

THE HUMAN TOUCH

Advancing technology and databases increasingly provide quick access to useful information regarding a Company's relationship with its customers. Much emphasis has been placed on Customer Relationship Management by using this information and therefore you would expect improving customer service as a result. However this is not always the case.

Many large companies place great emphasis on technology and using customer information to increase profits by monitoring spending patterns, changing shop layouts to improve sales, offering reward points etc. to influence sales. This is not actually customer service but an attempt to increase sales through impersonal and manipulative methods. The best customer service is often provided by the small business that may not even use technology such as a local restaurant, a local shop or taxi firm. They gain customer satisfaction through the personal touch.

Customer service is about dealing with people; we buy from people we like and with whom a relationship develops due to mutual understanding. There are many combining facets of customer/supplier interactions which create good customer service and the more of these you can distinguish and assemble the better the ultimate outcome; however, amongst these facets there are probably three which stand above the others in priority:

- **Firstly - How does a company communicate with its customers?**
Not in the literal sense of e-mailing etc. but more in the way of mutual understanding. Does it make the effort to see the customer's point of view and actually 'walk in their shoes' thus experiencing and appreciating their perceptions? In doing this and then by really listening to the customer a service provider can communicate back in away in which the recipient truly comprehends what is being said.
- **Secondly - The function of systems is important**
Not the computer systems, but those that govern the way in which business is conducted, how the customer is treated and how things are done. Many businesses will tell staff how to operate a computer, chase payment etc. but not how to behave towards a customer. Without the necessary training employees just do their job as they see fit and in the way they think is expected, which is not necessarily correct.
- **Thirdly - Leadership**
Strength of Leadership has an effect on the amount of effort people apply to serving customers. A good leader understands their employees, what motivates and inspires them and the pride and pleasure they can derive from giving good service. The best customer service businesses do not need to advertise because they receive large numbers of referrals from happy customers. In conclusion from the above it is vital that business leaders realise that the best technology cannot replace human understanding.

Customers respond positively to the human touch. No database has ever made a customer smile or sympathised when they felt low. Technological information is important and can help to support and improve the efficiency of customer service, but it will never take the place of the human touch!

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