



# e-impensa News Updates

Cost Management – Supplier Reduction – Customer Care and Service

Interim Management

## What is Customer Service?

For many people it is as simple as running your business well – do that and you automatically provide good customer service!

Customer service is the sum total of what an organisation does to meet customer expectations and produce customer satisfaction".

At the very least, your organisation should have systems in place to find out what customers expect of you and what would make them happy with the service you are providing.

There are many models of customer service but all agree that organisations should have clear answers to the following basic questions:

- Do customers have a clear idea of the service they can expect from you?
- Do you gather high quality information about your customers and what they want on a regular basis?
- Can you be contacted easily?
- Do you have competent and well trained staff?
- Do you respond quickly to queries and requests?
- Have you made it easy for customers to complain and make suggestions about the quality of your services?
- Do you involve your customers in the development of products and services?

The next question is always - How can I do **all** of these things better?

Customer service can be used as a framework to look at all aspects of your business:

- Image and presentation
- Promotion of services
- Contact and communication with customers
- Service delivery
- Monitoring and improving services
- Resolving customer problems
- Customer relationship management

Are you happy that all of these aspects of your business are as effective as they could be?

Key to customer service is getting all members of your organisation to embrace it through training and development, at individual and team level. Creating a **culture** of customer satisfaction starts with effective

management and leadership and having clear measures for customer satisfaction in all aspects of the business.

This can be encouraged through:

- Creating your own Customer Charter or Code of Practice
- Benchmarking your activities against other organisations
- Creating and monitoring specific measures of customer satisfaction

Good customer service is the lifeblood of any business. You can offer promotions and slash prices to bring in as many new customers as you want, but unless you can get some of those customers to come back, your business won't be profitable for long.

Good customer service is all about bringing customers back. And about sending them away happy - happy enough to pass positive feedback about your business along to others, who may then try the product or service you offer for themselves and in their turn become repeat customers.

If you're a good salesperson, you can sell anything to anyone once. But it will be your approach to customer service that determines whether or not you'll ever be able to sell that person anything else. The essence of good customer service is forming a relationship with customers – a relationship that that individual customer feels that he would like to pursue.

How do you go about forming such a relationship?

By remembering the one true secret of good customer service and acting accordingly; "You will be judged by what you do, not what you say." I know this verges on the kind of statement that's often seen on a sampler, but providing good customer service IS a simple thing. If you truly want to have good customer service, all you have to do is ensure that your business consistently does these things:

### **1) Answer your phone.**

Get call forwarding. Or an answering service. Hire staff if you need to. But make sure that someone is picking up the phone when someone calls your business. (Notice I say "someone". People who call want to talk to a live person, not a fake "recorded robot"

### **2) Don't make promises unless you will keep them.**

Not plan to keep them. Will keep them. Reliability is one of the keys to any good relationship, and good customer service is no exception. If you say, "Your new bedroom furniture will be delivered on Tuesday", make sure it is delivered on Tuesday. Otherwise, don't say it. The same rule applies to client appointments, deadlines, etc.. Think before you give any promise - because nothing annoys customers more than a broken one.

### **3) Listen to your customers.**

Is there anything more exasperating than telling someone what you want or what your problem is and then discovering that that person hasn't been paying attention and needs to have it explained again?

From a customer's point of view, I doubt it. Can the sales pitches and the product babble. Let your customer talk and show him that you are listening by making the appropriate responses, such as suggesting how to solve the problem.

### **4) Deal with complaints.**

No one likes hearing complaints, and many of us have developed a reflex shrug, saying, "You can't please all the people all the time". Maybe not, but if you give the complaint your attention, you may be able to please this one person this one time - and position your business to reap the benefits of good customer service.

### **5) Be helpful - even if there's no immediate profit in it.**

Assist your customers even if you are not going to make a profit out of the transaction. Small things matter and if it is not going to cost you anything albeit a little bit of time you have given your customer something they need for free. They will remember it and come back for repeat business.

### **6) Train your staff (if you have any) to be always helpful, courteous, and knowledgeable.**

Do it yourself or hire someone to train them. Talk to them about good customer service and what it is (and isn't) regularly. Most importantly, give every member of your staff enough information and power to make those small customer-pleasing decisions, so he never has to say, "I don't know, but so-and-so will be back at..."

### **7) Take the extra step.**

Please and thank you are the basics. Go that little extra mile. Show the customer you care about their needs. It costs nothing but makes a world of difference. If they are looking for something do not just point them in the right direction, take them there. If they are unsure on a product or service, explain to them the details giving the good points and the bad points. Do not sell them goods or products just to make your numbers up. They will bring them back and you are back to stage one again.

### **8) Throw in something extra.**

Whether it's a coupon for a future discount, additional information on how to use the product, or a genuine smile, people love to get more than they thought they were getting. And don't think that a gesture has to be large to be effective. If you apply these eight simple rules consistently, your business will become known for its good customer service. And the best part? The irony of good customer service is that over time it will bring in more new customers than promotions and price slashing ever did!