

# Mini-profile:

## a day in the life of a group customer services manager

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It's January and the busiest time of the year for customer services. Our annual renewals programme is in full flow and the orders are flooding into the department almost faster than we can handle them.

Each year is the same and the departmental workload is greatly affected by the success or failure rate of the main agents' electronic order files, generally referred to as FTPs or EDIs. Success is measured in percentage terms when the agents' electronic renewal requests exactly match our own records, in which case the orders can be processed automatically. Non-matching order lines or new orders require manual input from the team. By and large this year has gone well but the stable of Taylor & Francis (T&F) journals has grown to more than 1,000 with the acquisition in 2004 of Frank Cass, Marcel Dekker and Swets & Zeitlinger titles and we find, predictably, that acquisition titles throw up more errors and exceptions than our more established titles. The standard of information we receive from the subscription agents varies widely also and this year I am working on a project to liaise with the main agents to improve this. Thankfully the online editions are graced until the

end of February, so our customers' orders will all be processed before their online editions are lapsed automatically (of which more from Debbie later). In addition to our institutional subscribers, we have over 200 society partners and checking the renewals of their memberships is a priority for our society team here in customer services.

Today I am working in the Basingstoke customer service office rather than our head office in Abingdon so that means a cross-country commute of about an hour – road works and tractors permitting. A quick e-mail check reveals plenty of new messages since the previous night and it's only 9 am. I see that four are from the US office in Philadelphia and this reminds me that I must organize flights to Philadelphia for early February for meetings with the US office over the forthcoming switch to a new organizational structure and sales order processing system.

I open up three spreadsheets that I use daily. The first records staff holidays, sickness, overtime and temp costs for the department of 28.

The second sheet is a record of major agents' orders received via FTP or on paper. I also act as

the main liaison point between the agents, our accounts and IT department and the agents' team within customer services. A couple of files from one of our biggest agents doesn't match what we were expecting, so I send a quick e-mail hoping to resolve that. I send a summary of the cash due and received as well as order values processed, plus a summary by agent, to senior management.

My third daily sheet is a journal title sheet recording journal activity that can't be recorded on our current subscription processing system. Here I record details of new titles before they are loaded in the system, with notes on whether to expect subscriber lists from the previous publisher or whether we are waiting for one of our society partners to confirm special prices for a new deal. T&F publish on behalf of over 200 societies, with 93 new titles being launched or passed to us from other publishers in 2005 alone. My department is the front line for these societies, ensuring the membership records are up to date and in many cases handling the membership renewals as well as the subscriptions themselves. Next I turn to my in-tray and deal with the day's paperwork including system-generated daily reports, cheque requisitions for my authorization, holiday requests and invoices awaiting approval and coding. I operate an open-door policy and a number of staff bring queries and problems requiring my attention.

It is now late morning and my predecessor as customer services manager comes to brief me on

the development project for our new customer service processing system. It is scheduled to come on line later this year, and I have to make sure that any changes we make to the current system are recorded in detail to allow the developers to replicate them in the new system.

After grabbing a sandwich and working through lunch, it is again time to pay serious attention to the e-mails which have been arriving thick and fast. Sorting by subject and ignoring all but the latest in the chain allows many to be archived immediately. T&F have offices around the world, but the Basingstoke office is the 'lead' customer service department, so I will get e-mails from editorial and marketing people in the US, Scandinavia, UK, Singapore and Australia which need to be turned around quickly. Others can be passed straight through to the team as my name is often used when 'orders@', 'claims@' or 'enquiries@' would be more appropriate. I see that a follow-up e-mail relates to how our new batch of online-first journals will work.

A late surge of e-mails at the end of the day means that I must again break my New Year's resolution to clear all e-mails the day I get them. I notice one from my boss, entitled 'Not that you don't have enough to do'. I am intrigued and open it although I was about to leave. Would I mind doing an article for *Serials*? "Of course", I reply. A job for the weekend, I think!