

# Catalyst

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Customer Service Excellence Foundation

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*Customer 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 S. Ravi Kant

EVP (Corporate Communications) &  
CEO (Eyewear Business)  
Titan Industries Limited

## TITAN INDUSTRIES LIMITED

Q: TITAN pioneered the concept of modern organised retailing in India - what challenges did you encounter in the beginning?

A: Twenty-two years ago, when we pioneered the concept of modern retailing in India, we were a mono-brand, single-product company. Some of the key challenges faced by us at that time were:

At the consumer level - to break the perception that 'an expensive-looking store is expensive.' Some customers, especially in small towns would not walk into our stores. It took time for them to get accustomed to and be comfortable with a new world-class store experience that delivered 'value'.

At the trade level - our dealers saw Titan showrooms as a threat. They soon realised that the showrooms were helping in market expansion and Titan served the role of a catalyst by helping them upgrade their outlets too.

Q: What are the challenges now in delivering a great customer experience in your stores?

A: The biggest challenge we face is consistency of customer experience across all stores, from metros to small towns, and flagship stores to neighbourhood stores. This despite the fact that all our brands make huge investments in training of our store staff and take great care at the time of employee recruitment. This is an ongoing challenge for most retailers and requires periodical refresher training and motivation sessions.

Q: What attitudes and skills should one look for / plan while hiring and training retail sales people?

A: Some of the basic skill sets we look for are an attitude to serve, good communication skills, and a pleasing personality.



S. Ravi Kant  
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CEO (Eyewear Business)  
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Q: How do you manage to handle a wide variety of customers entering the store?

A: A good induction for retail staff is key - we invest in their training. The training programme is quite comprehensive and takes the participants through a complete cycle of theory to practical with case studies and role plays. The focus is on developing their ability to handle a wide variety of customers using real-life examples.

Q: When people talk of 'Customer Experience,' do expectations in India differ from expectations elsewhere?

A: The expectations are higher in India because India is blessed with diversity and a wide variety of customers. People in India tend to rely a lot on the sales staff and expect them to guide them through the purchase, especially in categories like jewellery and eyewear where they may be less familiar and possess less knowledge on diamonds and lenses respectively. It is therefore important for the sales staff to be fully equipped to understand the consumer well and deliver a good experience.

Q: Since 'youth' is a large segment in your customer profile, what expectations do they have about in-store experience?

A: The youth today expect the experience to be enjoyable, involving a lot of fun. They are tech-savvy and hence visit stores / brands that project this image.

Q: How do you monitor the pulse of youth expectations?

A: We connect with our customers quite well through a variety of initiatives. The most effective vehicle today to monitor the pulse of youth is social media.

Q: In Fastrack stores, how do you ensure that older customers don't feel antagonised or unwanted while emphasizing youth appeal?

A: Our Fastrack stores are 'young at heart' and hence appeal to all. Consumers of all age brackets receive the same 'welcome smile' and treatment in our stores. A large section of our Fastrack customers today are 25 years+ as people today want to look younger and be associated with youthful products and brands.

Q: What is the most popular touchpoint when your customer is trying to get information about your products?

A: The visitors to our corporate as well as brand websites are growing by the day. We are also in the process of launching an integrated E-commerce platform for all our brands. The second most important touchpoint is our chain of over 915 showrooms across the country.

Q: For companies in retail, is it essential to have a presence in the social media like Facebook?

A: It is very essential and is the most effective way of staying in touch and building a brand with our consumers, especially the youth.

Q: Are successful companies using social media as a 'listening post' or 'to influence public opinion' or 'to nip the problem in the bud'?

A: While social media is a platform to meet all these three objectives, successful companies today are using social media as a 'listening post.' It is an extremely important medium to connect with consumers and also co-create products and services. Some great ideas on product design and services have come from consumers through this medium.



## Beauty: Only as Deep as the Customer Experience

In beauty care and cosmetics, the customer's experience is where the sale is won or lost, where the brand comes to life, and where the seeds of loyalty are planted.



Source: A.T. Kearney analysis

To access the article, visit:

[http://www.atkearney.com/documents/10192/411421/Beauty-Only\\_as\\_Deep\\_as\\_the\\_Customer\\_Experience.pdf/8290af55-fe14-4471-9fb0-183fd83ba922](http://www.atkearney.com/documents/10192/411421/Beauty-Only_as_Deep_as_the_Customer_Experience.pdf/8290af55-fe14-4471-9fb0-183fd83ba922)

# Flying High

in a Competitive Industry

Secrets of the World's Leading Airline

Authors:

Loizos Heracleous, Jochen Wirtz, Nitin Pangarkar

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Extract from: Chapter 5

Managing People Effectively to Deliver Sustained Service Excellence

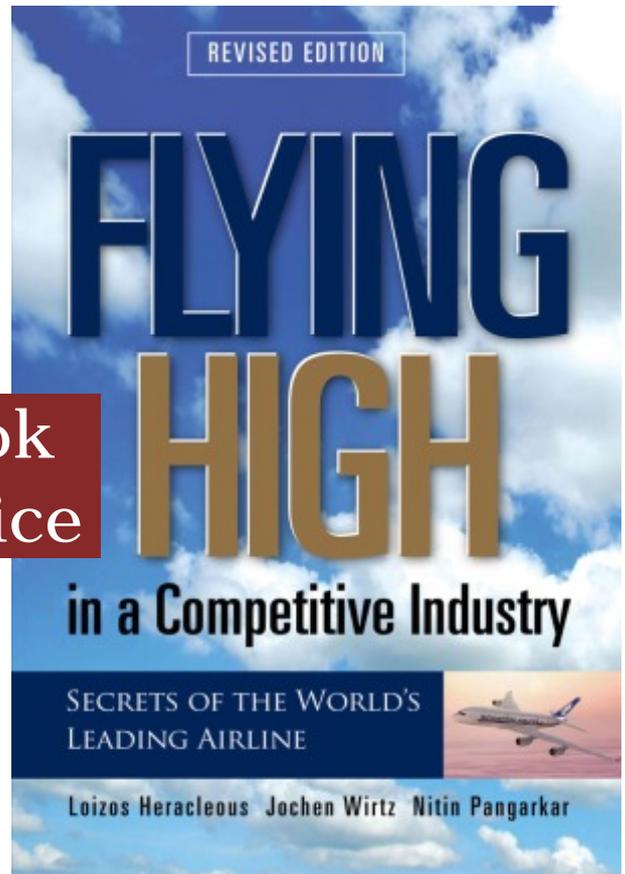
Behind most of today's successful service organizations stands a firm commitment to effective management of human resources, including recruitment, selection, training, motivation and retention of employees. Leading service firms are often characterized by a distinctive culture, strong service leadership and role modelling by top management. It is probably harder for competitors to duplicate high-performance human assets than any other corporate resource. In addition, service staff can be crucially important for a firm's competitive positioning because of the characteristics of the front line:

It is a core part of the product. As soon as front-line staff are involved in a service process, they tend to be the most visible element of the service...

It is the service firm. Front-line staff represent the service firm and, from a customer's perspective, is the firm...

It is the brand. Front-line staff and service are often a core part of the brand. It is the staff who determine whether the brand promise gets delivered or not...

Book  
Choice



## The five elements behind SIA's effective human resource management strategy



To read Chapter 5, visit:

<http://bschool.nus.edu/departments/Marketing/Jochen%20papers/flying%20high.pdf>

# Customer Experience

*"A customer experience is an interaction between an organization and a customer as perceived by a customer. It is a blend of the company's business performance, the senses stimulated and the emotions evoked and intuitively measured against customer expectations across all moments of contact."*

As is evident from the above definition, customer experience goes much beyond the rational aspect of a company's output. Emotions play an important part in customer experience but unfortunately most customer experience initiatives are focused on the basics and the rational experience of 4 Ps of marketing; price, place, product, promotion, and fixing what is wrong, etc. In reality, however, over half of Customer Experience is about emotions.

Today services as an industry comprises a major portion of our GDP. Hence the key to achieving sustained economic growth is to be able to arrive at systems and measurement mechanisms that provide clarity on customer service aspects. And an important component of this is 'customer experience'.

There are many benefits to the company - tangible and intangible that can be accrued through this. On a tangible scale, when addressed effectively, customer experience eases customer base addition, enhances customer loyalty, and improves customer retention. On the intangible front, customer experience enhances company image, spreads positive word of mouth, and increases potential share market value.

Apart from these, the other reason why customer experience is important to work on is that the companies have realized that this economic downturn is not a normal, short-lived recession. Normal life will not resume tomorrow. When you don't know what the future holds, the one thing that you have to hold onto is your customer. Thus the need to focus on your customer experience is all the more important.

Loyalty begins to take a new meaning in times such as these, where companies realize that the cost of holding on to customers is far less than acquiring new ones. In this scenario, the concept of customer life time value, or CLV, becomes paramount. CLV takes into account the life time revenues from a customer and the costs involved in acquiring that customer, thus representing the net value of holding onto a customer. If this is positive, then that particular customer is worth holding onto. Else, from a financial perspective, it is better to let him go.

Industries that have witnessed a tremendous growth in recent times have had to practice this. For example, if a telecom customer wants to exit, it is important for the company to understand the costs involved in retaining him versus letting him go and then take a right decision. Over a total customer cohort (group), the magnitude of this decision begins to show up. And it impacts the profitability of the organization in significant ways.

However there is an inherent paucity of trained Customer Experience Professionals. As more and more



K. Rajeshwari

Professor and Head of Department-  
Marketing and Retail Varsity  
Chennai Business School

Studied at IIMA

Worked for 14 years as a Marketing professional in  
Unilever, Cavinkare and Nippon Paint

Pursuing Ph.D. at IIT Chennai

Written a book "MY LIFE MY CHOICE"

E-Mail: [rajeshwarivictor@gmail.com](mailto:rajeshwarivictor@gmail.com)

companies focus on the customer experience, the demand for good Customer Experience Professionals will continue to grow. As the subject is comparatively new, there are few people with relevant track record.

Companies that want to produce a high-quality customer experience also need to routinely perform a set of sound and standard practices. The measurement of these practices have to be carefully designed such that organizations can put a number to customer experience in a consistent manner across the enterprise and deliver critical action points to employees and to stakeholders. Unless this is done, the uniformity in understanding customer experience will be lost.

For example, the customer experience team at technology giant EMC has a sophisticated measurement framework. It first identifies the aspects of the customer experience that drive loyalty, like ease of doing business. It then prioritizes those drivers based on customers' satisfaction with each driver and the impact of each driver on the overall experience. That tells EMC which things to fix immediately, which to improve over time, which to maintain at current levels, and which to promote as strengths.

## Now or never

In this age where a customer is faced with choices, companies cannot succeed through manufacturing strength, distribution power, or information mastery. What should be important is the thought of becoming irrelevant to your customers, which is what will happen if you don't take action.

Despite some of this thinking and practice, one of the reasons customer experience is in danger of dying is because it is not fully understood. A lot needs to be done in this area - by educationalists and management professionals alike.

- K. Rajeshwari