

*Here's how you'll waste 43 days of your life*



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*Hours spent on hold listening to Muzak add up over time*

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**Having to wait 40 days and 40 nights sounds like a torture of biblical proportions, but the average American suffers just that long over the course of a lifetime — on hold.**

Most of us spend some 10 to 20 minutes a week listening to Muzak while being assured “your call is important to us,” according to a new survey published Wednesday. That’s the equivalent of 13 hours per year — or 43 days in a lifetime, according to the report by TalkTo, an app that helps customers text businesses instead of calling, and ResearchNow, a market research company. And consumer advocates say there is very little we can do about it.

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“Being put on hold is a fact of life when you call a customer-service department,” says Edgar Dworky, founder of ConsumerWorld.org.

There are ways to get a real person on the line faster. GetHuman.com posts a list of the average wait times for companies like Facebook, Comcast and Bank of America, and gives customers a heads-up on what buttons to press to get re-routed to the right department when they do call. Companies like Dell, AT&T and Citibank use FastCustomer.com, a service that calls the customer back when an assistant becomes available. “There’s no doubt that will become the norm in the industry,” says Shawn Busted, senior vice-president of business strategy at marketing agency TBA Global.

Still, reducing hold time does not seem to be important to most businesses. Just 4% of companies ranked customer service as the top priority, versus 38% for new investments in products or services, according to a survey released last month by the American Society for Quality; 18% rated information technology as their top priority and 13% listed marketing and advertising. Even when customers get off hold, the calls themselves are often unpleasant experiences, experts say. “Too many times the person handing the calls is scripted,” says Marshal Cohen, analyst at market research firm NPD Group. “Most calls that go beyond that require someone of authority to make a decision.” That means re-routing the call — and more waiting.

Of course, some disgruntled customers are simply hard to please. In fact, they are likely to become even more impatient if they suspect they are being re-routed to a call center overseas rather than to someone within the company itself, says John Goodman, a customer service expert with the American Society for Quality. His research shows that customers look more intensively for errors when they hear a heavy accent. While they may not always be fair, consumers can also be unforgiving. “Once they decide that the representative is not competent,” he says, “it’s difficult to recover.”



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