

The users' choice

It's always nice to get an award, but it's even better to win an award based on votes from your own users, particularly if your business is providing mission-critical communications services to demanding corporate users.

The annual World Communication Awards includes a User Award category, and the winner of this award is selected not by a panel of judges but by respondents to a user survey. This survey is based on questions and customer experience definitions provided by Ocean82, the leading benchmarking company measuring the customer experience in the telecoms industry.

In addition to measuring how satisfying the product experience was to the respondents, the user survey looks at "soft" factors such as building and strengthening relationships between customers and suppliers.

"This approach enables us to assess best-practice experience wherever it may be found, irrespective of supplier, product, location or sector," said Janet Watkin, CEO of Ocean82.

And the winner is...

This year, Singapore based SingTel is the winner of the WCA User Award. It should be proud of its achievement because this award is not just a nice ornament for the company cabinet: it appraises an organisation's effectiveness at serving its business customers, based on the depth and breadth of customer relationships through the various interactions with individuals at all levels.

Ocean82 provides the key benchmarks that measure the customer service experience relative to best practice. "This type of benchmarking is critical to the effective implementation of strategy because it reinforces the desired behaviours necessary to win, keep and nurture customers," added Ms Watkin.

In order to enable other organisations to see where they came in the user ranking, Ocean82 is also providing a "gap to winner" assessment that shows how well, or badly, other entrants did compared to SingTel and, more importantly, why. Most of the Ocean82 benchmarks are dynamic and adjust to changes in customer priorities and competitive performances.

"The key task for users is to look at 'gaps' between their own results and any benchmark they select as their control," advised Ms Watkin. "The most popular benchmarks are: market average, nearest rival, best practice, outstanding performance, resilience target and just satisfied."

The gap to winner is calculated from the Ocean82 Positioning Score which measures customer commitment. If a user is positioned in the top right quadrant, they will qualify for the Ocean82 World Class insignia in recognition of the very high regard and strength of positive feelings from customers.

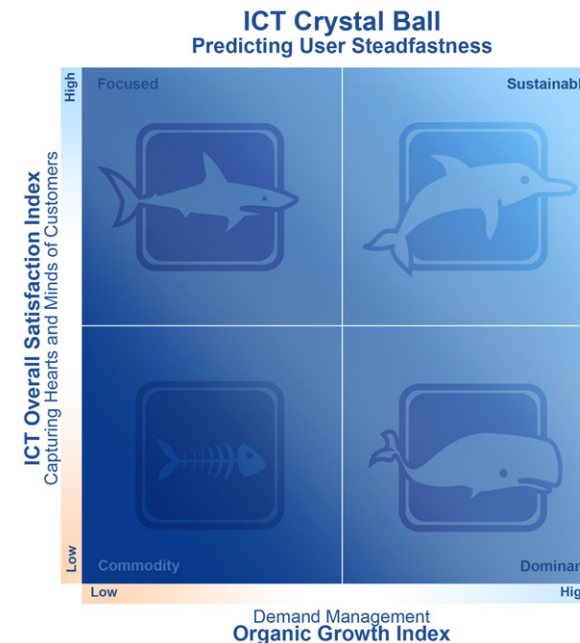
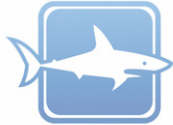


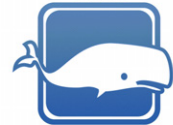
Figure 1 ICT Crystal Ball.



Sustainable: Successful at working in close partnership for mutual benefit resulting in sustainable competitive advantage. Outstanding customer experience overall and very strong strategic direction and demand management with high likelihood of organic growth.



Focused: Good customer experience overall but low customer demand for offerings, limiting organic growth.



Dominant: A notionally competitive situation. High likelihood of organic growth despite low customer satisfaction. In practice the cost, difficulty, inconvenience or risk in changing supplier is so great that customers will do it only as a last resort.



Commodity: Highly competitive environment, price pressure, little perceivable differences in offerings and/or brand.

Measures of excellence

Ocean82's "gap to winner" assessments represent nuggets of information that stem from the company's ongoing assessment of global service providers. One of its core studies measures the perceived performance of operators with global data VPN services, and assesses eight operators that qualify as "global" based on the geographic spread of their services.

According to the recently published 11th edition of the Ocean82 benchmarking report "Voice of the Customer: Global DataVPN", Orange Business Services has triumphed as the most formidable of the eight providers featured.

Global DataVPN also names Orange Business Services as the global provider that users expect to be the most successful in maintaining long-term competitive advantage. The few service providers rated "World Class" are symbolised as dolphins because these mammals are known for their flexibility, strength, stamina, social skills, intelligence, and ability to thrive in a difficult environment.



Figure 2 World Class Award.

"The independently produced Ocean82 results demonstrate that Orange Business Services earned the appreciation of our customers for the work done to meet their requirements effectively from quote-to-bill," said Dominique Espinasse, Senior Vice President, Customer Services & Operations, Orange Business Services. "We are delighted too that we are seen as having the highest chance of organic growth relative to other global providers. The improvements we have prioritised over the years were purposefully designed to make certain that we give an enduring and outstanding customer experience overall. Our commitment to our customers has been unceasing and has intensified in recent months."

And finally...

Ocean82 has now fully completed the transition of its branding from Telemark Services, a move it undertook to reflect the company's long track record in providing industry benchmarks as a measure of strategic success.

The new name is derived from the existing OCEAN brand that has been the theme of Telemark's, and now Ocean82's, customer experience publications for several years. It stands for: Outstanding Customer Experience Analysis & News. The number '82' represents the Ocean82 positioning score, which is a measure of strategic success. In the Ocean82 customer experience league table, a positioning score of 82 or above predicts sustainable competitive advantage.