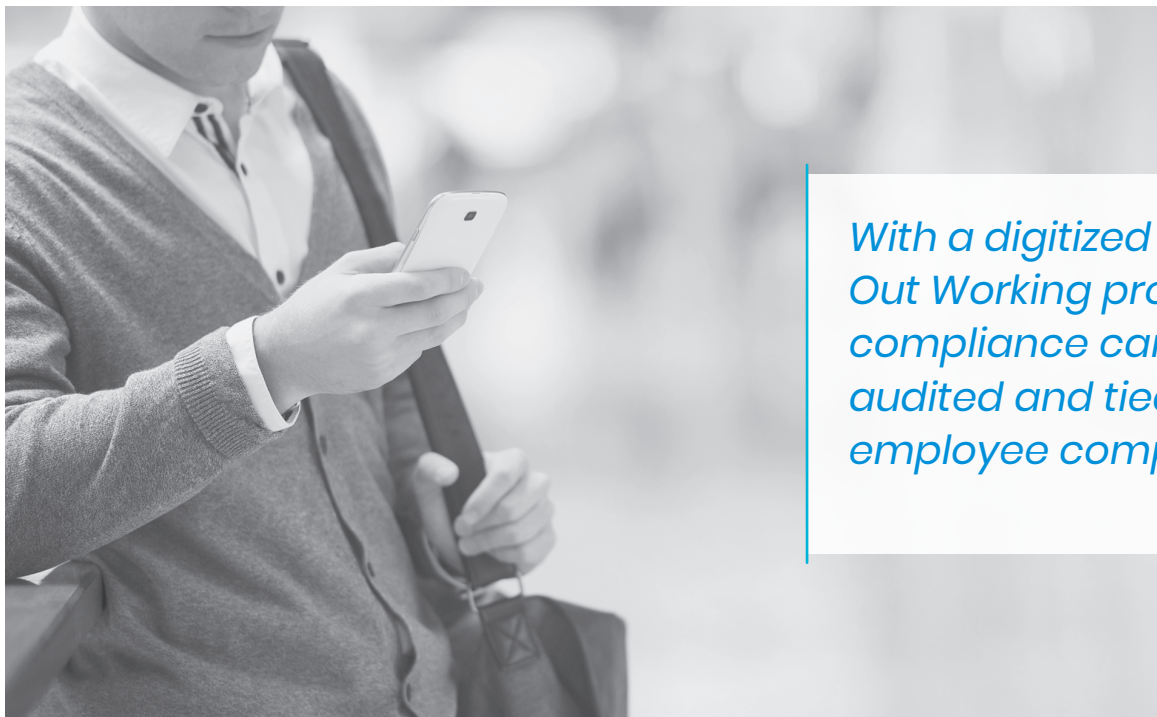
With a digitized Walk Out Working process, compliance can be audited and tied to employee compensation.

– Maplewave

04 Conclusion

Is your current training strategy effective? What are your next steps?

8 Signs You Need to Revisit Your Training Strategy

Nothing affects the retail customer experience more than the performance of a telco's salespeople.

If you're not sure if your current training strategy is effective, the following signs can indicate if you need to refresh your approach:

- Your retail staff turnover exceeds 25%.
- More than 12% of your expenses are related to recruitment.
- Key knowledge or skills are held by a select few salespeople.
- You have a negative or declining NPS score.
- Your profits are lower than expected or are trending downward.
- You do not have an induction program, or it's limited in scope.
- You don't offer advanced sales training.
- You don't offer refresher training or update skills on a continual basis.

With a few simple changes to their training programs, telcos can transform their customer experience while reducing turnover and increasing profitability.

Recommended Next Steps

- Ensure you have established a clear career path and have developed training plans and policies that will help employees advance.
- Create a comprehensive induction program that supports new staff through their first 100 days and sets them up for long-term success.
- Research and offer advanced sales training courses that are specifically designed for the telco industry.
- Invest in programs/systems that will help with continual training, such as an e-learning platform.
- Replace commerce systems that are hindering the customer experience.

Seeking Help

Making a large change to your retail training strategy can be difficult. If you're struggling with how to bring these recommendations to life, seek out a consultant who:

- Specializes in the telco industry.
- Understands the changing nature of telco retail and how to respond.
- Offers advanced sales training with flexible delivery options (classroom and e-learning).
- Can help develop supporting aspects of your training strategy, such as induction programs.

About Maplewave

Maplewave builds technology that powers telco innovation. Their products and services unite all aspects of the telco environment for a true "transact-anywhere" experience; whether customers are shopping in-store, or provisioning a new device from their couch at home, they get a consistent experience regardless of which channel they interact in.

Specializing in digital transformation, customer experience, inventory management and retail sales training, Maplewave has the solutions and expertise to solve telco's most pressing issues. Today, Maplewave's software is used in over 30 countries; in certain places, you can't buy a mobile device without it.

As telco specialists, Maplewave intimately understands telco's sales strategies and retail models better than anyone on the planet. With global experience that spans nearly every aspect of telco operations, Maplewave's consulting team uses their industry knowledge, solutions and partnerships to overcome any challenge while vaulting their clients to the top.

Headquartered in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada, Maplewave's global footprint includes offices in South Africa and the U.K. To learn more, visit **www.maplewave.com**

References

PYMNTS.com. (2019). Why The Physical Store Model is Dead. Retrieved from
https://www.pymnts.com/news/payment-methods/2019/physical-retail-brick-and-mortar-store-model-dead/

NBC. (2019). More than 9,300 stores closed this year, up 63 percent from 2018. Retrieved from
https://www.nbcnews.com/business/consumer/more-9-300-stores-closed-year-63-percent-increase-2018-n1109011

Bizain. (n.d.). Top 10 Brick-And-Mortar Retail Statistics That You Must Know. Retrieved from
https://www.bizain.com/brick-and-mortar-retail-statistics/

Forbes. (2019). 2000-Consumer Study: 68% Of Shoppers 'Click And Collect,' Or Buy Online And Pick Up In-Store.
Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnkoetsier/2019/03/11/hope-for-brick-and-mortar-retail-68-of-shoppers-
click-and-collect-or-buy-online-and-pick-up/#2fa19f537708

CNET. (2019). First Look inside Apple's newly remodeled NYC store. Retrieved from
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WJz-85zzd0

Wikipedia. (2019). Omnichannel. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omnichannel

Techopedia. (n.d.). Definition - What does Click And Collect mean?. Retrieved from
https://www.techopedia.com/definition/32660/click-and-collect

PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2018). Experience is everything: Here's how to get it right. Retrieved from
https://www.pwc.com/us/en/advisory-services/publications/consumer-intelligence-series/pwc-consumer-intelligence-
series-customer-experience.pdf

MarketingWeek. (2019). Just 10% of brands in the UK excel at customer experience. Retrieved from
https://www.marketingweek.com/brands-excel-customer-experience-nps/

HubSpot. (2019). The Ultimate Guide to Your Net Promoter Score (NPS). Retrieved from
https://blog.hubspot.com/service/what-is-nps

Retently. (2019). What is a Good Net Promoter Score?. Retrieved from
https://www.retently.com/blog/good-net-promoter-score/

National Retail Federation (n.d.). Economy Retail Jobs: About Retail Jobs. Retrieved from
https://nrf.com/insights/economy/about-retail-jobs

Wikipedia. (2019). Showrooming. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Showrooming

Retail Dive. (2017). NRF Foundation unveils retail education, credentialing program. Retrieved from
https://www.retaildive.com/news/nrf-foundation-unveils-retail-education-credentialing-program/434047/

SHIFT eLearning. (2018). The True Cost of Not Providing Employee Training. Retrieved from https://www.
shiftelearning.com/blog/the-true-cost-of-not-providing-employee-training

SHIFT eLearning. (2017). Mind-blowing Statistics that Prove the Value of Employee Training and Development.
Retrieved from https://www.shiftelearning.com/blog/statistics-value-of-employee-training-and-development

LinkedIn. (2016). The Biggest Reason Tech Workers Switch Jobs (Hint: It Isn't Money or Their Boss). Retrieved from
https://learning.linkedin.com/blog/managing-your-tech-team/the-biggest-reason-tech-workers-switch-jobs--hint--it-
isnt-money

Glassdoor. (2015). The True Cost of a Bad Hire. Retrieved from
https://b2b-assets.glassdoor.com/the-true-cost-of-a-bad-hire.pdf

Glance. (n.d.). Counting the Customer: The Complete Guide to Dynamite Customer Care. Retrieved from
http://ww2.glance.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Counting-the-customer_-Glance_eBook-4.pdf