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CASE STUDY

# Improving customer satisfaction and reducing agent attrition by building a feedback-driven culture



30% year-over-year increase in number of surveys completed

Top 25% of agents get enough Karma points to redeem awards

57% of those agents make multiple reward redemptions

## Supporting the fan and protecting the brand

### SUMMARY

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ESPN aims to offer world-class customer service, which they call fan support, and agents are sports fans who can empathize with customers and converse with them; fan to fan.

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Coaching agents to do the right thing, instead of chastising them when they do a wrong thing and focusing on qualitative metrics instead of quantitative ones like handle time, are core philosophies.

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Deriving insights from the “dark data” around fan interactions and emphasizing giving fans what they want, where they want, it is improving both fan experience and internal efficiency.

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Medallia’s Contact Center Suite and Agent Connect solution is providing valuable insights to enhance ESPN services and help them move even closer to the dream state of knowing what fans are concerned about before they even reach out.

ESPN is the leading multinational, multimedia sports entertainment brand, serving sports fans anytime, anywhere, since 1979. The company’s current offerings include TV networks, direct-to-consumer via ESPN+, radio and podcast shows, sports event management, and a broad range of digital delivery vehicles. Majority owned by ABC, Inc., which is a subsidiary of The Walt Disney Corporation, ESPN has an overarching directive to offer world-class customer service. Modeling the Disney philosophy of referring to customers as guests, ESPN refers to customer care as fan support.

ESPN’s fan support team is made up of sports fans, to better empathize with customers and converse with them, fan to fan. The team’s motto – “sitting with the fans in the stands as well as the suits in the suites” – is a great encapsulation of how they want agents to think and act. ESPN fan support reports into the marketing organization, with a mission to support the fan and protect the brand. As the primary point of contact with customers, they get the unvarnished and authentic truth and have a responsibility to listen to and echo the voice of the customer throughout the company.

When ESPN started its fan support organization 18 years ago, the leaders did not want to replicate the traditional call center with unempowered and unengaged agents. They knew that measuring agents by handling time or number of calls and reprimanding them for bad decisions would not deliver world class fan support. So the leadership de-emphasized quantity metrics and focused on quality, coaching people to do the right thing instead of catching and chastising people who do the “wrong” thing.

If a fan makes the effort to contact ESPN, whether by phone, chat, text, email, or social media, they usually have something on their mind. This could be streaming frustration, fantasy sports problems, gameplay confusion, or content they cannot access. ESPN’s goal is not just to resolve their problem, but to figure out what the company could do better or differently so that the fan wouldn’t

**Customer Experience needs to be sitting with the fans in the stands as well as the suits in the suites.**

Doug Kramon  
Head of Fan Support/Customer Care, ESPN

**It is our obligation and responsibility to listen to and consider the voice of the customer and echo that throughout the company.**

Jenn Lien  
Manager, Fan Support and Data Analytics, ESPN

have to contact ESPN in the first place. This means putting greater trust in the agents, coaching them through challenging scenarios, and celebrating successes. After all, even the best player has a batting coach to help adjust their swing for better results.

## Turning dark data into insights and action

In 2018, ESPN deployed Medallia Agent Connect to augment the fan support team and enable better collection of the “dark data” that flows around every interaction. By focusing on giving the fan what they want where they want it, ESPN has improved both fan experience and internal efficiency. They have introduced valuable alternatives to customer service delivery, such as chatbots and email autoresponders.

But bots and automation can only do so much. A live human interaction is the most expensive element of customer service, but it has the potential to be the most valuable. Call deflection and automated services are great for dealing with repetitive issues that can burn out agents, but they lack the depth of human conversations. So, it is important to empower human agents to build relationships and get value from their care interactions.

To supplement agents’ insights and increase their pool of data, ESPN directly surveys and interviews fans across their breadth of services and supported devices and brings that data into the fan experience analysis. Building a solid feedback loop from fan interactions, customer satisfaction surveys, recognition of exemplary agents, and a rewards program has been a significant contributor to changing the fan support dynamic. Agents seek out positive feedback and coaching, and leaders model a culture of open communication. Connecting with agents as peers and teammates makes it easier to talk about issues – “What’s working? What’s not working? How can we improve?”

Celebrating successes encourages excellence and sustains agent morale. The growing dataset helps ESPN improve agent training programs, informs accountability and quality assurance activities, and feeds the recognition and reward program. Agents with stand-out performance are featured in a monthly newsletter, collect Karma points, and can win cash prizes. Accumulated Karma points are redeemable for customized team jerseys and other swag. More than 25% of agents have accumulated enough points for at least one cool item from the Karma store in the past year, and over half of those have made enough for multiple redemptions.

## Improving customer satisfaction by moving at the speed of live

As fan support has evolved at ESPN, the leadership have transformed the paradigm from cost center to profit center, providing valuable insights to internal partners. For example, feedback from passionate fans drove some significant enhancements to ESPN's fantasy football leagues. Active collaboration between fan support and fantasy engineering prioritized sought-after features like league history and live chat, resourced them, and delivered them in time for the next season.

Results like this have an obvious effect on fan experience, but also give agents a strong sense of

contribution and job satisfaction. By focusing on excellence and continuous improvement, instead of "perfection" against quantitative metrics like average handle time, ESPN's agent attrition rate is less than 10% per year, and without COVID would have been closer to 4%, compared to the typical 30-45% attrition that many customer support organizations experience.

Fan support is also meeting internal budget requirements, while maximizing contact across an increasing set of channels, including calls, texts, chats, email, and tweets. Medallia enables ESPN to efficiently capture real-time feedback after customer interactions regardless of channel. Overall, fan support is operating at about 60% of their original budget, while maintaining consistently high customer satisfaction scores of 91% year over year, with little variability.

ESPN leadership is excited about the future possibilities with Medallia. While they currently capture real-time feedback post-interaction, their dream state is knowing what matters to fans right now. What are fans talking about, across all channels? With rapid analysis of a "bag of words", ESPN hopes to identify issues not just by the recent frequency of keywords, but also by velocity, surrounding sentiment, severity, and urgency. The goal is to have banners or bots that can say "We know there's a problem and we're working on it." Not only will this deflect a lot of connections, but it will also impress fans - "It's as if ESPN knew what my problem was before I even spoke." This is delivering fan experience in live speed.

### About Us

Medallia is the pioneer and market leader in Experience Management. Medallia's award-winning SaaS platform, the Medallia Experience Cloud, leads the market in the understanding and management of experience for customers, employees and citizens. Using Medallia customers can reduce churn, turn detractors into promoters and buyers and create in-the-moment cross-sell and up-sell opportunities, enabling clear returns on investment. [Medallia.com](https://www.medallia.com)