

Catalyst

Newsletter from
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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Customer Centricity

Ideally, being customer-centred (CC) should be a core value at all levels of society - not only in profit-oriented business enterprises, but also in the government, NGOs, civil society and citizens. In practice, it is not always so. In an economy which is customer-driven (CD), there is likely to be higher growth, arising both from domestic consumption-led expansion as well as exports. There has been a perception in some quarters that there is an antagonistic relationship between the customer and employee. This is a fallacy. Each employed adult citizen is both a customer and an employee.

So, to become a CD economy, we need the government and all organizations, private and public, to be CC. A CC organization can be recognized by three markers. Does the organization have a culture which fosters CC behavior? Do the employees have the attitudes and skills to be CC? Are the systems customer friendly? For all these three criteria to be met, the prime mover is a CC Leadership. So, in this short article, we shall begin with the Leadership.

1) CC Leadership

A relatively small percentage of business leaders are driven from within to be CC. This may be due to their education, experience, overseas exposure and similar influences. The majority of leaders tend to serve the owner/shareholders more, since their survival and compensation are linked to financial performance, measured through earnings per share and market capitalization. The more sustainable force that keeps leaders CC is competition in their industry. So, CC as a shared value has grown in India since the 1990s. Competitive forces have been unleashed in industry after industry. Business leaders have to formulate and implement mission, vision and strategies to survive and grow in a competitive environment. The mission defines two key parameters. First, which groups of customers do we want to serve, in terms of geography,



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need, income group, age, cluster, etc.? Second, to those customers, what products/services do we want to offer? So, the customer starts figuring at the very foundation. The vision is an aspiration of the position and image that the company wants to achieve in the long term. It often contains words like "leading, significant, most admired" etc. All these depend on customer perceptions and support. Similarly, marketing strategy has to be the spearhead of business strategy. Strategies for operations, supply chain, finance, HR, etc. flow from the marketing strategy, which itself has to start from the customer.

2) CC Culture

Some kind of culture evolves, by itself, in an organization. Unless specific steps are taken by the leadership, the informal, evolving culture tends to be a haphazard one with a mixture of professionalism, politics, survival, satisficing, etc. The first step in transforming the organization's culture is the enunciation of a set of core values. Typically, there are about five such values. The top of the list should be a value relating to the Customer, such as "Customer Orientation, Focus, Obsession, Satisfaction, Delight" etc. While articulation of the value is a necessary first step, its actualization poses many challenges. Through communication and discussion, each employee should be enabled to internalize the customer value. Employees need training in attitudes and skills to

practice the value. There should be rewards and recognition for customer-centred behaviour; as there should be disincentives for negligence or offence towards the customer.

3) CC Employee

The employee in turn should embrace the value of being CC. The younger employees may already have a predisposition toward this value, through their more recent education and own experiences as a customer. They will also be aware of the anger of dissatisfied customers. They would have been in such shoes. They might understand the truth of doing unto others, what you would like them do to you. In this age of internet and social media, a dissatisfied customer's experience can go viral, as American Airlines learned to its cost on the guitar case. The employee also needs to provide superior internal customer service, to those who take care of the external customer. It is nice of some CEOs to say "People First". But, they should have no illusion that all wages and profits ultimately come from only one source, namely, the satisfied customer.

4) CC Systems

There is increasing use of IT-based systems at the customer interface. Depending on how it is run, the system can lead to high customer satisfaction, or frustration. With commercial airlines, the option of booking one's ticket and seat reservation on the net and printing out an e-Boarding Pass seems to be generally appreciated as a great convenience, time saving, and anxiety reduction. On the other hand, call centres, either the company's own or outsourced, can cause customer frustration and anger. This could arise from various factors such as poor system design, line availability, long holds, pillar to post, skill gaps of the operators, etc. The simple mantra is to have customer-friendly systems. Easier said than done. The leadership needs to build in regular and surprise checks, customer feedback, systems audit and update.

5) CC Economy

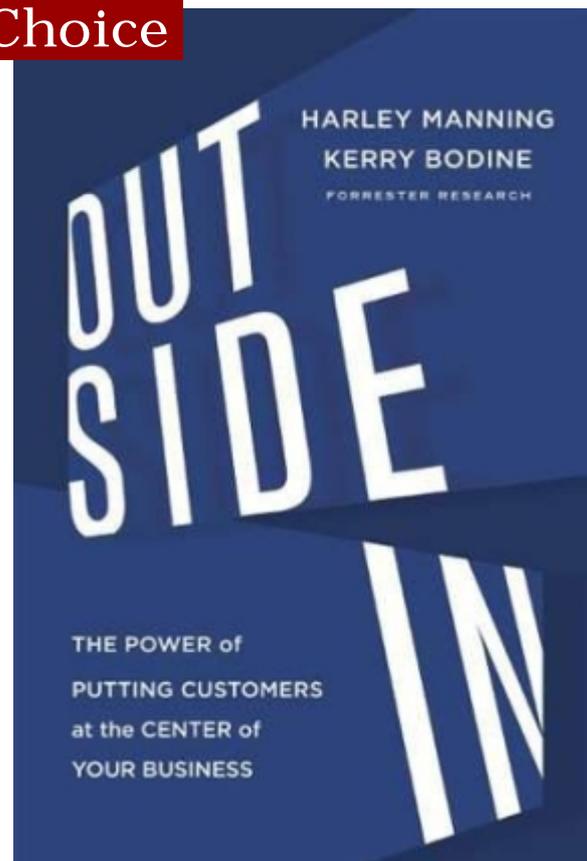
India is slowly on its way to being a customer-centred economy. It was not always so. For several decades after independence, it was driven by the government, through planning, licenses, permits and controls. Other stakeholders, like the promoters, major shareholders, and unionized employees were more in the mind space of managers. The customer had to wait and accept whatever products, quality, price, delivery, service, etc. were on offer. The economy has become more dynamic in those sectors where it is driven by customer needs and preferences. Initially the welcome change took place in consumer goods and durables. A variety of services have followed, such as telecom, airlines, banking, travel, etc. The CCE gives great scope to new entrepreneurs. There will be failures and successes. All that is part of creative destruction and re-creation.

6) Customer Responsibility

While industry and government should put the customer at the centre, the customer also has her/his responsibilities. The customers should do their own homework in prioritizing needs, shopping around, getting the necessary information, comparing products, brands, etc. and make the right buying decision. The customer should also give feedback, both positive and negative to the company. The customer should practice personal social responsibility (PSR), through reducing waste, safe disposal, buying greener products and generally reducing carbon footprint.

- Dr. M. B. Athreya

Book Choice



Book Title Outside In: The Power of Putting Customers at the Center of Your Business

Authors Harley Manning & Kerry Bodine
Amazon Publishing / New Harvest

This book is based on years of research by Forrester. Outside In includes tools to help master the six disciplines of customer experience: Strategy, Customer Understanding, Design, Measurement, Governance, and Culture. Outside In illustrates these disciplines with case studies of successful customer experience strategies and positive business outcomes across 15 industries in 16 countries, at companies like BBVA, Boeing, Fidelity, JetBlue, Mayo Clinic, Office Depot, Sprint, USAA, and Virgin Media.

Can we learn Customer Service from a government department?

Few paragraphs from the 24-page booklet on Centrelink's Customer Service Charter are given below. To read / download the booklet, visit <http://certivsem2.wikispaces.com/file/view/Centrelink.pdf>

This charter tells you the standard of service you can expect from Centrelink and what to do if you are unhappy with the service you received. It also tells you about your responsibilities as a Centrelink customer...

Centrelink is an Australian Government agency within the Human Services portfolio. We deliver payments and services for a number of government departments... We have over 300 Customer Service Centres Australia-wide and more than 20 Call Centres. We also have over 500 agents and access points in rural and remote Australia with free phone and fax available for Centrelink business. You can access our online services from any computer with internet access, Centrelink office or Centrelink agent...

What you can expect from us:

- 1) You can expect us to make it easy for you to use our services.
We do this by...
- 2) You can expect us to treat you with respect and courtesy.
We do this by...
- 3) You can expect us to explain your options to you.
This means we will...
- 4) You can expect us to respect your rights.
This means we will respect your right to...

Does your company
have a
Customer Service
Charter?



The image shows the cover of the 'Centrelink's Customer Service Charter' booklet. The top half has a teal background with the text 'What you can expect from Centrelink' in white. Below this is a photograph of a smiling woman with long brown hair. The bottom half of the cover is orange with the text 'Centrelink's Customer Service Charter' in white. At the very bottom, there are two logos: the Australian Government coat of arms and the Centrelink logo with the tagline 'giving you options'.



**E-Mail interview with
Nikhil Godbole, DGM-Operations
of cleartrip.com, the travel portal**



Q: What are the important elements that determine the customer experience?

A: Simplicity / Comprehensiveness / Reliability / Responsibility

Q: What are the service expectations of the customer while buying e-service?

A: Ease of access to the website (product) / Simplicity of the tool / Availability of Customer Care Team when needed.

Q: What are the most frequently accessed touchpoints for an e-commerce business like cleartrip?

A: Call Center/ E-mail support

Q: Is there a big shift towards accessing through any particular touchpoint?

A: For Non-Air (Hotel & Trains) products we have seen a big shift from voice to non-voice support.

Q: Do you think people want to interact with a live agent or are they happy with e-delivery as long as service is delivered?

A: Live agent is always better and widely accepted / needed as most of the e-transactions are related to payments, which require urgent attention.

Q: How do you handle customers with different levels of ability and comfort in handling technology of accessing your services?

A: Our website is optimised to work on all platforms (mobile/Web) with the same URL, www.cleartrip.com.

Q: Have you taken any specific effort to train or make it easy for your customers to access your services?

A: Online self-help is something which we are constantly working to improve. The very fact that the customer had to call us for an online transaction is a point of failure for us. What is it that we have not provided online for which he had to call us is what we constantly debate on.

Q: Have you taken any specific effort to understand better, the customer's service needs / expectations?

A: We do focus group meetings with our top 5% and bottom 10% selective customers (those who have called us at least 3 times in a year) and based on their feedback, we try to convert their ideas into service offerings.

Q: Are customers embracing e-services in a big way? If not, what can be done to facilitate this?

A: No. India has a majority of population who buys stuff online/offline using cash. Unless government has stricter rules to get control over the cash transactions, e-transactions cannot be pushed to a common man. People think twice before using their credit cards online as they feel that someone somewhere is watching them on this transaction. Government bodies like RBI need to educate the public about online transactions for them (the public) to get more benefit out of online transactions. Online registration for passport is a good example of getting people closer to online, or e-services. Also, India is the only country where one pays more for



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buying movie tickets online. Why will one spend INR 35 over and above the ticket for which he still has to stand in queue and get the same ticket which he booked online?

Q: Do you believe customers value a clean and efficient online customer experience as against a functional service on travel websites? What has your experience shown you?

A: Yes, they definitely do. An online customer expects issues to be resolved online itself. Self-service customer portals play an important role in getting issues resolved online; this results into lesser phone calls to the call center. For any online transaction, there are a specific number of outcomes to any failure; if messaging and assurances can be given online itself, it would be the best experience for the customer.

Q: Is pricing the only game changer in the online travel and ticketing space? Does the future lie in customer experience and how do you intend to deliver it consistently?

A: Pricing is not the only game changer. Reliability of the website/portal makes a lot of difference. For domestic travel (within India), pricing can be the only game changer as preference is given to Low Cost Carriers over the Full Service Carriers. Customers, however, stick to the website because of ease of operations/good experience, and this always leads to repeat business. We are in the market because of our customers, and our only intention is to make travel simple. We constantly work towards exceeding our customers' expectations by delivering world class products with the best-in-class user experience across all products.

Q: Tell us more about cleartrip Small World.

A: We want to be wiki of the Travel world and Small World is just a beginning.

Q: What are your views on socializing of travel portals today? Getting more traction is key and social media seems to be the go-to media for getting the necessary traffic through references.

A: We were the first ones to go social (Facebook, Twitter, etc.). Social media is a step towards transparent behavior of any company as it is being viewed by all those who are online. It all depends on whether you try to use this channel only for marketing your product or even resolve queries of your customers using the same. More the merrier is the key. However, this should be for the right reasons. We only do it for Making Travel Simple.