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Virgin Mobile USA drives toward high performance and increased customer loyalty with advanced self-service capabilities

Company overview

Virgin Mobile USA is a joint venture between Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Group and Sprint Nextel. Launched nationally in July 2002, Virgin Mobile USA enjoys the distinction of being the first US "mobile virtual network operator," or MVNO and the first wireless carrier exclusively focused on the youth market. Such companies—currently most prevalent in Europe, but also gaining momentum in the United States—typically do not own their own network infrastructure, but have partnerships with traditional mobile operators to buy minutes of use for sale to their customers.

Business challenge

Given the fiercely competitive landscape of the wireless marketplace, and the battle to gain and keep subscribers, it is critical for an MVNO to achieve and maintain brand recognition and appeal, establish cost-effective distribution channels, and provide outstanding customer service. Virgin Mobile USA's strengths in these areas have made the company one of the nation's fastest-growing prepaid wireless providers. The company surpassed 3 million wireless customers only

two-and-a-half years after its launch, thanks in part to the power and popularity of the Virgin brand, particularly among a younger generation of customers.

Virgin Mobile USA knew that to maintain its drive toward high performance, it had to extend its customer service offerings through technology-based customer self-service. Accenture research into the characteristics of high-performance businesses has underscored the importance of the effective use of technologies in delivering a consistent, branded customer experience. Technologies such as interactive voice response (IVR) and Web-based self-service are crucial, yet these must be implemented not only cost-effectively, but also in a way that delivers a superior customer experience to maintain high satisfaction levels.

To create a technology-based solution for its customer contact function that would effectively balance service and cost, Virgin Mobile USA turned to Accenture. Accenture had worked with the company from the beginning, helping with the

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Lisa Shardon

Vice President of Customer Care

Virgin Mobile USA

MVNO strategy and launch. With industry-leading capabilities in customer relationship management, and a deep knowledge of Virgin Mobile USA and its industry, Accenture had the right skills and experience to help lead this initiative.

How Accenture helped

Accenture worked closely with Virgin Mobile USA to enhance the technologies as well as the workforce performance capabilities necessary to drive the company's vision for improved customer service. The work included:

- Diagnosing Virgin Mobile USA's current IVR application and identifying opportunities for improvement.
- Assisting in the design of a new, speech-enabled IVR application with more self-service features and improved usability.
- Managing the implementation process for the new IVR.
- Managing the IVR and enabling it to handle new products and general business changes.
- Assisting Virgin Mobile USA through the IVR tuning process.
- Improving customer service at the call centers through better training for call center agents.

Working closely with the Virgin Mobile USA IVR user interface team, Accenture first performed an in-depth analysis of current call flows both within the IVR system and to the call centers in general. The Accenture team found several opportunities for improvement, including increasing IVR call containment rates for account replenishment requests. Also, by enabling customers to complete a higher percentage of the tasks during a service activation call, before transferring to a live agent to verify the application, the company would be able to shorten the average call handling time for agents. Accenture used the findings from the diagnostic phase of work to help Virgin Mobile USA create a business case for a new, speech-enabled IVR. Upon approval of the business case, Accenture worked with Virgin Mobile USA to design, implement and manage the new IVR

with the enhanced features, ensuring that the new functionalities produced the expected business benefits.

In addition, to support Virgin Mobile USA's strategy to increase market share in the Spanish-speaking community, Accenture helped the company build a Spanish IVR in only three months. This self-service feature has delivered containment rate improvements similar to the English IVR, while enhancing Virgin Mobile USA's service to this market.

High performance delivered

By working with Accenture to enhance its IVR capabilities and improve call center agent performance through better training, Virgin Mobile USA has significantly advanced toward high performance, as evidenced by several key measures.

With the enhanced IVR capabilities delivered by this project, Virgin Mobile USA realized a 68 percent increase in the self-service containment rate for the IVR's primary self-service functionality. The improved IVR system also reduced the number of callers needing to opt out of the IVR and request interaction with a customer care agent by 8.6 percent. Virgin Mobile USA estimates that these operational improvements translate into annual savings of more than \$4 million.

According to Lisa Shardon, vice president of customer care for Virgin Mobile USA, "Accenture has been a trusted service provider to our company since Virgin Mobile USA's inception. The Accenture team has helped us do more than simply improve the quality of customer interactions. They have helped support an improvement in the performance of our business."

For more information, visit the corporate websites at www.accenture.com and www.virginmobileusa.com.

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