

Catalyst

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Newsletter from
Customer Service Excellence Foundation

*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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The Customer is king. But where's his kingdom?



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How companies can create true customer delight and offer service that really counts.

As I sit in the Customer Service National Convention listening to exotic concepts such as customer-centricity, engagement, experience frameworks and multi-channel customer interactions, my mind started wandering. I can almost hear you saying “tell me another” but in my defence I must tell you that I was still staying in the customer experience realm but in my own selfish way, I was thinking about myself as a customer and my own experiences over the years. Was there anything truly outstanding that I have experienced as a customer that I could remember, relish and share with you?

Before that I must make a quick point. I had just travelled by Kingfisher Red from Mumbai. Sadly, I realised this fact “after” I got into the flight. Now that by itself is hardly surprising given that I can give Lord Emsworth a run for his money when it comes to absent-mindedness. But the problem in this case is that it was a morning flight from Mumbai to Chennai (there I got it right) and Kingfisher Red does not serve breakfast but only sells some cold sandwiches and hot rolls, neither of which I can handle or eat. In any case, this is not about my craving for *idli-vada*

but about the experience which, to my mind, was outstanding and my every request (and boy am I demanding) was met with by a smiling stewardess unlike some of my other trysts with destiny with other airlines in the past.

I promptly filled up a feedback form mentioning the name of the stewardess who had bent over backwards to serve me. I don't know if anyone ever reads feedback forms but I was moved to write positively, for once. Come on, Kingfisher, hang in there, I may not be able to help you with your fuel tax but will continue to fly though it may not be a bad idea to carry extra breakfast trays on your Red flights as passengers such as me are forever famished at 8 a.m. and are willing to pay.

Now to the biggie

But let me talk about something which happened 12 years ago, something that I remember and wonder about. I went to England to watch the 1999 Cricket World Cup which, in my view, was the most enthralling so far as it had everything including a historic tie between South Africa and Australia and after that game South Africa promptly earned the 'chokers' tag and in all fairness, they have lived up to this tag ever since but as I do not wish to offend Graeme Smith, I will move on to the World Cup.

But while the “carnival of cricket”, as it was called, was hardly a marketing success, I have wonderful memories of the tournament and I believe England is the best place in the world to watch cricket even if I don't care for cider. But the delight for me happened a year later when we got a letter addressed by the Chairman of the English and Wales Cricket Board thanking us for watching so many matches (they listed the matches) and giving us the itinerary of the 2000 season and the West Indies and

Zimbabwe (if my memory serves me right) tours that were happening that English summer and hoping that we could make it.

To say I was floored would be an understatement. And why do I say that? That is because watching cricket in India live is a nightmare. You may spend Rs. 5,000 as entry fee for the match and if you get up to go to the toilet (the stink of which would put the Cooum to shame) and return you would find a policeman sitting placidly in your expensive seat!

Of course, no one cares for the customer as there are a billion of us, anxiously waiting to take my place. So, grown as I have in a culture like this, I found the ECB's recognition of me as an individual and as a customer truly outstanding. Yes, I had an experience that I could never forget, not something that I would never forgive!

Analysis, not paralysis

So basically what was happening in my English experience? Simple, they had a database which was out of the credit card purchase for the tickets. What they did was use the data with them to make me an offer which, incidentally, I did not take up. But more importantly I felt valued as an individual and as a customer.

Now this leads me to certain questions. We have a lot of information about our consumer- demographics, date of birth, anniversary date, every possible date that you can think of and if you had more time they would also ask you for dog's birthday! But how well is this information used is a question that bothers me eternally. Of course, some such as Shoppers Stop do keep reminding me with mailers that say 'Hey, your birthday is coming soon', 'haven't seen you at the store recently' and I think to myself, that the discount being offered is too low - they only offer 50 per cent and I will certainly visit them when the discount gets to a reasonable 90 per cent.

And yet I have a question for some of you. Yes, many of us are sitting on hordes and hordes of data, but how effectively or smartly are we using the information that we have? Is it information or is there an insight hidden somewhere that we are just missing? Let me clarify. If you have my date of birth, then you don't have to be Srinivasa Ramanujam to figure out that my age is 58 as well represented by my totally absent hair line.

So instead of sending me a meaningless birthday wish, can you come up with an offer that is relevant to a person of my age? What would people of my age look for? Retirement plans, pilgrimage... in fact, anything that people of my age would be or should be interested in.

Yes, data by itself is of no use, what you do with it is what

makes the difference. Most fast bowlers have a Yorker but who uses it as well as Malinga? I wish some database marketer would bowl me over with a customer offer that I just can't refuse. But the starting point has to be that it comes from a deep understanding of me and my needs and an offer that makes sense to me.

Go ahead, surprise me

When was the last time a company or brand surprised you? So much so that you can share this with your friends or even tweet about that experience.

Recently I bought a Toyota Etios and forgive me if I have already shared this with you, but remember I am Lord Emsworth born again. Anyway here goes. Mind you this is not my first car, perhaps my sixteenth. As my friends solicitously tell me, I change cars like some people change underwear! It is a nice car (I hope my friends at Toyota are reading this) but that I discovered subsequently.

But what I am going to share is what happened at the outlet when I went to take delivery of the car. After the usual boring formalities, the manager of the outlet handed over the key to me. What was a simple gesture suddenly became an opportunity to recognise and reward.

For lo and behold, as the key was handed over, the whole dealership, I suspect that there must have been 60 people around, erupted into warm applause and a normally shy(!), reticent individual like me was actually blushing at all the attention. Christ, I was just buying a car, not got a hole in one! But I was pleased.

After all, however much we may deny it, we are all vain individuals who like to be recognised and rewarded as often as we can and I found this ritual quite different from those that I had experienced in my previous purchases.

Sum and substance

Each and every customer of yours is unique, even if he has not got his UID. Each one wants to feel special and be recognised.

Today with technology we have lots of information about the customer. Can we analyse this information insightfully. Can we make the customer truly feel like a king not like our former kings after the privy purses bill!

PS: I went back to Bangalore by Kingfisher Red on Saturday morning and the flight was delayed by a mere three hours and twenty minutes. So normalcy has been restored!

(This article has appeared in The Hindu Business Line on Sept 22, 2011)

How we see it:

Three senior executives on the future of marketing

There is no quick path to success in the new era of customer engagement. Progress is likely to come incrementally- by listening to customers, making adjustments to engagement strategies, and learning through trial and error. Since diverse perspectives will be essential to mastering this new landscape, McKinsey's Luke Collins, Tom French, and Paul Magill recently sought out three practitioners with very different vantage points on marketing's future. Virgin Atlantic Airways CEO Steve Ridgway talks about how his company recently has been pushing the boundaries of collaborating with customers, while experiencing the pleasant surprise of a successful mass-media campaign...

Customer experience as a marketing tool

Before we start marketing anything or talking about our brand proposition, we ask ourselves, are we being brave enough to get ahead of consumer expectations? One way we try to think ahead of our customers is through creating a superior customer experience. If we get our customers off the plane happy, and they go on to talk about that and get others to come and then come back again themselves- that's a huge marketing tool for us. Making that happen requires having the elements in place to help the staff do their jobs and make our customer experience distinct from what other airlines are offering. Those elements include things like putting our club houses in a different design world than the other airlines' lounges. Differentiation also is visible on-board the aircraft in all the design work we did in our upper-class suites to get the best flat-bed possible and in taking the fit and finish inside the aircraft to a whole new standard. But getting the tools right isn't enough. We were the first airline to put in-flight entertainment systems in our planes, for example, and now everybody's got them. And, frankly, there are some airlines out there now- in the Middle East, for example- that have very deep pockets and spend lots of money. So we need to go further. The real key is people and developing the chemistry and the attitudes, in our staff, that create the right experience for customers. We're constantly pushing

this in our professional training because without the human element, all the rest counts for nothing. There's massive complexity in doing this well because it extends from a customer's first phone call to saying, "Goodbye. Come back soon." When we get both things right- connecting the tools and the people- then our staff can really engage customers with attitude and spirit. They feel proud of what they're doing; they like being winners. And at the end of the day, that really matters. After all, we fly exactly the same planes as everybody else. We fly them under the same very strict safety rules. Yet if you go on one of our planes and experience the service, you'll see it's very different from many others.....

An invitation

We welcome companies to become Corporate Members of "Custommerce Service Excellence Foundation" and strengthen the partnership towards Service Excellence.

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Catalyst for Service Excellence



TVS Logistics Services Limited

Meet a Member

(Member - Customer Service Excellence Foundation)

TVS Logistics is more than a strategic partner to OEMs in providing end-to-end supply chain solutions

TVS Logistics was started as a business unit of T V Sundram Iyengar & Sons Ltd and was later established as a separate company named TVS Logistics Services Limited (TVSLSL) in December 2004.

TVS Logistics has an annual turnover of over Rs. 1,200 crores and controls about 3 million sq. ft. of warehouse space in India. With operations in UK, Spain, Thailand, USA, Germany and China, through warehouses located in 79 locations both in India and abroad. Through joint ventures mentioned in the above countries, TVS Logistics provides seamless supply-chain solutions to its clients. TVS Logistics has been considered as the best choice for low-cost sourcing and complete logistics management of automotive components from India.

Key highlights of TVS Logistics Services Ltd.:

- Over 16 years of rich experience in managing warehouse operations
- Strength of over 7000-strong headcount
- Fleet volume exceeding 800 in supporting material handling solutions
- Daily average of 650 trips to support milk-run activities for OEMs
- Around 950 vehicles plying on road, with the option of GPS tracking facility to meet the line haul activities

Services Offered:

- Transportation solutions including inbound / outbound logistics and milk-run collections
- Warehouse management solutions in-plant, spare parts warehouse & export KD pack plant.
- Freight management solutions
- Asset-based management solutions
- Materials management solutions



Mr. S. Ravichandran
Executive Director
TVS Logistics Services Ltd.

What does Customer-Centricity mean in a logistics company?

Ravichandran: Though we have many operations departments like transportation, warehousing, asset management, etc, with respect to the customer, he deals mostly with our "Customer Manager". The Customer Manager's job is to own the customer and represent them within the company. He is fully involved in all the stages, almost from the order negotiation stage. He is also responsible for overall customer satisfaction, including profitability. Hence commitments are realistic and because of his close interaction with the customer, he understands the customer's pain areas. He builds credibility with the customer over a period of time as a dependable and reliable partner. This is possible only if we are truly customer focused and become a partner in offering solutions. The Customer Manager is the face of the organisation though we actually service the customer through the various functional or specialised departments. Even in terms of responsibility and evaluation, the Customer Manager is responsible for overall profitability with respect to that customer whereas the operations departments are evaluated based on operational efficiency parameters. In terms of sales, we may look for new customers for existing services as well as try to enlarge the scope of our services to the existing customer. In this, the role of the Customer Manager is very high. In fact there are customers where we have enlarged the scope and volume to even 100 times our initial volume. Thus Customer-Centricity is as important in a B-to-B transaction and Customer Manager can be a tool to bring that focus.