

The Harley Davidson standard: If it's good enough for bikers...

Chris Stening, MD of Easynet Connect, asks whether the telecoms industry would benefit from a standardised benchmark for comparing customer service.

Would the telecoms industry benefit from establishing a standardised benchmark for measuring customer service across the sector? Would this actually improve standards or be just another rudimentary benchmark for criticising companies? And if customer service needs to be improved, is this the best way to do it?

Fundamentally, the real question is whether or not businesses have enough information to make informed choices about who to choose as their internet service provider (ISP). If they don't, is a customer service benchmark just what they need? If so, shouldn't we, as an industry, look into providing it?

An ISP is much more than the quoted download speed

Consumers and businesses already have access to fairly detailed technical data when choosing an ISP, but information on the levels of customer service available can be patchy.

Key factors in the decision-making process will generally be the quoted download speed, and where appropriate, the upload speed, whether this is guaranteed or not, and whether there are any download limits to be aware of. More sophisticated business users will investigate contention ratio and latency. But how can they measure a company's customer service, which is just as important? They can consult forums, colleagues and friends for their anecdotal feedback on working with a particular ISP, and of course, gathering feedback from real customers should be central to making an informed decision in any buying situation. You certainly should not rely on what the ISP is telling you alone. They can give you advice as to what connection your business needs and what speed you can realistically expect to get, but other customers are the only way to know what it is really like to rely on their service day in day out.

But what would a benchmark look like? A good place to start is to follow the principle on which the [Net Promoter Score](#) (NPS) is built, and which is in fact the ultimate question: 'Would you recommend us?'; from here other measurements such as overall satisfaction; value for money; network reliability; sales and communications would naturally flow.

NPS is used by companies around the world and across all industries. The most successful growth brands, such as Amazon, eBay, Costco and Dell boast an NPS of 50-80%. Not perfect, but considering most companies actually have negative NPS, this is quite an achievement. Perhaps more surprisingly (but not when you really think about it), the Harley Davidson Motor Company, a brand more commonly associated with the Hells Angels, Easy Rider and bar fights, actually boasts one of the best Net Promoter Scores in the world – at 81%. If we really want to please our customers, and ultimately reap the growth rewards that happy customers provide, shouldn't we adopt the Harley Davidson standard across our industry?

Why would we? What are the benefits?

Benefits for the industry

1. It is fair. By measuring everyone the same way, we put everyone on an even footing.
2. It is more representative and reliable than anecdotal feedback. Since one person's bad experience can have a disproportionately negative impact on a company's overall reputation, a benchmark of all customers' combined experiences could help put such cases into perspective.
3. It keeps the regulators at bay. The regulators don't want to intervene in how we interact with our customers. This level of proactivity reassures them that they have no reason to.

Benefits for the customer

1. If the benchmark is public it allows the customer to make more informed decisions.
2. If not public, it will at least encourage the industry to investigate and improve its customer service.
3. It gives customers a voice, allowing them to voice their concerns more regularly.

Clearly this is quite an undertaking, and not one we are necessarily endorsing at this stage. However, customer service is a key delivery of all ISPs. It is essentially what we all live and die by. So would a benchmark help? We have been running a system based on the NPS standard internally for over a year now, and can vouch for the benefits that such transparency of our own service has had for our business. But do we really want a standard benchmark across the whole industry? What do my colleagues in the industry, and indeed internet users, think?

Share your thoughts. Email me on: chris.stening@uk.easynet.net or contact us on Twitter: [@easynetconnect](https://twitter.com/easynetconnect)