

## Don't hang up on customers

**Level:** Intermediate (B1–B2)

**Time:** Approximately 90 minutes (plus extra time for email writing)

**Business topics:** customer service and support, customer satisfaction, communicating with customers, dealing with complaints

**Business language:** useful business vocabulary, collocations, language for dealing with complaints

**Activities:** discussing customer service and communication, key words, understanding the text, business language, discussion, writing an email to deal with a customer complaint

**Groups:** whole class, one-to-one, pair work or small groups

**Overview:** This article discusses the terrible consequences of companies dispensing with their phone numbers to cut costs, since calling is still most customers' first preference. It also describes a couple of success stories of companies that have brought back their call centres from offshore.

### 1. Warmer

- a. Put students into pairs or small groups and give them five minutes only to discuss their contact preferences before doing a class survey. You can ask students to raise their hand for their first preference and ask them if they think the article will state a similar preference for most customers.
- b. Ask students to brainstorm advantages and disadvantages of these different contact options in the same groups or pairs. Elicit some ideas from the whole class.

### 2. Key words

- a. This task can be divided up among students who can then share their answers with students who did the other half of the task.

**Key:**

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. reach           | 8. gripe; gripes                                      |
| 2. efficiency      | 9. outperform;<br>outperformed / are<br>outperforming |
| 3. query           | 10. demographic                                       |
| 4. flesh-and-blood | 11. word-of-mouth                                     |
| 5. call centre     | 12. satisfaction                                      |
| 6. complaint       |   |
| 7. fed up          |   |

### 3. Understanding the article

- a. Students look for key information in the article to complete the sentences.

**Key:**

- |      |      |
|------|------|
| 1. b | 4. c |
| 2. a | 5. a |
| 3. c | 6. b |

### 4. Business language

- a. Ask students to work individually to try to match the verb and noun collocations and find them in the text. Then ask them to work in pairs or small groups to match them to their meanings.

**Key (tasks a and c):**

1. fill in a form (definition e)
2. pick up the phone (definition c)
3. reach a person / member of staff (definition f)
4. offer support / decent customer service (definition a)
5. deal with queries / complaints (definition b)
6. train a person / member of staff (definition d)

**Key (task d):**

- |            |              |
|------------|--------------|
| 1. train   | 4. offer     |
| 2. pick up | 5. reach     |
| 3. fill in | 6. deal with |

### 5. Discussion questions

- a. Put the students in pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the questions. When students have covered all the questions, bring the whole class back together so that they can share their answers and any interesting information that arose from their discussions.

## 6. Wider business theme – dealing with customer complaints

- c. Ask students to discuss task a. before completing task b. individually. Ask them to compare their notes before writing their emails individually. You can then get students to complete the writing for homework or to peer edit someone else's email.

The situation in task a. is an example only. If students have a more relevant authentic situation, encourage them to use it.