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# Marketplace *Business*

## What makes you happy when your call is put on hold?

by David Weinberg

Marketplace for Thursday, April 25, 2013

Aaron Kleinhandler was at his 20th high school reunion recently, and inevitably he had to answer the same question over and over. "People ask me what I do, and I say 'have you ever been put on hold?' And the answer is yes and I say, I have company that provides music for business across the country," says Kleinhandler, whose company, Spectrio, makes \$17 million a year selling on-hold music.



Spectrio acts as an intermediary between the business that put you on hold and the licensing companies like ASCAP and BMI that pay musicians to write the music.

Christopher Ho is one of those musicians. I visited Ho at his home in California, where he records his compositions on a grand piano in his garage. "I probably made over \$2 million off my own compositions, but that spans about a 25-year period," Ho says.

He made most of that money selling his songs to Muzak. He also spent those years touring and recording with the Motown legend Smokey Robinson, who was a big influence on Ho's music, even on the pieces he wrote for on hold. Ho thinks of all his compositions as being equal.

"It's better that way," says Ho. "Because then I'm not trying to limit the music in any way technically or musically."

But the days of hiring professional studio musicians for on-hold music are pretty much over. Ho's income has dropped dramatically. He had to move to a smaller house and now he sleeps in his living room so his kids can have a bedroom.

Most on-hold music today is made on a computer. Julie Cook is the CEO of Easy On Hold, which has a library of digitally recorded music.

"This isn't your mom and dad's on-hold music. It's a world class library of music," says Cook.

She says matching the right business with the right on-hold track is more art than science.

"An example of really good on-hold music might be a nonprofit that maybe works on world hunger. They may want a more world beat where there's an African flavor," Cook says.

But does music actually make the experience of being on hold any less frustrating? Scott Broetzmann is the president of Customer Care Measurement and Consulting, which asked 702 households to rate their on-hold experiences on a scale of zero to ten. Zero being deeply unsatisfying.

"And on that zero to ten scale, playing music while you are on hold averages a score of 5.37 -- in effect a neutral score. It doesn't really have any impact on satisfaction of consumers while they are waiting on hold," says Broetzmann.

Silence had a negative impact on customer satisfaction. Having an operator say how long you will be on hold, says Broetzmann, is the most positive thing a company can do. "A recording that tells you how long you will have to wait before you can talk to a person averaged a 7.3 rating."

So why then do companies do things that have either no impact or a negative impact on customer satisfaction? Emily Yellin spent years trying to answer that question. She's the author of "Your Call is Not That Important to Us."

"There are ways that companies could do a much better job but it costs too much" says Yellin.

Where companies go wrong, according to Yellin, is spending huge amounts of money on things like surveys and focus groups to find out what customers want. "Meanwhile, they have this department called customer service where customers are calling and trying to tell the company what they think of them and they are being put on hold, they are treated poorly and then customers walk away frustrated," Yellin says.

Yellin looked at how companies calculate the cost per call of each customer service call they field. Businesses use this number to find the right balance between keeping costs low and not angering customers with long wait times. Yellin says the companies that really get it right never put you on hold for more than one minute.



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