

GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE?
THERE'S A COMPANY FOR THAT!



zenitx

Customer care experts in the ZENIT Group
rely on ReplyOne to provide written customer service

SEMATELL
INTELLIGENT ANSWERS

Every publisher, e-commerce company, institution or retailer looking for a professional customer care provider will come across the ZENIT Group sooner or later. The Group comprises ZENIT X, officially called ZENIT Pressevertrieb GmbH, plus international telephone service provider ZENITCOM GmbH and PVS Relationship Services GmbH & Co. KG. As a specialist inbound service provider, ZENIT X attends to more than 150 titles from various genres and 150,000 direct orders – for both print and digital publications. The Stuttgart-based company's clients include renowned publishing houses such as DUMONT, falkemedia, EMMA, Spektrum der Wissenschaft, DoldeMedien, CORA-Verlag, WEKA, the Konradin Publishing Group and a joint venture with the Funke Group. ZENIT X offers customer care to more than 2.5 million subscribers. In terms of supplementary, sales-supporting services, ZENIT X also offers e-Commerce solutions, IT services and direct marketing.

For its part, ZENIT subsidiary PVS Relationship Services primarily offers international customer care services outside the publishing sector, including in the fashion, beauty and lifestyle sectors, as well as influencer marketing and social media management. Its list of clients includes Parfumdreams, ODLO, Weber Grill and Joop!. The ZENIT Group has around 350 employees. Through its partner networks, it has more than 500 employees at its disposal worldwide. The service provider records over five million customer contacts per year, predominantly telephone calls, emails, letters and faxes.

And whoever spends time at the ZENIT Group will encounter Franco Aleo at some point. The animated customer service expert has been with the company since 1996 and is now active as Managing Director of PVS Relationship Services and ZENITCOM and Chief Business Development Officer of ZENIT X. Like many service providers, he is well

used to working on systems provided by his clients in order to care for their customers. Consequently, he is familiar with the full range of customer care solutions on the market today. For clients without a customer service solution of their own, he recommends the solution he chose following an in-depth investigation in 2013 – ReplyOne from Sematell.

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Franco Aleo, Managing Director of PVS Relationship Services and Chief Business Development Officer of ZENIT X.

Data protection and multi-client capability are crucial

“Following various acquisitions, we ‘inherited’ a legacy system from the UK and eventually reached our limit with it, and in our publishing segment we used a ‘pimped’ office email program for some clients,” explains Franco Aleo. “It eventually became clear we needed a professional solution of our own with multi-client capability that we could propose to clients when required. Only then could we truly provide good service. And, of course, it was very important for us to be able to meet our clients’ strict data protection requirements.”

Aleo issued a call for proposals and was faced with a whole host of competing service solutions. The clear winner in the benchmark competition was ReplyOne. “The overall package was impressive: the functionality, the multi-client capability, how easily it can be scaled up and the licensing. For a service provider, a licence-based model capable of handling the maximum number of simultaneous users is much easier to manage than a named-user model,” he explains.

Developing to meet customer requirements

One contributing factor to his decision was the fact the solution had been developed in Germany. “For us, that meant easy access to the development team,” says Franco Aleo. “It was important for us to choose a solution that had been developed on the basis of customers’ actual requirements. While Sematell receives challenging demands from clients such as bonprix and Deutsche Bahn, the team also independently generates and integrates new ideas in ReplyOne at the same time. We benefit from the fact that requirements identified in practice are incorporated in the product directly. And, of course, we also make suggestions for functionalities we thought were good in other solutions and would like to see in ReplyOne.”

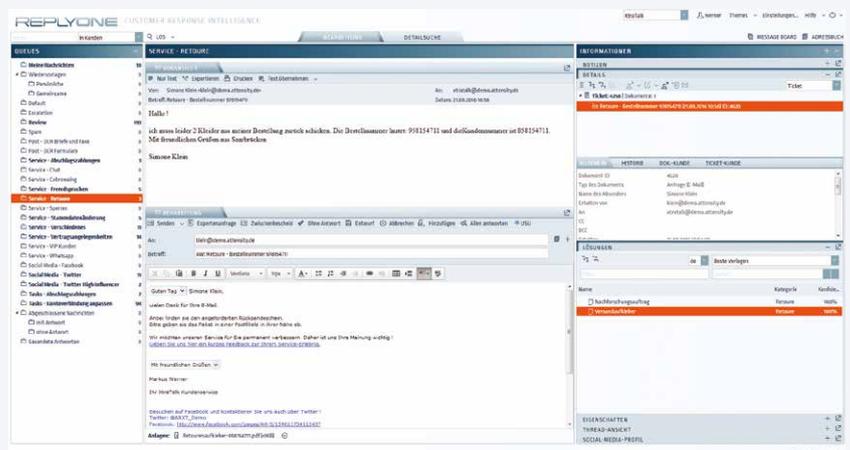
The flexibility of the solution was another plus point for the customer service expert. For instance, Aleo had a life dashboard developed based on the open reporting database. “This means our clients can see key indicators at a glance; the dashboard updates itself every few seconds.” His team has used the standardised interface to the USU database KCenter as its knowledge management solution since 2019. This has proven to be an excellent combination in the company’s work for many of its clients, as KCenter also offers a licensing model based on the maximum number of simultaneous users as well as a high degree of system flexibility. “We still don’t use it for all of our clients, but we hope to roll it out gradually.”

Individual integration for 360-degree view

The Sematell development team has also integrated specific systems for clients of the ZENIT Group, in some cases via specific plugins, but in other cases via specifically programmed interfaces. In many instances, the focus was on integrating ERP solutions such as SAP or Navision. “If our customer service advisors can access the information in the ERP system, it demonstrates markedly greater competence to the customer. Our advice is therefore much more meaningful than before, including on the telephone,” explains Franco Aleo. He knows what his employees need to deliver a good service. If important connections to his clients’ systems are missing, these can be established quickly using the company’s in-house IT or through ReplyOne by the Sematell Professional Service Team. This provides a 360-degree view of the customer – a basic requirement for delivering good service.

The key business benefits

- » Central customer service platform for all written communication channels
- » AI learns quickly and with little training data
- » Precise language and topic identification
- » Service employees soon get to grips with the system
- » Multi-client capability
- » Quality-controlled text blocks
- » Process automation and automated processing



ReplyOne allows service employees to access predefined templates and channel-specific text blocks to respond to enquiries. The underlying workflow is identical for all written service channels. This increases enquiry processing speeds and ensures the quality of responds.

Central administration for greater transparency

All of the ZENIT Group's key accounts are managed centrally from Stuttgart. All reports are collated there and the ReplyOne system is also administered centrally – even though customer service advisors all round the world have access to the solution. “We have a whole series of international service partners that access our solution through a terminal services solution,” explains Franco Aleo. The ZENIT Group provides services throughout Europe as well as further afield, including in Russia and the USA. This is no problem for ReplyOne, as the solution can process more than 70 languages.

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Franco Aleo, Managing Director of PVS Relationship Services and Chief Business Development Officer of ZENIT X.



Full-service consultation

Of the more than five million customer contacts processed by the ZENIT Group every year, around one-third of these are still telephone calls. These are also recorded in ReplyOne so that customer service advisors have a full customer contact history to refer to when processing an enquiry. From time to time, clients request service channels such as chat functions or WhatsApp. However, as these channels require a much higher level of service, companies still often balk at such requests due to cost concerns. “We’ve looked at the option of ReplyChat,” says Franco Aleo, “and we’re in close contact with Sematell. We definitely like it a lot. If one of our clients wants us to handle a chat function, that’s certainly an option.”

The service expert sees the ZENIT Group as capable consultant. That starts with the onboarding process for a new client. “Firstly, we need training data to train ReplyOne, and of course we also need text blocks so that we can send the correct answer quickly in response to recurrent enquiries,” explains Franco Aleo. A small number of clients have come with their own suggestions. In most cases, the text blocks were developed in collaboration: “Of course, in certain industries there are certain standards that clients expect. Thanks to our many years of experience, we can take our clients by the hand, thereby making it much easier to implement a good customer service strategy.”

An onboarding process like this takes around four to six weeks on average, during which time both the system itself and the service employees who will use it can be given specific training. “We generally start with around 10 categories, each with around 4 to 5 different contact reasons. Then, we look at the identification rate and usually see very quickly where we need to make adjustments,” explains Franco Aleo. For most clients, we are soon able to respond to around 10-15% of enquiries automatically because ReplyOne precisely identifies the enquiry topic based on the training data. “Of course, we still want to increase that figure further.”

The service provider also provides advice on customer service and the customer experience during live operation. “For example, we systematically analyse the reason for customer calls,” explains Franco Aleo. “If we receive lots of pre-sales enquiries, we can tell straight away that the online shop might be poorly designed and then feed this back to our client directly.”

Significantly higher productivity

Even a few years on, Franco Aleo is still very pleased with his choice of ReplyOne: “We’ve become considerably faster and have greater transparency. ReplyOne has been and remains a real productivity gain for us.”

Aleo is already planning the next optimisation steps. “I think it’s sensible, for example, that we’re rolling out knowledge management to other clients.” The customer service expert also hopes to increase the level of automation in customer service further still. “In some places there is certainly scope for additional improvements. There’s more we can do,” as Franco Aleo states with conviction. In any case, things certainly will not be boring for him. “In parallel to this, we’re also working to expand our service portfolio to include new branches and additional services,” Aleo says chuckling. It won’t be long, then, before this animated and dynamic service manager makes a name for himself in some new fields.



