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consommateurs

## Do I have the right number? Customer Service at Telecommunications Companies

Report by Option consommateurs

June 2010

## Option consommateurs

### MISSION

Option consommateurs is a not-for-profit association whose mission is to promote and defend the basic rights of consumers and ensure that they are recognized and respected.

### HISTORY

Option consommateurs has been in existence since 1983, when it arose from the Associations coopératives d'économie familiale (ACEF) movement, more specifically, the ACEF of Montreal. In 1999, it joined forces with the Association des consommateurs du Québec (ACQ), which had already pursued a similar mission for over 50 years.

### PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES

Options consommateurs has a team of some 30 employees working in five departments: Budgeting, Energy Efficiency, Legal Affairs, Press Room, and Research and Representation. Over the years, Option consommateurs has developed special expertise in the areas of financial services, health, agrifood, energy, travel, access to justice, commercial practices, indebtedness, and the protection of personal information and privacy. Every year, we reach 7,000-10,000 consumers directly, conduct numerous interviews in the media, participate in working groups, sit on boards of directors, carry out large-scale projects with key partners, and produce research reports, policy papers and buyer's guides, including the annual Toy Guide in *Protégez-vous* magazine.

### MEMBERSHIP

In its quest to bring about change, Option consommateurs is active on many fronts: conducting research, organizing class action suits, and applying pressure on companies and government authorities. You can help us do more for you by becoming a member of Option consommateurs at [www.option-consommateurs.org](http://www.option-consommateurs.org).

## **Recognition**

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## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Executive Summary**

We are in the era of telecommunications, a sector in which most Canadians consume multiple services such as home telephone, cell phone, Internet and cable or satellite TV. It is safe to say that virtually all Canadian households have a contract with one or more telecommunications companies. The current situation, however, leads us to believe that dissatisfaction with telecommunications companies is on the rise. From January 1 to October 31, 2008, the Office de protection du consommateur (OPC)<sup>1</sup> reported that the telecommunications sector received the second highest number of complaints, accounting for 11% of complaints handled. OPC also estimated that 14% of the 12,778 complaints about cell phone companies received in 2005-2006 were related to customer service. Other statistics confirm the accuracy of this. For example, statistics on complaints in Canada from the Better Business Bureau<sup>2</sup> reveal that in 2008, 1,382 types of companies were ranked based on the number of complaints received. Wireless phone services came in 1st place, Internet services 7th, cable television 14th, and landline services 17th. By comparison, the food industry (grocery stores), another sector that concerns all Canadian households, was in 107th place for complaints.

Despite the CRTC's efforts to promote competition in the Canadian telecommunications arena, there are still very few Canadian carriers. This situation is likely to prove exploitative for consumers, who will not enjoy the advantages of a competitive market.

According to data that Option consommateurs gathered for this report, a major share of complaints relate, either directly or indirectly, to customer service. For example, in 10 months in 2008, Option consommateurs received over 300 complaints about telecommunications services; 41% of these related to customer service.

The purpose of this report is to investigate customer service in major Canadian telecommunications companies and specifically how they handle complaints and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.opc.gouv.qc.ca/Index.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bbb.org/>

resolve disputes. We shall evaluate Canadian telecommunications companies' customer satisfaction policies and review consumer feedback.

The study is based on document research, interviews with representatives from telecommunications companies and consumer rights organizations, detailed examination of websites, and the findings of four focus groups composed of consumers who have utilized customer service. The base of reference for the study is the ISO standard (10001, 10002, and 10003), which is used in this context as a basis of comparison for in-company customer service.

Finally, based on an analysis of each of the three ISO standards, Option consommateurs will make a number of recommendations, including the following general recommendations:

**General recommendations for companies**

Companies must change their attitude toward loyal customers. On the issue of improving customer service and retaining existing customers, certain findings emerge. Customer service must be tailored to individual requirements and be responsive to needs.

This means that customer service should provide a prompt, personal response and an effective resolution of problems. In this regard, a contractual promise to resolve problems within a standard timeframe is essential.

Good customer service is also defined by its availability and openness, meaning easy-to-find contact information, an easy-to-navigate telephone service and diligent tracking of complaints and customer files.

Accessibility is also partly determined by the language that a company uses. Accordingly, simple, everyday language should be used for contracts and technical support. Invoices should also be straightforward, so that customers can understand at a glance what they are paying for each month.

Companies should also demonstrate transparency, for example, by publishing clear contact information for complaints, making their complaints handling process available and drafting clear and concise contracts.

**General recommendations made to the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services (CCTS)**

We consider it essential that the CCTS mandate be expanded to include consumer information and education about customer service issues in the telecommunications domain. It is also essential that CRTC intervenes towards the industry in order to prevent once and for all the occurrence of systemic problems, either CCTS take on a more coercive role and be empowered to implement a comprehensive system of sanctions against telecommunications companies and introduce regulations for ensuring a certain quality of customer service. In the present context, CCTS only settles disputes on a "case-by-case" basis. By broadening its mandate, CCTS could prevent many of these disputes by ensuring that the same problems do not occur repeatedly.

In addition, CCTS should be more accessible. For example, contact information should appear on all bills that customers receive from service providers and be easily accessible on their websites.

Regarding visibility, CCTS should enhance its presence in the mass media to ensure that Canadian consumers are familiar its mandate and how to get in touch.

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## Introduction

### Context

We are in the era of telecommunications, a sector in which most Canadians consume several services, such as home telephone, cell phone, Internet, and cable or satellite TV. It is safe to say that virtually all Canadian households have a contract with one or more telecommunications companies. The current situation, however, leads us to believe that consumers are becoming more and more dissatisfied with telecommunications companies. From January 1 to October 31, 2008, the Office de protection du consommateur<sup>3</sup> reported that the telecommunications sector received the second highest number of complaints, accounting for 11% of complaints processed. OPC also estimated that 14% of the 12,778 complaints received in 2005-2006 about cell phone companies were related to customer service. Other statistics confirm the accuracy of this. For example, statistics on complaints in Canada from the Better Business Bureau<sup>4</sup> confirm that in 2008 there were 1,382 companies classified by the number of complaints they received. Wireless phone services came in 1st place, Internet services 7th, cable television 14th, and landline services 17th. In comparison, the food industry (grocery stores), another area that concerns all Canadian households, was in 107th place.

When we look at the number of complaints received by consumer organizations, it doesn't seem very high. But when we take into account that "96% of consumers never complain," and that "each complaint represents approximately 25 customers,"<sup>5</sup> the situation becomes alarming. In 2008-2009, the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services (CCTS) received 17,407 calls, 3,214 of which were complaints as defined by the Commissioner's mandate. If we presume, based on these

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.opc.gouv.qc.ca/Index.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bbb.org/>

<sup>5</sup> Léger Marketing. *L'entreprise infidèle; les clients veulent être loyaux, mais les entreprises les font fuir*, Les Éditions Transcontinental, fondation l'entrepreneurship éditions, Québec, 2009, p.14

figures, that about 400,000 Canadians needed help with telecommunications service issues, but only 80,350 would have complained to the CCTS, the problem starts to look more serious.

Despite the CRTC's efforts to encourage competition, there are still very few Canadian telecommunications companies, Anthony Hémond of the Union des consommateurs says. "[W]e have two oligopolies: on the one hand, we have the old, traditional telecommunications service monopolies, and on the other we have the cable distributors. So, we have very few companies, of which 5 share about 90% of the revenues. These domains are extremely problematic because they dictate the market." The situation can lead to consumer abuse because consumers cannot benefit from a competitive market.

### **A field for exploration**

That being said, according to the mass media and the data that Option consommateurs compiled for this study, most complaints are related directly or indirectly to customer service. For example, in 2008, over a period of ten months, Option consommateurs received over 300 complaints about telecommunications services, 41% of which were related to customer service. The mass media and public opinion seem to confirm this. In fact, two reports by the program *La facture* criticized, among other things, the fact that sales were combined with customer service, and that customer satisfaction was a second-order priority. Although some efforts are being made to improve the situation, it is far from resolved. This was fully supported by testimony from experts in customer service, former employees, and customers.<sup>6</sup>

Over the years, journalists have published many articles and reports on the topic. Among these is an article by Suzanne Dansereau published in *Les affaires*,

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<sup>6</sup> These reports date from October 13, 2009 and December 1, 2009. They are available at [http://www.radio-canada.ca/emissions/la\\_facture/2009-2010/archivage.asp](http://www.radio-canada.ca/emissions/la_facture/2009-2010/archivage.asp)

January 17-23, 2009, entitled “Le mauvais service à la clientèle déplaît plus à la clientèle que des prix trop élevés.”<sup>7</sup> The *Globe and Mail* columnist, John Doyle, also complained in his June 2, 2009 article called “Ten Things I Hate about Cable Companies”<sup>3</sup> about the telecommunications companies’ many inconsistencies. The magazine *Commerce* came out with an entire issue entitled “La chute d’une marque”<sup>4</sup> talking about Bell Canada and the multitude of problems they have encountered. Public figures like Jean-François Mercier, a Quebec actor and comedian, have even started to talk publicly about how bad customer service is at telecommunications companies.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the telecommunications industry seems to focus its interest on new customers. The quality of customer service obviously suffers because customer retention is not a priority. For the publication of *L’entreprise infidèle*, Léger Marketing recruited an array of experts in research, industry, business, and marketing to identify the problems underlying customer defection. One of its conclusions is that customers are not disloyal, but companies and businesses that neglect their loyal customers are. The authors state:

*Sometimes there’s real hypocrisy. The company wants the customer to be loyal, but its actions demonstrate that it does not intend to return the favour. Although it’s rare that customers feel deliberately exploited, there are other subtle ways of betraying the loyalty of those who let the company dip into their wallets. This sense of betrayal can take many forms: customer service that makes no attempt to resolve customer problems; promotions that aren’t open to all; an abuse of trust; the feeling of not being treated fairly. (Léger Marketing, 2009, p. 82) [Our translation].*

The following passage explains what kind of attitudes to avoid and further reveals that telecommunication companies are major culprits in the field. It shows the

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<sup>7</sup> Dansereau, Suzanne. *Les affaires*, “Le mauvais service à la clientèle déplaît plus à la clientèle que des prix trop élevés,” January 17 to 23, 2009, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Doyle, John. *The Globe and Mail*, “Ten things I Hate about Cable Companies,” June 2, 2009, p. R3.

<sup>4</sup> Bergeron, Ulysse. *Commerce*, “La chute d’une marque,” September 2008, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7GHRF3Y1oo&feature=related>

telecommunications industry as a lazy “brute” that is unwilling to change how it interacts and negotiates with its customers:

*Three major telecommunications companies were among the top ten most poorly managed companies: Bell, Bell Mobility, and Express Vu in the lead, were followed closely by Rogers and Telus. Their problems relate of course to the three A's [advantage, affinity, attraction], but more specifically to their pricing practices, or should I say, the perceived lack of value in their rates. Fortunately for the reputation of their name and for us consumers, IP voice transmission and new markets being opened by the CRTC will force some of these companies to be more considerate to the customer. (Leger Marketing, 2009, pp. 63-64) [Our translation].*

It seems the telecommunications industry has little respect for its customers. Our study will attempt to explore customer service at telecommunications companies in Canada in order to understand all its intricacies, identify problems, and possibly find solutions.

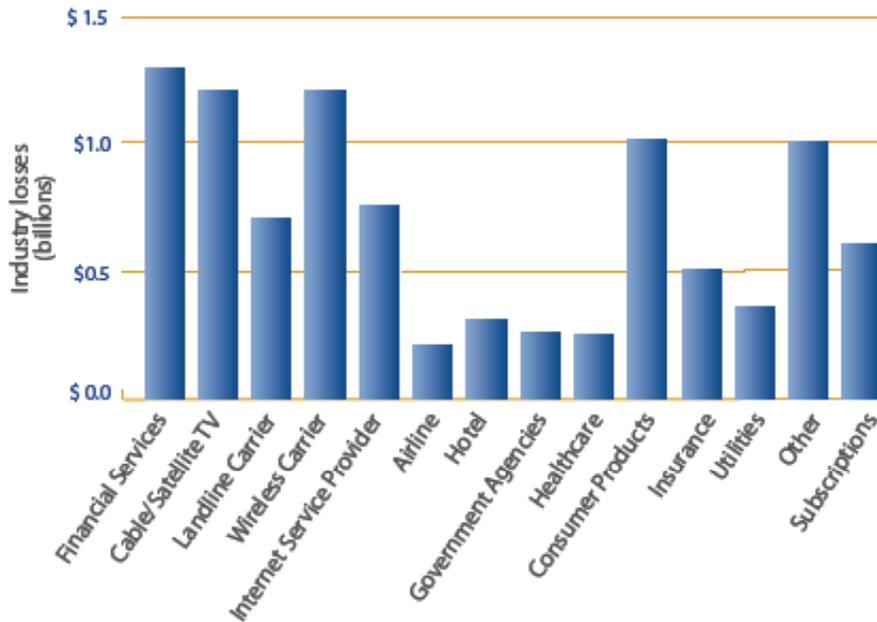
Lastly, we wanted to refer to a study by Genesys: *The Cost of Poor Customer Service*.<sup>6</sup> Genesys provides software for managing different telecommunications applications involving customer service (for example, Internet, wireless and landline service). The study was conducted by the industry analysts, Datamonitor/Ovum, and the market research firm, Greenfield Online, to evaluate the cost of poor customer service at various Canadian companies. It was estimated that bad customer service costs companies a lot: “The cost of poor customer service is a significant problem. Enterprises in Canada lose an estimated CDN \$9.7 billion each year due to defections and abandoned purchases as a direct result of a poor experience. More than 73% of consumers said they had ended a relationship due to customer service alone.” (Genesys, 2009, p. 4). It also appears that the telecommunications industry is among those losing the most:

*The problem is even clearer when we look at the data at industry level. The biggest losers are in financial services, telecommunications, cable/satellite TV, and consumer products.*

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<sup>6</sup> GENESYS. *The Cost of Poor Customer Service*, Octobre 2009, 8 pages.

*Chart 2: Losses by Industry*



(Genesys, 2009, p. 4)

Therefore, in Canada, the telecommunications industry occupies 5 out of 15 places in terms of financial losses resulting from unsatisfactory customer service. We consider that conducting this study is equally important for industry improvement and for consumer protection.

### **Project Scope**

The purpose of this report is to explore customer service in major Canadian telecommunications companies and, more specifically, how these companies handle complaints and settle disputes. We propose to evaluate Canadian telecommunications companies' customer satisfaction policies and to examine consumer feedback about the companies.

The present study is based on document research, interviews with representatives from telecommunications companies and consumer rights organizations, close scrutiny of websites, and the results of four consumer focus groups with customer service experience. The study's base reference is the ISO standard (10001, 10002, and 10003), which is used in this context as a basis of comparison for in-company customer service.

We chose the following approach and methodology:

- Contact the major Canadian telecommunications companies to determine policies on handling complaints and customer service. The companies we contacted were Bell, Rogers, Telus, Videotron, Shaw, MTS Allstream, SaskTel and Bell Aliant. Together, these companies own the vast majority of the telecommunications market in Canada;
- Undertake a document search on measures taken by the major telecommunications companies to make customer service accessible and to speedily resolve problems (e.g. information available on websites or in brochures);
- Analyze policies in accordance with standards for customer satisfaction: ISO 10001 (code of conduct), 10002 (complaints handling) and 10003 (dispute settlement);
- Hold four focus groups with consumers who contacted their provider's customer service to file a complaint.
- Evaluate the government body responsible for external conflict resolution in Canada: the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services (CCTS).

In light of these results, we will be able, if necessary, to make recommendations for improvement to carriers, the CRTC, and CCTS.

## Stakeholders

In addition to our document research, we considered it essential to discover the opinions and the positions held by stakeholders in the telecommunications arena. When it comes to customer service in telecommunications, opinions differ greatly between consumers and providers, making it necessary to look at both sides.

**Consumer focus groups:** We conducted four focus groups in November 2009. The first two groups were held on November 11, 2009 in Toronto in English; the other two were held on November 17, 2009 in Montreal in French. The meetings all lasted about an hour and a half.

Participants had all contacted the customer service department at their telecommunications company for reasons ranging from a simple change of address to a formal complaint about a contracted service. At both the Toronto and the Montreal meetings, there were two groups of people: one aged 20 to 44 and one aged 45 to 70. Although the balance between men and women was relatively equal within the groups, gender was not a significant factor in this study.

After carefully studying all the meetings and having read the final report by the firm in question, we found that consumers' experience of customer service in telecommunications was approximately the same in Toronto as in Montreal; the same held true of younger and older participants. Details of these findings will be thoroughly explored in the following chapters.

The firm mandated to conduct the focus groups and submit a final report on their results was Environics Research Group, a Toronto-based firm that describes itself as follows:

*Environics is one of Canada's leading marketing and social survey*

*research consultancies with a reputation for integrity, accuracy and insight. Co-founded in 1970 by Michael Adams, the firm has evolved into a multi-disciplined international research and consulting group. Headquartered in Toronto, the firm has offices and affiliates in Ottawa, Calgary, Montreal, Oakland, New York and Washington D.C.*<sup>7</sup>

**Bell Canada (BCE):** BCE is Canada's largest communications company, providing the most comprehensive and innovative suite of communication services to residential and business customers in Canada. Operating under the Bell banner, the company's services include Bell Home Phone local and long distance services, Bell Mobility and Solo Mobile wireless, high-speed Bell Internet, Bell TV direct-to-home satellite and VDSL TV, IP-broadband services and information and communications technology (ICT) services.<sup>8</sup>

**Rogers:** Rogers Communications Inc. is a Canadian company offering different communications and media services. Its four main divisions are Rogers Wireless, the largest Canadian wireless service provider; Rogers Cable, a provider of cable services, high speed Internet access, telephone service and video retail sales; Rogers Media, a media group with interests in radio and television broadcasting, televised shopping, publishing and sports entertainment; and Rogers Telecom, a national provider of solutions for voice and data transmission, Internet solutions, and wireless services to companies and enterprises of all sizes.<sup>9</sup>

**Videotron:** A wholly-owned subsidiary of [Quebecor Media inc.](#) and partially owned by Capital d'Amérique CDPO inc., Videotron is an integrated communications company involved in cable broadcasting, interactive multimedia development, Internet access services, cable telephony and wireless telephone services.<sup>10</sup>

**Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC), John Lawford:** PIAC is a non-profit organization that provides legal and research services on behalf of consumer interests,

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<sup>7</sup> [http://erg.vironics.net/about\\_us/](http://erg.vironics.net/about_us/)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.bce.ca/en/aboutbce/index.php>

<sup>9</sup> <http://votre.rogers.com/aboutrogers/historyofrogers/overview.asp>

<sup>10</sup> <http://corpo.videotron.com/site/our-company/videotron-news/at-a-glance.jsp>

particularly for vulnerable consumers. John Lawford is a lawyer for the organization and responsible for telecommunications issues.<sup>11</sup>

**Union des consommateurs, Mtre. Anthony Hémond:** The Union des consommateurs' mission is to promote and defend the rights of consumers, especially the interests of those living in low-income households. The support that the Union des consommateurs provides to consumers is inspired by important values such as solidarity, equity and social justice, as well as by improving the living conditions of consumers at the economic, social, and political levels. Mtre. Anthony Hémond is a policy and regulations analyst in telecommunications, broadcasting, information highway and privacy.<sup>12</sup>

We attempted to interview representatives from all the major Canadian telecommunications companies. However, the following companies either refused to participate or ignored our many calls and emails: Telus, Shaw, MTS Allstream, SaskTel and Bell Aliant.

**Telus:** We left five messages and sent three e-mails to public relations representatives, but had no conclusive answer.

**Shaw:** We left three messages with a public relations representative and with the vice-president of customer service. After a brief email exchange, we thought we would be able to talk, but had no further response.

**MTS Allstream:** We talked to the public relations department, which referred us to the Director, Corporate and Employee. We left two messages with the secretary but received no response.

**Sasktel:** After an exchange of fifteen emails, Sasktel seemed interested in participating in our study. Finally, the Customer Loyalty Manager told us that they did

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.piac.ca/information/>

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.consommateur.qc.ca/union-des-consommateurs/?page\\_id=3](http://www.consommateur.qc.ca/union-des-consommateurs/?page_id=3)

not have the information we needed for the study and that they preferred to continue their relationship with the Consumer Association of Saskatchewan.

Bell Aliant: We emailed the company's general email address because we could find no specific contact information (public relations, President of Customer Service, etc.) on their website or via their telephone service. We finally received a message referring us to the head of media relations. We left two messages but received no response.

These are the reasons why these companies do not appear in the list of stakeholders who participated in this study. Furthermore, while Bell Canada and Bell Aliant are both under the banner of BCE, only Bell Canada agreed to answer our questions.

## **Chapter 1 - ISO 10001 - Guidelines for codes of conduct for organizations**

### **1.1 Using ISO 10001 as an evaluation grid**

The first step in analyzing telecommunication companies' customer service is to evaluate their codes of conduct. This analysis has two aspects: the documents and how they are applied. It is important not only to analyze companies' commitments but also to study how they are applied in a real context. As in the other two chapters of this study, we will look at documents published on each company's website, interviews with Bell, Rogers and Videotron, the results of focus groups conducted by Environics Research Group, and the complaints we have compiled.

From the outset, we thought it essential to use a universally recognized standard to develop an evaluation grid for telecommunications companies' codes of conduct vis-à-vis customer service policies. We chose the Canadian Standards Association's ISO 10001 standard for the following reasons. First, it was designed and developed by a committee of industry representatives, members of consumer rights organizations,

standards experts, federal and provincial government representatives, and academics. Second, this standard is extremely precise and can be adapted to several industry sectors and thus lends itself very well to analyzing codes of conduct in the telecommunications industry. Third, it provides practical recommendations rather than theoretical ones. Finally, this standard is part of a three-part set that enables us not only to analyze the code of conduct itself, but also to measure secondary aspects such as complaints handling and external conflict resolution.<sup>13</sup>

ISO 10001 mostly targets how a company plans, develops, implements and upholds its customer satisfaction codes. This standard is the backbone of customer service policy and companies can use it to develop outstanding customer service while anticipating in detail how the industry will evolve by maintaining and improving their existing customer service. Obviously, ISO 10001 is not a legal document, but must be seen as representing the ideal in customer service.

The standard “provides guidelines enabling an organization to ensure that all provisions of the customer satisfaction code meet the customer’s needs and expectations and that the code is precise and sincere,” [Our translation].<sup>14</sup> Using this standard as a tool, companies can:

- *Contribute to fairer trade practices and enhanced customer confidence in the organization*
- *Enable customers to understand what to expect from an organization in terms of products and customer relationships, thereby reducing the risk of misunderstandings and complaints*
- *Potentially reduce the need for new regulations on a company’s conduct vis-à-vis customers (ISO 10001, p. vi) [Our translation].*

Each element of this standard was developed into a series of questions used to interview companies and lead focus groups, and as a tool for assessing the quality of

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<sup>13</sup> Each of these topics is examined in chapters 2 and 3 of this study.

<sup>14</sup> *National Standard of Canada, CAN/CSA-ISO 10001-08 (ISO 10001-2007), Quality Management - Customer Satisfaction- Guidelines for Complaints Handling in Organizations*, Canadian Standards Association, 2007 [Our translation]

customer service at telecommunications companies.

ISO 10001 defines the term “code of conduct” as “certain commitments an organization makes to their customers regarding the actions they take to enhance customer satisfaction, together with appropriate provisions” (ISO 10001, p. 2) [our translation]. These “appropriate provisions may include objectives, conditions and restrictions, as well as contact information and procedures for handling complaints” (ISO 10001, p. 2) [our translation]

## **1.2 Codes of conduct of participating companies**

We shall now take a look at these commitments and how they compare to the consumer’s experience. The first thing to consider is that not all companies make direct commitments to customers.

Bell's commitment is fairly succinct. On their page “Our commitment,” Bell outlines the following:

*Our commitment: Yes, delight. Simply put, that's our mission: To delight you with the products, services and customer support that we provide to you every day.*

*It's more than just talk. It comes with a commitment. Here it is:*

- *We will bring you outstanding products and services that can help you in your daily life;*
- *We will strive to provide you with the products and services that you want;*
- *We will remember that technology can be fun, and excite you with creative and useful new product innovations;*
- *We will strive to ensure that pricing information is presented clearly;*
- *We will be helpful and courteous in your dealings with us;*
- *We will strive to be accessible to you through the medium of your choice, whether it be online, in-store or by phone.<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> [http://support.bell.ca/en-ON/Customer\\_service/How\\_does\\_Bell\\_commit\\_to\\_their\\_customers](http://support.bell.ca/en-ON/Customer_service/How_does_Bell_commit_to_their_customers)

We also noticed that in mid-February 2010, Bell began an advertising campaign on TV and in print media on the quality of their customer service and the transparency of their commitment to that service.<sup>16</sup>

For Bell Aliant, another BCE company, with Bell's name, the commitment is shorter and located in the section "Legal and regulatory"<sup>17</sup> on their website:

### *Compliments and Concerns*

*At Bell Aliant our customers come first. We are here to help you. Call 1 866 425-4268 and speak to a customer service representative who will be happy to assist you. Situation not resolved? Ask to speak to a Customer Service and Sales manager. Your customer service representative will gladly transfer you directly or you may write to: Bell Aliant Customer Service, PO Box 1430 Saint John, NB E2L 4K2 (Ibid.).*

At Rogers, their page "Our Commitment to you"<sup>18</sup> includes a general statement: "You can count on Rogers to provide the world's most advanced and accessible communications solutions, and leading-edge content across multiple platforms. Our goal is to bring you the latest technology and services that are designed for you, offer you a choice, and meet your highest" (Ibid.). Then they continue with more specific statements:

- *We stand behind our products.*
- *We listen. And we empower our people to help you.*
- *We give you more choices.*
- *We help you understand your purchase.*
- *We put innovation to work for you.*
- *We keep you contacted.*
- *We will protect your information.*
- *We believe in doing the right thing (Ibid.).*

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<sup>16</sup> See the commercial at <http://www.infopresse.com/visuel.aspx?id=33924&idimg=4>

<sup>17</sup> [http://productsandservice.bellaliant.net/PS/nb/english/common/legal\\_and\\_regulatory.jsp#top](http://productsandservice.bellaliant.net/PS/nb/english/common/legal_and_regulatory.jsp#top)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.rogers.com/web/content/support-terms/commitment>

Each of these sections is further explained by a number of commitments. For example, the one most relevant to this study, “We listen. And we empower our people to help you” deals specifically with customer service and states the following (Ibid.) :

*Our service teams are ready to ensure you’re completely satisfied and take ownership of your issue until it is resolved.*

- *The majority of our residential customer service support is available 24/7 through our call centres.*
- *We contact you within 90 minutes of a cable installation visit to ensure you’re completely satisfied with the service and to resolve any issues promptly.*
- *We are listening to do better using tools like Twitter and online forums to hear your feedback, answer your questions and to act quickly to resolve your service questions.*
- *We have improved our process to resolve any escalated complaints and we have added more employees to respond to your concerns swiftly and fairly.*
- *We have established an Office of the Ombudsman to provide a fair and impartial review of unresolved, escalated complaints.*
- *We continue to make a long-term investment in self-service information and online tools (Ibid.).*

At Videotron, customer service is part of their advertising strategy. Their service commitments are presented in promotional videos available at the “Discover Videotron” under the banner “Try the Videotron Experience!”<sup>19</sup> The video states as follows:

*Experience entertainment the Videotron way with cutting edge technology and products and services in constant innovation. (...) Give us the pleasure of informing you and assisting you to make your choice. We’ll know what will best suit your needs, your lifestyle, and your budget. The more you combine, the more you save!*

*And it’s so simple! We take care of everything! One call to answer all your telecommunications needs, one visit from our technician for all your services, and one bill per month.*

*(...) In addition to endless possibilities, Videotron is committed to giving*

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.videotron.com/service/products>

*you much more. Videotron is the only telecommunications company in Quebec to offer you so much:  
Customer service 7 days a week;  
technical support 24 hours a day;  
installation 7 days a week by one of our technicians.  
Make the right choice! Opt for a unique experience. Call us now or visit videotron.com.*

In addition, under "Careers"<sup>20</sup> we found a statement of values that all relate one way or another to customer service:

*Treat our customers as we would want to be treated*

- *Demonstrate professionalism when dealing with customers.*
- *Understand the realities of customers and meet their needs within a specified timeframe.*
- *Collect information from customers and take the necessary means to improve the quality of service, when applicable.*
- *Develop strong relationships with customers and provide them with the best possible experience.*

*Agility and speed*

- *Act according to your instincts, on your own initiative and in a timely manner.*
- *Quickly adapt to new orientations or priorities with an open, positive attitude.*
- *Clearly identify priorities of a mandate or task and complete the work in the time prescribed.*
- *Be able to function in uncertainty.*

*Distinction*

- *Suggest innovative ideas and develop the most promising.*
- *Take risks with discretion.*
- *Use your strengths to benefit others.*
- *Welcome new ideas and creative suggestions with an open mind.*

*Teamwork*

- *Collaborate with colleagues and other departments on common goals.*
- *Show solidarity with team decisions even when you differ.*
- *Share useful information and knowledge with colleagues and other departments.*
- *Consider how your decisions impact on colleagues and other departments, and act accordingly.*
- *Promote synergy between colleagues and/or departments to reach objectives more effectively.*

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<sup>20</sup> <http://corpo.videotron.com/site/careers/life-videotron/shared-values.jsp>

### *Openness*

- *Challenge others to question ideas and processes, and be supportive.*
- *Take a position, share your opinions and defend them if necessary, while respecting others.*
- *Do what you say.*
- *Be able to tell it like it is, but in a respectful and appropriate manner.*

### *Thoroughness*

- *Show concern for the quality of service and respect professional standards.*
- *Contribute to the continuous improvement of the organization's process for effective and efficient work.*
- *Master the skills needed for your work and expand your skill set.*
- *Use available human, financial and material resources to reach projected goals and ensure maximum profitability for the company (Ibid.).*

We also found what is termed "Our mission" under "Videotron at a glance."<sup>21</sup> "As a leader in Canadian telecommunications, distinguished through its employees, and state-of-the-art products and services, Videotron's mission is to provide customers with the best possible experience, while remaining the most profitable in the industry," (Ibid.). This mission statement accompanies the six values described above. Videotron has also expressed its commitment to customer service through TV commercials and in print.<sup>22</sup>

At Telus, under "About Telus" on the page "Charter of Services"<sup>23</sup> the following commitments are listed:

*We are committed ...  
To serving you with respect and courtesy at all times;  
To taking the initiative to regularly offer you products or services that meet your needs;  
To always helping you benefit from economical long-distance plans suited to your needs;  
To providing you with after-sales support;*

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<sup>21</sup> <http://corpo.videotron.com/site/our-company/videotron-news/at-a-glance.jsp>

<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.infopresse.com/visuel.aspx?id=30776&idimg=2> for one of their TV commercials (in French). Sid Lee agency has also created more commercials for Videotron on their website [www.sidlee.com](http://www.sidlee.com) under "Our Work."

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.telusquebec.com/telus\\_fr/telusquebec/entreprise/charte.jsp](http://www.telusquebec.com/telus_fr/telusquebec/entreprise/charte.jsp) (Our translation; this page is unavailable in English.)

*To arriving on the day we said one of our specialists would come;  
To insuring that the installation or repair is completed to your  
satisfaction;  
To insuring that a qualified person calls you back in less than 24 hours if  
the first person your contacted couldn't respond to your request (Ibid.).*

At Shaw, their commitment is included in the list of contact information for consumers to get in touch with customer service, where it is stated:

### ***We Love to Help!***

*At Shaw, we have more than 10,000 helping hands working to bring exceptional experiences to our customers. We love hearing your great Shaw stories (thanks for those!), but we also want to know if you have a concern, complaint or suggestion for how we can improve. Here's how we make sure your thoughts and concerns are quickly addressed:*

- *Contact Customer Care - Our team is available to you 24/7/365 through [email](#), phone (1-888-750-7429) or at our [retail locations](#). Our friendly team will work diligently towards finding a solution to your concern in a timely manner.*
- *Local Customer Care Management - we're here with a helping hand, several hands, in fact! If a solution can't be found with our customer care team, then our local management team is available to help. Your Customer Care representative can put you in touch with a local Manager.*
- *Vice President, Customer Care - The entire Shaw team is committed to providing exceptional experiences to our customers. Our Vice President, Customer Care is available to ensure we find an appropriate solution to your concern. Our local management teams will be happy to put you in touch with our VP, Customer Care as required or the Vice President can be reached directly as follows:*
  - *Address: Suite 900, 630 3rd Avenue SW, Calgary, AB T3A 5S3*
  - *Phone: 1-888-750-7429*
  - *Fax: (403) 750-4501*
  - *Email: [vpccare@sjrb.ca](mailto:vpccare@sjrb.ca)<sup>24</sup>*

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.shaw.ca/en-ca/AboutShaw/TermsOfUse/PaymentTermsandConditions.htm#q1>

This passage was taken from a sub-menu, "Payment Terms and Conditions" on the "About Shaw" page. This page, however, is only available in English.<sup>25</sup> Shaw also took care to display their "Business Conduct Standards,"<sup>31</sup> a very comprehensive document containing the employee code of conduct.

MTS Allstream has no actual commitment to customer service. However, you can read the code of conduct and ethics that employees must sign by going to the page "About MTS Allstream" in the "Governance" section and then looking under "Conduct and Ethics."<sup>32</sup> This does not, however, make the situation any clearer. In this document, the section called "Relations with Customers" states:

*The Company's service often involves visiting a customer's home or place of business. When working at a customer's premises, you must:*

- *Demonstrate honesty and courtesy;*
- *Show the customer your Company ID and ask permission from the customer or other authorized individual before entering the premises;*
- *Work as efficiently and meticulously as possible;*
- *Leave the customer's premises and property as you found them.*

*Report any unauthorized connections, wiretaps or other infractions of the Company's regulations to Corporate Security (Ibid.).*

At Sasktel, we found their commitment to customer service under "Company Information," which is located under "About us," where it is stated:

***Our Vision***

*To improve the lives of everyone we serve each and every time.*

***Our Mission***

*We will go beyond in delivering innovative information, communication*

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<sup>25</sup> Seeing as french-speaking people use Shaw, it would be a good idea to provide a French version of this information.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.shaw.ca/NR/rdonlyres/15BB8AA2-87B9-4318-B9BF-640CA64743BB/0/BCSJuly09.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.mts.ca/portal/site/mts/menuitem.d7050076ca93feb6a1720010408021a0/?vgnextoid=2fdd8dca20041110VgnVCM1000001342a8c0RCRD>

*and entertainment solutions to our customers in Saskatchewan and other select markets. We will be a socially and environmentally responsible organization that delivers sound financial returns.*

*Our focus is our Customer. Our strength is our People.*

***Our Values***

***Honesty:*** *We build honest relationships through open communications with all people interacting with our business -- our customers, employees, partners and shareholder.*

***Integrity:*** *We deliver excellence by acting with integrity when conducting business and by taking pride in and responsibility for our work and decisions.*

***Mutual Respect:*** *Working together, we create an atmosphere of respect -- treating others how we would want to be treated.*<sup>33</sup>

This serves as a statement of the attitudes that may be expected by Sasktel's customers. There is, however, only an English version of this page.<sup>34</sup>

There are some differences between the companies' commitments, but the majority of them are relatively similar. There is a general tendency towards respect for customers and their needs. Several companies promote their availability and their openness to customer feedback. Honesty and courtesy are the most frequently mentioned attitudes; quick, efficient problem solving is the most commonly repeated commitment; and innovation is a major recurring theme in terms of technology and products. Although companies tend to say they stand out from the competition, we noticed that their attitudes and commitments to customers are quite similar. Certain companies mentioned their environmental awareness or transparency and openness, either under the heading of customer support or of rates and billing. The industry seems very homogeneous, however, in terms of customer focus. We shall also see that consumers tend to have similar experiences from one company to another. This information gives us an excellent summary of companies' commitments to customers. We will now explore how these commitments are implemented in a

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.sasktel.com/about-us/company-information/vision-and-values.html>

<sup>34</sup> Since Francophones use Shaw, it would be a good idea to provide this information in French.

specific context. The following analysis is based strictly on the principles of ISO 10001.<sup>35</sup>

## **1.2 How participating companies apply guidelines**

In this section, several elements of the analytical grid could not be completed for companies such as Bell Aliant, MTS Allstream, SaskTel, Telus and Shaw because we were not able to talk to representatives who could answer our questions.

### **1.2.1 Industry opinion**

From the outset, it seemed essential to see if **companies were respecting their commitments**. This is probably the most important principle in this study. Much of customer satisfaction is directly related to how companies respect commitments made to customers when they choose one company over another. If companies respect commitments and provide excellent customer service, customers are satisfied and feel no need to complain (Chapter 2) or to take their dissatisfaction to a third party (Chapter 3). It seemed equally valuable to analyze other elements of ISO 10001,<sup>36</sup> and these will be evaluated at the end of the chapter.

Regarding commitment, Bell, Rogers and Videotron representatives were unanimous. Each of these companies expressed their profound commitment to respecting promises made to customers.

Rogers sees their “Commitment” as a promise to be kept, which they have developed based on feedback from their customers and customer service agents:

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<sup>35</sup> In order to shorten the text, we display continuous text rather than separate each principle into multiple sub-categories. However, the main principles are in bold.

<sup>36</sup> Among these requirements, those that seemed most important were transparency and accessibility of company commitments, company responses to customer needs and expectations, accuracy of information, and company accountability for actions and decisions respecting the code of conduct.

*[We have put in place the] Rogers Customer Commitment, (...) it's a commitment to our customers that says: "If you engage and interact with Rogers, here is what you can expect from us." We actually avoided the word "code" because the actual commitment in and of itself was based on truly extensive research with our customers, but also with our front-line employees. (...) The commitment we have drafted, we see it as a stake in the ground, very much, we see it as a clear opportunity to enhance and to bolster it, and we are certainly committed to enhancing it and making it stronger, but the intent of it was to work with our customers in its creation. (...) When we rolled it out, we worked really closely with our front-line group and did a proper training with the front line who were very excited about the commitment because they felt that it represented, symbolically, an important gesture on behalf of the company, to make it clear that we really were seriously committed to enhancing the experience our customers have with us.<sup>37</sup>*

This shows that Rogers takes their commitment seriously and is determined to respect it. Moreover, it shows how this commitment is also an opportunity for continuous improvement.

At Videotron, they told us about their company's fundamental commitment to quality customer service, which led to an assertion of their values and mission:

*We've changed our way of thinking somewhat. We used to be very technology-oriented, and now we've become more customer-oriented. (...) [The new president (2001), Robert Dépatie] started this shift towards the customer, and now the customer is at the centre of our mission and our values. You can find [a copy] of our mission statement almost everywhere in our offices; it's really the focus of everything we do. If you check it out, our mission is to "create the best possible customer experience," obviously by offering the best products and cutting-edge technology. It's like a code of conduct we've got, one that everyone goes by. We're evaluated according to its values [as described in our mission statement]. Here's one, for example: "Treat the customer as you'd like to be treated." We've made it our focus, and there's been a real turnaround in the company - on all levels, not necessarily only in customer service. And that's what's important, that even someone in engineering, who we might think isn't aware of the customer... well, quite the opposite, definitely, even the engineers are*

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<sup>37</sup> Telephone interview with Rogers, January 27, 2010.

*thinking "How will [my work] help the customer... how's it going to improve their experience?"<sup>38</sup>*

Thus, Videotron's "mission" and "value" statements are presented not only as a company's commitment to their customers but also as a tool for evaluating employees and procedures. It goes on to say:

*Our mission is everywhere. It comes through in the voice of our president and our directors. (...) It's there in everyone's objectives. In each objective of what we call our performance management plans, [you'll find] the company's six main values. [For example], "Treat the customer as you'd like to be treated" is one of the points we use in the evaluation criteria for all management employees, so everyone gets the message.*

Set in place by its president, Videotron's mission and values have become an integral part of the company's culture: a promise to the customer coupled with a commitment by employees.

Bell confirmed that commitment is a fundamental priority: "Obviously, we're still in the process of reviewing customer service. Making a commitment has been a major priority for, let's say, the last 3 or 4 years, but it's a little hard to say because we're still constantly evolving."<sup>39</sup> They go on to say:

*Customer satisfaction. Those are words that come up everywhere... in our customer surveys, in surveys we commission, or in a memo to one of our agents about a survey. It's all about customer satisfaction - which is something that's actually rather intangible. It's not easy asking someone to measure customer satisfaction, knowing not only that each agent is different, but that each customer is different too.*

They are committed to customer satisfaction, but they also see this as an imprecise concept. However, they assured us that their commitment is serious. Each year, they

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Videotron in company offices, February 11, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Telephone interview with Bell, February 8th, 2010.

make each of their customer service agents sign a code of conduct to ensure that everyone agrees to respect the company's commitments:

*[We've got] a code of conduct that employees all sign every year during their annual review, and with this code of conduct they commit themselves to providing impeccable customer service, such as they don't hang up on customers and they try not to lie... it's all about maximum integrity. It's a hassle going through this sort of thing I know, but we don't imagine that the document alone is going to make our service perfect.*

Bell considers that making employees sign a code of conduct is not enough to ensure quality customer service. They demonstrated that commitment to the code is shown by investment in the company:

*I'd have trouble finding an exact point in time when we decided to commit more to customer service, but I'd say that over the last 3 years at Bell there's been a huge investment made, precisely to try and better understand why people perceive, based on certain experiences, that Bell's customer service is worse than any other company's, and so that we'll be in a position, instead of trying to resolve problems one at a time, to make a major investment into resolving problems at a higher level. For example, because of the recession, other companies made huge cuts. Well, Bell totally didn't do this at the customer service level, and, in fact, we were told to try and keep all our talent in customer service. I'd say [that] for about 3 years our mandate [has been] quite clear: not only did we say we wanted to improve the performance of our online people, we also invested just as much in our network as in improving customer service (...) with systems [such as] "post-call customer survey" and investing in staff training (...) online (...) and in support they'd get when they took calls (...) and other investments we've got planned for improving customer experience even more.*

Thus, Bell demonstrates their commitment to quality customer service through the investments they have made. They also demonstrate that they wish to improve, as indicated by their intention to resolve systemic problems. Indeed, when a company provides the necessary resources to develop, establish, uphold, and improve policies, this is one of the major signs it is committed to outstanding customer service. By deploying the necessary resources, a company takes on the capability to

respect its commitment to the customer.<sup>40</sup> In this regard, it seemed important to not only seek the views of representatives from Bell, Rogers and Videotron but also those of consumers.

The telecommunications industry seems convinced that there are sufficient resources to develop, establish, uphold, and improve its policies.

At Bell, this aspect was often stressed. "What's we really want to say is that we invest as much as possible in our [customer service], which is really there to give outstanding service." When we asked Bell representatives if they had a customer service code of conduct, they said: "A document, no, we have several documents, and obviously there's training, it's what we call 'resolution first.' So, before doing anything, we try to resolve the customer's problems, and of course answer their questions. So, this was a determining factor." Bell therefore provides training to improve employee attitude and competence in customer service. Unfortunately, we do not know how long these courses are.

Here, we will review the full range of initiatives to deploy the necessary resources for a model customer service department. Bell stresses, however, that "other [initiatives] date a little farther back, such as call monitoring, [where] calls were recorded to [satisfy us] that each call was given quality treatment. So, codes of conduct like this have been there for decades." More recently, the approach to measuring service quality seems to be changing and Bell is trying to improve its service based on *post-call customer surveys* that target its TV customer service:

*[W]hen you call Bell TV, at the end of each call there's an automated telephone survey. So you talk to one of our agents for almost all calls, that is 60-70 % of calls, and then you get a telephone survey that asks you if you were satisfied or not with your agent, were your problems resolved, do you have any suggestions for us, are you satisfied with our products in general? There are really 4 or 5 questions that come up often and are basic enough so you can tell us if you were satisfied or not with*

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<sup>40</sup> Some resources such as complaints handling and external conflicts resolution are explored more specifically in ISO 10002 and 10003. They are therefore presented in chapters two and three of this report.

*our agents and our products. We started this because we tried for many years to establish our quality standards based on call quality, the number of new customers, and other criteria, but in the end we found these statistics didn't really measure customer satisfaction. So, there's nothing better for the customer... instead of telling an agent "You should be respecting various policies" (or code of conduct as you call it) - than the customer just having their say [about their opinions].*

Bell also said that they might like to use this kind of survey for other services such as telephony or Internet. This approach to improving customer service was inspired by ISO 10001. "For example, [the post-call customer survey] is totally institutionalized (sic) because with each contact we want to improve certain points, but based on customer satisfaction, not on the company's perception, which is very important." Thus, Bell tries to improve its customer approach according to what their customers say, rather than relying only on surveys or call monitoring. These are more traditional approaches that view quality control "from the inside," meaning that there is no measure of customer satisfaction but rather a perception or assessment of it.

Bell also said that they used published resources to highlight customer experience: "A lot of books really inspired us, and we gave them to our entire team to help them get the picture, I mean, to try and go from a regular experience to an exceptional one. So it's a culture where an average experience isn't really [enough]." Bell talked to us, among others, about the book *Good to Great*,<sup>41</sup> which they used to improve their customer approach, indicating that they try to keep up to date with customer service trends.

Bell added they took other steps to deploy resources for outstanding customer service. Among others, Bell said customer service agents are paid according to the quality of their customer service:

*Another initiative we took to emphasize customer service, (...) was in terms of [customer service agents'] performance. Over 60% of their measurable performance is on points relating to the customer*

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<sup>41</sup> COLLINS, James C. *Good to Great: Why some Companies Make the Leap – and Others Don't*, HarperBusiness, New York, 2001, 300 pages.

*experience. This shows the agent, every day, that if he or she really want success, it's based on indicators relating to customer experience. The money's there, sure, and the costs are there, but the emphasis - over 60% - is really focused on indicators such as first call resolution rate, interaction - how they score on their level of interaction with the customer. It really helps to orient the agent's "focus" - if you like - on their interaction with the customer. The biggest thing vis-à-vis the customer is that a customer doesn't call back after they called to say they needed something.*

So, we might conclude that rewarding agents financially based on the quality of customer service will create an additional incentive for employees, and, in turn, ensure their compliance with Bell's commitment. Bell is the only company we spoke to that said it rewarded its employees, not only for the quality of their service but also for sales generated: "There are other things that ensure that, for example, in the different reward plans, employees are first of all evaluated on the quality of their customer service before they can qualify for rewards. So, this was another change that was quite significant that we made just to get the message across." Bell states, however, that their priority really is customer service, not just profit:

*The first job in customer service is totally to listen to customers and resolve their problems [if a customer calls us] with a problem or question before we even get into financial benefits. There are different perspectives on financial performance, and whether to push it (...) We're working with humans, so we don't talk about it all the time, and financial performance shouldn't come through high-pressure sales to the customer. (...) Once again, everyone's going to have their own criteria for the human aspect of sales, especially about customer needs. So, for us, a customer, for example, who watches TV but doesn't know what's available and doesn't benefit from the best deals we have to offer, not only needs their questions answered but also to check that what they're paying reflects their needs. So this type of approach could make a customer cancel some TV services and be bad for financial performance, but the customer who gets the most for their money is going to stay with us the longest.*

This quotation stresses that in customer service, sales volume is secondary to

customer satisfaction. Bell admits, however, that in the past, maybe this priority was not so clear:

*[I]t's easy to say that we need to offer perfect customer service and that rewards are not only based on sales. (...) It's true that we did that a few years ago [but now] we try to say: "It's important, and the proof is your salary depends on your customer service, and if you want to earn more, you have to exceed expectations in terms of customer service, no matter what your sales figures are.*

We can conclude, therefore, that certain changes were made to salary structures in terms of sales, which shows a more dedicated effort towards customer satisfaction.

In line with their commitment, Bell seems to have introduced a number of initiatives to put resources in place to "delight" their customers. These include providing new training for agents; conducting "post-call" surveys to rate customer satisfaction more directly; using ISO 10001 for inspiration; reading up on improving customer service; restructuring agent compensation schemes; etc. However, Bell does not claim to have a 100% satisfaction rate:

*The truth is that we have three to five thousand human beings working online, and they're really motivated to provide an excellent service. But people aren't machines, and like everyone's got problems at home (...), so trying to offer an excellent service to each caller when they're calling in one after the other, or face-to-face one after the other - I know very few companies that can claim that 100% of their contacts are perfect. So, we must also work with the fact that... you have to find the error and resolve it because, despite our efforts to be 100% perfect, we'll still be working with human error and we'll still have to apologize.*

Bell believes that the resources they have deployed seem to have improved their approach, but they are nevertheless aware that customer satisfaction cannot always be 100%. They believe, moreover, that these slips are due to either human or system error.

*For people who are here only temporarily, that is, who may not have*

*offered an excellent service, [we must] try to help them as much as possible through coaching sessions, through increased support. But when we make a mistake, especially, we apologize, because people make mistakes - whether it's a product launched by an IT system that didn't work or someone who slipped up in a procedure [and an error occurred]. In every process, there's always 0.1% or 0.2% or 0.3% errors that could happen. So when [a problem happens, we turn to our strategy and planning team or to] customer polls [to] make sure the problem gets resolved, and if we can't resolve it, at least to make a [proactive] call to the customer to tell them we're really sorry that we made a mistake and we're going to compensate them.*

When human errors occur, a refresher training session or coaching can help agents improve. Regarding system errors, it is important to apologize to the customer and to fix the problem. In addition to providing a quality customer service, Bell considers it necessary to put in place tools for improving and maintaining current customer service.

Rogers feels the same way. During the interview with Rogers' representatives, they even started out by saying:

*So the first thing I would say, from an organizational perspective, is that the customer experience is one of Rogers's top three priorities. So, there is a number of activities that we have under way to sort of continue to attend to improve the customer experience. We sort of view it as, we want to make it easier for our customers to do business with us, but also, importantly, we want to make it easier for our frontline employees.*

Here, Rogers explains the initiatives, investments, and resources they have used to hone their customer service. Rogers' first area of focus is "customer service culture":

*There are really three key areas that we focus on. One of them, is, sort of, the area of culture and that's really about fostering an environment, or culture, where employees are empowered to do the right thing for the customer. And, given the size and complexity of our organization, it's an important element of continuing to enhance the customer experience. For example, one thing we have done the past year is introduce the, what we call, the service commitment, and it's basically*

*something we developed in conjunction with our frontline employees to say: "What could we do, as an organization, as frontline employees, to make the experience better for our customers? What are the specific, tangible actions or steps we can take, and then how would we actually evaluate the frontline employees against those statements?" And so that's something we worked out collaboratively with the employees in terms of creating it, but also now evaluating it and continual improvement. So that's just one example of what we are trying to do in terms of fostering the right culture.*

Rogers have literally changed their perspective in order to assess, improve, and transform their customer approach, the first step being to consult with employees in the company who regularly interact with customers. After consultation, Rogers gave their customer service agents the tools and solutions needed to establish a service that reflected this commitment. In order to create a customer service "culture," Rogers felt that even executives, who rarely deal directly with customers, needed to get a clear idea of what the customer experience consists of:

*We also have a program called "Walk a mile." And the idea of that is the employees in the company [take] 2 half-days a year and have to go out and spend a half-day with a frontline employee. So that could be spending time with a service technician, that could be spending time with a call-center rep, and the idea is really to make sure that every employee in the company has a good [view] into what the customer experience is and so that they can take that back to their work and figure out how they can actually do their work differently to again make it better for the customer.*

Putting executives into the shoes of a customer service rep enables them to better assess customer needs and refocus their performance based on the experience. These two objectives are aimed at creating a company-wide culture focused on customer experience. A Rogers representative confirmed this:

*And the third thing is, as another example, we have a program called "Customer First Recognition" program, and it's a widely used program where we actually sort of identify and recognize, from the top CEO down, those employees and/or staff who go above and beyond to make the customers' experience exceptional. And so, that's a very widely used program. [This might seem] like standardized programs, but in an organization our size, it is critically important in terms of helping the frontline staff understand the critical world they play in terms of*

*making a better experience for our customers.*

Regarding the extent to which Rogers respects its commitment, this first “cultural” focus shows its interest in more abstract resources that reflect more a mindset than specific initiatives. Rogers also told us how it uses more tangible resources to fulfill its commitment to improving customer experience. The second key element in its approach focuses more specifically on the process. Rogers considers process to be definitely the most difficult element to control in a company of its size:

*The second category is really around the process, and we sort of characterize that as, because of the complexity of our business, to a day to day blocking and tackling to resolve for a key customer irritant. You know, one of the programs that we have is called “customer-based calling” (...) basically we have a proactive program in place where we try and identify and proactively resolve why customers are calling us. And we have a number of work streams under way there.*

Rogers tries to rapidly identify reasons why customers call, in order to reduce irritants and make the process smoother and more effective. Don Moffatt, Ombudsman for Rogers, explains this feature more precisely: “First of all we do a lot of analysis of call details to understand why customers are calling and then look at that to determine the root cause.” Among the initiatives the company has put in place as a result of these analyses, Rogers gave us the example of a process called “Walk Out Working,” in which when a customer purchases a product or service, the employee is required to follow a checklist of specific procedures for correctly advising the customer and ensuring that they understand exactly what kind of product or service they have just contracted with Rogers. Don Moffatt gives us a few examples:

*There is a detailed checklist that the employees walk through with the customer to insure, and that the documentation is filled out with the customer to make sure that the customer knows exactly what plan they have just put on, what their media usage is, what their first bill is going to look like, and, in some instances, we would actually print a mock of their first bill to explain it to them so that they would understand what it looks like.*

In this way, Rogers tries to ensure that customers do not receive a nasty surprise with their first bill, not just in terms of price but also in terms of their use of the product (cell phone minutes or Internet download volume, for example). In brief, “Walk Out Working” seems to be aimed more specifically at potential customer problems with understanding the often-complex jargon of contracts and invoices. In the same vein, Rogers has set up another procedure to reduce misunderstandings about bills and product use, as Mr. Moffatt explains:

*[There is the] “Call Me Out Program,” [where customers would get an] “order confirmation” so the customer would get an indication, for a cable product, would get an email after they finished their call with a service rep again confirming exactly what actions have been taken as a result of that call. So again: “These are the changes we’ve made, this is the impact it is going to have on your bill,” and so on.*

Rogers takes the initiative to help customers better understand exactly what they are signing a contract for. Service contracts are documents of bewildering complexity and few can claim to understand them perfectly. Bills are not easy to read, especially the “single bill,” which is now more common than not in the telecommunications field. Option consommateurs conducted a report on understanding single bills.<sup>42</sup> For this study, Option consommateurs consulted Éric Kavanagh, an information design expert. He explained that consumers skim through “single bills” without realizing how complex they are:

*It is possible that over time and through force of habit, the majority of consumers don’t object to the information overload. People read their bills without paying much attention, as if the only important part was the total amount. In fact, many consumers routinely give bills the minimum attention and use, and ignore secondary information unless the total is quite out of line with other months... Then they discover the real consequences of how the single bill has become a part of life: general confusion, difficulty locating important information, etc., (Ibid., pp. 98-99).*

It appears that consumers do not mind complex bills, until the time comes that they

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<sup>42</sup> Option consommateurs. *Entreprises de télécommunication; Une facture unique et incompréhensible ?*, 2009, 157 pages. (English is not available.)

do not understand what they are being billed for. By taking the initiative to at least clarify some parts of contracts and bills, Rogers seems to be trying to limit misunderstandings arising from overcomplicated bills. Similarly, Rogers offers an additional service for wireless customers: "Another example would be a self-service application that we've actually put on wireless to allow customers to understand what their usage is in real time, so they can query exactly how many minutes they use month to day and actually do some transactions on the phone as opposed to having to call in." Wireless customers can track their use and avoid extra service charges or misunderstandings related to billing. These two initiatives show Rogers's efforts to understand one of the most frequent causes of customer dissatisfaction: additional costs due for service that exceeds the terms of the contract. Rogers has used their resources to avoid these situations as much as possible, thereby fulfilling one of their commitments: "We help you understand your purchase."

Rogers also decided to simplify procedures in the area of customer service by integrating customer information regarding different services contracted:

*The company recently reorganized, starting off in September of '09, concluding it in December of '09, and one of the things we did... we brought our cable and wireless businesses together because we recognized the convergence in terms of the technologies coming together, and we wanted to reorient the organization to the way our customers see us. So we brought the cable and wireless businesses together and, as part of that, we actually created an FTP [file transfer protocol] of the customer experience. The intent of that group is [to look] across all of the data and information that we have about our customers, how they engage with us, and really try and dig into the analytics and figure out how we can continually enhance that experience. So there is some good work happening with that route, but it is still in the early days and we have great expectations in terms of the way it'll take that going forward.*

This way, Rogers' employees are able to more comprehensively collate information gathered from calls and also access all multiservice customer files, which helps them better understand why a customer has contacted customer service. They also created a new executive post: "In the late [sic] reorganization that we did, back in the fourth

quarter, we actually created a new senior vice-president position whose sole responsibility is customer experience, and that's bringing further mandate and focus to the activities around how do we improve the customer experience." Additional human resources have been assigned to the process so as to better understand and ultimately improve the Rogers customer experience.

Regarding human resources, Rogers representatives made a number of statements. First, for new hires, Rogers ensures that the person is right for the job: "One of the things we do when we hire new employees is - it's actually a fairly extensive training process. So there is a fairly extensive online screening process that we follow which includes doing call-centre simulations, but we also have things like personality fit casts and a number of other tools. So, before we even hire somebody, there is a fairly rigorous process." This ensures from the outset that candidates have some expertise in customer service. Then, a number of training sessions are provided for new employees to hone their skills:

*First of all, any employee, before going onto calls to deal with customers, ends up with a month's worth of training, classroom training. 25% of that is on soft skills training. So, specifically, to address (...) issues of understanding how [to deal with irate customers, (...) understand how to influence appropriately, how to change the behaviour depending on the nature of the customer, and so on.*

Next, Rogers talked about other training that new employees must receive and various specialized courses for employees seeking extended training for career advancement or wishing to learn more about customer service:

*[As] part of our new hire training for our call-centre agents, we do talk about the escalation process that is available to them within the call-centre to their team manager and now three, and now four-step process. In addition to that, we also have a Rogers university, which is open, in-class, facilitated training that are [given in classrooms] as well as some online training [for which employees can register] as part of their development plan. One of them is handling difficult customers and dealing with negotiation skills and to deal with influencing skills. As part of the office of the president, my team, that is one of the two or three*

*courses that, once they come on board to the office of the president, that we put them through as a refresher - and many of them have already been through them.*

Rogers has implemented a comprehensive and varied employee-training program to develop skills and improve efficiency. Regarding employee performance, Rogers discussed their quality control program, where each agent is regularly evaluated to see if they need training or coaching:

*[As] part of our quality program, (...) we actually will do the protocol monitoring of a minimum of 5 [calls] per agent, per month, and we will actually listen to this. [The quality monitoring team] will listen to the call and mark the call and they will provide coaching feedback that goes out to the manager, for the agent as well. (...) What we are able to do then with all of those calls - and it is truly about 15,000 calls per month that we are actually listening to and providing feedback [for] the frontline management team - we actually are able then to harvest that data and find out what are the drivers of those calls, why are customers calling, what have we done to address the issue (...) We are then able to feed that information back to a number of places in our organization for improvement.*

This information is also used for systems analysis and ongoing processes. By integrating information, Rogers may be able to use it to more generally improve service.

The third element that Rogers representatives discussed concerns systems as such:

*The last category is what we'll further call "systems." We have a lot of systems that grew out organically as the business matured, and it sort of reached a point where you need to look at that and, as that evolution continues, figure out a way to have a more common view of the customers. So, an initiative that we have under way is (...) a project, which we internally call "business transformation," and it is a multimillion-dollar project to really improve and enhance the experience from a customer's perspective.*

Over the years, Rogers has added a number of new products and services to expand their original cable service. Gradually, wireless services, Internet, etc., have been added. Rogers' focus on systems is about creating a customer service - and related telephone and computer systems - combining all these services:

*[We] have systems that have grown in the business. Some of the systems were as much as 30 years old. So, over the years, they are doing unnatural things rather than what they were originally designed to do and, of course, what is very common these days is our customers are taking a number of our products, some of which were originally [being operated and billed], on different operating systems. So, we are on a 2- or 3-year journey to replace all of our billing systems to one integrated billing system that will ensure that our employees, when they are speaking with a customer, have a good line up of all the products and services the customer has and we can ensure that, in the issue of the common bill, the system is a fully integrated, state-of-the-art system. The other thing that Terri mentioned, in our focus in making things easier for our customers and making things easier for our frontline employees who are servicing customers, is that this new system that we are working on and that we will roll out in the next year and a half or so, is that it will provide a lot of enablement capabilities for our frontline employees to make the job easier for them in terms of support and in the consolidating of the customers.*

Rogers wants to integrate their systems not only to facilitate their agents' task, but also to provide them with access to all the information for the customer they are dealing with. Therefore, someone calling customer service does not have to speak to multiple agents if they have a problem or question about two or more contracted services. This facilitates things for agent and customer alike. We will see later that one of the major problems identified by consumers was being transferred from one department to another during a single call. The initiative to integrate the systems aims to eliminate, if not alleviate, this problem.

Finally, Rogers told us about an innovation regarding customer contact and how customers interact with the company:

*The other thing, on [the] system's side is also looking to the future, so we know that there are a lot of customers that would prefer to interact with the organization through self-service capabilities versus needing to call the call centre, for example. So, early technology adaptor is an example. So, one of the things we've also been doing is investing quite substantially in terms of enhancing the tools and the resources that we have available [such as] a self-service environment where customers can go onto our website and transact with us through the website versus calling into the call centre.*

Rogers is trying to vary the ways customers communicate and interact with the company. Rogers also told us that they had set up a social-media-standby team on the Web:

*We have a team, not a big team of people, but we have a team of people that are basically monitoring conversations online 24/7, we actually print daily reports in terms of the conversations that are distributed to a number of leaders in the organization, including the executives. You can imagine almost every major social networking blogging site. We track it. The idea is, if there are some issues or concerns being raised, what we do then is work with the area of the business where the concern is being raised and let them know the customer feedback and/or if there are any suggestions in terms of what the customers are looking for, we bring that forth as well. So that has been in place for probably the past 6 months.*

The specific social media mentioned by Rogers were Twitter<sup>43</sup> and Youtube.<sup>44</sup> They also specified that their team not only monitors these media, but also tries to provide some elements of customer service or technical support for those with questions or comments:

*[One] of the things this team does, [if they come across someone who has a question about a product, for example], is engage online in discussion forums and offer tips and suggestions and, sort of engage in the conversation and try to be helpful where they can. It's not a service issue always, but it is a few helpful suggestions or ideas for those who don't want to call into a call centre.*

Rogers tries to assess customer attitudes over and above surveys and information compiled by the customer service department, thereby fulfilling another of their commitments, "We listen. And we empower our people to help you."

Videotron also told us about a number of resources that they used to fulfill their commitment and uphold a certain standard of quality in customer service. First, the mission and values that were introduced in early 2000 by the new president, Robert

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<sup>43</sup> [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

<sup>44</sup> [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

Dépatie, were the result of a major change to shift the company's focus towards the customer. Robert Dépatie's profile, published on the company's website, briefly shows how this turning point deployed all the resources that we are going to see later:

*Under Robert Dépatie's leadership, the company then entered a rethinking phase to shortly become a full-service telecommunications provider, firmly grounded in its new mission of delivering the best possible user experience to all Videotron customers. To accomplish this new mission, Mr. Dépatie and his team devoted their time to fine-tuning an "on-demand" approach to positioning company products and delivering entertainment to customers. This on-demand approach and other strategies spawned some 20 new products and services, including IP technology cable telephony and mobile services. Major investments also enabled the Videotron network to add new, advanced technologies and paved the way for a future one-stop-shop and bundled service options for both residential and business customers. The months of constant effort to address customer needs and improve operational effectiveness paid off. By the end of 2005, with Robert Dépatie at the helm, Videotron had undergone a complete turnaround in customer service and posted record growth in all departments.<sup>45</sup>*

Around 2003 to 2004, Videotron started to change its vision and turned from a basically technological approach to one that proudly puts the customer experience in first place. Among these changes, the one that seems the most significant is the "one-stop-shop" approach, which integrates all customer services into a one-stop facility that amalgamates all the services a customer might potentially request into one bill and a single customer service occasion. Videotron representatives described it as follows: "A 'single window' involves having one agent who serves the customer, regardless of the product, and not having agents specializing in products like you find at some of our competitors; this is what really started the whole process of customer focus and customer service." This approach is also thought to provide increased customer satisfaction:

*Now, with this resolution to resolve problems at the first contact, when a customer calls, an agent can provide information on all products and should be able to resolve the problem the first time. So, it's a process we've been using for several years and it's working out well. In the*

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<sup>45</sup> <http://corpo.videotron.com/site/our-company/team/executive-team/robert-depatie.jsp>

*latest polls, we had 97% customer satisfaction, and our multi-product customers were 99% satisfied. So, it's a process we started and promoted and it's working very well.*

When we asked Videotron representatives if they had used ISO 10001 to develop procedures, codes and policies, they responded: "We're not currently certified, but when we looked at the standards in more detail, there were certainly a lot of criteria that you see in our operations, so it made us think of possibly one day getting certification. So, I think we're applying the vast majority of the standard's criteria." They feel that their policies meet the standard's requirements targeted in this study.<sup>46</sup> They added: "Regarding our ability to provide the resources needed for developing, maintaining, and improving our policies... We do a lot of analysis and make policy adjustments on various teams." In essence, they review and upgrade policies to make their current customer service more effective.

Videotron explained the program of policy implementation, analysis, support and improvement in the following terms:

*Essentially, our program is based on survey results and is reviewed quarterly. As soon as we get the survey results, each team sets up a quality plan based on three axes. There's everything that relates to policies and procedures. Then, the second axis has to do with training, because sometimes it's more a question of skills and training. The third axis is coaching. Managers do a lot of coaching. We put in place a mentoring system that enables us to mentor and support the agents.*

More specifically, the senior training and projects director (Senior Director, Sales strategies and operations support), explained the work of policy review and improvement:

*On my team, I have a "project" team dedicated to everything connected with policies and procedures for customer service overall. It's a team that generally analyzes why customers call or are dissatisfied with us. They look into what the problems are and why customers are dissatisfied and their goal is to adapt or modify policies, or explain why they can't be modified because of legislation or other reasons.*

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<sup>46</sup> In fact, ISO 10001 certification does not exist.

Videotron uses the information compiled from customer service calls to change the way they act and avoid various irritants. They state that the policies and practices were appraised by the company's legal department, but not by an external firm: "[There] is a project right now to evaluate the company's business process and we are very open to that."

The company regularly conducts surveys to keep up to date on the level of customer satisfaction:

*We really have three types of surveys. We have one with Leger Marketing that rates customer satisfaction with our products. We have a more in-depth one with CROP that rates customer satisfaction with our customer service, according to centre, and that enables us to do an in-depth analysis. We also have direct surveys with Utopia, including telephone surveys directly after the customer is connected. When dissatisfied customers have called several times, we call back to find out why they were dissatisfied, When customers say in the CROP surveys that they're dissatisfied, we call back, with their permission, to settle the issue. So we're really using macro-data for micro-management of customer dissatisfaction, which enables us to constantly upgrade our satisfaction rating.*

Videotron's customer service culture makes extensive use of surveys to measure satisfaction. We notice that telecommunications companies, such as Rogers and Bell, are also contracting outside firms to provide surveys after service calls or when a customer contracts a new service.

We asked Videotron if they consulted other reference materials besides surveys, such as books or studies. They told us: "Certainly, whether it's in marketing - because I'm thinking about customer service - we keep up to date via service providers or we read books on new trends and new approaches to customer culture, customer service, the customer is king, disloyal companies, things like that. Of course we read a lot because things constantly evolve." This shows that Videotron tries to keep up to date with trends in customer service. A Videotron representative even made reference to the

Léger Marketing survey “*L’entreprise infidèle*” from which we took certain passages for this report.<sup>47</sup>

Regarding employee training, Videotron representatives said they make sure to emphasize their mission and values:

*Our whole initial employee training - which lasts 51 days, if I’m not mistaken, including class time and hands-on experience - is focused on the customer approach. There are even specific days devoted to the kind of customer focus we need to have. And for 3 years now, (...) we’ve been incorporating this concept of customer orientation into all the workshops because we realized that people needed a “refresher” - it’s not necessarily an innate ability for an agent - so these theory sessions and workshops reflect the theory on a more practical level.*

We also note that Videotron employees have refresher training sessions to focus them on the customer approach. When Videotron shifted towards “customer approach” training a few years ago, they changed their customer service agents’ practices and upgraded their knowledge:

*[There were] major changes, with the “single window” (...), it’s sure a change because you’re asking an agent to know all the products. On the one hand, we soon saw that it worked, and in terms of the company, I think it was a gradual evolution; it wasn’t major, all at once. (...) When we put all this in place, we launched our network of kiosks and shops, so it has always been developed with this in mind, and has always been gradual. I don’t think there was really a major change at any one specific moment. We established a strategy and deployed it gradually.*

Videotron has clearly taken the time to train employees to respond to customers with several different services.

To promote and advance the company’s customer approach, Videotron also told us that the president met annually, either individually or in groups, with each of the company’s employees, and that his message is explicit:

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<sup>47</sup> Léger Marketing. *L’entreprise infidèle; les clients veulent être loyaux, mais les entreprises les font fuir*, Les Éditions Transcontinental, fondation l’entrepreneurship éditions, Québec, 2009, p.14

*Robert Dépatie, the president (...) does 2 big things. He meets all non-union employees at an event in December and he does a meet-and-greet, and then because union employees have a schedule, he goes around to meet with all the other employees. There's not a speech he makes that doesn't begin with the mission and values. So, the mission is the path we are headed on - the direction we're going in - and the values are what we do to get there. It's really, yeah, treating customers as we'd want to be treated, but also efficiency, openness, and thoroughness. So this is exactly how we promote ourselves, by being transparent and by trying to respond to problems as fast as possible.*

Customer satisfaction and ensuring respect for the company's mission and values are at the heart of Videotron's culture.

Regarding other companies whose commitments we cited, we do not know if they have committed to respecting them, or if they have put in place the resources needed to meet those commitments, because they either ignored our requests for comment or refused to speak with us.

### **1.2.2 Consumer Opinions**

In order to research consumer opinion, we enlisted Environics Research Group, which held four focus groups: two in English that took place on November 11, 2009 in Toronto, and two in French that took place on November 17, 2009 in Montreal. These focus groups gave us a very clear idea of the major problems in customer service in telecommunications companies.

These results were quite similar to the complaints statistics that Option consommateurs have been receiving since 2002.<sup>48</sup> Naturally, this data can only be on a qualitative basis, since large-scale surveys on the subject are unavailable. Although the Office de protection du consommateur (OPC), the Better Business Bureau (BBB), and the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services (CCTS) have

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<sup>48</sup> We compiled all the consumer complaints we received about customer service at telecommunications companies. We then looked at the nature of each complaint, which allowed us to discover the major reasons for dissatisfaction with customer service in the telecommunications industry.

data on complaints in the telecommunications industry, these complaints are not detailed enough to show their nature. CCTS provides a few more details on the types of complaints in its annual report, but we were disappointed to find that the organization does not deal with complaints about customer service.<sup>49</sup> However, the organization's new mandate now seems to include issues related to customer service, even though the term "customer service" is still not clearly stated.

### *Main findings*

Among the main topics discussed in focus groups, wait times came up first. If a company wants to provide quality customer service, having enough customer service agents would appear to be the first prerequisite. However, the theory that wait times are the biggest complaint about customer service is apparently false. Consumers participating in focus groups showed some frustration with long wait times, but they also seemed willing to wait if the service was satisfactory. Environics supports this in their report<sup>50</sup>:

*One common issue revolved around the length of time it could take to be served. Most people reported that they tended to be serviced quite quickly once they actually got past all the endless menus and voice-recognition options and waiting on hold for a customer service rep. Only a couple of people reported being on hold for inappropriately long periods of time. Some expressed frustration, while others were more resigned to the long waits. Some were eager to discuss their favourite strategies for reducing or dealing with wait times, such as immediately pressing 0, calling at certain times of day and getting on with other things while the phone was on speakerphone. Most people did appreciate it when a recording would tell them how long they might be on hold before their call was answered.*

The report did not discover major dissatisfaction with wait times. Some people did in fact say they had to wait a long time, but these cases were fairly rare. In fact, several

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<sup>49</sup> We still study the data compiled on these organizations in the conclusion in order to give an overall picture of consumer satisfaction with the telecommunications industry. However, this data does not help us determine the nature of the major complaints regarding customer service.

<sup>50</sup> See the whole report in Appendix 1

people said they were resigned to waiting. One man said: "Over the years, I've gotten used to having to wait." Another said: "When you go into these phone calls, you have to be in a frame of mind. (...) You have to be prepared to wait." One person told us she left a company because of wait times. Many placed the blame on calling during busy times (or after normal business hours, according to some). So, we cannot conclude that the major problem in customer service is the lack of agents on duty.

However, systemic or procedural problems may give rise to another much more irritating type of wait time that is the prime culprit in customer dissatisfaction and frustration: automated telephone systems. Most participants got annoyed when having to choose from menu lists and clearly enunciate their problems via automated voice recognition systems:

*Many of the participants disliked voice recognition systems such as "Emily" at Bell Canada. They complained that frequently they did not seem to work correctly, could not interpret frustration in a person's voice and often did not result in reaching the correct person or department. Furthermore, some participants complained about the level of detail contained in menus. Specifically they often found that either there were too many choices or the issues they were calling about were not contained in any of the options. In Montreal in particular, several participants spoke of their strategies for "getting past Emily." Participants reported that when they encountered such frustrations they often hit # or 0 in hopes of reaching a live operator. One woman even spoke of selecting whichever option was for new customers since she was convinced that this generally was the quickest path to a live operator who could then direct her to the appropriate person.*

According to our analysis, although a customer is unlikely leave because of this, it certainly plays a role in customer dissatisfaction. Some industry representatives asked us if this was a widespread feeling or if those who felt frustrated were not mostly older people, which would indicate a generational difference. Surprisingly, this was not the case. According to our data, the vast majority of consumers prefer to speak to a human when they call a company. Some even suggested that companies train customer service agents in all areas of the company so they can answer any question at all, or at least, hire receptionists who can direct calls to the right service after

identifying why the customer is calling.

An even bigger problem - which is sometimes a direct result of system failure - is repeated transfers during the same call:

*Once the participants had successfully navigated the phone systems and reached a live person, the next frustration was that they would not contact the person who was best able to help them, or as one put it "you never get to the right person the first time." In these cases they reported that they would typically be transferred. In this case it seems that the transfers themselves were not so much an issue as the way in which they occurred. Specifically, participants reported frustration with giving out their information and telling their story complete with all the relevant details and then being transferred only to have to begin once again at the beginning with their basic information. Because participants were already impatient after holding and then navigating the phone system to this point this was felt to be even more frustrating. Even worse, if the first service person did not adequately understand the issue this could result in a further transfer. Finally, a minority of participants spoke of having to call back for their issue. In this case they were frustrated not only by having to give their information over again, but also by having to wade through the opening hold queue again and often not being able to speak to the same person or people they spoke to before. People with relatively simple and straightforward reasons for having to call customer service usually found that they could get their problem resolved by dealing with one rep. However, some people who had more complex and more adversarial issues to resolve reported having to talk to as many as 5 different people before getting any resolution.*

From what we understand, repeated transfers are due not only to automated systems but also to bigger problems. First, it seems that some agents lack the competence to resolve the customer's problem. If, of course, the customer has a technical problem, and they end up with a billing agent, it is understandable that they would be transferred to a technical support agent. However, once the customer reaches the right department, why would their call need to be transferred, or alternatively, put on hold for a long period of time while the agent talks to a colleague?<sup>51</sup> Lack of problem-solving training for agents and the inability to initially resolve a problem were some of

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<sup>51</sup> Another complaint raised by one of the participants in focus groups.

the major irritants identified by focus groups and the complaints received by Option consommateurs. In fact, Option consommateurs calculates<sup>52</sup> that of all complaints received, 29.7% were related to frustration with repeated transfers or the need to call back, and 40.1% were related to a company's inability to initially resolve a problem. Members of our focus groups were in agreement:

*Once the customer reaches the right person for their problem it seems that they may achieve varying levels of success. Most spoke of typically being satisfied with the response, others less so. Specific concerns here included delays in making changes to bills, with some customers reporting frustration that they would be told that changes to their billing would be made only to receive bills dated after the apparent resolution and then being told that they should wait one more month for the changes to be made. One exasperated participant exclaimed "I always get what I want until the bill comes...they'll help you out, and then the bill comes - it's still there - ' Oh no, you have to wait one more month'!" Some also complained of instances where they were assured that changes had been made and/or a solution had been reached only to call back and discover that apparently nothing had been done and no one seemed aware of the agreement reached.*

The problem is not always resolved on the first call. Sometimes customers are transferred and have to explain their problem to another agent all over again, only to discover a few days later, or when their new bill comes, that the problem is still unresolved.

These problems are further exacerbated by a lack of tracking in telecommunications companies. Consumers do not like having to constantly repeat their story each time their call is transferred or call back because a problem they thought was resolved actually wasn't. John Lawford of the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) also addressed this problem.<sup>53</sup> We asked Rogers, Bell, and Videotron if they had a tracking

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<sup>52</sup> Note that these facts are provided for information purposes only and cannot be considered scientific evidence. It is also important to note that the majority of complaints received by Option consommateurs referred to several issues, and the percentages do not total 100%.

<sup>53</sup> Telephone interview with John Lawford of PIAC, January 25, 2010. Tracking problems will be studied in more detail in the next chapter on the handling of complaints since it is often related to filing a complaint.

system, and they all insisted they tracked all the calls they receive. Bell even sent us a screen copy of their tracking system. Rogers told us:

*We have managed, a couple of years ago, an internal system where the representatives are required to record the details, in abbreviated form, (...) the reason the customer called and the actions that they took. The intent of that is to create a common thread so that if the customer calls back, 2 or 3 days later or a week later, there should be a record of the previous conversation that they had so that the representative can take the second call and have the context. So that is the intent of the system, if it's the accuracy of it could tend to not complying so that our frontline people did input into that system but that is something that we monitor and measure in hopes, so playing the intent that we do capture the details so that we have a common thread of the discussions and dialogs we have with customers and the next person you talk to can reference that so that the customer is not going back having to repeat the story. Is it a 100 %? No it isn't. I will tell you though that we also record 100% of our calls.*

Rogers is making an effort in terms of tracking. Videotron representatives also showed us their tracking system: "In technical support, for every call, all employees have to record why the customer phoned and how their problem was resolved, what happened, what did they do to resolve the problem, and what exactly was the cause. (...) I work in the complaints department where we work on what causes problems, and if you call and you've already called with a problem 6 months ago, we have your call history." However, they added, "customer service is still something we're working on. We already have customers' files in the system, but we want to develop it further." Thus, all three companies seem to be making an effort with tracking but admit that their system still needs to be improved or completed.

Some focus group participants found that employee training was inadequate. One person said: "In explaining the breakdown of costs, I find that oftentimes they're not very clear. Sometimes I think they personally don't understand. (...) It's extremely convoluted, it doesn't really make sense. (...) It seems like there are hidden costs, several journalists have made an investigation into this. So, I think there are some issues around that." Some participants also stated they had difficulty understanding

the person they were speaking to, especially when talking to technical support or when the agent's level of language was too complex. Others also complained that some companies had moved their customer service overseas, to India in particular, and that they had trouble understanding their agent's accent.

*Another issue that came up a few times in Toronto, in particular, was that of offshore call centres. While most participants had the experience of dealing with service centres located in foreign countries, particularly for technical support for their personal computers, few seemed to have experienced this with respect to telecoms. Some were frustrated by poor language or communications skills on the part of those they were dealing with. Some also disliked the principle of a Canadian telecommunications company using staff in countries such as India or Panama. Others cited a perceived lack of responsibility to Canadian laws on the part of call centre employees or an orientation towards "filling out call reports" rather than actually helping the customer or solving the problem. For many it seemed that the problem was related to the fact that they called a specific company and reached someone who was relatively disconnected from that company.*

However, it's important to know that customers do not think an agent's attitude is an issue in itself. In fact, companies seem to be quite careful to select courteous, empathetic and helpful employees:

*Once participants got through to a live customer service person they generally seemed pleased with the quality of the people they spoke to. However, this area was not without its frustrations as it was often pointed out that the quality of service one received from the person reached could vary dramatically and that it often seemed to be a matter of the "Luck of the draw - if you're lucky you get a good customer rep...if not...." Some reported that if they ever found themselves dealing with a rep who was not helpful enough, they would hang up and call again in the hopes of getting a better customer service rep. Participants spoke of occasional frustrations with those who seemed to display little empathy and little concern for resolving the issue at hand. While it was acknowledged that not all issues could be resolved by all service reps, it seemed that a willingness to understand and empathize were, at least at some times, even more important than finding a successful solution. Nonetheless, it should be stressed that almost all the participants reported that they found the reps they dealt with to be very polite and professional and that in some cases when they had a negative experience dealing with customer service, it was more due to company policies than the attitude of the rep. While there was also some frustration with*

*some customer service representatives, it was also felt that these were certainly a minority and that most representatives were honestly trying to help. While they may have been hampered by company policies or a lack of training their efforts were generally acknowledged and appreciated by the participants. As one pointed out "they don't have a reason to be nasty." Feelings towards technical support were also quite positive. One participant spoke of how the tech support person she dealt with even described the colour of the particular wires and sockets and could specifically direct her through the setup of her hardware using this information. Needless to say she was quite pleased.*

The majority of focus group participants seemed convinced that employee rudeness or apathy was not a weak point with telecommunications companies. In fact, as we mentioned, problems appear to start because of an inability to initially resolve a problem, indicating a lack of agent training for resolving certain problems or, as we will see, because policies and procedures prevented the agent from solving them.

The Environics report states that:

*Plans, contracts, bundles and unnecessarily complex policies were cited as a source of frustration. While most participants seemed to be comfortable with the necessity of such plans they reported being annoyed by plans that were rigidly enforced and being prevented from making changes in extenuating circumstances. One participant described a situation where she had attempted to change to upgrade to a more expensive plan only to be told that she could not make changes until her current plan had expired. Another described losing his job and needing to contact his cable provider in order reduce his cable bill. In these circumstances participants reported feeling frustration when confronted with an apparently lack of flexibility, but also reported being very appreciative when companies were able to compromise or make exceptions for their special circumstances despite policies or even the participants' own contracts or choices.*

Thus, the rigidity of contracts and restrictive policies and procedures seem to make customer service relatively inflexible. One participant said, "With my cell phone, I couldn't change my package, I was locked in, and that was annoying, and they didn't do anything." Another, who had gone to the company's store to make changes said: "[The clerk] was totally showing me he was not interested in helping me whatsoever and that was so frustrating. (...) He said: 'That's the rules, that's it'. He wouldn't try to search [for a solution], like, 'You can get this for \$30' or try to make another

deal.” Another said: “And the contracts! (...) You know, when you’re in a contract, you’re basically their pets and when you get off the contract, *then* you can start making demands (...) because they’re interested in keeping you as a customer.” Another one of the complaints received by Option consommateurs was the two parties’ inability to reach an agreement (23.6% made reference to this problem). Some individuals in the focus groups were disappointed about the lack of information they received about their contracts, and some felt they had agreed to something they did not entirely understand (22% of complaints received by Option consommateurs made reference to this problem). There is obviously a lack in this aspect of customer service. First, agents need to be able to clearly explain what customers are agreeing to. Second, when customers have questions, agents should be adequately trained to respond. Finally, without conceding to everything the customer asks for, policies and procedures should authorize some negotiation of the terms of contract in special cases.

Another irritant identified by participants, which was also addressed on the TV program *La facture*,<sup>54</sup> was that some companies incorporate customer service into sales. Environics told us: “Another issue that some participants reported was that when they would call about a technical support or billing issue, the rep would often try to sell them a new service or upgrade. They felt that customer service reps should not be sales reps.” Louis Fabian, a professor at the University of Montreal’s Hautes Etudes Commerciales (HEC) supported this viewpoint on *La facture*, where he deplored the practice, saying that these companies saw customer service from a financial perspective in terms of immediate profits, not from a rational point of view. In effect, this approach prioritizes short-term profits, because companies would risk losing frustrated customers, which can be a much greater loss.<sup>55</sup>

We have a number of recommendations for improving the problems we identified regarding the resources it takes for a company to prove their commitment to

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<sup>54</sup> *La facture*, Radio-Canada, October 13, 2009, available in the program’s archives at [www.radio-canada.ca/lafacture](http://www.radio-canada.ca/lafacture)

<sup>55</sup> In the conclusion we will look at the cost of losing clients due to poor customer service, in particular in the Genesys Canada report, *The Cost of Poor Customer Service*.

outstanding customer service. We would, however, like to review other features of ISO 10001. The standard also lays down a number of requirements that go beyond company commitments and the resources it uses to demonstrate them. Among the requirements, the most important are the visibility and accessibility of the commitment, the company's response to customer needs and expectations, the accuracy of information, and the company's accountability for actions and decisions involving the code of conduct.

First, the standard underlines the importance of **visibility** or making the customer service policy or code of conduct available to the public. Although companies seem quite eager to publish their commitments, they usually only publish abbreviated versions of policies and codes of conduct because such documents are never available to the general public.<sup>56</sup> Even when we asked companies if they could show them to us, the answer was no. Only Bell let us look at the code of conduct they ask their customer service agents to sign, but they insisted that we not cite any passages in this report. Thus, companies keep these policies and codes secret. The only evidence of companies' real commitment<sup>57</sup> is in the service contracts that customers must sign before receiving the service they request. That being said, the contracts are written in legal language, which the majority of people have difficulty understanding. We conclude, therefore, that on this particular aspect of ISO 10001, companies may lack transparency.

Regarding **accessibility**, as we have seen, codes and corporate policies are virtually inaccessible. However, general commitments and how to reach customer service seem relatively easy to obtain. Most commitments are either under tabs like "About Us" or "Why Choose (name of company)." Regarding the company's contact information, all the focus groups participants said it was easy to find. The Environics report supported this:

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<sup>56</sup> Shaw and MTS Allstream provide a number of these codes, but they are an exception to this rule. In addition, not all their codes and policies are available.

<sup>57</sup> We are referring to the contractual commitment companies are required to respect by law.

*Knowing how to contact customer service at telecommunications providers was not an issue. Virtually all participants felt it was easy to figure out what number to call. Many participants simply found the number to call on their bill. In addition, others found the appropriate contact information on the website of the company they wanted to reach where it could easily be found under the tab "contact us." To the extent that there were any complaints about knowing who to contact for customer service, it had less to do with finding a central number to call than with having to go through too many "menus" find the appropriate person to talk to. However, participants generally felt that if they needed to contact their provider the information was available. Virtually all participants spoke about using the telephone as their primary means of contacting telecommunications providers. Some also visited retail locations - usually when the issue involved purchasing new hardware or having a device that needed to be repaired or exchanged. Only a small minority used online means such as email or online live chat functions offered by some company websites as well.*

Regarding the general understanding of policies and codes, it is impossible to know, because even we did not have access to them. The same is true with regard to accuracy of information. Since we did not have access to documents, it was impossible to verify the accuracy and sincerity of the information, much less how it complied with legislation and regulations in place.

Regarding general commitments, we believe they are relatively easy to understand, and that most companies make an effort to provide them in French and English. The language level is appropriate and the sentences are relatively short. The contracts and terms of use, however, are another story; even individuals with a high level of education sometimes had difficulty understanding them. We did not do a specific study on the readability of telecommunications contracts, but a few years ago Option consommateurs conducted a study on the readability of home insurance policies.<sup>58</sup> Although the subject is not the same, we noticed that contracts use very similar language from one industry to another. Among the findings in that study we said:

*Insurance contracts are written by experts. This means only those with a*

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<sup>58</sup> Option consommateurs. *L'assurance habitation; Plaidoyer pour la lisibilité des contrats: pour être lu et compris par les consommateurs*, 2006, 58 pages.

*legal background and intimate knowledge of the insurance field can understand them. This causes problems for both consumers and the insurance industry. For one, obscure expressions obstruct the transmission of information. In addition, this affects access to justice; our focus group enabled us see how consumers have difficulty knowing in what circumstances they are covered (or not). Finally, according to some participants in the focus group, these factors damage the insurance industry's image and undermine consumer's confidence. (Ibid., p.V.) [Our translation].*

Therefore, we cannot conclude that everyone understands the language used in contracts.

Among other things, ISO 10001 underlines the importance of the company's responsiveness to customer needs and expectations. Industry representatives all testified, in one way or another, that they tried to get feedback from their customers. Bell, Rogers, and Videotron all have departments such as "planning and strategies" in which they collate information by call-recording, conducting post-call surveys, recording complaints, and conducting all types of surveys to assess, adjust and improve existing customer service. Rogers goes even so far as to use social media to get to know their customers better and provide customer service in line with their image. Thus, the company representatives that we interviewed seem to confirm they respond well to customer needs and expectations.

The last topic we wish to address is certainly no less important than the others. It looks at a company's responsibility for its codes, or in other words, its responsibility and accountability for actions and decisions regarding codes of conduct and customer service policies. Again, our not having access to documents makes our task quite difficult. In fact, even though the commitments posted on the majority of websites and sometimes in advertisements demonstrate some willingness to comply with a code of conduct, whatever it might be, companies are not necessarily bound to these commitments, because they are voluntary. There is no real customer service regulation or law that consumers can call upon or that companies are forced to respect. In addition, moral commitments to customer service undertaken by

telecommunications companies remain a grey area. Obviously, if a customer saw a company was not respecting this commitment, they could accuse the company of issuing false or misleading statements, but what this would accomplish is uncertain.

For example, in August 2009, the Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association (CWTA) issued the CWTA's code of conduct for wireless service providers.<sup>59</sup> This is a voluntary code that promises to "*provide [their] customers with complete details on the rates, terms, and coverage offered in each of [their] plans*"; to "*help ensure that [their] customers understand the terms of their contracts*"; to "*communicate with [their] customers in a way they understand*"; to "*ensure that [their] advertising is clear*"; to "*protect [their] customers' rights when [they] change contract terms*"; and to "*safeguard [their] customers' personal information.*" In a statement issued on September 1, 2009,<sup>60</sup> Option consommateurs described these commitments, which are worthwhile in themselves, as a "collection of pious hopes." Indeed, although we can only commend the CWTA's commitment to these actions, they are already regulated by, amongst others, the Consumer Protection Act<sup>61</sup> and, more importantly, Bill 60<sup>62</sup> passed on December 2, 2009 in Quebec, the Quebec Civil Code,<sup>63</sup> and the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act.<sup>64</sup> Regarding elements of the code of conduct not covered by law, the document remains a voluntary commitment in which tracking, evaluation, and sanctions were not identified or foreseen. This kind of commitment therefore has a more of a symbolic value than a legal or regulatory one.

However, since contracts and terms and conditions of use are generally available to the public, we can at least look at how far companies commit to their customers

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<sup>59</sup> Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association (CWTA). CWTA's *Code of conduct for wireless service providers*, August 13, 2009. Available at <http://www.cwta.ca/CWTASite/english/codeofconduct.html>

<sup>60</sup> Available at [http://www.option-consommateurs.org/en/press\\_room/press\\_releases/239/](http://www.option-consommateurs.org/en/press_room/press_releases/239/)

<sup>61</sup> Available at

[http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=2&file=/P\\_40\\_1/P40\\_1\\_A.html](http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=2&file=/P_40_1/P40_1_A.html)

<sup>62</sup> Available at <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/projets-loi/projet-loi-60-39-1.html>

<sup>63</sup> Available at

[http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=2&file=/CCQ/CCQ\\_A.html](http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=2&file=/CCQ/CCQ_A.html)

<sup>64</sup> Available at <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/P-8.6/20090818/page-1.html>

through their contracts. Contracts and verbal agreements must be respected, otherwise a customer can accuse a company of defaulting on a contract or providing false or misleading information. Moreover, in studying these service contracts, we did not find any sections regarding the company's responsibility for customer service, let alone its quality. Some companies, however, commit to making repairs due to normal product usage or providing time frames for excess charges and billing errors. These commitments, however, were already stipulated by a decision made by the CRTC.<sup>65</sup>

Ultimately, we can only rely on companies' good faith in meeting their commitments to customer service. Obviously, customers can refer to these commitments when filing a formal complaint, but no law or regulation requires companies to take responsibility.

Finally, regarding the **Guidelines for writing the code**, we were unfortunately unable to compare them to the codes of conduct because we did not have access to them.

Having looked at the problems, let us see how customer service in telecommunications companies can be improved.<sup>66</sup>

### Box 1 - Issues regarding customer service

- Difficulty navigating automated systems;
- Too many call transfers;
- Ineffective resolution;
- Tracking issues;
- Inappropriate level of language;

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<sup>65</sup> The CRTC's *Statement of consumer rights* is available at <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2006/dt2006-52.htm>  
MTS Allstream's website provides an in-depth look at:  
<http://www.mts.ca/portal/site/mts/menuitem.a0636022fb694ce88e6e951031248a0c/?vgnnextoid=21a501c744eb1110VgnVCM1000000408120aRCRD>

<sup>66</sup> Complaints and external conflict resolution will be examined more carefully in chapters 2 and 3.

- Inability to compromise;
- Adding a sales component to customer service;
- Lack of transparency;
- Responsibility.

## 1.3 Solutions?

### 1.3.1 Practical issues

Regarding automated systems, focus group members suggested a number of interesting solutions:

*The most common single suggestion was to have a person answer the phone initially who could quickly determine who the caller needed to talk to and could then transfer the caller to - as opposed to dealing with "Emily." Some also suggested that it would be good to be able to have a printable "key" of the menus and voice commands so that if you do have to call customer service you can quickly punch in the right numbers or say the right words without having to listen to every menu being recited.*

Therefore, it seems the best alternative to complicated automated services is not developing a new technology but using an old one that everyone liked: a human-operated call reception and redirection service. This way, instead of leaving customers to "choose" the best option for their needs, the agent makes to find out the reason for the call before redirecting it. This solution obviously requires more hires in customer service. Focus group members also suggested companies use simpler, more economical solutions, such as simplifying menus and providing a menu guide on the website or in the phonebook to help consumers navigate the system.

Regarding repeated transfers, simplifying call redirection will help limit excessive

transfers from one department to another. The best solution we found for resolving these two problems is to train customer service agents in all the areas of the company. Companies that provide a single window are more likely to limit repeated transfers and thereby reduce the number of customers lost in the maze of automated systems. A single window for the whole company also gives agents access to customer information regarding all services, allowing for overall tracking of customer files. The Environics report confirms this view:

*Some participants also wished that customer service representatives, particularly those who answer initial calls, be trained in more areas of their company in order to reduce the need to transfer callers. It was considered important that the representatives understand and receive adequate training on their companies' computer systems. Finally, one participant pointed out that even training in basic company issues such as how invoices are created and interpreted would be helpful. As one participant stated "It's not like they need to know technical or really in-depth specifics, but if I don't understand what my bill says - they should know how to read a bill."*

Regarding training, we believe agents need to learn to simplify complicated concepts such as installing programs in the technical support department and explaining contracts and invoices in customer service. Some customers even consider their problem unresolved if the customer service agent did not clearly explain some very complex matter. If a technician poorly explains a program installation, or if an agent fails to explain the terms of a contract or the components of an invoice, they open the door to lack of understanding, service inefficiencies and, ultimately, potentially unresolved problems. No doubt, this will increase service calls and complaints about inefficient customer service. Regarding transparency and accessibility, we highly recommend that contracts and invoices be written in a simple, accessible language to minimize misunderstandings.

Regarding customer dissatisfaction at incorporating sales into customer service, the solution is simple: do not mix the two departments. Customer service should simply meet customer needs and ensure satisfaction, thereby guaranteeing customer

retention. The marketing department is responsible for sales, not customer service; combining the two roles risks creating customer frustration and defections. Although these statements seem obvious, they are important reminders. Another option might be to prohibit this practice. All it would take is a simple initiative, and one that would be easy to evaluate and sanction.

Speaking of regulation, some problems cannot be solved by such simple solutions. The following are the customer service problems that we consider ought to be regulated.

### **1.3.2 Legal issues**

The most glaring problem is companies' inefficiencies in problem solving. This is confirmed by many focus group participants and many of the complaints Option consommateurs received:

*While participants considered it important for service reps to have a good understanding of their computer systems it was also considered important that the information contained in these systems be accurate and up to date. When changes were made to an account, participants felt that these changes should be implemented and available to the organization immediately. They expected that their next bill reflect the changes and that if they called back the next person they talked to would have access to the changes as well (Environics Report).*

After requesting a file modification or a service repair via phone or by a technician, consumers are often surprised to learn that nothing was done or the repair failed. Most major carriers have had this type of problem. We believe the CRTC should expand their regulations for landline service<sup>67</sup> and impose an obligation of results within a certain time frame. Although companies make commitments such as "We'll do everything we can to resolve your problem as quickly and efficiently as possible," these commitments remain legal duties of care and diligence rather than an obligation

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<sup>67</sup> They provide time frames for wireline telephony service repairs and complaints, and invoice corrections.

of results. As *le Grand dictionnaire terminologique* explains, [our translation] in civil law, the general obligation of care and diligence is also called an obligation of means (not an obligation to achieve a specific result but one where skill and care are applied), which is different from an obligation of results.<sup>68</sup> An obligation of means does not allow a consumer to require resolution of a problem, but an obligation of results does. An obligation of results would at least give consumers more recourse to ensure that they receive the services paid for and that telecommunications companies manage the customer's files more conscientiously.

Regarding customer file management, it would be a good idea to establish a more stringent tracking system. John Lawford of the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) suggested a simple and effective solution to this problem:

*[When we were addressing the problem with telemarketers' lists], this whole issue came up in spades... So the idea was - and the commission decided - you have to give [the customer] a tracking number... [The industry complained a lot about the costs and the logistics that this modus operandi would entail]... But, that is one of the solutions that I think, if they were serious about their customer service within their organizations, they would have [implemented this system]... I just can't believe that big organizations like that can't give an incident number... That is one of the types of solutions that, I think it cost some money, maybe that aren't the end of the world, but that showed to me that they don't care. If they did care, they would know that you have to have a system of tracking to solve things quickly. But I believe, although I don't know for sure, that it is cheaper to just bother people, let the ones who have real issues and can find the CCTS complaint [system] and you pick off complaints one at a time, it's much cheaper that way...*

The companies we interviewed spoke about their efforts to combine call monitoring and history. These monitoring systems should be obligatory.

The commitments regarding customer service made by telecommunications companies must also be considered moral commitments and not legal or contractual ones.

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<sup>68</sup> Grand Dictionnaire terminologique: [http://www.granddictionnaire.com/BTML/FRA/r\\_Motclef/index1024\\_1.asp](http://www.granddictionnaire.com/BTML/FRA/r_Motclef/index1024_1.asp)

Contracts do not include customer service features, making it no doubt very difficult for the consumer to ensure proper service. In this sense, telecommunications service contracts should include real customer service commitments. If such commitments were required, an obligation of results would be guaranteed by the company's good will rather than by CRTC requirements. There are two solutions: either the CRTC establishes an obligation of results for all telecommunications services as it did for landline telephony, or the CRTC requires telecommunications companies to contractually promise to resolve their customer's problems within a standard time frame.

Speaking of contractual obligations, carriers seem to offer rather restrictive contracts. Although we understand that a contract is an agreement between a company and a customer for a particular service, and one that must be respected, companies could at least be more flexible in extreme cases such as job loss or even insignificant ones such as changing a name on a contract. A little more flexibility would also compensate for telecommunications' frequent, unilateral changes to contracts.

The Environics report confirms this:

*It was also considered important that policies and procedures empower the representatives to solve client problems effectively. For some, it was felt that their issues and suggested solutions were reasonably dealt with and that the CSR would help them if allowed, but that they were hampered by systems or policies. Needless to say they found this situation frustrating. In the end it was generally agreed, that the best service calls were those in which the issue was resolved quickly, efficiently and finally.*

That being said, most contract problems and misunderstandings seem to arise from the same origins: the level of language and a lack of information. Contracts are so complex that only lawyers or those with legal training understand them properly. Just as other common contracts such as leases are written in a simple language most consumers can understand, telecommunications' contracts should be simplified in the

same way. In fact, considering that the vast majority of Canadians have a telecommunications service contract with one company or another, logically, they should be able to understand them. Consumers are also poorly informed on the terms of their contract, which obviously causes frustrations when agents tell them they cannot make changes. Therefore, from the outset, contracts should be drafted to be easy to understand, and could be regulated, evaluated and sanctioned by the CRTC. Customer service agents should also be able, and above all required, to explain service contract details before the consumer signs.

Finally, in terms of clarity and transparency, it seems essential that telecommunications companies go beyond a general commitment to customer service. The public should have access to codes of conduct, so that when consumers go shopping or try to file complaints, they at least know what the company's actual commitment to customer service is.

Ultimately, in addition to CCTS, it would be useful to have a regulatory body to inform and advise telecommunications consumers, like the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada (FCAC) does for financial consumers.

## **Chapter 2 - ISO 10002 - Guidelines for complaints handling within organizations**

### **2.1 ISO 10002 standard as an evaluation grid**

ISO 10002<sup>69</sup> addresses the complaints process, specifically complaints handling. The standard focuses more particularly on the attitude of organizations to complaints, how they are resolved and how this information is used to improve complaints handling and

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<sup>69</sup> *National Standard of Canada CAN/CSA-ISO 10001-08 (ISO 10001-2007), Quality Management - Customer Satisfaction- Guidelines for Complaints Handling in Organizations*, Canadian Standards Association, 2007.

make changes to the general code of conduct for customer service, so as to address systemic or procedural issues or problems with the product as such. It is defined as follows:

*This International Standard provides guidance on the design and implementation of an effective and efficient claims process for all types of business, commercial or otherwise, including electronic commerce. It is intended to provide benefits to organizations, customers, complainants and other interested parties. Information obtained through the complaints process may lead to improvements to products and processes, while effective complaints handling can improve the reputation of an organization, regardless of size, location and sector of activities. On the world market, the value of an International Standard becomes even more obvious in that it ensures consistent treatment of claims, regardless of where the transaction occurred. Effective and efficient complaints handling reflects the needs of organizations providing products and those who benefit thereby. (Ibid., vi [Our translation])*

We will examine the guiding principles for evaluating the complaints handling process within telecommunications companies. We will explore relevant documents available to the general public,<sup>70</sup> testimony from Bell, Rogers and Videotron, together with opinions of focus groups we held and complaints received from Option consommateurs.

## **2.2 The complaints handling process of participating firms and their application**

We wish from the outset to specify that only representatives from Bell, Rogers and Videotron agreed to answer our questions, so that we cannot assess complaints handling procedures at other telecommunication companies implicated in this study. We cannot prove or disprove whether they handle complaints adequately, especially since no complaints handling policy is available for public consultation.

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<sup>70</sup> Since industry members did not give us access to their complaint handling policies.

First, the standard requires **visibility** of information about how and where to file a complaint, and that the policy be familiar to both customers and company employees. It requires that procedures for making a complaint be **accessible** to all complainants and easy to understand, and that all complainants be provided with information and assistance for drafting and filing a complaint. We started by testing the path a consumer would have to follow on the website of companies in this study in order to find out the procedures for filing a complaint. It should be noted here that most websites detailing the stages of escalating a complaint always end up with contact information for the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services.<sup>71</sup>

To access procedures for filing a complaint with Bell, you either have to go to “Frequently Asked Questions” under “Support” or click on the link “To escalate a complaint” on the “Customer commitment” page. The information is not on the same page as other customer service contact information (under “Contact us”) and these two pages are not linked to any of the services (home phone, Mobility, TV, etc.). The page<sup>72</sup> clearly details the various steps and offers advice to facilitate the process (note down call date and name of supervisor spoken to, etc.) and contact information for each of the services involved. In addition, we found contact information for filing a complaint in the opening pages of the company telephone directory.

In the case of Bell Aliant, we only found the brief paragraph quoted in the previous chapter and that was in the “Legal and regulatory” section:

*At Bell Aliant our customers come first. We are here to help you.  
Call 1 866 425-4268 and speak to a customer service representative who will be  
happy to assist you.*

*Situation not resolved? Ask to speak to a Customer Service and Sales manager.*

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<sup>71</sup> A not-for-profit organization designed to provide dispute resolution services to consumers and Canadian carriers. This will be studied extensively in the next chapter on external conflict resolution.

<sup>72</sup> [http://bell.ca/support/PrsCSrvGnl\\_Escalate.page](http://bell.ca/support/PrsCSrvGnl_Escalate.page)

*Your customer service representative will gladly transfer you directly or you may write to: Bell Aliant Customer Service PO Box 1430 Saint John, NB E2L 4K2.*

Other than that, under “Send us your comments” in the “Contact Us” section, we found a form that could be used to file a complaint. Even entering the word “complaint” in the search tool brings up no information or contact information for escalating a complaint.

With Rogers, it is very easy to find the procedure for filing a complaint right from the home page by pointing to the “Support” tab, where a menu appears with the option “Make a complaint.” This page<sup>74</sup> goes through all the steps of escalating a complaint, with appropriate contact information at each stage. It also suggests a number of objectives regarding response and problem resolution. For example, if a customer wants to send their complaint to the Ombudsman, Rogers says:

*Once we receive your written complaint, we will do an initial assessment to confirm that the issue falls within the mandate of our office. We will acknowledge your complaint within 48 hours and most disputes will be handled within 30 days of receiving the complaint and all relevant documentation. If this deadline cannot be met, we will contact you to let you know why additional time is necessary and when you can expect a response. By submitting your complaint, you provide us with permission to discuss your issue with the appropriate Rogers business in order to complete our assessment. If your complaint is within our mandate and requires a full investigation, we will send you a Consent and Confidentiality Agreement to sign and return to us. This agreement outlines the process to follow and how to interact during the investigative process and beyond.*

So, although it is stated that certain complaints might not fall within the mandate of the ombudsman, it still provides a timeline for response and resolution.

At Videotron, on the site videotron.com, consumers clicking on the link “Contact us”

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<sup>74</sup> <http://votre.rogers.com/contact/complaint.asp>

will find a menu with a link to “File a complaint,” which leads to a page<sup>75</sup> detailing the steps for escalating a complaint, with appropriate contact information for each stage. It also provides a response timeline for each step, as for example:

*If you are not satisfied as a result of the actions taken earlier (Step 1), complete the online form and select “Complaint” in the Product/Category dropdown menu. Use the form to describe the problem situation and indicate why the proposed solution is not satisfactory. Within 24 hours of receipt of the form, a specialist consultant will call you about your complaint.*

The procedure is clear and promises a speedy response.

At Telus, on the website [telusquebec.com](http://telusquebec.com), you can click on the tab “Contact us” and on that page,<sup>76</sup> you find the following:

***Complaints, compliments and suggestions***

*Complaints or compliments to make or suggestions to offer? If you have a comment to make about a TELUS service, please contact one of our representatives from Customer Service.*

*By telephone:  
1-888-520-TELUS (8358)  
Or 1-877-365-7724.*

*By mail:  
TELUS  
281 René-Lepage Blvd.  
Department R0811  
Rimouski, QC G5L 7E4.*

*If you do not reach an agreement with TELUS:*

***Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services (CCTS)***

*CCTS is an agency independent of the telecommunications industry, whose*

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<sup>75</sup> [https://www.videotron.com/service/sac/plainteCourriel?request\\_locale=en](https://www.videotron.com/service/sac/plainteCourriel?request_locale=en) (Our translation; the exact English text was unavailable.)

<sup>76</sup> [http://www.telusquebec.com/telus\\_fr/aide/joindre.htm](http://www.telusquebec.com/telus_fr/aide/joindre.htm) (Our translation; this page is unavailable in English.)

*mandate is to resolve complaints of individual and small business retail customers about their telecommunications services. If you have a complaint about your services, including local or long distance telephone service, wireless telephone service, or Internet service, you must first try to resolve it directly with your service provider. If you have done so and have been unable to reach a satisfactory resolution, CCTS may be able to help you, free of charge. To learn more about CCTS, you may visit its website at [www.ccts-cprst.ca](http://www.ccts-cprst.ca) or call toll-free at 1-888-221-1687.*

In the case of Telus, there is no real procedure to follow, as they only give a customer service telephone number and postal address. It should also be noted that sites in other provinces are not all as explicit; you have to go to the “Telus Mobility Corporate Offices” section, and the word “complaint” does not appear. Only addresses are given and the CCTS paragraph is quoted in the event of dissatisfaction. We found no complaints procedure for Alberta and British Columbia.

At Shaw, as we saw in the previous chapter, contact information and procedures for filing complaints are provided. The text is clear and the steps are easy to follow. The only problem is the location of this page on the site, as it is found in the “Payment Terms and Conditions” sub-section in “About Shaw.”<sup>77</sup> The search tool is no help in accessing the page (by entering the word “complaint” for example).

At MTS Allstream, you have to click on the “Support” tab, then go to “Call us” and select the “Advocate’s Office for Service Questions & Concerns.”<sup>78</sup> There you will find contact information for the “MTS Customer Relations Manager” and “Allstream Customer Service Resource Team,” while customers that remain unsatisfied are referred to the CCTS. The page is located in “Billing and Payment.” Although you could say that the page is listed in the right place (“Call us”), it should be noted that you still have to search the section for several minutes before finding it. It should also be noted that the MTS Allstream website does not have a search tool to facilitate finding the page.

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<sup>77</sup> <http://www.shaw.ca/en-ca/AboutShaw/TermsOfUse/PaymentTermsandConditions.htm#q1>

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<http://www.mts.ca/portal/site/mts/menuitem.0290497802902f369e5e921031248a0c/?vgnextoid=0f454dd8c8f69010VgnVCM1000000408120aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=0a5a6c9b56809010VgnVCM1000000408120aRCRD#advocates>

At Sasktel, you have to go to the “Contact us” section, where there is a link labelled “Compliments and concerns,”<sup>79</sup> where customers are informed of the following:

*If you have a compliment you wish to share or a concern that you want to discuss, call SaskTel at 1-800-SASKTEL (1-800-727-5835).  
If you are not satisfied, request to speak to a Customer Services Manager.*

*You can also write to SaskTel at the following address:*

*SaskTel Corporate Communications  
12th Floor, 2121 Saskatchewan Drive,  
Regina, SK S4P 3Y2*

Then, contact information is given for CCTS and the CRTC. Although Sasktel does not give a complete list for escalating a complaint, it does provide some details on how to file a complaint.

From this list we note that, in terms of clarity, some companies use vague terms like “Comments or concerns,” “Questions or concerns,” or “Send us your comments” that do not specifically refer to complaints as such. Although we concede that voicing complaints is part of the information that a company uses as feedback, it is different from making comments, since it implies the need for resolution, which a comment does not. According to ISO 10002, procedures for making a complaint should be explained in simple, easy-to-understand terms and provide appropriate contact information for the convenience of dissatisfied customers. Using euphemisms can confuse consumers and make filing a complaint more complicated.

We also learned that not all telecommunications companies provide easy access to information that customers need for filing a complaint. Some companies even seem to fail to provide a list of contacts for complaints. That being said, in terms of visibility, some companies may put relevant contact information in a more appropriate part of

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<sup>79</sup> <http://www.sasktel.com/contact-us/phone-numbers/compliments-and-concerns.html>

the site, namely customer service. It is not enough to post the various stages of escalating a complaint, as the customer still needs to find them easily.

In this regard, we also investigated whether the complaints process appeared on the bill, like the telephone number for customer service. When we reviewed bills from Bell, Videotron, Telus and Rogers, we did not find this information. Therefore, to find the procedures for making a complaint, you must either call customer service and ask how to make a complaint, or go to the company website, or request the information from a store clerk. The bill, which as we saw in the previous chapter is the most common and easiest way for customers to find contact information for their telecommunications company, does not provide the information needed for filing a complaint. A Videotron representative has however stated that “twice a year, we re-explain [the complaint process] in a billing message.” We do not know if other companies do the same. Furthermore, we consider that such information should be included in an insert on all invoices. We also question whether, in today’s realities, e-invoices should not also show these details.

Company representatives were however convinced that it was very easy to reach them with complaints, that contact information was easy to find, and that the process was easy to navigate.

At Bell, we were told in an interview that filing a complaint was very easy to access and understand:

*All our resources [are available] for the customer to make a complaint. [A]nyone that calls here may simply ask to speak to a supervisor (...). We have specialist teams to take such calls. It's really the most common approach used by our customers (...) for making complaints. Via the telephone. We have teams there just to take calls and ensure that the customer's needs really have been handled with all the empathy that you expect. Sometimes, there are customers who try to deal directly with management because they know the contacts. (...) If these people send an email, there's a team devoted to responding to these customers to really listen to their complaints and really and truly*

*meet their needs and solve their problem. At Bell.ca, there are references where customers can give us feedback and send in their comments, whether complaints or real recommendations. We have a team handling this and getting back to customers. If one of the customers' comments turns out to be a complaint, they will be called back immediately. I think we have a 4-hour limit on calling back.<sup>80</sup>*

Bell believes the best way to file a complaint is to call customer service and speak to a supervisor. Furthermore, we confirmed that email contact is available on the website. Bell representatives believe that making complaints is easy and accessible. We were also assured that information about procedures and relevant contacts are sufficiently visible.

Rogers representatives stated their intention of making the process of filing complaints easier for their customers:

*Over the past year, we have done a few things that are really trying to make it easier for the customers when they have an issue with the organization. So, for example, one of the things we heard from our customers was that they didn't clearly understand what our escalation process was when they were interacting with us. So, one of the things we did was we brought a working team together and we actually implemented (...) a 3-step escalation process which we put on our website, which basically said, "If you have a concern or an issue with the organization, here is the 3-step [process] that you need to go through."<sup>81</sup>*

The process seems designed so that customers know how to take it to the next level if they are still not satisfied with the resolution proposed by the company. The stages were explained as follows:

*What we have in this 3-step process is that customers obviously will call our call-centres regularly and on the first line of contact to have their issue resolved. Then, our customer service agents are fully enabled and empowered in many ways to resolve our customers' issues, but in those situations where they may not be able to satisfy that customer, or if the [agent] may not have the empowerment to perhaps do what the*

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<sup>80</sup> Telephone interview with Bell representatives, February 8, 2010

<sup>81</sup> Telephone interview with Rogers representatives, January 27, 2010

*customer might be asking them to do, in these unique situations, we have an escalation process that says that those agents escalate to their team manager. So as [team managers] go through that call and help address all of those issues, and in many cases, it is reinforcing the message or educating [the customer] or providing some clarity, and in most cases we find out that (...) that is all the customer is asking for. In cases where the customer feels that they really want to escalate beyond the frontline agent and beyond the team manager, then we have provided an avenue for them in our step 3, so they can come directly here to the office of our president team, and that is a specialized team of agents and advisors that will then take full ownership for addressing any of the issues that customers might have, and they can [contact] the office of the president through the rogers.com website and the commitment is the office of the president will be in contact with them within 24 hours with the commitment to fully resolve and to restore satisfaction of that customer. Generally, the customers will go through those 3 steps and the issue will be resolved, and it is a small percentage of customers who actually end up taking that step-3 process.*

In addition, Rogers has recently added a fourth step to their complaints escalation process, that of the role played by the Rogers ombudsman and team:

*I think the important thing that we decided to undertake last year is we added a fourth step shortly after launching the 3-step process where we actually introduced an office of the ombudsman - and you've been talking with [Don Moffatt] today - but the intention of that was that we really wanted that our customers feel that they had a fair and impartial individual within the organization that they can go to to have their disputes looked at if they didn't feel that they were adequately resolved by the 3-step process.*

In terms of ease of access to relevant information for handling complaints, Rogers representatives told us, "I think we have really tried to create a very simple and streamlined process that is easy for our customers to follow and my understanding is that the feedback we have gotten, my answer would be [that the escalation is easy to understand]."

Videotron also considers their procedures for filing a complaint are easily accessible, as indicated by their management relationship with customers:

*They are given in detail on the website, but the first step is to call customer service. Then customers have several options. They can initiate a chat session with an adviser, or write an email, or fill in the complaint form online. After that, if they're still dissatisfied - which would surprise me - they can write a letter to Videotron using information on the site. As a last resort, they can talk to a consumer organization such as the CCTS or CRTC.<sup>82</sup>*

The steps are essentially the same as for Bell and Rogers. However, Mr. Desroches insisted that his team was available to the customer, no matter what step in the escalation process the customer has reached:

*[W]hether it's being escalated or not doesn't matter, my department can always intervene if escalations occur during the process. We consider that our procedures are fairly standardized in terms of steps to take because we collate all the information obtained by supervisors through the complaints and try to improve service depending on the types and categories of complaints received.*

He also considers that it is easy for customers to navigate the complaint process at Videotron: "Absolutely, whether it's a suggestion, comment or complaint, it's easy to get through the procedures.

It should be noted that, like Bell and Rogers, Videotron recommends starting with a phone call to customer service. Company representatives confirm this. For example, a Videotron representative said:

*We prefer customers to call because it's always easier to resolve a complaint in a verbal exchange and assess that the customer is dissatisfied and handle it verbally right away rather than leaving them unhappy; they think about it, they write a letter, they get more and more unhappy, so to us it seems logical to say, "Call first, if the adviser can't handle it - as Pascal would say - we have a process where you can speak to the manager or supervisor or someone and solve the problem immediately rather than getting into endless exchanges. So, it's an escalation concept - yes and no - meaning we offer options that we consider the most reasonable from the customer's point of view and the most effective for us.*

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with Videotron representatives in company offices, February 11, 2010.

When we asked whether they would prefer customers to call first in order to defuse their dissatisfaction, we were told:

*Yes, that's what happens. There are some very unhappy customers who get the right treatment from an adviser who's able to solve their problem immediately, and then it's over. Whereas when they write, it's quite a process; they write, then it takes someone on the team [of managing relationships with customers] who remember ... It's heavier and it is less immediate . We think it's more efficient to call if you have a problem.*

We found that Bell and Rogers also promote an initial contact by telephone, as confirmed by a Bell representative:

*[You should] always try to call because, depending on the complaint, we can't really predict the resolution time, so we prefer to speak to you directly. For us, the best way is: Call and ask to speak to a supervisor. And when we say we have specialist staff, there are also supervisors who are on the phone, so there are people managing the other teams who are required to handle complaints just to make sure that in every case you get up to the level you want. The second step, we definitely ask for your name and phone number to ensure we can follow up. (...) The third step is really... well, again it's an attempt to resolve the issue, and if all this doesn't work out satisfactorily... well, you've tried but unfortunately you come up against a certain percentage in the process, due to our fault or other factors... there's always an address where you can send a complaint directly in writing, or otherwise there's the direct email address of the president of customer service, James Myers, who is there to receive complaints and read them in order to compile case histories, not just of success stories, but also to see why people go through difficult situations.*

When we investigated companies that provide a complaints escalation program, the process is substantially the same, i.e. telephone, supervisor, office for handling complaints. The preferred approach is always the same, but is this really the best approach for the consumer? John Lawford of the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) seems to think otherwise. He told us,<sup>83</sup> "So, when people call us after being frustrated, or email us, I say, 'Never phone the phone company, write the phone

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<sup>83</sup> Telephone interview with John Lawford, January 25, 2010.

company - a paper letter if you really want action! And [it has to be addressed to the] executive customer service's office [and it has to be a registered letter] and then maybe they'll listen to you.' " Clearly, Lawford believes that a phone call is not enough to get serious follow-up to a complaint. We have already discussed tracking problems in the telecommunications industry. It is therefore understandable why Lawford suggests this approach. If follow-up tends to be lacking, then by complaining in writing, at least the consumer has written proof of communication with the company. However, regardless of the solution proposed by the company for making complaints, we nevertheless question whether customers really know how to proceed and if they know whether to call or write if they want to complain to the company. In focus groups conducted by Environics Research Group<sup>84</sup> on behalf of Option consommateurs, every participant save one was unaware of how to push their complaint above the level of the service supervisor:

*When asked what they did when they felt that their issues were not being adequately addressed by the customer service person or department they had reached, participants' most common method of escalating the complaint was to ask for a manager within the department. Few reported going beyond this, and some talked about abandoning the company for other providers if satisfaction could not be achieved after dealing with a manager in a call center. Only one participant was aware of other methods of escalating a complaint within a company. He spoke of taking his complaint to the President's office at Rogers. For some, however, the available manager was as far as the complaint went and one even reported that if she didn't get what she wanted then "sometimes I let things slide as a result."*

Although we were able to find contact information for filing complaints on most telecommunications company websites, it seems evident that the general public is unaware of how to lodge a complaint. It seems to require a huge effort to research and find the procedures for filing a complaint with appropriate contact information. In addition, complaints received by Option consommateurs seem to confirm the same problem. In general, consumers contact us when they have not gotten satisfaction from talking to a service supervisor - and sometimes even when they've only

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<sup>84</sup> Two groups were interviewed in English on November 11, 2009 in Toronto. Two other French-speaking focus groups were interviewed on November 17, 2009 in Montreal.

contacted a frontline service rep – and they want to know how to take things further. In some rare cases, consumers have already contacted a higher level, but find they lack an effective means of getting their complaint listened to. In this regard, Mtre. Élise Thériault of Option consommateurs' legal department, stated, "Generally, people call us when they have exhausted every means they can find to get their complaint attended to. Sometimes it's after only one call, sometimes after about three tries. What these consumers have in common is that they don't know what's the next step for getting their complaint listened to and resolved."

The information is there, but consumers do not get to it. This feeling of being unable to resolve a problem can certainly create a major irritation for customers. If they think the company they are dealing with is not receptive to their expression of dissatisfaction – whether real or perceived – it's understandable that telecommunications customers are also likely to complain of other bodies such as Option consommateurs, the Office de la protection du consommateur (OPC), the Better Business Bureau (BBB) or the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services (CCTS). It is clear that policies for handling complaints are not sufficiently advertised to customers, since most people do not know the steps to take after contacting a service supervisor. One might say that this is due to the fact that companies prefer handling complaints by telephone with the basic customer service department. Maybe this approach helps to defuse some frustration, but we question whether it is effective for addressing more fundamental or complex issues.

We also question whether policies for handling complaints are familiar to employees and encouraged by management. Representatives from Bell, Rogers and Videotron all said that such information was part of customer service training. However, in the telecommunications industry in general, we found that information on complaint escalation was not given to consumers when they wished to file a complaint.

Concerning the **objectivity** of companies in resolving complaints, it is difficult to assess the attitude of the industry. However, all representatives stated that they took

complaints seriously and found them necessary for understanding issues the company needed to address.

With regard to fees for handling complaints, Videotron confirmed that they imposed no fee for this service. Rogers and Bell do not charge for this service either.

Regarding a **confidentiality** policy for customer information, we confirmed its existence through the privacy policies available on company websites.<sup>85</sup>

We wish here to investigate a major point of ISO 10002, its **customer-centric approach**. This underlies a number of attitudes to bear in mind when an organizations handle complaints. These include encouraging customer feedback, responsiveness to complaints, even data on complaints and the organization's commitment to resolve them. In this regard, industry representatives all confirmed how much they took complaints seriously. Speaking about timeframes for resolving complaints, Bell representatives, for example, told us that complaints resolution really was a priority for them:

*We don't need time to resolve a problem for the simple reason that we make sure to do the necessary work. The customer gets a call back right away, that's for sure, at least to properly acknowledge receipt of the complaint, to listen to their story and get the details. Normally, what we ask of our reps is that they resolve customer problems during the call. Besides, that's why a large measure of their performance is based on first call resolution. They are fully empowered to at least resolve the issue during the live call. It may be that there are cases that require follow up. Our customer assistance department takes on these "escalations." There's time scheduled every day for callbacks. They've got everything, not only to spend the time online to do the required follow-up with other organizations, but also to call customers back and at least give them a status update [on their complaints].*

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<sup>85</sup> For example: Bell: [http://bell.ca/support/PrsCSrvGnl\\_Privacy.page](http://bell.ca/support/PrsCSrvGnl_Privacy.page)  
Rogers: <http://your.rogers.com/privacy1.asp>  
Videotron: <http://corpo.videotron.com/site/securite-confidentialite-en.jsp>

Therefore, there is an initial attempt to resolve complaints at the customer service level. However, if the complaint goes any further, Bell is committed to responding promptly and following up on the complaint. In addition, Bell representatives go beyond the resolution of the problem:

*We try to solve a particular problem at the customer level, because if it happens to one customer, it can happen to other customers who didn't get a chance to speak up or who didn't want to leave a message, who didn't take the trouble to write to us and say they were unhappy.*

So in addition to trying to resolve an individual complaint, the information is used to prevent a recurrence of the same problem. Information about the type of complaints is collected and then used to improve policies and procedures, in addition to addressing systemic issues and product quality. Bell representatives also stated that they were interested in all types of feedback in order to improve products and service:

*At that level [strategy and planning team], we have several sources of data that we depend on to assess customer experience. And surveys are one. Another one is when unfortunately the customer gets to the point where they really want to express their dissatisfaction by escalating their complaint. There's a team that works on dealing with cases immediately, whose ultimate goal is to really solve the customer's problem, but in fact we don't stop there. My team, what it does, is it'll take all these escalation cases and do an analysis of the root causes to find out what it is in our procedures, or in our systems, or in our policies that has brought the customer to that juncture, so we can really address the issue. We use it as another source of data that gives us an idea of what the customer is going through. I also can name 3 or 4 other sources we depend on to really measure the quality of our customer service, which we use not just to resolve the problem, but to prevent (...) others from having to deal with [the same situation].*

Then we use this information for a number of initiatives:

*[It's] maybe that there's some [individual] behaviour issue - which isn't really a major cause - but when it happens, we make certain our operations address the issue by ensuring that there's some real feedback to the rep for coaching purposes. But otherwise, if there's a real gap in a procedure or system that results in customers not getting service, or when they really asked for something and we didn't respond to their*

*needs, [the goal of the strategic planning team] is to really get to the root of it and find the initial cause that started it all, so we can change and improve it.*

We then asked whom these recommendations were sent to and were told:

*They go to the director of customer service when it's really an operational need, meaning when it involves coaching to ensure that the rep's knowledge is at an appropriate level. Otherwise, when it really involves making a change in a process or a product, that's where I'm going to turn for example to [the strategies and customer service projects team] which is tasked with implementing call centre initiatives. So I'll go to them, with everything I need of course, to demonstrate the need for change.*

Bell confirms that they not only undertake to resolve the specific problems underlying complaints, but they also use information gathered from complaints, comments and surveys to address systemic problems. They then give coaching to employees experiencing difficulties, in addition to tapping into this information to improve products and services.

Rogers reported a similar situation. The company tries first to resolve complaints with the initial call, a concept they call "first call resolution," as their representative explained. "We have a measure that we call "first call resolution." It is a measure, from a customer perspective, (...) where we are actually measuring what percentage of the calls we resolve the customer's issue the first time." So, they try to have a high percentage of complaints resolved with the first call. We asked what the results were, and were told, "Our resolves are competitive with the industry. They are not where we would like them to be, which is (...) a journey, not a destination, so a lot of the actions we have taken in the last year in terms of trying to continually get that first call resolution." Therefore, Rogers tries to improve its first call resolution results. Among the initiatives identified by Rogers representatives for improving complaints resolution, the company records and monitors a certain number of calls per month to evaluate the effectiveness of customer service procedures and reduce irritants. We were also informed that post-call surveys are conducted. The Rogers

Ombudsman and the office of the President of Rogers undertake to resolve complaints, and also to gather information for developing broader solutions. Mr. Moffatt, the Ombudsman, explained how his team operates:

*In addition to attempting to reach resolution of customers' issues, the other part of my role is in working through those cases, I am looking for a root cause where I can make recommendations back to the organization on where I believe there is a need to review all means and processes and procedures to make more customers [satisfied]. We have been having success in influencing change within the organization around processes involved in procedures. [Organization open to suggestions?] Yes, they have been very responsive.*

The office of the Ombudsman makes recommendations for addressing systemic problems. Like Bell, it makes a commitment to complaint resolution and to an effort to reduce and prevent future complaints.

We also asked Pascal Desroches, customer relations manager for Videotron, if he considered that the company was open, efficient and easy to navigate for customers, and he replied, "Yes, it's very accessible I'd say. [We're open to customers' feedback] and we also encourage it." Demonstrating this openness to input about complaints, he showed us how his team handles such data. "All the information that we gather from the complaint database, whether it's in our database or in surveys, is analyzed and used if necessary to modify procedures or processes already in place. We do everything we can to change procedures to meet the needs of our customers." He also stated that complaints management was part of employee training. "Absolutely, both initial and ongoing training." In addition, Videotron records information on complaints handling (audit):

*First of all, yes, we record calls for coaching purposes, and then for all our customer service calls, we've got a mentoring system in place. Regarding complaints, well, we collect all the information in a [data] base that my team checks afterwards. If there was any non-compliance with regulations, we'll coach even the managers or [the director] of operations about a need for information in sector X. That's the spirit behind our whole team [customer relations management]. Although we're inside the company, we work like an ombudsman and we try to be impartial between the two parties, Videotron and customer, and we try*

*to end up in a win-win situation.*

Another representative added, on this same subject:

*Because you have to understand that actually there are several departments that deal with complaints. Pascal's team is really the team that handles complaints from outside organizations and so on, but we also provide consistent and effective complaints management in all areas, so we keep a check overall and we provide coaching and statistics in a way that we share a vision and try to have uniform complaints management, whether it's a complaint received by engineering or by customer service.*

At Videotron there is an effort not only to ensure customer satisfaction, but also to prevent a repetition of the same situation by reorganizing various procedures or by assisting employees to better serve customers. Videotron representatives also discussed their timeframes for handling complaints. First, there is an immediate acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint. Then, the process continues as follows:

*The corporate objective is to contact the customer within 24 hours. (...) Afterwards, there are various goals depending on the complexity of complaints. If it's a complaint about a process, or a bill, etc., we want to resolve it immediately. If it's a complaint about some technical problem, of course that takes more time - 5 to 10 days, it all depends. (...) We have different objectives depending on the complexity of the complaints and what's involved in terms of resolution.*

Videotron was very specific about this. They really want to take responsibility for every complaint quickly and effectively. We saw earlier that Rogers also provides callback timeframes in the escalation process posted on their website. Bell representatives did not specify that they had timeframes for resolving complaints, but they do try to call back the same day the complaint is received.

In terms of **accountability**, the three companies we interviewed all described their responsibilities and delegations of responsibility respecting company actions and decisions. The principle of complaint escalation also demonstrates an intention to

distribute complaints handling tasks. In addition, Bell, Rogers and Videotron all have a **complaints handling manager**. In all three cases, this individual was present among the representatives we interviewed. They were, in accordance with the standard, responsible for maintaining effectiveness by means of employee training (frequently referred to as coaching); for organizing needed operational resources; for evaluating the process; and for establishing deadlines (sometimes only for callbacks, sometimes for the whole process).

Ultimately, the three companies we researched seem to have a **commitment** to resolving complaints and deploying various resources to fulfill this commitment. However, it seems that a number of complaints seem to “slip through the cracks.” First, as we shall see in the next chapter, complaints are sometimes taken outside the company, for example, to the CCTS. It also seems that some consumers get derailed at some point in the escalation of a complaint to the extent that they contact organizations such as Option consommateurs, or the Union des consommateurs du Québec, or even the PIAC. We have discussed this issue with telecommunications analysts working within these organizations. The conclusions they draw are very similar to those we took from focus groups conducted by Environics and complaints that Option consommateurs has received on the topic.

All our focus groups participants save one<sup>86</sup> told us they did not know where to take their complaint beyond the customer service supervisor. In addition, among the complaints received at Option consommateurs, a good proportion complained about a lack of follow-up of their complaint (42.3%), or ineffectiveness in resolving their problem (40.1%).

For PIAC, John Lawford outlined a typical profile of the type of complaints they receive:

*We get about 4 or 5 [complaints] a week and they're unsolicited. We*

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<sup>86</sup> In all, 30 individuals participated in focus groups. Of these, only one knew a complaint could be taken higher than the customer service supervisor.

*don't have anything on the webpage saying, "We're experts in telecom, we will take your complaint. Please contact us." We have a link to the CCTS saying [the complaints should be addressed to the CCTS], because we don't deal with individual complaints... [We write the consumers that we cannot take care of individual cases, but tell them:] "You'll be happy to know there's a third party designated to help you solve your problems free [of charge]... Tell me if it doesn't work." And we got a few people that called back [saying], "It didn't work." It's just really nice to have somewhere to send them.*

It is also interesting to see the number of complaints received by the PIAC, even though it does not have a mission of resolving individual consumer problems. We also investigated the nature of these complaints. Mr. Lawford described tracking problems and inefficiencies in first-time problem resolution:

*[W]hat it is [sometimes], is that someone's made a mistake - and we tell them it was a mistake, if they do actually call here - that they've spoken to someone on the phone and got a verbal confirmation that a certain charge will be waived or credited, and it doesn't get credited and it doesn't get waived either because the CSR didn't make a note of it and it went on to the next call, or they did make a note of it and passed it up and no-one actioned it, or they didn't have the authority to promise that and they promised it, so they lied, or else the thing just got lost in the mail, so to speak, and/or the customer imagined it wrong. In other words, they thought they made a request for credit that was never done.*

Going back to Lawford's advice that we mentioned earlier, his way of dealing with follow-up problems is quite pragmatic but seems to provide a fairly effective way of ensuring appropriate follow-up to the complaint:

*You know, "Don't phone the phone company" is sad advice, but it's one that we do give. There's a "He said, she said" thing, where the [customer] says, "You told me you were going to credit me \$200" and [the company says, "We have no record of that," because [this promise was] oral... and then nothing happens! (...) I don't know, because I don't work in customer service, but I assume that they have a number of scripts to go through and a number of different screens and they may just get confused in what they're doing as well, or not being competent, or not properly trained, or just don't know how to do it properly either. So, they think that they've done the credit request and it's not done right.*

Lawford believes that training or lack of equipment could also be a cause of inefficiency. He also considers that consumers do not necessarily know how to navigate the complaints process and give up:

*There are many reasons why [around 90% of disgruntled customers do not act on their dissatisfaction]. One is simply that there's no information available to them about how to complain and another one is (...) a choice of the customer [thinking], "It's just not worth my time." A lot of it is that [customers] don't know where to go, how to go about the complaints process. A lot of the time, they have a language problem and communications problems (...), but customer service can only go so far [in servicing people in their own language], but I think they can make some effort [in this regard] ... If there's a really big problem with language, [the telecommunications companies] may have to either send people straight to CCTS and support CCTS if they're hiring people who speak other languages, or if it's really a large group in their business section, they should maybe start hiring people that [do speak the language].*

In fact, this information is provided on line only in English and French, which could disadvantage those for whom English and French are a second language,<sup>87</sup> those who have limited literacy skills and those who do not know how to use the Internet. In a country like Canada, that accounts for a large proportion of the population. In fact, according to Statistics Canada, 48% of Canadians aged 16 and over do not possess a minimum level of literacy skills for functional daily living.<sup>88</sup> We must also consider those who do not use the Internet in their personal life. According to Statistics Canada again, although the percentage of users is on the rise, 27% of the population still do not use the Internet. "Almost three-quarters (73%) of Canadians aged 16 and over, or 19.2 million, used the Internet for personal reasons during the 12 months preceding the survey. This is higher than the proportion of slightly more than two-thirds (68%) recorded in 2005 when the survey was last conducted."<sup>89</sup> Asked if he thought that consumers were sufficiently equipped to make a complaint, Lawford spoke of the

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<sup>87</sup> As an indication, according to the 2006 Canadian Census, around 11% of the populations speaks a language other than French or English at home. Source: <http://www40.statcan.ca/102/cst01/demo61a-fra.htm>

<sup>88</sup> Statistics Canada, The Daily, International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, (November 9, 2005)

<sup>89</sup> Statistics Canada, The Daily, Canadian Internet Use Survey (June 12, 2008)

helplessness that the consumer may feel when confronted with a huge industry such as telecommunications:

*I don't know, there's such gap, they know what the problem is very well because they've just lived through it, and it's obviously enough of an issue that they need to contact the company, but they have no understanding of contract law, they have no understanding of what consumer protection there is in the province, they have no idea where to go if the company didn't give them a satisfactory answer - that would be CCTS, I would hope - they have an idea of their own negotiating power or their own worth to the company, so they can't, say, [negotiate on the basis that they might leave]. The companies have a lot of scripts ready for when you are [threatening that you might leave, saying], "Oh well, certainly, but it will cost you this much" or "If you stay with us, we will give you this." [Customers] are ill equipped to fight and they don't know how to do a complaint, they phone instead of writing, but you're not leaving any kind of evidence trail. So if anybody ever says, "You didn't call," they say, "Yes, I did." They think they're going to believe them because they're telling the truth. Well, truth doesn't mean much unless you can prove it. So, it's just a very hard lesson to learn. It's very frustrating for them too, and then they get mad and think the world is against them... Until you really have been really taken to the cleaners's by these folks a couple of times, you're not going to realize that.*

Thus, there is a real problem in following up on complaints, but more important is the fact that consumers do not have the necessary tools for filing a complaint and receiving a satisfactory answer. Although it must be admitted that literacy in business practices is definitely a problem, it must be remembered that consumers cannot easily exercise the skills for escalating a complaint and demanding results.

Anthony Hémond, telecommunications and broadcasting analyst at the Union des consommateurs, is in complete agreement.<sup>90</sup> We asked him what kind of complaints he received and he responded as follows:

*The ACEF [Associations coopératives d'économie familiale] refer cases to me, and sometimes, from what I see, it's hard to get to talk to someone who's authorized for customer service, I mean someone who can actually deal with the problem. Often, you've got to call non-stop, with call times that are sometimes incredible, like you can be on the phone for an*

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<sup>90</sup> Telephone interview with Anthony Hémond of the Union des consommateurs, January 11, 2010.

*hour at a time (...) waiting for someone and explaining [the problem], but then you have to call back again because you've gotten nowhere and you have to [explain the whole story] again to someone new. So, really, there's a malfunction in customer service because consumers can't find someone to talk to who's competent. Then, even when the consumer's right [to complain about the product or customer service] and it's the company that's in the wrong, it's hard to argue with the company. It's a big machine with lots of resources and in any billing dispute they have no hesitation in jeopardizing your credit rating by threatening [to send the file to] a collection agency. So the consumer gets scared and pays up, when they might have been totally in the right.*

Therefore, the complaints received are consistent with those sent to Option consommateurs, namely tracking problems, inefficiencies, transfer, etc. When we asked whether consumers were properly equipped to navigate the complaints process, he replied:

*It's very difficult (...) It makes a difference if the person has access to the Internet or (does not), and it depends on their age as well. Often, seniors will be assisted by relatives, the family, because unfortunately they'll be less capable of finding the information. Those who've got Internet will also be able to find information more easily and learn about their rights and insist on them. So, not everybody's equal when it comes to getting information and asserting their rights, that's obvious.*

Hémond is therefore in agreement with this study regarding literacy and reading skills. He continues:

*Some information is quite accessible if you have access to the Internet. [For example, contracts are available on the Internet, otherwise the company is supposed to send a duplicate. Much information is available in contracts.] In the blue pages of directories, you can find the consumer rights guaranteed by the CRTC and inside you've got all the available information to enforce your rights in accordance with current legislation but (...) it's only valid for your residential land line (...) Then, for all other services such as cell phone and the Internet, it's [the CCTS] that's in charge of these if you have a complaint. But, you know, getting the information, it's not that easy, so the best solution for the consumer is (...) associations that may assist at that point. ACEF [get] numerous telecom complaints and they help consumers who've got a problem [to resolve it]. It's really not easy or straightforward when you've got a problem with these large telecommunications companies to get help from people who know how*

*the system works and what the rights of consumers are.*

Therefore, the tools for filing complaints are inadequate for average consumers to assert their rights. In the current situation and in the context of the issues raised by this chapter, what can be done?

**Table 2 - Problems identified in complaints handling**

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Clarity: convoluted language like “concerns” or “comments”</li><li>- Access to information needed to effectively navigate the complaint process</li><li>- Follow-up</li></ul> |
|---|

### **2.3 Solutions?**

First, regarding language, telecommunications companies should use simple, direct language when describing how to make a complaint. The fact that they equate “comments” with “complaints” is confusing and can give consumers the impression that there is no recourse for complaint, which may give the feeling that the company is not open to complaints.

Regarding openness to complaints, the fact that complaint procedures are difficult or impossible to access also gives the impression that the company is not committed to resolving complaints. It seems absolutely essential that the process be easily accessible to all consumers. So, being confined to information posted on a website puts many consumers at a disadvantage. We therefore recommend that the CRTC require that complaints escalation procedures and relevant contact information be printed in an insert on the utility bill each month. In addition, all telecommunications companies should publish a complaints escalation process that is clear and easy to navigate. Furthermore, we consider that a link to “How to make a complaint” should

be available on the company site in the appropriate place, that is to say, under "Support" or "Contact us."

With regard to tracking issues, we repeat our recommendation of the previous chapter.

Regarding follow-up of active files, it would be desirable to establish a more thorough tracking system. Lawford suggested a simple and effective solution for this problem:

*[When we were addressing the problem with telemarketers' lists], this whole issue came up in spades... So the idea was - and the commission decided - you have to give [the customer] a tracking number... [The industry complained a lot about the costs and the logistics that this modus operandi would entail]... But, that is one of the solutions that I think, if they were serious about their customer service within their organizations, they would have [implemented this system]... I just can't believe that big organizations like that can't give an incident number... That is one of the types of solutions that I think cost some money, maybe that aren't the end of the world, but that show to me that they don't care. If they did care, they would know that you have to have a system of tracking to solve things quickly. But I believe, although I don't know for sure, that it's cheaper to just bother people, let the ones who have real issues and can find the CCTS complaint [system] and you pick off complaints one at a time, it's much cheaper that way...*

The companies we interviewed spoke about their efforts to strengthen tracking and call history. We consider it essential that these monitoring systems be required.

## **Chapter 3 - ISO 10003 - Guidelines for external conflict resolution**

### **3.1 ISO 10003 as an analytical grid**

This third chapter is devoted to the third and final standard on customer service

developed by the International Organization of Standardization, ISO 10003.<sup>91</sup> This standard was developed jointly with ISO 10001 on codes of conduct regarding customer service and is devoted more specifically to external conflict resolution. It essentially tries to ensure that there is an objective last resort in cases where conflicts cannot be solved internally. The scope of the standard is defined as follows:

*This International Standard provides organizations with guidelines for the planning, design, development, operation, maintenance and improvement of effective and efficient external conflict resolution of product complaints. Conflict resolution is a means to finding remedies when organizations are unable to arrive at an internal resolution of the complaint. Most complaints can be resolved satisfactorily within the organization without having to engage in lengthier and more serious procedures. (...)*

*This International Standard may be used:*  
*a) to develop a conflict resolution process and determine when conflict resolution should be offered to the complainants; and*  
*b) to select a conflict resolution provider (...) capable of meeting the specific needs and expectations of an organization. (...)*

*Although the International Standard is intended for organizations, the guidelines provided are also useful for service providers. Providers can implement the guidelines in their own conflict resolution process. (Ibid., p. VI [Our translation])*

In this chapter, we will explore the standard's guidelines in order to evaluate external conflict resolution procedures in the telecommunications industry.

### **3.2 The Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services (CCTS)**

Before we begin, some specifics about the telecommunications industry are in order. First, carriers have no choice of service provider in resolving external conflicts,

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<sup>91</sup> *National Standard of Canada, CAN/CSA-ISO 10003-08 (ISO 10003-2007), Quality Management - Customer Satisfaction- Guidelines for Dispute Resolution External to Organizations, Canadian Standards Association 2007*

as the appointment will already have been made by the federal government, namely the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services (CCTS),<sup>92</sup> and in some cases the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).<sup>93</sup> However, since CCTS was instituted, all complaints about the telecommunications industry are directed to the commissioner and not to the CRTC, which now plays more of a regulatory and supervisory role in telecommunications, as seen in this description of the Commission:

*The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) is an independent public organization that regulates and supervises the Canadian broadcasting and telecommunications systems.*

*The CRTC does not regulate newspapers, magazines, cell phone rates, the quality of service and business practices of cell phone companies, or the quality and content of TV and radio programs.*

*As an independent organization, the CRTC works to serve the needs and interests of citizens, industries, interest groups and the government.<sup>94</sup>*

Therefore, the provider for resolving external disputes in Canada is CCTS, which prevents us from dealing with certain aspects of ISO 10003 standard such as the section on selecting the right provider. Telecommunications companies cannot choose a provider, as the position is filled by the government. However, we will examine company attitudes towards external conflict resolution and attempt to evaluate the quality of the service provider.

In interview, we nevertheless asked company representatives if they had other means of external conflict resolution, apart from CCTS. At Bell,<sup>95</sup> we were told that there was no external conflict resolution because everything is taken care of internally, and that there were clear, direct policies for speaking to a director within the office

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<sup>92</sup> <http://www.ccts-cprst.ca>

<sup>93</sup> <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/>

<sup>94</sup> <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/backgrnd/brochures/b29903.htm>

<sup>95</sup> Telephone interview with Bell representatives, February 8, 2010

of Vice President or President. Videotron<sup>96</sup> confirmed that the resolution of external conflicts was referred to CCTS:

*In telecommunications we have an organization called CCTS - Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services - that acts as an external ombudsman for telecommunications. So, if a complaint is not resolved at the first, second or third level, the final step is CCTS, which has powers of decision and recommendation.*

We rely therefore on CCTS as the conflict resolution provider. Of the companies interviewed, Rogers is the only one to establish an internal ombudsman. His name is Don Moffatt and we spoke with him in the interview with Rogers representatives.<sup>97</sup> During this interview, a company representative briefly explained the role of Mr. Moffatt and his team: "It is our fourth step in the escalation [process], so if things don't get resolved through our office of the president, (...) then they have the choice to go through our office of the ombudsman." Therefore, we consider the Ombudsman's office as the fourth stage in the escalation of a complaint. Mr. Moffatt then explained the responsibilities of his office:

*We have set it out to be as objective as possible. What that means is that I don't report to any of the operating lines in the company. I report into the top of the organization. I do not have access to any of the company systems, the billing systems. If a customer's issue gets referred to me, then I have, first of all, have to gain the consent of the customer to go and request the details of their records from the organization. And then, I would look in an impartial way at the assessment of the details that Rogers provides and the details that the customer provides, and then, basically, I use principles of natural justice to review those and make recommendations. My recommendations are not binding, on either the customer or the company, but we have had good success in those recommendations being accepted and those recommendations being acceptable to the customer in terms of resolution.*

The office of the ombudsman at Rogers follows a number of guidelines laid down by ISO 10003, such as the organization's willingness to participate in external conflict resolution and the provider's competence<sup>98</sup> and capacity for making appropriate

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with Videotron representatives in company offices, February 11, 2010

<sup>97</sup> Telephone interview with Rogers representatives, January 27, 2010

<sup>98</sup> Don Moffatt's biography on the Rogers website indicates that he has the expertise to find solutions in customer

recommendations, as explained by a Rogers's representative:

*One of the things we did when we decided to introduce the ombudsman's office was, we did a lot of research in terms of best practices, what would be the role of the office of the ombudsman. We actually looked to our peers in financial services who are mandated to have an office of the ombudsman, unlike our sector, and spent some time with these offices to understand how they operate and how they work and how they would interact with an office of the president. We feel that we did a very thorough job in terms of architecting it in a way that would best meet the needs of our customers.*

There was certainly an effort by Rogers to establish an ombudsman's office in accordance with guidelines. We recognize that Rogers has made efforts to limit external conflict resolutions by establishing a fourth step in their complaints escalation process. As we have seen, Mr. Moffatt considers that his role is as objective as possible under the circumstances, and that he arrives at a resolution acceptable to both parties in the majority of complaints he receives. Naturally, Rogers customers can contact CCTS to resolve a dispute with the company if the solution proposed is not satisfactory. Therefore, our evaluation of external conflict resolution will concentrate on CCTS, since it is the objective authority appointed by the federal government to resolve complaints in the telecommunications field.

### 3.2.1 The code

The CCTS code is **available** on their website.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, it is written in **clear, accessible** language. The code is supported by procedures and objectives for each function and each role that are part of the process. In itself, the CCTS Procedural Code meets the guidelines of ISO 10003.

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service conflict resolution. Biography posted at <http://your.rogers.com/contact/complaint.asp>

<sup>99</sup> <http://www.ccts-cprst.ca/documents/procedural-code>

### 3.2.2 Guidelines

Let us first consider the mission of CCTS. Their website describes the Commissioner's Office as follows:

**OUR MISSION:** To provide outstanding dispute resolution service to Canadian consumers and telecommunications providers, and always to adhere to our core values and performance standards

**OUR VISION:** We are a dynamic organization that adheres to the best principles of customer service in resolving disputes independently, fairly, effectively and efficiently

**OUR VALUES:**

**We are:**

*Effective: using appropriate processes for the dispute in question, we deliver fair resolutions in a reasonable time frame;*

*Rigorous: we carefully analyze disputes, ensure that we fully understand the positions of the parties, and explain our outcomes clearly and logically;*

*Competent: we understand technology issues, act professionally, and show good judgment;*

*Unbiased: in keeping with our role as a completely independent arbiter of disputes, we take no side in any dispute;*

*Fair: we assess the scale and scope of disputes, apply fair process appropriate to the nature of the dispute, and deliver balanced and reasonable outcomes when required to do so;*

*Responsive: we understand the needs of the disputing parties, and work to resolve disputes in a manner that reflects and respects those needs; and*

*Accessible: All consumers, including those with disabilities, can reach us easily and make use of our processes.*

We note here that most guiding principles of ISO 10003 are enunciated in CCTS values. In fact, of the guidelines of interest here, CCTS fulfills most of the major criteria. This is confirmed by the CCTS initiative of using ISO 10003 to upgrade their code, as stated in their latest annual report:

*The Board noted that the timely and effective resolution of complaints would require changes to existing code procedures and launched a review of the latter to identify opportunities to simplify the process for handling complaints. The proposed code amendments were developed and they are at the stage of consultation with stakeholders. In addition, the board adopted, and posted on its website, a series of performance*

*standards modelled according to the guidelines of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO 10003).<sup>100</sup>*

In terms of **applicability**, we consider that the method of conflict resolution is likely applicable to most conflicts in the telecommunications field. The recent CCTS annual report identifies the organization's mandate as follows:

*We are able to handle complaints about:*

- Home telephone: deregulated local exchange services and VoIP services
- Long distance telephone services (including prepaid calling cards)
- Wireless phone services
- Wired and wireless Internet access services
- White page directories, Directory assistance and Operator services

*We can assist with most types of problems that can arise between a customer and a TSP, including:*

- Compliance with contract terms and commitments
  - Billing disputes
  - Service delivery, including installations, repairs, and disconnections
  - Credit management
  - Unauthorized transfer of service ("slamming")
- (Annual Report 2008-2009, p. 6)*

They handle the conflicts most frequently encountered by telecommunications customers for the majority of services provided by these companies. However, CCTS names certain exclusions:

*These services include television and radio broadcasting services, complaints relating to yellow page directories, security services such as alarm monitoring, internet content and software-based applications, and services that CRTC has not forborne for social or economic reasons (for example, payphones, 900/976 premium services, and accessibility services such as teletypewriter).*

*Examples of matters which we will be unable to assist you with are complaints about telemarketing or unsolicited messages, claims of false or misleading advertising, the pricing of services, privacy and*

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<sup>100</sup> Available at <http://ccts-cprst.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/CCTS-Annual-Report-2008-2009.pdf>. Passage taken from page 6 of report.

*confidentiality violations, contract terms or terms on service agreements and related documents (other than compliance with your provider's contract or service terms), and complaints that have been, currently are, or should be before another organisation or tribunal that has the authority to compensate a customer for losses arising from the occurrence at issue.*<sup>101</sup>

We note here that CCTS does not handle complaints about customer service as such. Obviously, most complaints about customer service have to do with the lack of a resolution to a problem that lies within the mandate of CCTS. For example, a repair that is not made, a billing error that has not been adjusted, a feeling that the contract agreed to is not being respected or is too restrictive, and so on. We understand that, for example, a complaint about the lack of tracking as such by a telecommunications company is difficult to resolve without saying that the whole company lacks organization - which relates more to regulation rather than recommendation, and therefore a task that is more appropriate to the mandate of the CRTC. However, for cases excluded by CCTS, there are alternative resources.<sup>102</sup> We suggest contacting the CRTC and Industry Canada for regulatory issues or problems arising with telecommunications companies that do not lie within the mandate of CCTS.

In addition, CCTS is clearly in a position to resolve conflicts arising with telecommunications companies, since the expertise of their staff, as evidenced by their biographies, is fully relevant.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, the fact that the organization has taken the initiative to comply with ISO 10003 indicates their desire to make the resolution process as efficient as possible.

Regarding fairness, one can only hope that a government-appointed organization is fair and unbiased. In fact, CCTS is funded by the telecommunications industry, which raises some doubts about the organization's objectivity. However, we have no way to

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<sup>101</sup> <http://www.ccts-cprst.ca/complaints/mandate>

<sup>102</sup> <http://www.ccts-cprst.ca/complaints/other-resources>

<sup>103</sup> <http://www.ccts-cprst.ca/about>

confirm or deny their objectivity. The structure of the board seems to balance power between industry and consumers, as this passage from the most recent financial report shows:

*Our Board is structured to provide for participation of all stakeholders, on the one hand, and, independence from the telecommunications industry, on the other. The Board consists of eight Directors, seven of whom are voting Directors:*

- *Four Independent Directors, two of whom are nominees of consumer groups;*
- *Three Industry Directors, one each to represent the ILEC1 Members, the Cable Company Members, and the Other TSP Members; and*
- *The Commissioner, who is an ex-officio non-voting Director, and is independent of the telecommunications industry. (Annual Report 2008-2009, p. 31)*

We can say, therefore, that there is at least an effort to enable the two interested parties, industry and consumer, to have a voice in decisions concerning the Commission and its organization.

Regarding **privacy** of consumers' personal information, CCTS clearly must have access to a certain amount of personal data, but still provides a more than acceptable level of confidentiality, in accordance with the law.<sup>104</sup> For more information, one may consult the privacy policy of the organization (available in English only) on their site.<sup>105</sup> Speaking of information sharing, the organization also demonstrates **transparency**, as well as requiring transparency from the complainant and company involved. Thus, each of CCTS member companies undertakes to provide the necessary information to CCTS to study a case and, if necessary, to investigate, recommend, or render a decision. It is also the responsibility of the complainant to disclose any information that may be needed to process the complaint.

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<sup>104</sup> Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, S.C. 2000, c. 5

Available at [http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/showdoc/cs/P-8.6/bo-ga:s\\_1::bo-ga:l\\_1/20090818/fr?page=1](http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/showdoc/cs/P-8.6/bo-ga:s_1::bo-ga:l_1/20090818/fr?page=1)

<sup>105</sup> <http://www.ccts-cprst.ca/en/privacy-policy>

In terms of speed and efficiency of conflict resolution, the annual report again sheds light on this. CCTS provides a summary of activities that reveals much on how complaints are handled. In terms of speed, it posts the following performance standards:

**Table 3 - Results Performance on the handling of complaints by CCTS**

<b>Performance Standard</b>	<b>CCTS Results*</b>
All telephone calls answered in person	89% of calls answered in person
All voice messages returned within 1 business day	100% of calls returned within 1 business day
All written communications analyzed, assessed and responded to within 1-2 business days	100% analyzed, assessed and responded to within 1-2 business days (average response time to written complaints is 0.34 days)
All eligible complaints will be forwarded to the service provider within 1-2 business days	95%** of eligible complaints forwarded to providers within 2 business days
Once the service provider responds regarding the status of the complaint, If unresolved, we will assess the response, notify the complainant and the service provider, and prepare the file for investigation, within 2 to 5 business days	95%** of notifications made within 5 business days

(Annual Report 2008-2009, p. 9)

To the above, is added:

Our team of Complaints Resolution Officers and Investigators employ the most efficient and effective processes available to us in order to handle complaints in a timely manner. The actual time required to investigate a complaint will vary based on a number of factors, including: the complexity of the case, the number of issues to be resolved (particularly if we need to consult with outside experts), the degree of cooperation we receive from the customer and the service provider, any delays resulting from unsuccessful efforts at resolution during the course of the investigation, and the current volume of complaints (Ibid.).

Therefore, the organization's performance seems more than reasonable. Of course, depending on the complexity of conflict, the actual resolution as such can be speedy

or delayed. However, contact and tracking schedules ensure that the complainant is kept up to date with the handling and investigation of their file. It is difficult to assess efficiency in resolving conflicts. However, we see that a fairly large proportion of cases are settled eventually, as shown in the following table from the annual report:

Table 4 - Status of complaints made to CCTS in 2008-2009

<b>2008-2009</b>	
<b>Number of New Contacts</b>	17,407
<b>Number of Complaints Opened</b>	3,214
<b>Pre-Investigation Dispositions</b>	
Number of Complaints resolved between the TSP & complainant	1,968
Number of Complaints closed before investigation level	239
<b>Investigations</b>	
Number of Complaints sent for investigation	1,004
Number of Complaints resolved at Investigation	427
Number of Complaints closed at Investigation	321
<b>Recommendations</b>	
Number of Recommendations issued	48
Number of Recommendations accepted	31
Number of Recommendations rejected	6
<b>Decisions</b>	
Number of Decisions rendered	6
Number of Decisions accepted	5
Number of Decisions rejected	1

(Annual Report 2008-2009, p. 15)

We can conclude that a willingness to resolve conflicts is evident from the above figures.

We have reviewed all the guidelines of the ISO standard that seem adequately fulfilled by the industry, conflict resolution provider and complainant. However, there are still some areas that need to be examined more closely.

First, we shall consider our most problematic guideline in this instance:

**accessibility.** In the previous chapter we found that although most of the time companies gave information on filing and escalating complaints, consumers do not seem to know to whom they should turn in order to escalate their complaint beyond the customer service supervisor. It is therefore not surprising that consumers are not aware of CCTS. In fact, the report of Environics Research Group shows that only one single participant was aware of CCTS:

*There was little or no awareness that there was any way of appealing to anybody outside of the company they were dealing with. Some guessed that there might be an ombudsman or the CRTC, but no one knew for certain. Only one participant claimed to have heard of the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services and she seemed quite unclear as to what the actual mandate was. It was interesting that when CCTS was discussed many participants seemed very interested and had further questions about the mandate and where they could find more information. Quite a few made a point of taking the time to write down and save the name. Participants were certainly interested in knowing where they could potentially take such issues.*

It is clear that the only participant who seemed to know of CCTS was not even clear on its mandate. Consumers seem not to know where to turn for conflict resolution beyond the company with which they are dealing. This is often why consumers contact the offices of Option consommateurs, Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC),<sup>106</sup> the Union des consommateurs, the Better Business Bureau (BBB),<sup>107</sup> the Office de la protection du consommateur (OPC)<sup>108</sup> or any other organization claiming to protect consumers' rights.

John Lawford,<sup>109</sup> of PIAC, also identified CCTS's lack of visibility as a major obstacle for consumers wishing to make a complaint. As he stated:

*I don't know how the backlog is at CCTS. I was actually supposed to see Howard [Maker] this week, I was going to ask him how they were doing...*

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<sup>106</sup> <http://www.piac.ca/>

<sup>107</sup> <http://www.bbb.org/>

<sup>108</sup> <http://www.opc.gouv.qc.ca/>

<sup>109</sup> Telephone interview with John Lawford of PIAC, January 25, 2010

*Well, the communications plan, I'm going to bug him about because it was due 18 months ago and there's no excuse, really, for that. And something as simple as requiring their members to put a link that is prominent on their webpage, it wouldn't hurt: One mailing, even one answer would increase their visibility... But that's out of our hands! Nothing we can do. If the Commissioner would have ordered [members to put a link on their website, the visibility of CCTS] would have been a lot better. [It is] an issue: the visibility of a supposed complaints body...*

It would, in fact, be very useful to make the CCTS link more obvious on the telecommunications companies' websites. Anthony Hémond<sup>110</sup> of the Union des consommateurs agrees:

*There is now a telecommunications services ombudsman, the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services, which has full authority and whose mandate applies to various specific areas, but consumers are still often unaware of the existence of the office. (...) It's a real problem because [CCTS] can intervene and help consumers, so really, consumers have to be aware of their existence if they're going to defend consumer rights. These large companies, they always stand their ground, sometimes wrongly, sometimes justifiably, (...) these are the main problems we face.*

We then asked him whether CCTS needs more visibility:

*They will have to be [more visible] because guidelines have been put in place that the existence of [CCTS] has to be mentioned on customers' bills. There must be an insert mentioning the existence of [CCTS], also in the blue pages of the telephone directory. There will soon be a publicity campaign to spread the word that [CCTS] exists. [CCTS] is still a little new, and it was very difficult to set up because the companies kept throwing obstacles in its path. Now it has to hit its stride. It was necessary to hire staff. There have been many changes within the organization, so in the coming years we'll see how it works. (...) We'll see how it all falls into place and how fast.*

We have already seen how difficult it can be to access information needed to escalate a complaint. It should be noted that CCTS is always the last step in the escalation of a complaint, so it's just as difficult to find as the procedures for a so-called "internal" complaint. Therefore, it is evident that a link on the website is not enough to ensure

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<sup>110</sup> Telephone interview with Anthony Hémond of the Union des consommateurs, January 11, 2010

all consumers have access to CCTS. CCTS is not publicized in the mass media, and there is still no permanent reference on the invoice - which is the first and sometimes only way consumers know how to contact their carrier.

However, we stress that once the consumer knows where to go, CCTS provides all the necessary information on conflict resolution procedures. The information is in plain and simple language on the website and the actual process is easy to navigate for the average consumer, whether via telephone, website, email, or post.

In terms of **competence** and **capability**, they are unevenly distributed. ISO 10003 requires that company, complainant and provider possess the appropriate resources, know-how, training and experience needed to adequately fulfill their responsibilities. Although we can confirm that companies have the resources, expertise and experience to negotiate a conflict resolution,<sup>111</sup> and that CCTS has investigators, providers and managers trained and experienced in the field, we question to what extent the consumer is equipped to participate in conflict resolution. Although CCTS can help consumers navigate the process, it may be that from the outset consumers do not even know that CCTS is there for them. In focus groups, we noticed that when we mentioned CCTS, the majority of people believed that it only dealt with major cases, not their own minor billing problems or repairs. CCTS's "official" nature seemed to intimidate them, or at least create the impression they were not included in its mandate. Thus, in addition to suffering from a lack of visibility, CCTS does not seem to know how exactly to make its mandate known to the public.

The third problem area is **continuous improvement**. Although CCTS can be congratulated on initiatives based on its decision to upgrade procedures - specifically by adopting ISO 10003 and trying to improve its visibility - it seems that the industry at large considers CCTS an outside entity for conflict resolution purposes, and not usually

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<sup>111</sup> All companies interviewed had complaints offices, as well as conflict resolution managers such as Pascal Desroches at Videotron

as a source of information to help improve their products and services. In fact, since CCTS's mandate is conflict resolution rather than general recommendations to address systemic problems, we question whether external conflict resolution is sufficient to ensure continuous improvement in industry-client relations in the telecommunications field. John Lawford explained this problem quite clearly during our interview:

*[T]here is a lot of pressure that's being put on individuals to resolve their own problems and the solution, I guess, at the time, was to create this commissioner for complaints for telecommunications services, which does exist... The problem, from my point of view, is that you again are trying to pick off complaints on a one-off basis and you put a lot of pressure on the individuals to solve their problems and it's unfair to consumers to do all the work because they're already outgunned in terms of contracting written by the telecommunications companies and not being modifiable, and then problems naturally do arise and some of them are systemic, and they could be solved at the other end by regulations-enforcing, but that is not the style these days. So that is, in a large macro sense, what the problem is at the moment.*

By adopting a "case-by-case" approach to resolution, rather than taking a broader view of the problem, there is an avoidance of regulation that would resolve certain systemic problems outright. Although CCTS can solve individual problems as an external conflict resolution provider, it cannot prevent the recurrence of systemic problems, since it has no power to regulate.

Company representatives that we interviewed testified that they used feedback gathered from complaints to improve their products, services, processes and systems. In focus groups, many participants believed that the quality of customer service in telecommunications was improved or unchanged:

*In general, despite the many frustrations experienced, participants felt that the telecommunications industry was improving and making some amount of effort to, at the very least, give "the impression of customer service improved in the eyes of consumers." Furthermore, participants were generally happy with the quality of product received from the telecommunications providers and felt that this was improving as well. It was noted that the telecommunications industry was no worse than any other industry sector when it came to customer service. In fact,*

*several participants felt the telecommunications industry compared favourably for its customer service in contrast with utilities such as Hydro-Quebec and government departments or banks or credit card companies or airlines. It was generally felt that customer service improvements in the industry were also occurring despite the fact that customer service reps deal with increasingly complex technology and issues. However, once again this was an area with a diversity of views, as some felt that "it's always been the same with the big companies." None of the participants felt that there was any decline in customer service levels.*

However, although many participants mentioned a number of dissatisfactions, they did not seem to believe that the fact of complaining would make a difference. Lawford has his opinions on such consumer resignation. As regards the escalation of a complaint, Lawford believes that at some point in the escalation, the consumer will eventually drop their case, either because the procedures are too complex or because they think that their claim is not substantial enough. In the following specific example, Lawford discusses a consumer who had to go to small claims court:

*So, when people call us, after being frustrated or email us, I say: "Never phone the phone company, write the phone company a paper letter if you really want actions. And [it has to be addressed to the] executive customer service's office [and it has to be a registered letter] and then maybe they'll listen to you." Because, then, it's very hard for them to say - when you show up in a small claims court, if you have to go that far - that they never caught it. But most people kind of stop at that point, saying: "You know, it's not that important" or they say, "Well, I've called 14 times" and the only thing we can say to them is, "Did you keep a log?" Again, for most of the minor amounts involved, they're not going to end up in small claims testifying against [a certain telecommunications company]. They are just going to eat it.*

Anthony Hémond, of the Union des consommateurs, also talks about consumer fatigue and the industry's lack of initiative to improve:

*There are way too many complaints and people are really upset having to contact people, and explain the problem and endlessly call back. People are fed up and tired of contacting them. Some efforts have been made and we've seen improvement in some companies, but there are others that do absolutely nothing to improve the situation. (...) This is exactly what we are facing, and it's unfortunate.*

Therefore, it appears that consumers are wearying themselves complaining. In reality, the fact that the whole approach to external conflict resolution is on a case-by-case basis prevents the resolution of systemic problems. Data on complaints reported to CCTS are given to the CRTC in the Commissioner's annual report. However, the CRTC does not seem to compile this information or use it to regulate the industry. Some regulations have been introduced by the CRTC, but these only apply to landline telecommunication services. Lawford illustrates his opinion of the CRTC on this issue:

*I would say the largest issue is simply retreat from regulations by the regulator (CRTC)... The government has issued what we could call a policy direction, which the documents say "Don't regulate telecommunications companies unless you have to and let the market do its work." Our experience [indicates] that it doesn't, usually, largely because the number of telecommunications providers in Canada is still pretty small, and [...] now they're trying to open that up, it's a little better, but not that much, and Internet [providers are] becoming more like wireless... That's new in the last 4-5 years.*

Therefore, at present, it is preferred that market forces do the job, which Lawford finds insufficient because there is not enough competition in Canada to allow a real change in practices. Hémond feels the same way:

*We talk a lot in all these campaigns about a code of ethics. Maybe it's time to have a code of ethics for customer service in phone companies. (...) There's nothing binding. It's a real problem. And we've seen it with the code of conduct for wireless carriers. Most of the main provisions focus on contract information, which is already addressed in legislation and the Civil Code, so you could (say it's that) or nothing, it's all the same.*

He adds, about codes of ethics: "[There should also be] binding measures. How can we know that the sales rep of such-and-such company has informed customers about everything stated in the code of conduct? I sincerely believe that this is incorrect. There's no one explaining things, that's the problem."

According to ISO 10003, conflict resolution should serve to gather useful information to resolve problems. The procedure is simple: diagnose, evaluate, update and

improve. Diagnosis of conflict resolution leads us to believe that CCTS solves problems quite well, but lacks visibility and accessibility. The provider's performance evaluation seems satisfactory enough. On the other hand, updating and improving involves the analysis of conflict resolution data to identify individual and systemic problems and trends in products and companies. Clearly, this is the aim of the present study and our findings will help us draw up certain recommendations. However, this is also the job of the industry and those authorities empowered to enact recommendations and regulations so that problems are eventually resolved.

**Table 5 - Problems identified in external conflict resolution**

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Accessibility and visibility;</li><li>- Continuous improvement.</li></ul> |
|---|

### **3.3 Solutions?**

On July 21, 2009, CCTS approved an "outreach program"<sup>112</sup> to raise consumer awareness of the Commissioner's office. Although the suggestions in this program seem inherently laudable, some points ought to be somewhat strengthened. In this study, we have suggested that CCTS contact information appear prominently on all bills. However, the "outreach program" offers only this:

*The TSPs will provide a message referencing CCTS on customer bills (whether paper or electronic), or optionally by way of a bill insert:*

- *The message will appear at least semi-annually, and each TSP must have issued its first notice within six months of the date upon which CCTS Board of Directors approves this Plan. The TSPs will inform CCTS of the anticipated date of their initial bill notice or insert.*
- *Placement of CCTS notice on customer bills will be left to the discretion of the Member, provided that the notice is reasonably*

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<sup>112</sup> <http://www.cts-cprst.ca/documents/public-awareness>

*prominent relative to other notices of a similar nature. It is anticipated that many Members would place the notice at the bottom of the last page of an invoice.*

- *The billing notice will read as follows: Do you have a complaint regarding your telecommunications service that we haven't been able to resolve? The Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services (CCTS) may be able to assist you: [www.ccts-cprst.ca](http://www.ccts-cprst.ca) or 1-888-221-1687.*
- *An optional third sentence for the notice will be available for use at the TSPs' discretion. This third sentence would indicate that CCTS does not address complaints relating to broadcasting services or regulated telecommunications services (Ibid.).*

Therefore, CCTS will require that their contact information appear on bills only twice a year. This means consumers will not have access to the information each month of the year, except for those who keep old bills or remember seeing the insert. We also question why, in the digital age, electronic invoices should not also contain such details.

In addition, this program requires telecommunications companies that publish white pages directories to publish information on CCTS, which we welcome. The "outreach program" also requires that carriers publish relevant information about CCTS on their websites. The provision reads as follows:

*FSTs shall make reference to CCTS on websites and shall include a link to the CCTS website.*

- *Most TSPs have indicated an intention to locate the link on web pages reached by "Legal" links (generally in the footer) or "Customer Care" links (generally fairly prominent in the header or in the body of the home page). Wherever the TSP decides to place it, the link must be easy to find, of reasonable size, and readily accessible to any site visitor.*
- *Where the TSP's individual website permits, the CCTS link may also be searchable using logical search terms, such as "complaints" or "CCTS."*
- *The notice will be in the same terms as the white pages directory notice (Ibid.).*

Although it is logical for companies to provide information through “Customer Service” links, we are dubious about the accessibility of the information if it is placed in “Legal” links. We also welcome the initiative to make information available through a search for words such as “complaints” or “CCTS.” However, it should be noted that this is required only “where the TSP website permits.”

One section of the “outreach program” seems rather strange:

*In dealing with customers who have come to the TSP with a customer service issue or complaint, the TSPs will ensure that their staffs inform the customer of the recourse offered by CCTS in the event of an unresolved complaint.*

- *TSPs’ personnel will refer customers to CCTS after a complaint has been escalated to the final complaint-handling level within the Member’s organization. Front line complaints-handling representatives will not be required to make a customer aware of CCTS in order to facilitate resolution of the dispute directly between the TSP and the customer, and in order to prevent the premature referral of complaints to CCTS (Ibid.).*

Although we understand that CCTS wishes “to prevent premature referral of complaints to CCTS,” we consider that if a customer asks which entity to contact to take their complaint outside the company, they should at least be provided with contact information, even if only through a willingness to raise awareness of CCTS when a situation arises where the consumer will actually need it. This requirement seems counterproductive.

CCTS is also implementing an awareness campaign. We do not consider it adequate. In fact, the target audiences are government agencies and elected officials. It seems to us that the target group is rather narrow, especially given the number of consumer complaints that arise. At the very least, a mass media advertising campaign should be considered.

Regarding continuous improvement, our recommendation seems self-evident: the entity responsible for regulating (CRTC) should regulate. It may be a truism, but we

note that although CCTS submits its annual report to the CRTC every year, regulations addressing systemic issues tend to be lacking. If need be, we consider that CCTS should have the power to go beyond rendering decisions in individual cases and possibly have a general prescriptive authority to address systemic problems identified by an evaluation of data collected by the organization.

#### **4. Conclusion - The current state of the industry and recommendations of Option consommateurs**

To complete the study, we here present our conclusions and recommendations.

From the outset, we would like to state that although the CRTC tries to ensure that competition in the marketplace guarantees quality of service in telecommunications companies, we consider it inadequate at this time. At the time of writing, Industry Canada has opened the market to foreign companies and has auctioned off cellular spectrums. It remains to be seen whether these initiatives will impact customer service at telecoms. Anthony Hémond stated his desire for greater competition:

*In the market itself, if there were more competition, it would force companies to be more competitive and improve their customer service. (...) Now, I don't want to be mean, but changing certain top executives at some companies wouldn't be a bad idea either. Or maybe they'll just consult us. In the consultations we had with the OPC, we were up against a brick wall. If we could just dialogue and tell them what their problems are... they're perfectly aware of the problems they've got, it would be easy to improve it all. But they have their market logic of dividends and earning money for the shareholders for the next half-year, which doesn't fit in with improving customer relations.*

At this point, we shall review the conclusions of each of the chapters.

#### **4.1 Problems in customer service**

- Hard-to-navigate automated systems
- Too many call transfers
- Ineffective resolution
- Tracking issues
- Inappropriate language level
- Lack of tolerance and flexibility
- Combining sales pitch with customer service
- Lack of transparency
- Accountability

##### **4.1.1 Solutions proposed by Option consommateurs**

1. In the case of automated systems, it seems that the best alternative to hard-to-navigate automated services is not to develop new technology, but to go back to the old one that seemed to satisfy everyone - a human-operated reception and call-routing service. Agents answering consumers can make sure that they understand the reasons for complaints before redirecting the call, rather than making consumers "guess" exactly which option is the one that fits their needs.
2. A simpler, less expensive solution is also possible: to simplify menus and provide access to a list of menus on the website or in the directory so that consumers can view the navigation path.
3. We recommend training customer service agents for the entire range of services provided by the company. Companies providing one-stop service seem the ones most likely to limit repeated transfers and the fact that consumers get lost in the automated system maze. In addition, this would allow agents to access

consumer information regarding all services, enabling comprehensive tracking of customer records.

4. Regarding training, we consider it necessary for agents to learn to explain complex topics in everyday language, such as technical support staff installing programs and customer service agents explaining bills or contracts. Some customers fail to resolve problems because customer service agents cannot adequately explain complicated concepts.
5. Regarding transparency and accessibility, we recommend that contracts and invoices be in plain, accessible language to minimize misunderstandings.
6. Regarding consumer displeasure at combining customer service and sales service, the solution is simple: do not mix these two services. Customer service should just be intended to meet customers' demands and ensure their satisfaction, thereby guaranteeing their retention.
7. It would also be desirable to prohibit this practice. This is a simple initiative that would be easy to monitor and sanction.
8. We consider that the CRTC should extend its regulation of landline services<sup>113</sup> by imposing an obligation to achieve results in terms of problem resolution and repairs within a standard timeframe.
9. Regarding file tracking, we consider it essential that customer file tracking systems be mandatory; for example, a reference number that consumers can quote if they do not obtain satisfaction.

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<sup>113</sup> It includes deadlines for wireline service repairs, billing disputes and invoice corrections.

10. Telecommunications service contracts should contain some real commitment to customer service.
11. Regarding lack of flexibility, if we consider that a contract is an agreement between the company and consumer for obtaining a particular service and that such agreements must be respected, it would be at least desirable if companies showed more flexibility in extreme cases such as loss of employment, or insignificant changes such as changing the name on the contract. A little more flexibility by companies would also provide some compensation for unilateral contract modifications that are frequent in the telecom field.
12. Regarding a lack of information and the language level of contracts, it seems essential to simplify the language used in contracts for telecommunications service, as is done in other common contracts such as leases.
13. Regarding clarity and transparency, codes of conduct for telecommunications companies should be available for inspection by the general public, so that consumers who shop around or who want to express some dissatisfaction can at least know what a company's customer service commitments actually consist of.
14. In short, we consider it would be helpful if, in addition to CCTS, there were a government body to inform and guide telecommunications consumers, much like the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada (FCAC) does in the financial arena.

## **4.2 Problems in complaints handling**

- Clarity: misleading language like "Concerns" or "Comments"
- Access to information necessary to effectively navigate the complaints process;
- Tracking

#### **4.2.1 Solutions proposed by Option consommateurs**

1. Regarding language and terminology used, it should be required that companies use simple, direct language when describing how to file a complaint. To equate the two terms “comments” and “complaints” is confusing and may give consumers the impression that there is no recourse for complaint, which may in turn give the impression that the company is not open to complaints.
2. We also consider it absolutely essential that the procedures for filing a complaint be easily accessible to all consumers. The fact that information is only posted on the Internet puts most consumers at a disadvantage. We therefore recommend that the CRTC require that procedures for escalating complaints and relevant contact information be available in an insert with the utility bill each month.
3. In addition, all telecommunications companies should post a complaints escalation process that is clear and easy to navigate. We also consider that a link to “How to make a complaint” should be available on the company website in an appropriate place, namely “Support” or “Contact us.”
4. Regarding tracking problems, we reiterate our recommendation in the chapter on customer service. In terms of tracking files, we consider it is essential that mandatory tracking systems be required for customer files; for example, a reference number that consumers can quote if they do not obtain satisfaction.

#### **4.3 Problems in external conflict resolution**

- Accessibility and visibility
- Continuous improvement

#### **4.3.1 Solutions proposed by Option consommateurs**

1. We recommend that CCTS contact information appear prominently on all telecommunications company invoices each month.
2. Regarding visibility and accessibility again, it is desirable that companies post CCTS information in "Customer service" links. We question the accessibility of the information if it is put in a "Legal" link. We also suggest making the information available through a word-search for terms like "Complaints" or "CCTS."
3. Although we understand that the CCTS wishes "to prevent premature forwarding of complaints to CCTS," we consider that if customer enquire which organization to contact in order to take a complaint outside the company, they should at least be provided with contact information, if only out of a commitment to promote awareness of CCTS should a situation arise where there is a real need.<
4. CCTS has also set up a certain visibility campaign. We do not believe it is adequate. Basically, the target audience consists of government agencies and elected officials. The target population seems very narrow. There should be a mass media advertising campaign.
5. Regarding continuous improvement, the regulatory body (CRTC) should regulate. To repeat a truism, we note that although CCTS presents its annual report to the CRTC each year, regulations addressing certain systemic issues tend to be lacking. If need be, we feel that CCTS should be able to go beyond the provisions in individual cases and possibly have general prescriptive powers to resolve systemic problems identified by analyzing data collected by the organization.

## **4.4 In general**

In light of these observations, we make two general recommendations: one for the industry and one for CCTS.

### **4.4.1 General recommendations for companies**

Companies must change their perspective vis-à-vis loyal customers. On the issue of improving customer service and retaining existing customers, certain findings emerge. Customer service must be tailored to individual requirements and be responsive to needs.

This means that customer service should provide a prompt, personal response and effective resolution of problems. In this regard, a contractual promise to resolve problems within a standard timeframe is essential.

Good customer service is also defined by its availability and openness, meaning easy-to-find contact information, an easy-to-navigate telephone service and diligent tracking of complaints and customer files.

Accessibility is also partly determined by the language that a company uses. Accordingly, simple, everyday language should be used for contracts and technical support. Invoices should also be straightforward, so that customers can understand at a glance what they are paying for each month.

Companies should also demonstrate transparency, for example, by publishing clear contact information for complaints, making their complaints handling process available and drafting clear and concise contracts.

### **General recommendations made to the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services (CCTS)**

We consider it essential that the CCTS mandate be expanded to include consumer information and education about customer service issues in the telecommunications field. It is also essential that CRTC intervenes towards the industry in order to prevent once and for all the occurrence of systemic problems, either CCTS take on a more coercive role and be empowered to implement a comprehensive system of sanctions

against telecommunications companies and introduce regulations for ensuring a certain quality of customer service. In the present context, CCTS only settles disputes on a “case-by-case” basis. By broadening its mandate, CCTS could prevent many of these disputes by ensuring that the same problems do not recur repeatedly.

In addition, CCTS should be more accessible. For example, contact information should appear on all bills that customers receive from service providers and be easily accessible on their websites.

Regarding visibility, CCTS should enhance its presence in the mass media to ensure that Canadian consumers are familiar with its mandate and how to get in touch.

# Appendix 1

## FINAL REPORT

Focus Group Report:  
Public Attitudes toward Telecommunications Customer Service

Prepared for: Option Consommateurs

November 2009

pn 6565

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## PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

EnviroNics Research is pleased to present this focus group report to Option Consommateurs. This report provides an overview of attitudes that Canadians hold towards the customer service they receive from their telecommunications providers. In particular, methods of contact, experience with customer service, attitudes towards customer service and knowledge of where to turn if dissatisfied were explored.

Four focus groups were conducted in November of 2009. Two were held in English in Toronto

(November 11th) and two in French in Montreal (November 17th). The participants in these focus groups had all contacted customer service for their telecommunications provider for some reason in the past year. In each city one session was composed of people between the ages of 45 and 70 and one session was composed of participants between the ages of 20 and 44.

Derek Leebosh, Senior Associate at Environics Research was the Project Director and focus group moderator.

The discussion guide used in the groups can be found in the Appendix at the conclusion of this report.

## DETAILED FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

### CONTACTING TELECOMMUNICATIONS CUSTOMER SERVICE

#### 1. How to make contact

The focus group participants were asked if they had contacted a telecommunications provider (including phone companies - cellular or landline, internet service providers and/or cable or satellite TV companies) in recent years. All participants had contacted at least one service provider and many had also contacted multiple providers.

Companies contacted included Rogers, Bell, Videotron, Fido, Virgin and Telus. There were relatively few mentions of smaller telecommunications companies in the sessions.

Knowing how to contact customer service at telecommunications providers was not an issue. Virtually all participants felt it was easy to figure out what number to call. Many participants simply found the number to call on their bill. In addition, others found the appropriate contact information on the website of the company they wanted to reach where it could easily be found under the tab “contact us.” To the extent that there were any complaints about knowing who to contact for customer service, it had less to do with finding a central number to call than with having to go through too many “menus” find the appropriate person to talk to. However, participants generally felt that if they needed to contact their provider the information was available.

Virtually all participants spoke about using the telephone as their primary means of contacting telecommunications providers. Some also visited retail locations – usually when the issue involved purchasing new hardware or having a device that needed to be repaired or exchanged. Only a small minority used online means such as email or online live chat functions offered by some company websites as well.

## 2. Reasons for contacting customer service

The most common reasons for contacting customer service tended to be billing questions or issues, as well as installation or starting up of service. In addition, participants also mentioned issues with online account access, needing to change usage plans and various technical support issues, including service interruptions.

Some participants were quite forthcoming that the reasons for calling included such matters as losing or damaging a cell phone, selecting a wrong or inappropriate plan or needing to reduce their plan because of difficult financial circumstances.

## EXPERIENCES WITH CUSTOMER SERVICE

Participants were eager to talk about their experiences with customer service. They reported a wide variety of issues, frustrations, successes and failures in dealing with customer service with various companies. It should be noted that, while many participants had some frustrations in dealing with customer service, most reported having had positive experiences. The general feeling was that the actual people working in customers service that one deals with were almost always very courteous and were trying to be helpful.

### 1. Waiting time for service

There were a number of issues around customer service that tended to be raised by the participants. One common issue revolved around the length of time it could take to be served. Most people reported that they tended to be serviced quite quickly once they actually got past all the endless menus and voice-recognition options and were on hold for a customer service rep.

Only a couple of people reported being on hold for inappropriately long periods of time. Some expressed frustration while some were more resigned to the long waits. Others seemed eager to discuss their favourite strategies for reducing or dealing with wait times such as immediately pressing 0, calling at certain times of day and doing other things while the phone was on speakerphone. Most people did appreciate it when a recording would tell them how long they might be on hold before their call was answered.

### 2. Voice recognition systems

Many of the participants disliked voice recognition systems such as “Emily” at Bell Canada. They complained that frequently they did not seem to work correctly, could not interpret frustration in a person’s voice and often did not result in reaching the correct person or

department. Furthermore, some participants complained about the level of detail contained in menus. Specifically they often found that either there were too many choices or the issues they were calling about were not contained in any of the options.

In Montreal in particular, several participants spoke of their strategies for “getting past Emily.” Participants reported that when they encountered such frustrations they often hit # or 0 in hopes of reaching a live operator. One woman even spoke of selecting whichever option was for new customers since she was convinced that this generally was the quickest path to a live operator who could then direct her to the appropriate person.

### 3. Getting in touch with the right person

Once the participants had successfully navigated the phone systems and reached a live person, the next frustration was that they would not contact the person who was best able to help them, or as one put it “you never get to the right person the first time.” In these cases they reported that they would typically be transferred. In this case it seems that the transfers themselves were not so much an issue as the way in which they occurred. Specifically, participants reported frustration with giving out their information and telling their story complete with all the relevant details and then being transferred only to have to begin once again at the beginning with their basic information.

Because participants were already impatient after holding and then navigating the phone system to this point this was felt to be even more frustrating. Even worse, if the first service person did not adequately understand the issue this could result in a further transfer. Finally, a minority of participants spoke of having to call back for their issue. In this case they were frustrated not only by having to give their information over again, but also by having to wade through the opening hold queue again and often not being able to speak to the same person or people they spoke to before.

People with relatively simple and straightforward reasons for having to call customer service usually found that they could get their problem resolved by dealing with one rep. However, some people who had more complex and more adversarial issues to resolve reported having to talk to as many as 5 different people before getting any resolution.

In person customer service in boutiques is usually quite prompt, though it was noted that more and more boutiques are actually franchises and are only able to deal with a limited range of issues.

#### 4. Attitude of customer service representatives

Once participants got through to a live customer service person they generally seemed pleased with the quality of the people they spoke to. However, this area was not without its frustrations as it was often pointed out that the quality of service one received from the person reached could vary dramatically and that it often seemed to be a matter of the “Luck of the draw – if you’re lucky you get a good customer rep...if not...” Some reported that if they ever found themselves dealing with a rep who was not helpful enough, they would hang up and call again in the hopes of getting a better customer service rep. Participants spoke of occasional frustrations with those who seemed to display little empathy and little concern for resolving the issue at hand. While it was acknowledged that not all issues could be solved by all service reps, it seemed that a willingness to understand and empathize were, at least at some times, even more important than finding a successful solution.

Nonetheless, it should be stressed that almost all the participants reported that they found the reps they dealt with to be very polite and professional and that in some cases when they had a negative experience dealing with customer service, it was more due to company policies than the attitude of the rep.

While there was also some frustration with some customer service representatives, it was also felt that these were certainly a minority and that most representatives were honestly trying to help. While they may have been hampered by company policies or a lack of training their efforts were generally acknowledged and appreciated by the participants. As one pointed out “they don’t have a reason to be nasty.”

Feelings towards technical support were also quite positive. One participant spoke of how the tech support person she dealt with even described the colour of the particular wires and sockets and could specifically direct her through the setup of her hardware using this information. Needless to say she was quite pleased.

Another issue that some participants reported was that when they would call about a technical support or billing issue, the rep would often try to sell them a new service or upgrade. They felt that customer service reps should not be sales reps.

Another issue that came up a few times in Toronto in particular was that of offshore call centers. While most participants had the experience of dealing with service centres located in foreign countries, particularly for technical support for their personal computers, few seemed to have experienced this with respect to telecoms. Some were frustrated by poor language or communications skills on the part of those they were dealing with. Some also disliked the principle of a Canadian telecommunications company using staff in countries such as India or Panama. Others cited a perceived lack of responsibility to Canadian laws on the part of call center employees or an orientation towards “filling out call reports” rather than actually helping the customer or solving the problem. For many it seemed that the problem was related to the fact that they called a specific company and reached someone who was relatively disconnected from that company.

## 5. Problem resolution

Once the customer reaches the right person for their problem it seems that they may achieve varying levels of success. Most spoke of typically being satisfied with the response, others less so. Specific concerns here included delays in making changes to bills, with some customers reporting frustration that they would be told that changes to their billing would be made only to receive bills dated after the apparent resolution and then being told that they should wait one more month for the changes to be made. One exasperated participant exclaimed “I always get what I want until the bill comes...they’ll help you out, and then the bill comes - it’s still there - ‘Oh no, you have to wait one more month’!” Some also complained of instances where they were assured that changes had been made and/or a solution had been reached only to call back and discover that apparently nothing had been done and no one seemed aware of the agreement reached.

Plans, contracts, bundles and unnecessarily complex policies were cited as a source of frustration. While most participants seemed to be comfortable with the necessity of such plans they reported being annoyed by plans that were rigidly enforced and being prevented from making changes in extenuating circumstances. One participant described a situation where she had attempted to change to upgrade to a more expensive plan only to be told that she could not make changes until her current plan had expired. Another described losing his job and needing to contact his cable provider in order reduce his cable bill. In these circumstances participants reported feeling frustration when confronted with an apparently lack of flexibility, but also reported being very appreciative when companies were able to compromise or make exceptions for their special circumstances despite policies or even the participants’ own contracts or choices.

## ORIENTATIONS TOWARD TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY CUSTOMER SERVICE

It was generally felt that the original issues for which the telecoms were contacted were dealt with to the participants’ satisfaction. Even though the timelines involved and process may have

been at times frustrating the majority of complaints seem to have been dealt with and the participants seemed to be typically happy with the resolution reached.

While overseas call centers were a source of some frustration, there were certainly some who made a point of mentioning that they have at times received excellent service from overseas call centers. In particular, the younger group seemed to have less of a problem with this type of service.

Participants also seemed willing to endure some level of challenge in dealing with telecoms. One participant pointed you “must be willing to wait” while another added “it’s just the number of people trying to call in.” In general, they seemed relatively willing to accept these difficulties and seemed to sympathize somewhat with their providers – particularly when the issues they contacted the providers about were resolved to their satisfaction in the end.

#### 1. Customer service improvements

In general, despite the many frustrations experienced, participants felt that the telecommunications industry was improving and making some amount of effort to, at the very least, give “the impression of customer service improved in the eyes of consumers.” Furthermore, participants were generally happy with the quality of product received from the telecommunications providers and felt that this was improving as well. It was noted that the telecommunications industry was no worse than any other industry sector when it came to customer service. In fact several participants felt the telecommunications industry compared favourably for its customer service in contrast with utilities such as Hydro-Quebec and government departments or banks or credit card companies or airlines. It was generally felt that customer service improvements in the industry were also occurring despite the fact that customer service reps deal with increasingly complex technology and issues. However, once again this was an area with a diversity of views as some felt that “it’s always been the same with the big companies.” None of the participants felt that there was any decline in customer service levels.

## 2. Reasons for choosing a telecommunications service provider

When it came to purchasing or signing up for telecommunications service, participants generally felt that the quality of the customer service department was not a key issue. It was felt that it is simply too difficult to judge and compare customer service before purchasing. The decision was commonly made based on issues such as price, quality of product and friends' recommendations. As one person stated, "I don't care about the customer service until I have a problem...you can't have one month of free of customer service." However, it was generally acknowledged that customer service could – and in some cases was reported to – lead to switching to another telecom. As another participant stated, "the reason you choose the company is not customer service but the reason why you abandon the company may be customer service."

Interestingly, there appears to be a wide range of thresholds at which participants would consider switching telecoms. This threshold was impacted by both contracts and convenience of switching. While contracts were an issue during the period that they were in effect, many seemed to enjoy having the opportunity to renegotiate them once they expired since it seemed to upset the balance of power in their favour. But even when contracts were not in effect the challenge of having to change providers for many bundled services and then even to have to return hardware for internet, phone and cable was simply too much hassle for some. After experiencing some issues with service, once participant recalled, "my solution was just cancelling the whole services and then going back to it when I couldn't find anything else. I figured there's a phone, cable internet and I had to return everything – it was just too much work."

There was some difference of opinion on whether one could expect better service from larger telecommunications companies. Some felt that the larger companies would have the resources, personnel and policies to better serve them while others felt that it was more likely that smaller companies would be more motivated to serve customers in an effort to grow their businesses. Participants had varied opinions as to whether any one company had a reputation for having

better customer service than others. Some were convinced that Bell Canada was better while others were convinced that Rogers or Videotron was better in this regard. It was noted in Montreal that Bell used to have a very poor reputation for customer service and now seemed to be trying to improve.

#### 4. Definition of good customer service

Participants were asked to describe some of the things they felt an ideal customer service experience in dealing with a telecommunications should include. Key issues here included better and faster phone service, as well as the courtesy and helpful of the human being you deal with. While some wait time was expected it was generally felt that if this could be reduced as much as possible this would be a tremendous benefit.

While some felt that little or no wait time was acceptable, most felt that about two to three minutes should be the maximum they are expected with a wait before talking to a live person. They certainly felt that 20 minutes was too long. It was also felt by many that if they were to be put on hold; it would be nice to have an accurate estimate of how long the hold would be.

#### 5. Suggested improvements in customer service

Adequate training of customer service representatives was also seen as key to a positive experience. Participants felt that training in basic people skills such as showing empathy and listening skills was critical since it made an enormous difference when service reps showed concern and genuine interest in helping. They also felt that basic etiquette and politeness were also important skills for representatives to constantly refine. They should be there to serve and not to sell.

Some participants also wished that customer service representatives, particularly those who

answer initial calls, be trained in more areas of their company in order to reduce the need to transfer callers. It was considered important that the representatives understand and receive adequate training on their companies' computer systems. Finally, one participant pointed out that even training in basic company issues such as how invoices are created and interpreted would be helpful. As one participant stated "It's not like they need to know technical or really in-depth specifics, but if I don't understand what my bill says - they should know how to read a bill."

While participants considered it important for service reps to have a good understanding of their computer systems it was also considered important that the information contained in these systems be accurate and up to date. When changes were made to an account, participants felt that these changes should be implemented and available to the organization immediately. They expected that their next bill reflect the changes and that if they called back the next person they talked to would have access to the changes as well.

It was also considered important that policies and procedures empower the representatives to solve customer problems effectively. For some, it was felt that their issues and suggested solutions were reasonably dealt with and that the CSR would help them if allowed, but that they were hampered by systems or policies. Needless to say they found this situation frustrating.

In the end it was generally agreed, that the best service calls were those in which the issue was resolved quickly, efficiently and finally.

The most common single suggestion was to have a person answer the phone initially who could quickly determine who the caller needed to talk to and could then transfer the caller to – as opposed to dealing with "Emily." Some also suggested that it would be good to be able to have a printable "key" of the menus and voice commands so that if you do have to call customer service you can quickly punch in the right numbers or say the right words without having to listen to every menu being recited.

## 6. Appealing unresolved issues and disputes

When asked what they did when they felt that their issues were not being adequately addressed by the customer service person or department they had reached participants most common method of escalating the complaint was to ask for a manager within the department. Few reported going beyond this, and some talked about abandoning the company for other providers if satisfaction could not be achieved after dealing with a manager in a call center. Only one participant was aware of other methods of escalating a complaint within a company. He spoke of taking his complaint to the President's office at Rogers. For some, however, the available manager was as far as the complaint went and one even reported that if she didn't get what she wanted then "sometimes I let things slide as a result."

There was little or no awareness that there was any way of appealing to anybody outside of the company they were dealing with. Some guessed that there might be an ombudsman or the CRTC, but no one knew for certain. Only one participant claimed to have heard of the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services and she seemed quite unclear as to what the actual mandate was. It was interesting that when the CCTS was discussed many participants seemed very interested and had further questions about the mandate and where they could find more information. Quite a few made a point of taking the time to write down and save the name. Participants were certainly interested in knowing where they could potentially take such issues.

## APPENDICES

November 10, 2009

EnviroNics Research

Attitudes towards Telecommunications Customer Service

Discussion Guide

PN6565

Option Consommateurs

### 1.0 Introduction to Procedures (10 minutes)

Welcome to the group. We want to hear your opinions. Not what you think other people think – but what you think!

Feel free to agree or disagree. Even if you are just one person among ten that takes a certain point of view, you could represent millions of Canadians who feel the same way as you do.

You don't have to direct all your comments to me; you can exchange ideas and arguments with each other too.

You are being taped and observed to help me write my report.

I may take some notes during the group to remind myself of things also.

The host/hostess will pay you your incentives at the end of the session.

Let's go around the table so that each of you can tell us your name and a little bit about yourself, such as what kind of work you do if you work outside the home and who lives with you in your house.

## 2.0 Contacting telecommunications customer service (10 minutes)

Tonight we are going to be discussing your experiences with customer service in dealing with telecommunications companies. When I say telecommunications companies I mean phone companies – cellular or land-line, Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and also cable or satellite TV companies. Your dealings could be by phone, in person or online as well.

How many of you (show of hands) have called your ISP in the last couple of years? What about your cell phone provider? What about your cable company? What about your phone company?

In general, do you feel you know or can easily find out how to contact customer service at any of your telecommunications providers?

IF YES, How do you know? PROBE: On the bill, the website, phone book, other?

Would you say that the information about how to contact customer service is easy to access? Was it clearly explained?

## 2.0 Experiences with telecommunications customer service (30 minutes)

I would like you to each take a pen and paper and jot down the last two or three times where you have had to deal with customer service at one of these companies for any reason and just make note of what kind of company you called (i.e. phone, cable, internet etc...), what it was about (NB: we are interested any of the reasons why you might have dealt with customer service – technical support, billing issues, complaints, questions about the service etc...) and what you remember about the experience.

Let's now hear about your experiences. I'd like to go around the table and have you each tell us which companies you called and what the nature of the call was.

PROBE: Was it to make changes to the service package you had with the company? To change your address? To make a complaint? Other?

How many of you would say that you called the company to complain about something? IF YES: What were you complaining about? Technical support? Billing issues? Other?

What medium did you use to contact customer service? Was it by phone? In person in a shop? Online?

Would you say that you were dealt with quickly or were you kept waiting a lot?

About how long did it take you get serviced?

Did you think this was satisfactory?

Did you get what you wanted the first time you contacted the company or did you have to go back to them more than once over the same issue?

How many times did you have to contact them?

In the end was the issue that caused you to contact customer service resolved one way or the other? Were you satisfied with how it was resolved?

IF NOT, did you take any further steps? What?

When you contacted customer service, did you deal with one customer service representative or with several?

What did you think of the way you were treated by the customer service rep? Did they give you useful answers? Relevant answers? Were they easy to understand?

#### 4.0 Overall attitudes towards customer service (20 min.)

When you choose which telecommunications company to use, to what extent is the quality of customer service a factor?

Do you think that telecommunications companies differ at all when it comes to customer service? Are some better than others?

What about corporate policies on customer service? Have any of you chosen to use one company

over another because they had a customer service policy that attracted you?

Did you choose your telecommunications provider because of its reputation for customer service and how it is reputed to treat its customers?

Are there other reasons why you choose one telecommunications company over another?

In your opinion, what are the main criteria or elements that constitute good customer service?

In your opinion, what is poor customer service? What are the factors that can make customer service poor?

In general are you satisfied with the customer service at the telecom company you deal with? Why? Why not?

Over the last couple of years do you think their customer service has improved or deteriorated or stayed about the same?

In what way do you think customer service can be improved? What can telecommunications companies do differently?

## 5.0 Where to turn if dissatisfied (10 min.)

If you are dissatisfied with how you have been treated by customer service, what recourse do you have? Is there anywhere you can turn?

Are there any other agencies you can turn to? Which ones?

Have any of you ever heard of the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services? Do you know what it is and what its mandate is?

Have any of you ever had any contact with it?

Do you have any last comments on this whole topic?

Thanks for your participation!

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