

Industry interactions - Storytrails

Storytrails follows an unconventional business model and provides a service that not many in the country can claim to own or emulate. New ventures with innovative business models tend to focus more on perfecting their products and process but here we have a company that is innovative yet places Customer Service at the core of its offerings. Often times, you will find that their unique service of 'heritage walks' and their indomitable customer service spirit is nearly inseparable, making for one great experience for their customers.



Vijay Prabhat set up Storytrails in December 2006 after having worked in organizations like HSBC and TCS for over seven years. He holds an MBA from IIM Indore. He was recently presented the 'Young Creative Entrepreneur Award' by the British Council and a Youth Achiever Award for 'Innovative Entrepreneurship' by Yuva Shakti. Storytrails received a certificate of excellence from Tripadvisor for the year 2013. Vijay has been a regular guest speaker at forums like TED and Ignite, at many social clubs and leading educational institutions including IITs and IIMs.



Q. What was the idea behind Storytrails?

A. Storytrails (www.storytrails.in) is an organization that designs and conducts story-based walks and short tours. India exists in her stories. Every sight one beholds here has a story to tell, as does every mundane ritual from daily life. Storytrails was born with the idea of sampling India through her stories; of taking visitors to savor local sights and sounds, but through the eyes of a storyteller. Currently offered in Chennai and Madurai, these walking tours have consistently received excellent ratings in international travel journals and publications.

Q. Besides the novelty of the trails, what customer service principle do you think make people come back/endorse story trails?

A. Our trails are a promise – of an enjoyable day spent with a storyteller, discovering fascinating stories behind ordinary sights. To keep up this simple promise takes the weight of our entire organization. A good storyteller is only the starting point. A trail comes together after months of research, scripting, planning and training to ensure the safety and comfort of the guests on our trails. The guiding principle for us when designing our trails is not how much can be packed into a few hours, but how we could get our guests to leave with a contented smile on their faces.

Q. The complexities of handling customers in such a high touch service.

A. A typical group on our trails includes people from many nationalities, each with a very different expectation from a 'tour'. So communicating and setting the right level of expectations is a key first step for us in creating a customer experience. We make it a point to be very clear about what our trails entail. We do this through standard mail response templates and through all our promotional literature. We recognize that when a guest is on our trail, anything that affects his/her experience, even if not of our own doing, still impacts the overall perception of our trail. So we make every effort to mitigate/plan for such eventualities. This could range from poor quality of services from a third-party, to it even being a very hot or a very rainy day!

Q. What is being done differently in the training of story tellers to handle different kind of people on the trail?

A. While our trails are choreographed to a large extent, there is always a potential for surprises when you are out on the streets. Our storytellers are trained to be assertive in their handling of guests, especially when it involves the safety or comfort of other guests. They also regularly share their trail experiences with each other, to find common solutions to recurring issues. Periodically, we refine our pre-trail communications to preempt the occurrence of some such issues – like the guests coming inappropriately dressed for trails. Our customer experience starts long before the guest even meets our storytellers. We actively use our pre-trail communications with our customers, to understand their interests, to bring them to speed on what they should expect on our trails and also what is expected of them on our trails.

Q. Lessons that other companies can learn from Storytrails with regard to customer experience.

A. In this area of service, we find that very often less is more. While our research throws up a lot of interesting material, when designing a trail, we have to constantly ask ourselves how much is too much. Our focus is not on telling our guests all we know, but on anticipating what our typical customer would want to know, and telling that really well. Small details matter, when it comes to creating a great customer experience. It could be something as simple as a refreshments break planned at the right time, or simple instructions that could save the guests a lot of inconvenience. When a guest joins us on a trail, we take charge of the overall experience and not just of how well our stories are delivered. It is easy to get carried away by focusing only on the content and presentation, when comfort and hygiene factors actually matter at least as much if not a lot more for the overall customer experience.



Customer Service – Member Initiative

In this section we highlight the service initiatives undertaken by our member organizations to provide better customer service. In this month's edition we look at how TVS Logistics Services Ltd. (TVSLSL) provided customer delight to its client Nissan Motor Co.

TVSLSL has committed itself to a vision of providing unique value added supply chain solutions and create a committed partnership-like approach with great customer service at its core. This has enabled them to execute many projects in the past that has helped their customers accomplish their goals, and all that has been done always keeping superior customer service at the fore. TVSLSL proved their ability to deliver on their vision in a recent event for Nissan Motor Company in Chennai

Nissan organized a two day "Safety Awareness" Campaign (NSDF – National Safety Driving Forum) at Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai during February-March 2013. TVSLSL was chosen as the logistics service partner for this programme which involved movement of real cars that doubled up as cutting edge simulators capable of providing visitors with an experience in line with the theme of the event. These simulators were set up at public shopping malls and other vantage locations, where customers could experience the safety features of the Nissan vehicles and also understand some very important tenets of road safety. All this was made possible by TVSLSL's close collaboration with their customer to understand their vision for the event and be able to translate that for the visitors to the event. The event was an unparalleled success at all locations and visitors to the event were truly appreciative of the efforts put in by Nissan ensuring that TVSLSL managed to provide a fulfilling experience for the customer.

This was a very prestigious event and all the activities were time-bound. Any small lapse on the part of TVS would have had an impact on the public image of Nissan Motor. No deviation from the original plan and design was reported at any of point of time. It was a very well knit team effort that yielded the desired result as envisioned by Nissan.

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