

Is It Time For A Customer Service Audit?

by
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From the youngest customer to the oldest, from the smallest purchase to the largest, or the loudest complainer to the silent purchaser - what do your customers really think of you?

Were they served well? Did they enjoy their experience while in your business, or did they become so frustrated that they left without even a purchase - or worse yet, another horror story to tell their friends and family?

The past 30 days have been a real eye opener for me. I have tried to do business with a variety of companies from single operators working from their home to multi-franchise operations and it's been the same horrific experience.

At 10.17am one Friday morning I was told by a large camera store they can't cash my \$100 bill and that I should put my \$11.01 purchase on a credit card. When I told them I chose not to put it on a credit card and that I felt that certainly with 4-6 registers in the store they must be able to make change, I was told NO by a manger, in no uncertain terms. Their attitude was, if you want this picture you deal with our rules and right now that means cash isn't good enough here.

I left without my picture and vowed to write a very detailed letter of the 3 horrific experiences at this one store, send it to the manager and never to shop there again. I also vowed to put them in my Customer Service story file for the *"how not to treat customers and future customers."*

It doesn't seem to get any better with small operators either. I need to have my printer repaired and needed it useable in 3-4 hours. So, I called someone from three yellow pages that did on-site printer repairs. "The expert in Laser Printer repairs!

Within 3 minutes of looking at the printer he replied that he had the wrong part with him and had to take the printer back to the shop. "Okay, when would I get it back?"

"Well, by 2-3 pm this afternoon" was his reply.

If he couldn't fix it he'd give me a replacement to use till he could get mine fixed. Reluctantly I said okay. By 2.00pm he'd not been back to his home office and hadn't even started to repair my printer.

By 3.00pm he'd called and said some part was needed that he didn't have (a major part - you'd think the "expert" would carry in his shop.) So I'd need to use his loaner. He'd bring it by for another \$20.00 house call. "No thanks, I'll pick it up."

Upon arriving at his home office he proceeded to tell me what is wrong with the printer and when I asked how much would the repairs cost he replied "somewhere between \$130 - \$180."

"Are you crazy?" The printer now could be purchased new for under \$200.00. Why would I pay for you to fix it for that amount? Once he calmed me down he said "well take the loaner and I won't charge you for it or the normal 2 cents a copy." Am I insane? He promised to fix my machine on the spot, within a couple of hours and now I've got a ridiculous bill and he's not going to charge me for the loaner?

It turned out that the loaner was so old it didn't have enough memory to print any of the documents I needed. So I left for Florida without the material and spent 2 hours in a copy shop trying to get the originals I desperately needed.

Lesson learned. Get everything in writing; believe little of what you read and never let anyone take something from your home without a written estimate and a guarantee of delivery.

I realize not every business is like this, but do you really know what your customers think of you? How clean are your bathrooms? How friendly and helpful is your staff? What does your front yard look like? All of these make an impression - one that lasts.

I'm amazed at how poor customer service in general has gotten to be in America. I will not shop at stores where the service is bad. I don't care how great their merchandise is at the time or how cost effective; the savings are simply not worth the costs.

As a businessperson in very competitive times, you need loyal customers who refer other people to you if you plan on doing business face to face. Otherwise someone who **does** make your shoppers happy will take them away with minimum ease. Even now as the Internet grows daily by leaps and bounds - no business is safe from savvy marketers who know what the buying population wants and needs.

It's time to do a customer service audit throughout every area of your business. How much will it cost? Less than \$5.00 for most companies.

Simply buy 1 or 2 packs of colored index cards and ask every staff member to write on the cards 5 single words that describe how they feel when doing their job. Make it anonymous so everyone participates. Remember, I said "*feelings*" not job description words.

Then over a one month period ask every customer who comes into your place to write 5 single words that describe the service they have received.

Not a sentence, just 5 single words - positive or negative - whatever they think. We've had words like awesome, great, slow, mean, dirty, rude, wonderful, and so on.

Whatever your staff write will tell you the service they give. Negative feelings generally give negative service. Positive feelings give positive service.

Whatever your customers write will tell you exactly what *they* think they're getting. In the customer service arena, ***perception is reality.***

This audit can be done in any department with any focus for the question. Delivery times and service, telephone service, cleanliness, staff response time, and so on.

Just remember *one question* at a time, and just 5 single words. It's easy, it's fast and it's *really* inexpensive to do.

One last tip. Have a lock box made for the cards to be put in. That way you have a better chance of all answers reaching you rather than just the good ones. When you have the staff do it, have them complete it and put it into the box while you are there. That avoids one person giving everyone words to use.

This private, cost effective and simple practice is one audit that has saved thousands for many companies I've worked with and is one I'm sure will save you headaches and hassles in the future!

KAZ is an international speaker, author, consultant and coach who focuses on working with people who want to **BE** more and organizations that want to **DO** more. For a free booklist, more articles or a copy of **KAZ's** speaking topics simply visit www.CompetitiveBalance.com and let us know how we can help you.