

No job too small

Going that extra mile is more important than ever in today's tricky market. This year's Elanco Customer Care award winner, **Mark Matthews**, proves that effort really does pay off

Excellent customer service is essential, particularly in today's climate, but it can be hard to achieve in practice, said this year's judges at the *OvertheCounter* awards. They were looking for someone who could clearly demonstrate that they had exceeded expectations in their work to deliver outstanding service on a regular basis, and Mark Matthews of Wynnstay was a clear winner for the category Customer Care: for SQPs working in businesses with more than 10 retail premises.

Whether it's taking a telephone call out of hours or personally delivering products to farmers to complete a task in difficult weather conditions, the judges felt that Mark showed enthusiasm for his job and commitment to exceeding customer service.

And that's commitment 24/7. As Mark says, those out-of-office-hours phone calls will happen more than once during the busiest times of year. "We're busy all year, but the key times are from March until October. And everyone calls at the same time – the animals are being turned out and the fly control needs to be looked at. I enjoy dealing with issues as and when they crop up and I feel it is necessary to adapt to the customer's working hours.

"When the farmers are bringing in the harvest, I take the policy that you have to ignore your set hours – you can't just clock off at 5pm. Soon winter closes in and everything is done and dusted for the season. With

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Mark Matthews, centre, receives his award from Adam Henson, left, and Nick Burford, Elanco Animal Health, right

the job I have, working with farmers, they don't have Sundays off and every day is the same for them – Monday is the same as Saturday – and if a customer does ring on a Sunday afternoon it's easier to deal with the call then, than try and pick up the pieces on the Monday."

PEACE OF MIND

The customer may simply need some reassuring advice. "You can have a phone call on a Sunday and the farmer is worming some cattle and wants to double-check the withdrawal period, and you just confirm what he's supposed to be doing and you've put his mind at rest. It's peace of mind for him."

Like many of our award winners, Mark comes from a farming background, and when he first left agricultural college his plan was to go into farm management. But the first job he got was

working in store, he loved it and worked his way up the ladder. Mark has an excellent rapport with his customers which, for him, means treating each transaction with the same importance, however large or small.

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"If customers have trust they will continue to do business with their supplier. I have built up a good track record of customer service which has led to me forming

efficient and solid relationships with my customers. I feel that I know them well and am willing to go that step further to meet their needs. I also think it's important to keep in regular contact with the customer, even if it just updating them on the progress of an order."

There was no doubt in the judges' minds that Mark is totally committed to his job and his customers and ticked all the boxes in terms of delivering outstanding service. Mark cites an example of one of the many incidents during his working week where he will exceed expectation. "A large sheep client phoned me up one day, half way through dosing his sheep with a blow-fly prevention product which he had purchased from me earlier in the year. The application gun he was using was failing and he still had a large number of applications to do. Rather

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than arranging delivery of a new gun using the normal delivery channels, I drove to the store, picked one up and delivered it to the customer so that he could continue dosing with minimal delay. This meant that he did not have to suspend work until the following day."

KNOWLEDGE IS KEY

Mark feels that keeping on top of developing his subject knowledge is also a key part of being able to provide excellent customer care.

"The key is to keep up to speed with what's going on in the farming industry, what the current issues are, what the dairies are doing, the fluctuating milk prices, what's going on in the market place, even new vet products that are coming through. It's important for me to remain an expert in my field, so I'm always developing my subject knowledge. I'm currently working towards a BASIS qualification in grassland in order to gain expertise in this area."

Mark is duly proud of his award and is delighted with the praise he has received from customers.

"They're all very pleased and say: 'You've looked after us really well, so if you've done that with everyone else you deserve this.'"

He's not planning on sitting back on his laurels, though, because of it. "If anything, this award has helped me want to achieve more and to maintain and improve on my level of standard."