Catalyst

Volume 2, Issue 12, December 2012

Newsletter from Custommerce Service Excellence Foundation

Custommerce Service Excellence Foundation *is a not-for-profit organization striving to create a customer experience driven, globally competitive Indian economy.*

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E-Mail interview with Sandeep Singh
Dy. Managing Director (Marketing) Toyota Kirloskar Motor Pvt. Ltd.

TOYOTA Quality Revolution

Q: While buying a car or getting other services, what are the important touchpoints which the customer accesses for getting information and service from the company?

A: Call-in, Web-in and walk-in are the modes preferred by customers to access our services. Keeping that in mind, we operate dedicated single window call centers and user-friendly Websites both at Toyota and dealerships. Also, our frontline staff are sufficiently trained and equipped to provide all related information to our customers during initial interaction.

Sandeep Singh
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Q: How much control does the manufacturer have across the different touchpoints while delivering service as many of the touch points are managed by dealers?

A: All our dealers are connected to us through highly sophisticated systems and applications (CTDMS and i-CROP). We follow important touchpoint KPIs periodically and share feedback with dealers at proper forums.

Q: What specific effort does the company take to impart service values like “respecting the customer” and “caring for the customer”?

A: As a part of our Happy Customer philosophy, Toyota believes in bringing a smile on the face of all its customers. Just as sales is important, more important is the after-sales service. This is what defines a customer's experience with the brand. Starting from the first visit for sales, we maintain the complete history, in our computer systems, of the customer and the vehicle well into the after-sales period. Through dealer call centers, we remind our customers of periodic service and other value-added services. From the security at the gate to the service advisor, we train every person to give the customer a pleasant experience every time he visits the showroom. We respect our customer's time. Hence, we strive to reduce his waiting time with services like Express Maintenance that reduces the time spent on periodic servicing. Even then, customer has the option of using our well-equipped customer lounge to get a home-like feeling. Our efforts are to ensure that once a Toyota customer, always a Toyota customer. We hope to see the Happy Toyota families across India growing each year. This is the true yardstick of success for every manufacturer. All our collective efforts are focused on providing best customer experience both in sales and after sales.

Q: What does “customer experience” mean in the automobile business?

A: It means 'Keystone' of our success and sustainability. We always look for opportunities to go that extra mile to make customer relationship more personalized and long standing (explained in previous question).

Q: What can product marketing companies learn from service marketing companies?

A: Service marketing is an integral part of product marketing. Service marketing is all about selling your abilities and trying to gain the trust and confidence of the customer. In product marketing the product assists you and buys the trust and confidence of the customer based on its quality, durability and reliability as in the case of Toyota's products being globally renowned for high quality. So there is a lot that product marketing companies can learn from service marketing companies as they are more specialized in marketing. Service marketing is all about investing in time, trust, deliverability and relationship, all without the backing of a tangible product and that is what makes service marketing companies specialists.

Q: Since people at the customer-facing jobs play a large role in delivering service, what effort is taken to select, train and manage them? Do you look for specific attitude/behaviour for staffing such positions?

A: We have an elaborate “Gain, Train and Retain” strategy. As a first of its kind, we have recently initiated 'Toyota Sales Education Foundation' to train college graduates on automotive sales and to develop a desire towards sales career. We rollout a customized training calendar based on the need of the hour. Also, through an Annual Dealer Employee Satisfaction Survey, we identify improvement areas and work on them earnestly.

Q: Between financial incentives and training / motivation, which is more useful in improving customer service?

A: Financial incentives may help to achieve short-term gains. However, it will not help to build the customer-centric culture within the system. To provide best and consistent customer experience, we rely largely on training programs and motivation through various other means.

Q: When you sell cars costing X, 2X and 3X, how do you differentiate service to 3X-paying customer (business-class customer of cars) without offending the X-paying customer?

A: As a brand, we try to provide highest level of customer service to all our customers irrespective of the product value. Toyota customers are Toyota customers, irrespective of what products they buy. However, the needs may vary depending on the customer. For example, most Toyota cars are chauffeur driven; however the Etios and Etios Liva are owner-driven cars. Hence, we came up with the Express Maintenance Service that reduces the time spent by the customer for getting the periodic maintenance done. We are expanding our dealer network in smaller towns, where we have appointed a resident customer relations officer who speaks the local language, to assist local customers better. On need basis and as a special case sometimes we also provide a temporary replacement car to our high-end customers when they give their vehicle for servicing.

Q: In the last 10 years, is there a gradual shift towards e-delivery of information/service. Which modes have been preferred by car customers (Internet, call center, SMS, Facebook, Twitter, etc.)?

A: There is definitely a shift towards more convenient methods of approach like a call center and Internet. Of late, social media is also preferred by customers as we try to appeal more to the younger generation.

Q: What effort does your company take to listen to customers regarding product, service and business interactions?

A: We constantly look forward for customer's voice to improve the quality of our products and services. To that effect, we have detailed processes to capture customers' concerns during the entire vehicle ownership period. We have a dedicated team (Customer Relations Division) to receive and resolve customer complaints in the shortest possible time.

A second chance to make a good first impression

Muralidharan R.
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You can say I am old school. I have grown with the belief that you don't get a second chance to make a good first impression, though most of my colleagues think it is too hard on them. They believe there is always a second chance and have at times proved that you can indeed make amends for a bad first attempt. Occasionally I succumb to the pressure of wanting to appear contemporary and yield to their demand of not being unforgiving for a botch up in the first time. There is only one exception. That's on customer service. I am a bit maniacal and touchy about that subject. I have reasons borne out by experiences. I am sure most of us do have similar experiences.

A customer just does not give you a second chance to make a good impression. I learnt this over two decades in the banking industry. I am sure my colleagues in the other industries, especially the service industry, may well second this. I just want to highlight a couple of first-impression opportunities such as buying a product / opening an account, recovery when things go wrong in commencing a relationship...

The vital lessons began at home. Both my dad and I had bank accounts with the same neighbourhood PSU bank branch. I used to call the bank lousy; he used to adore the bank. I am not anti-establishment to just oppose anything that my dad said. One day we decided to crack it by going over there together. I could instantly figure out why our perceptions differ so drastically. The savings account clerk gave me the same cold vibes that he did when I went on to open the student account and treated me like I am on his dole. The institutional accounts desk officer who handled my dad's office account and hence his too, was all over him. Instant recognition, coffee, crisp notes, denominations of his choice and the works.

Predictably we met soon after the respective transactions were over and our descriptions and opinions continued unaltered. Only this time the coin dropped for me. Both of us were right except that we were describing the bank with the adjective that was meant for the person servicing us. I learnt the facet of inseparability that is the hallmark of service experience where the consumer is not able to distinguish between the service and the service provider through a practical example, and has stayed with me till date. I also realized that the first time I met the officer to commence an account, I got treated shabbily as I was a student whose balances he knew would be low and transactions heavy. But he lost out a chance to get me back when I became a professional and had healthy savings. But my experience as student pretty much shut my mind off any association when I was reasonably in cash.

Here are some instances that are common sight. When you walk into open an account or buy a new cell-phone connection, the desk is not ready with all that is needed for efficient execution. While the officer is talking to you there are numerous cell-phone calls or visits to the stationery room to fetch the form needed to complete your work or disturbance from another colleague. You tend to repeat your details during the interaction, which if there was undivided attention and impeccable preparedness of the desk could have got done in less than half the time. Often the details are captured inadequately or wrongly thereby resulting in missed statements, bills, penalties and follow-through calls and visits for correcting things. These could have been done perfectly in the first attempt itself, but for the complete lack of attention to details or poor attention span on the customer.

An account-opening desk or the new-connection counter in a telecom service provider has the best chance to make the good first impression. They deserve to be manned by an experienced staff member instead of the junior staff members who are ill equipped to answer questions or are just intimidated by an impatient customer.

The customer deserves a well-organized desk that is ready to receive the customer, well-trained staff who either know the answers or will fetch them for the customer without the customer having to move from desk to desk discovering answers. The walk-in customer to my mind is God. He has taken time and effort and has committed a certain time to be in your premises and most importantly with intent of commencing a relationship with you. An ill-prepared office desk or an ill-equipped official not only leaves a poor opinion about the brand but raises questions as to whether the customer made the correct decision to get associated.

I decided to take a new phone connection from a service provider who is professedly 'happy to help' because I was already a user and was doing ok. My luck this time was awful. The service provider made me visit their office six times to submit a proof of document for correcting the spelling of my name from Murlidharan to Muralidharan. The data entry operator at the back office entered the wrong spelling though I had taken the form very seriously and filled it in all capital letters as the instructions directed me. Besides, someone who entered the form details in the system dropped a word from the address, because of which the verification officer could not complete the job. I had the line disconnected because the verification could not be done. After the exasperating six attempts I did what finally made sense for both of us. I surrendered the number. This despite my mentioning repeatedly to them that in the same address we have three other connections from the same service provider. But that just will not do: neither to the contact centre nor the service outlet. The call centre which was forever “happy to help” repeatedly directed me to the customer service who continued to mess up. More than the error, the manner of dealing with the correction when they had a second chance to make up for the mistake was a disaster too. They lost me forever.

I am waiting for them to catch up with me on the other connections and completely drive me to another service provider. One consistent thing I noticed was that the officer kept apologizing saying that he is new and hence cannot help me then and there. This was across three stores and that makes me believe that the new connection desk is consigned to the freshers, though that should be the best desk to make the good first impression. Most of the service providers seem to get this one wrong.

The opportunity to resolve the issue elegantly should the first interaction go wrong is the next best opportunity to make a good impression.

Organizations miss out on this opportunity too. Like the telecom service provider in my case; they never once bothered to check if they had got the particulars right at the stage of data entry but presumed that I filled in the application wrong. This I guess is because they are in a hurry to 'close' the case. What they mean is to resolve the problem and close the issue to its logical end. But the expression at the hands of the customer is sad. I have become allergic to the expression 'closing'. It is hardly an expression which makes you feel welcome when you are a customer. When the contact centre agent tells you tomorrow your case/issue will be 'closed' I get this eerie feeling that someone is coming to do me in. While I am attempting to commence the relationship why would such an insensitive expression creep in. Why would the organizations not substitute 'closing' the case or 'closing' the file with, 'solving' the issue or 'helping' you with a resolution? Do we not know that most often our words give away who we are and our body language and spoken language supplement each other?

Well, if you have not got your first interaction right, please ensure that the second interaction that is expected to fix what went wrong is handled with enough sensitivity it deserves. And watch the language and the expressions.

A good step when the first interaction goes wrong and is not a straight through case, is to first presume that the customer was right and we were wrong and check the issue internally before getting the customer to repeat the process all over. Invariably, the organization's internal efficiencies may have caused the problem for the customer. It will put you back on the credibility map when you stand up and say 'mea culpa' and own up the mistake and put the customer at ease. In most cases, customer is forgiving if the service provider owns up the mistake and corrects it with grace.

How do some line managers crack this whereas most miss it. They follow the golden rule 'Inspect what you expect'. They do not take it for granted that the induction training has morphed the three-month old associate in the organization, who was a footloose and fancy free student till recently, into a customer-service veteran who will give a good account of the brand. The managers who constantly inspect what they expect at the store front to happen, get it right invariably the first time. Their teams make good impressions from the word go. Even if they do not do it the first time, good service leaders know that the service recovery effort is another great opportunity for making a good impression.

It just reinforces my belief that the customer indeed does not remember your mistake. He certainly does not forget how you behaved or made up for it when he pointed it out. Indeed a second chance to make a good first impression!

- Muralidharan R.

There is no “single” customer view

Posted on March 8, 2011 by Steve Jones, Capgemini

One of the bits that happens around MDM is that people talk about a “single customer view” that everyone in the business will use. My colleague Simon Gratton today made a great, and often over looked point.

Whose view?

... Lets think on this for a moment. You are a utility company. What do you know about the customer? Well you know:

Their name and core details, addresses, billing history, customer contact history, history of every transaction,... payment details and history, credit risk report...

... Imagine some poor call centre agent who is answering a call around a boiler problem and being presented with all of the information above. Imagine the billing system that just wants to print out the bill. Do all these systems, people and processes have to cope with knowing all of the information about that customer?

Of course not. So what is this mythical single customer view? The answer is in fact that its actually a classic case of an IT solution missing the point of the business question.

What the single view means is simple:

Supplying the right information at the right time and ensuring consistency across the information value chain

So it means that it must be *possible* to get any piece of information about a customer *if required* rather than forcing all that information via a single blob...

For the full article visit : http://www.capgemini.com/technology-blog/2011/03/single-customer-view/