CASE STUDY

TELENOR CALLS IN INTELLIGENT VIRTUAL ASSISTANT

WHEN FACED WITH A RAPIDLY GROWING NETWORK, A PRICE WAR AND A NEED FOR 24/7 SUPPORT, SWEDEN’S LEADING MOBILE OPERATOR, TELENOR RAN AN ADVERTISEMENT FOR A NEW EMPLOYEE.

The successful candidate must be prepared to be available around the clock, enjoy routine work answering repetitive questions and be familiar with the Internet – just the job for a Teneo Virtual Assistant from Artificial Solutions!
At 28, Emma is almost like any other employee at Telenor’s customer services department. A typical Capricorn, she has a fun sense of humor and can frequently be seen wearing flowers in her hair at mid-summer or joining in the tradition of Påskkärring at Easter, but she always takes her work very seriously, answering customer queries with ease. 66% of Telenor’s customers said they would come back to Emma directly if they had another question, which means she’s rather busy. In fact, Emma singlehandedly answers nearly 5000 questions – every day.

With 203 million mobile subscriptions, Telenor Group is one of the leading mobile operators in the world. In the Nordics, Telenor is a leading provider of mobile and fixed services as well as having a strong position in the rapidly growing Scandinavian broadband market. Telenor Sweden is the third largest mobile operator in Sweden and the second largest provider of broadband services to the consumer market.

COST SAVINGS IN A HIGHLY COMPETITIVE MARKET

The telecommunications market is highly competitive and very price orientated. In 2006 and in the middle of a Scandinavian wide price war, Telenor made the decision to start moving customer service traffic from telephone and emails to web based self-service. An earlier pre-study conducted in conjunction with Artificial Solutions had shown that the results could mean significant cost reductions, enabling Telenor to use the resources saved to be reinvested in other areas of the business.

Lotta Jacobsson, Online Business Development Manager at Telenor Sweden explains further, "We wanted to expand our services to offer customers 24/7 support. The work we had already carried out with Artificial Solutions showed us that moving traffic from telephone calls and email to the website would not only allow us to continue to deliver excellent service to a rapidly growing customer base, but enable customers to resolve problems at a time that suited them.

"Many customers today prefer to go online to find their own answers, sometimes because call centers aren’t open when they need an answer; others just like to be able to follow instructions at their own pace. Since calls are frequently about subscriptions or simple trouble shooting problems it made sense to provide customers with the answers they required under the instruction of an intelligent, humanlike virtual assistant.”

Teneo Virtual Assistants from Artificial Solutions are able to understand and interpret the meaning and context of customer queries using a wide variety of channels such as email, live-chat, SMS or social networks. Equipped with the intelligence to learn, reason and understand, and then apply this knowledge to real customer interactions, Teneo Virtual Assistants can resolve queries, answer questions, provide links to information or resources, log issues, book service calls, even complete transactions through back-end or e-commerce systems, and update databases - all at the same time.
CHOOSING THE RIGHT CANDIDATE

Emma’s profile was developed as a collaborative project between Telenor’s customer service and marketing departments together with an outside agency who helped provide the graphics. Originally three different personalities were created, with the final vote given to customer services. It was decided from the outset that one of the key criteria for the virtual assistant to be accepted by customers and staff alike was to make her one of the customer service team.

Profiles were developed for each potential virtual assistant including star sign, marital status and previous career (for example, Emma was a ski instructor). Just like every other employee the chosen assistant has an employee number, identity card and is included on the internal phone list. A humorous advertisement for the position was even created.

“We wanted our virtual assistant to be able to engage with customers and felt that enabling her to be able to discuss other subjects beyond just answering mobile related queries would make her a more complete individual that people would respond positively to,” explains Jacobsson. “One example of this is the way Emma greets people depending on the time of day, but at the same time we are always careful that she uses plain, simple language that is easy to understand.”
A FUTURE IN SALES
For the most part, Emma works on her own initiative, answering all kinds of questions from mobile services to SIM cards. About 80% of Emma’s dialogues are work related, but impressed by her knowledge on so many aspects, visitors to the website will often discuss other subjects such as the weather with her.

Emma is also able to refer dialogues to live agents in the service center, either because Telenor has asked her to do so under certain situations such as a subscription cancellation, or because she is unable to resolve the issue and needs the assistance of a live agent. This facility is crucial in offering choice to the customer, although Emma typically refers less than 4% of queries to live agents – illustrating the depth of knowledge she developed. Interestingly, the referral is usually handled using Telenor’s live chat facility – an important aspect in allowing the customer to continue to communicate using their chosen online channel, rather than requiring them to switch to the phone.

"In the future we anticipate that Emma will also work on the sales side of our website answering questions and helping customers with their online purchases. I would also like to see her be a part of our marketing campaigns, using Emma to increase brand awareness," concludes Jacobsson. "At every step of the way Artificial Solutions has been there to help and advise us - I couldn’t imagine Emma not being part of our overall customer service team."