Consumer Experiences Calling Vanity Toll–Free Numbers - An Exploratory Study

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Abstract:

This study examines the experiences of consumers using vanity toll free numbers during the following three phases (pre-usage, usage, post-usage). This includes, the source from where they came to know the vanity toll-free numbers, perceptions about using vanity toll-free numbers, frequency of usage, industries and organizations they have tried to contact, problems encountered by them and their post usage reactions and managerial implications

Data were collected from 250 respondents residing in and around the Emirates of Sharjah and Dubai of the United Arab Emirates. The survey results indicate the following: that the sample came to know about the vanity toll free numbers through print media, audio-visual media, radio and word of mouth in that order. The respondents find vanity toll free numbers are easy to operate and helpful. The respondents used vanity toll- free numbers to call the following institutions and services: Banking, Fast – food outlets, Airlines, Travel Agencies, Insurance and Taxi respectively, to gather the required information, to get solutions for the problems faced by them, and/ or to get the desired service.

The survey revealed that the respondents faced problems such as long waiting time and unable to speak to the right person. It is suggested that to improve the services of vanity toll free numbers, professionally trained staff should be available round the clock to attend consumers' calls. Organizations can prepare a list of frequently asked questions and orient the staffs who attend vanity toll free calls. Also staff handling vanity toll free calls should be trained to be thorough professionals who can communicate effectively the relevant information in a polite and courteous manner. To successfully meet this requirement, organizations can customize their training program and these training programs can be periodically updated and modified to suit the changing needs of the consumers and the organization.

It is further suggested that studies taking samples from other Emirates can be carried out on specific service industries or manufacturing organizations.

Keywords: *Consumers, Vanity Toll – free numbers, Phases, Frequency, Problems, Training.*

1. Introduction

Successful business organizations continue to put in every possible effort for getting satisfied and loyal consumers to survive and grow. However, these efforts can work well only when the consumers are satisfied every time they make a purchase. Organizations aspiring to secure the continued support and patronage of their consumers should design strategies for their consumers to voice their compliments, complaints, and suggestions.

Such strategies may well include feedback surveys, or service provider / employee evaluation forms, toll- free numbers and customer service calls (Kelli Bodey, Debra Grace, 2006). AT&T developed 1-800 numbers in 1967 as a convenient way for businesses to pay the tolls for their customers who contacted them (Gaebler.com). However, Vanity toll-free numbers came in to use in the mid-nineties almost two and half decades after the toll-free numbers were launched (Answer.com)

Toll free numbers are an integral part of doing business today. They combine a powerful sales and marketing tool with added benefits over a local line. Small and large business alike use toll free numbers to appeal to a larger percentage of consumers, establish confidence with customers, and take advantage of features not offered on local lines (Brandi Cummings, 2006).

A toll free number motivates a potential customer to satisfy his curiosity of the product or service in a convenient and hassle free manner since he is not charged for making calls to the company.

In addition, toll free numbers serve as a user friendly marketing tool (Mark Richardson, 2008).Consumer research shows that customers who search phone book listings, when faced with a choice of several similar businesses, are much more likely to call a business with a toll free number than a business with a long- distance number. In addition, toll free numbers boost consumer confidence. Consumers assume that business with toll- free numbers are larger and more stable than their competitors (Yahoo! Small Business). Toll- free numbers are also increasingly popular for personal use. For example, parents can obtain toll-free numbers to give to a young adult who is away at college (FCC Consumer Facts, 2008).

According to the US Census Bureau, every 31 seconds a limited- English speaker enters the US. But there is a silver lining. Typically, a pharmacist in a health system, clinic or community pharmacy setting initiates a three-way call over an 800- line via a dual hand set among the patient, pharmacist, and physician. An interpreter assists the pharmacist in explaining to patients how to take medications, the proper dosage and potential interaction. (Anthony Vecchione, 2006). Even for a small association, an 800 service can still be a good investment. According to Mark B. Bundick of the National Association of Rocketry, when considering an 800 service, the combination of staff size, services offered, and the number of members who will be calling will help you determine whether you can provide a better service with an 800 number than with other methods (Gary Fetgatter, Susan Cheshire, Mark B. Bundick, 2007).

Due to liberalization and globalization of trade, commerce and services and developments in the field of information and

communication technology, the need for faster, reliable and inexpensive means of communication such as the toll-free number may become a necessity for companies operating in different industries (Mark Richardson, 2008).

2. Literature Review

A few studies have been undertaken to understand the experiences of consumers using vanity toll-free numbers.

Branding is important to every small business. It's what sets you apart from competitors and helps people remember your business name and products. There are numerous ways small business owners can brand their business, and one successful way is to invest in a vanity toll free number. A vanity toll free number instantly gives your business brand recognition and gives off the impression of a reputable company. If your business is still small, a specialized number will also give consumers the impression of a larger business that can handle a large call volume. (Brandi Armstrong, ezienarticles.com) Toll free vanity numbers make it easy for your customers and prospective customers to remember your number, and that means that your business gets more calls. It also helps to brand your business. Keep this in mind when you're brainstorming toll free vanity numbers and don't stop coming up with ideas until you hit the right one. (Tim Paulino, freedom800.com) When it comes to marketing a business vanity number plays a very essential role because these toll free numbers provide an additional benefit of memorability. Vanity phone numbers can be a great way to promote your business if they are dealt with a little creativity and professionalism. Accurately chosen vanity number can grab the loads of clients to your business. (bukisa.com)

Regardless of the size of your business, toll free vanity numbers have the potential to increase your profits and achieve a greater customer base. A vanity number also has the potential to boost your chances of existing customers finding you more easily and sharing your unique phone number with their friends. (Tim Paulino, freedom800.com)

Acquiring a vanity number can be quite expensive especially if the company is just starting but the benefits can be endless and beneficial at the same time. The vanity advertising system is a powerful marketing technique that many companies have dared to use to attain a higher marketing level. All huge corporations nowadays choose to have a vanity number instead of just a local number to set themselves apart from other companies. The benefits of a vanity number can be timeless for a company that knows how to use the benefits to their advantages.(Alena,2010)

The power of vanity number was conducted by Michael J. Motto Advertising (New Providence, NJ) that found it pulled 14 times more calls than its numeric equivalent when used in identical radio spots (Adeptel.com, 2008)

A number of research studies were carried out by Response Marketing Group, on the effectiveness of toll-free numbers including:
Toll-free Numbers in Television Commercials
Fortune 500 SM Companies- Use of Toll-Free Numbers on the Internet
Use of Toll-Free Numbers in Radio Advertising
Use of Toll-Free Numbers in Magazine Advertising
Use of Toll-Free Numbers in Billboard Advertising
 Some of their major findings are listed below:
 Use of Toll Free Numbers as direct response mechanism in television advertising was undertaken and the results of this study show that 35% of commercials display a phone number: the response mechanism, with 82% being toll-free, additionally, 74% use the use toll-free 800 prefix (as opposed to 866, 877 or 888), and 61% being 800 vanity numbers.

In the study on the General use of Toll-free Numbers as direct response vehicles in television advertising it was found that 24% of commercials viewed use toll-free number as response mechanisms, with 91% being toll-free 800 numbers (as opposed toll-free 888, 877 or 866), and 57% being 800 vanity numbers.

Use of Toll-free Numbers on the internet, the results of this study, focusing on the use of toll-free numbers by companies on the Fortune 500SM list, shows 86% of these companies use a toll-free numbers and 80% of them use a number with the 800 prefix, 50% of these companies with toll-free numbers used a vanity number (numbers that translate into a word for easy recall), with the 800 Prefix (as opposed to toll-free 888,877,866) being used 80% of the time.

Use of Toll-Free numbers in radio advertising: The results of this study show that radio advertisements featuring a vanity 800 number yield fifty- eight percent more phone calls than radio advertisements that mention a numeric toll-free number. Direct Response in Radio Advertising : The results of this study show 29% of advertisements use toll-free numbers as response mechanisms, with 66% being toll-free 800 numbers (as opposed to toll-free 888,877 or 866), and 72% being vanity 800 numbers.

Telephone Number recall in Radio Advertising: This study quantified how consumers retain toll-free numbers used in radio advertisements. The findings show that after only one exposure to a radio spot 58% of the subjects could recall a vanity 800 numbers, which compares very favorably with "hybrid" numbers – which were recalled correctly by 44% of subjects.

Use of Toll-free Numbers as Direct Response Mechanisms in Billboard advertising: This study examined vanity toll-free numbers as response device in billboard advertising in two markets. The study data reveals that almost 30% of the surveyed billboard advertising included a telephone number. Toll-free numbers made up the largest percentage – approximately 71% - of the telephone numbers included in the advertisements. Vanity numbers predominated; make up 76% of the total toll-free numbers. (Response Marketing Group, 2008)

One of the best tools to use in advertising is a toll free number that's easy to remember. Whether your ads are on Television, billboards, or business cards you want a good number of customers who associate with you positively.

Take some of the highest ranking companies on Fortune's 500 lists. Verizon communications is ranked at number twelve whereas their competitors are ranked amazingly lower.

It could be due to the fact that Verizon communications uses a customized toll free number, 1-800-Pick-DSL, while competitors use increasingly harder to remember numbers. Customized numbers should convey a positive meaning to their audience as well as being easy to remember.

The world is a competitive marketplace and in order to get your own business in a highly ranked position you have to take all the necessary steps. Best of all, the necessary steps

don't have to cost you a fortune. Use a vanity/custom phone number to be remembered. (Tollfreenumber.org, 2008)

The results of this study not only confirm conventional wisdom that vanity numbers draw more calls, they remove even the slightest doubt said Sandra Murray, President of Response marketing group (Business Wire, Jan 19, 1999)

Top ten benefits of a vanity number are increased response rates, credibility & prestige, instant brand name, customer focused image, stronger presence, better domain name availability, repeat and second hand marketing, better customer service, improving customer feed back, additional sales avenue. The bottom line is that anyone that does business or deals with customer over the phone can reap huge benefits from a great vanity number (Telecentrex LLC, 2008)

As an ecommerce site owner, ensure to go step ahead of the normal website to provide instantaneous support and help to your customers. If it's possible to offer live help service, it would be great. If not, display your customer care contact information very prominently on all pages and encourage your customers to call on your toll free numbers to sort their problems.

Also having a toll free number that spells your company name adds a little credibility that shows very easily too. It gives you a bigger company image, even if it's just you and the toll free number forwards to your cell phone! The definition of good customer service is having a live person that knows what they're doing answer the phone today (Bill Quimby, Toll free numbers.com, 2008)

Kerry Lauricella, founder of 1- 800 REPAIRS has listed the following advantages for contractors with vanity toll- free numbers:
Improved advertising results, improved credibility, service providers do not pay a percentage of the job, customer calls are dispatched to only one service provider, long-term contact not required, service provider maintains their identity, marketing service provided, advertising networking.
Greenfield noted some advantages of the vanity numbers, such as building brand awareness and refocusing marketing dollars. "It is a very cost effective way to continue to build a business," she said.

The bottom line is that people remember letters more so than numbers," Greenfield said. "It's been proven with all the Fortune 500 companies using those catchy 1-800GOFEDEX, 1-800-FLOWERS, etc.

1-800 REPAIRS give consumers free access to local, licensed, and insured companies that stand behind their work with a written guarantee.

"1-800 vanity phone numbers become imprinted in a prospect's memory, long after an advertising campaign is completed and these numbers continue to produce calls. That's because vanity phone numbers spell out exactly what you do."(John R Hall-Air Conditioning, Heating and Refrigeration News July 30, 2007 Vol. 231)

According to a recent study, the lodging industry is the most frequent user of vanity toll-free telephone numbers (including 866,877, and 888 prefixes) in TV advertising. The Toll-free numbers in television advertising study found that, despite the growth of the World Wide Web, usage of toll-free numbers in TV ads continue to grow (Anonymous-

Marketing Management. Chicago: Nov/Dec 2005. Vol. 14, ISS 6; 6, 1 pgs)

If you want to make your business line ring more often, get a toll free vanity number where the number spell words. According to a demographically representative in-house study of 110 adults conducted by Response marketing group, 58% of consumers can recall a toll-free vanity number after hearing it just once in an advertisement. (John Fetto-American Demographics, Ithaca: Nov 2002, Vol.24, ISS.10, Pg.15, 1 Pgs)

3. Research Objectives

Present study has been undertaken with the objective to know from the consumers the experiences they have had when they used the vanity toll-free numbers. This includes:
- The source from where they came to know the vanity toll-free numbers
- Perceptions about using vanity toll-free numbers
- Frequency of usage
- Industries and organizations they have tried to contact using vanity toll-free numbers
- The problems encountered by them
- Post usage reactions and managerial implications

4. Research Design
A pre-designed questionnaire on a five point scale was used to collect the primary data from the respondents (experiences). The questionnaire was framed to elicit the experiences of the respondents on the following three usage phases.

4.1 Pre-usage phase
- Awareness about vanity toll free numbers
- Perceived utility of vanity toll free numbers

4.2 Usage phase
- Frequency of vanity toll free numbers called
- Reasons for usage
- Organizations / Institutions called

4.3 Post – usage phase
- Problems encountered while using vanity toll free numbers
- Perceived training need for the staff

Three hundred questionnaires were distributed and after repeated calls two hundred and sixty two questionnaires were got back and out of which two hundred and fifty questionnaires were found to be complete in all respects and the same have been taken as the sample for the study. Convenient sampling was used to collect the primary data from the residents of both the Emirates of Sharjah and Dubai. This was because the residents of UAE come from different countries having social, economical and cultural background.

5. Sample Profile
Demographic information reported on the survey indicated the following:
Male respondents represented 55% of the sample, while female respondents represented the remaining 45%, with 58% percent being under 25 years of age, 40% between 35 to 50 years of age and 2% over 50 years. The report also indicated that 66% of the respondents to be single and the remaining 34% to be married.

Tables Showing the Sample Profile

Table1: Gender details

Gender	Count	Percentage
Male	137	54.8
Female	113	45.2
Total	250	100.0

Table2: Age distribution

Age distribution	Count	Percentage
Under 25	144	57.6
25-34	74	29.6
35-49	27	10.8
50-59	5	2.0
Total	250	100.0

Table3:Marital Status

Marital status	Count	Percentage
Unmarried	165	66.0
Married	85	34.0
Total	250	100.0

Table4:Education Level

Education Level	Count	Percentage
High School	24	9.6
Higher Secondary	55	22.0
Bachelor Degree	114	45.6
Master Degree	43	17.2
Others like diploma	14	5.6
Total	250	100.0

Table5:Income Range

Income Range	Count	Percentage
Below AED 3000	80	32.0
AED 3000- AED 5000	53	21.2
AED 5000- AED10000	63	25.2
AED 10000- AED15000	28	11.2
Above AED.15000	26	10.4
Total	250	100.0

About 32% of the respondents reported to have studied up to school level, while 46%of the sample has done a bachelor degree and about 17% have done their masters and the remaining 5%of the respondents are diploma holders. The income levels of the respondents were 53% of the sample getting up to AED 5000 per month, while 25% earned between AED 5000 and 10, 000, and 22% of the respondents earned over AED 10000 per month.

6. Survey Results

Table 7: Distribution of respondents count showing sources of Information
SA=Strongly Agree, A= Agree, SD= Strongly Agree
D= Disagree

Source of Information	SA/ A	Neutral	SD / D
Print media	201(80.4%)	22(8.8%)	27(10.8%)
Audio Media	161(64.4%)	39(15.6%)	50(20%)
Word of Mouth	129(51.6%)	49(19.6%)	72(28.8%)

Table - 8 Distribution of respondents count showing Perception about
Vanity toll free numbers
SA=Strongly Agree, A= Agree, SD= Strongly Agree, D= Disagree

Perception	SA / A	Neutral	SD / D
Easy to Register	167(67.6%)	40(16%)	43(17.2%)
Easy to Recall	169(67.6%)	46(18.4%)	35(14.0%)
Easy to Use	186(74.4%)	25(10%)	39(15.6%)

6.1 Sources of Information
Print media 80%, radio 64% and word of mouth 52% in that order indicated the respondents as the sources through which they came to know about the vanity toll-free numbers.

6.2 Perception about Vanity toll free numbers
Seventy-four percent of the respondents informed that vanity toll-free numbers are easy to use, while 68% feel that vanity toll-free numbers are easy to recall and 68% of the sample opined that vanity toll-free numbers are easy to register.

6.3 Frequency of Usage
About 50% of the surveyed respondents informed that they have made up to 10 calls, 24% have made between 10 and 20 calls and 26% more than 20 calls.

Table 9A: Distribution of respondents count on Frequency of calls made

Frequency of usage	Up to 10 calls	Between 10 and 20 calls	More Than 20 calls
Number / % of respondents	126(50.4%)	59(23.6%)	65(26%)

Table 9B : Distribution of respondents count on Period when calls made

Period when calls made	Last 2 months	Last 4 months	Last 6 months	Last 8 Months	Last 1year
Number / % of respondents	74(29.6%)	53(21.2%)	33(13.2%)	26(10.4%)	64(25.6%)

6.4 Period when calls made
Regarding the period during which these calls were made, 30% have called in the last two months, 26% during the last one year, 21% in the last four months and 23% in the last six and eight months.

6.5 Institutions / Organizations called
The survey reveals that respondents used vanity toll- free numbers to call the following institutions and services: Banking 83%, Fast – food outlets 63%, Airlines 62%, Travel Agencies 62%, Insurance 54%, and Taxis 52%. The other institutions called by the respondents include Hospitals and Medical centers and Educational institutions each about 48%, and both Hotels and Drinking water each about 45%.

Table 10: Distribution of respondents count on usage across various Institutions/ Organizations
SA=Strongly Agree, A= Agree, SD= Strongly Agree
D= Disagree

Institutions/ Organizations Called	SA/ A	Neutral	SD/D
Banking	208(83.2%)	09(3.6%)	33(13.2%)
Insurance	136(54.4%)	40(16.0%)	74(29.6)
Fast-food	158(63.2%)	37(14.8%)	55(22.0%)
Travel Agencies	154(61.6%)	37(14.8%)	59(23.6%)

Airlines	156(62.4%)	27(10.8%)	67(26.8%)
Taxis	131(52.4%)	41(16.4%)	78(31.2%)
Hospitals & Medical centers	121(48.4%)	32(12.8%)	97(38.8%)
Educational Institution	120(48%)	39(15.6%)	91(36.4%)
Hotels	113(45.2%)	49(19.6%)	88(35.2%)
Drinking water	112(44.8%)	57(22.8%)	81(32.4%)

6.6 Purpose for which calls made

The survey disclosed that 82% of the respondents used the vanity toll-free numbers to gather the required information, 75% to get solutions for the problems faced by them, and 66% to get the desired service.

Table 11: Distribution of respondents count on purpose for which calls made

SA=Strongly Agree, A= Agree, SD= Strongly Agree
D= Disagree

Purpose	SA / A	Neutral	SD/ D
Solve the problem	187(74.8%)	30(12.0%)	33(13.2%)
Get the required information	205(82%)	22(8.8%)	23(9.2%)
Get the desired services	166(66.4%)	41(16.4%)	43(17.2%)

6.7 Type of problems encountered

The survey, however, showed that the respondents encountered problems while using the toll-free numbers. They disclosed the following as the major problems encountered by them: Long waiting time/ being put on hold 72%, no response / no answer 52%, unable to speak to the right person 45% and communication problems 38%. Apart from these problems, about 26% of the respondents informed that the persons answering the calls to be not informative and 25% felt the persons answering the call to be rude in their behavior.

Table 12: Distribution of respondents count on problems encountered

SA=Strongly Agree, A= Agree, SD= Strongly Agree
D= Disagree

Problems Encountered	SA / A	Neutral	SD/ D
No response/Answer	127(51.9%)	43(17.9%)	70(29.2%)
Long Waiting time/ Put on Hold	181(72.4%)	28(11.2%)	41(16.4%)
Not informative	66(26.4%)	91(36.4%)	93(37.2%)
Rude Behavior	63(25.2%)	62(24.8%)	125(50%)
Communication Problem	96(38.4%)	69(27.6%)	85(34%)
Unable to speak to the right person	113 (45.2%)	61(24.4%)	76(30.4%)

6.8 Post usage reactions

Four-fifth of the surveyed respondents have opined that to improve the effective usage of vanity toll-free numbers, staff should be available to attend calls; 73% and 71% of the sample respectively feel that customers should not be put on hold or made to wait and only the right person should respond.

Table 13: Distribution of respondents count on post usage reaction

SA=Strongly Agree, A= Agree, SD= Strongly Agree,
D= Disagree

Post Usage Reaction	SA/ Agree	Neutral	SD/ D
Staff Availability	200(80%)	22(8.8%)	28(11.2%)
Customers not to be put on hold	182(72.8%)	23(9.2%)	45(18%)
Right person should respond	177(70.8%)	38(15.2%)	35(14%)

Training to Enhance	SA/ A	Neutral	SD/ D
Professional approach	202(80.8%)	20(8%)	28(11.2%)
Being Polite and courteous	198(79.2%)	18(7.2%)	34(13.6%)
Being Informative	191(76.4%)	20(8%)	39(15.6%)
Communication Skills	194(77.6%)	20(8%)	36(14.4%)
Giving relevant information	192(76.8%)	24(9.6%)	34(13.6%)

The survey reveal that not less than 76% of the sample strongly feels proper training should be given to staff answering vanity toll-free calls. Training should focus on both making these staff to be more professional, polite and courteous when answering calls, and improve their communication skills to make them to be more informative and provide relevant information to the consumers

7. Hypothesis Testing

No significant level of dependency or association could be established between variables and the major phases taken for the study.
However, significant level of association could be noted between the following phases.

H1 There is a significant level of association between vanity toll free awareness and perceived utility of vanity toll free operations

Table – 1 Vanity toll free awareness classification * Perceived Utility of vanity toll free operations
Count

		Perceived Utility of Vanity toll free Operations			Total
		Low	High	Very High	
Vanity Toll free awareness classification	Less Awareness	45	25	6	76
	Good awareness	14	63	29	106
	Very Good Awareness	11	23	34	68
Total		70	111	69	250

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	70.550	4	.000

Table – 1 above shows that there exists a very significant association between vanity toll-free awareness and perceived utility of vanity toll free operations
Sample who have good and very good awareness about vanity toll free classification perceive the utility of vanity toll free to be high or very high

H2 There is a significant level of association between vanity toll free awareness and perceived training need for staff / employees handling vanity toll free calls
Table –2 Vanity toll free awareness classification * Perceived training need for employees handling vanity toll free calls - Cross tabulation
Count

Vanity Toll free awareness classification		Perceived training need for employees handling Vanity toll free calls			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
	Less Awareness	45	8	23	76
	Good awareness	14	20	72	106
	Very Good Awareness	10	10	48	68
Total		69	38	143	250

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	55.511	4	.000

Table – 2 above shows that there exists a very significant association between vanity toll-free awareness and perceived training need for vanity toll free employees

Sample who have good and very good awareness about vanity toll free classification feel strongly that the employees handling vanity toll free calls needs to be professionally trained

H3 There is a significant level of association between perceived utility of vanity toll free numbers and problems encountered by the respondents

Table – 3 Perceived Utility of vanity toll- free Operations * Problems encountered while using vanity toll free numbers - Cross tabulation
Count

Perceived Utility of vanity toll free Operations		Problems encountered while using vanity toll free numbers			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
	Low Utility	58	7	5	70
	High Utility	16	77	18	111
	Very High Utility	12	24	33	69
Total		86	108	56	250

Chi-Square Tests

Pearson Chi-Square	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
	165.942	4	.000

Table – 3 above shows that there exists a very significant association between perceived utility of vanity toll-free operations and problems encountered by the respondents using vanity toll free numbers

Sample who perceived the utility of the vanity toll free operations to be high or very high, have encountered more problems.

H4 There is a significant level of association between perceived utility and perceived training need for staff / employees handling vanity toll free calls

Table –4 Perceived Utility of vanity toll free Operations * Perceived training need for employees /staff handling vanity toll free calls - Cross tabulation
Count

Perceived Utility of vanity toll free Operations		Perceived training need for employees/ staff handling vanity toll free calls			Total
		Less Training need	More Training need	Intense Training need	
	Low Utility	59	5	6	70
	High Utility	7	27	77	111
	Very High Utility	6	6	57	69
Total		72	38	140	250

Chi-Square Tests

Pearson Chi-Square	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
	230.413	4	.000

Table – 4 above shows that there exists a very significant association between perceived utility of vanity toll-free operations and perceived training need for staff/ employees handling vanity toll free calls

Sample who have perceived the utility of the vanity toll free operations to be high or very high, feel strongly that staff / employees handling vanity toll-free calls should be properly and professionally trained.

Managerial Implications

Study shows that the respondents come to know about vanity toll free numbers through print media, audio visual media, radio and word of mouth. This being the case organizations instead of spending their promotion budget on other media can spend more on these media, to advertise the vanity toll free number.

This can be done by increasing the frequency of the advertisements giving the vanity toll free number appearing in the print media currently used (e.g., newspapers, magazines) or can advertise the vanity toll free number in other newspapers and magazines so far not advertised. Similarly ads announc-

ing the vanity toll free numbers can be repeated more often in the audio visual channels, radio channels, where it is presently advertised or new audio visual channels and radio channels can be identified to broadcast the vanity toll free number. To improve the effective usage of vanity toll free numbers consumers must be able to contact the organizations during any time of the day and organizations should ensure that there is always some staff available to attend customers' calls.

In case the requirement of the consumers can not be met immediately, instead of putting the consumers on hold or make them wait, the staff can inform the consumer that they will call back at the time which is suited to the consumer. This will also provide an opportunity for the right person to speak to the consumer.

As a part of improving customer service, internal marketing should be done to all the staffs who attend vanity toll free calls, so that they are better informed and equipped to provide improved service to consumers.

Organizations can prepare a list of frequently asked questions and orient the staff who attend vanity toll free calls with this information so that they can provide a more professional and thorough service to consumers. This list can be periodically updated as and when new questions are repeatedly raised or when new products / services are introduced or launched. Staff handling vanity toll free calls should be trained to be through professionals who can communicate effectively the relevant information in a polite and courteous manner. To successfully meet this requirement, organizations can customize their training program and these training programs can be periodically updated and modified to suit the changing needs of the consumers and the organization.

Limitations and Future Research
Firstly, any survey based method, including that adopted in this study, involves measurement error. In other words, the elicitation of a scale measurement, respondent's ability to accurately report their level of agreement with the survey statements (Kelli Bodey, Debra Grace, 2006). However, efforts were made to design the administered tool to be simple, easy to understand and respond. Convenient sampling was used to collect the data from residents living in and around the Emirates of Sharjah and Dubai.

Regarding future research, it is suggested that more samples from other Emirates can be taken for study. Further, separate studies can be undertaken on service industries and manufacturing organizations.

Conclusion
While organizations have started to respond to the voices of their consumers, still plenty of scope is there for them to listen to their consumers more intently and fine tune their customer service strategies. This will encourage more and more consumers to ventilate their views and help the organizations immensely not only to improve their performances and strengthen relationships with their consumers but also their bottom line.

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