Header: Banking on customer service

Intro: It may be based in a small town, but Databank is doing an excellent job of bringing clients in to the HP fold

Based in Vapi, a small town on the outskirts of Gujarat, HP partner Databank Computer Services defies conventional belief that small-town companies cannot strike big. What started as a computer-training centre in 1987 and expanded in to hardware solutions two years later, is today a Rs. 4 crore company. It's also the proud owner of HP's 'Best Upcountry Partner' award since April this year.

Databank has earned this accolade through its ability to successfully champion HP's products. Take for instance Micro Inks, India's largest ink manufacturer, which had traditionally been IBM territory. It had even bought more than a hundred laptops from the Big Blue. But then Rakesh Naik, partner and CEO, Databank, decided to make a pitch for HP laptops, and highlighted IBM's weak customer service, as compared to HP.

"HP is the only company that has a customer support centre in Vapi. Unlike other players, HP's support is much more direct and personal," says Naik. What followed were regular meetings, demonstrations and an aggressive sales campaign that lasted nearly 45 days. Eventually Micro Inks decided to install nine HP laptops, with the catch that Databank should deliver and install them within six days, failing which the entire order stood cancelled. Databank instantly sent its engineers to Ahmedabad to procure the laptops from the regional distributor there. Within five days, Databank delivered the promised HP laptops of model nx6120 to Micro Inks.

Databank is now in talks with Micro Inks once again, to close a deal for 30 HP servers and a possible Rs.1 crore deal for storage solutions. Vapi being the nerve centre of industrial and business activities, Databank is hoping to penetrate the market further. But to achieve that, Naik wants HP's help in the form of roadshows in Vapi, as it does in other major cities in Gujarat.

HP, feels Naik, is the only company that's genuinely concerned about after-sales support. "HP responds faster to customer complaints and never takes more than three days to resolve a problem at any given time," he says. But Naik sees further scope for HP to reduce its response times.

A high standard of service to customers is very important to Naik. What really differentiates a good company from a bad one is its commitment to customer service, he feels. "If you offer good products to clients, they will come back once, but if you combine that with good service, they will come back again and again," says Naik. Therefore, Databank has an in-house maintenance division that provides on-site repairs to all its clients, irrespective of whether they are eligible under warranty or not. It also provides standby laptops to clients as a goodwill measure.

According to Naik, the gap between HP and its competitors is narrowing, though IBM is still strong in the server and storage segment. But HP could soon fill the divide by its competitive pricing, faster delivery and efficient after-sales support. "HP is emerging as a total solutions provider delivering high-performance products in every category – from printers to high-end storage devices," says Naik, whose job wasn't always as easy. In fact, in the early days, "our job was tougher because people were not as brand conscious as they are today," recalls Naik. "It used to be a real challenge to convince clients to use a branded product like HP," he adds.

With the goodwill collected over 16 years of operations, convincing clients to add another Rs. 2 crores to the company's turnover before the end of the current fiscal will hardly be a problem for Databank.

Lessons Learnt:

- Commitments should always be adhered to and respected.
- Client servicing does not end after a sale. Rather, it begins there.

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