

October 2015

Respect – Secret to Great Customer Service

How many times have we seen it? A company, small or large, decides to change direction or simply target a specific audience. It may want to target the high end well-to-do clientele, or simply change its product mix. Another may decide to leave the country altogether, deemed too small or the wrong market for its products. A change in direction or targeting a specific group of clients is done for many good reasons, however, there is no good reason for poor customer service. Some real-life scenarios to contemplate:

The High-End: Recently in Sydney, a traditional pub decided to introduce stricter dress codes and (by all reports) banned the hi-vis worker's uniform. In principal, nothing too wrong with the idea, in fact, considering the inner city location, it had a lot of merit. Become a more presentable establishment and attract a more up market clientele by introducing better dress standards. The unfortunate part with this strategy was that management did not communicate it well and the media had a field day. The hi-vis uniform ban was perceived to be an act of class discrimination against all blue collar workers.

A Larger Audience: The A-League football competition had its inaugural season in 2005. Prior to this, the top level football in Australia was the NSL, made up of ethnic-based clubs such as Marconi (Italian), Sydney United (Croatian), Sydney Olympic (Greek), etc. It was believed this only attracted people from those backgrounds, resulting in poor and often racially hostile crowds. So the A-league was born with new clubs devoid of any ethnic ties and designed to appeal to a much broader audience. In the main it has worked well, however, they left behind a lot of disgruntled NSL club supporters – foundation fans of the game, who felt they had been disrespected and ignored. A lost opportunity to bring those fans along, all great advocates and supporters of the game.

The Nuisance Sale: You know the one I'm referring to – typical Joe Public who wanders in and purchases a \$10 item which costs the company \$15 just to process the paperwork. A lot of organisations will abruptly state there is a minimum order value and provide little to no option on how else the client can purchase the product they've been buying for many years. It makes perfect business sense to eliminate this type of loss-making transaction but it makes no sense to alienate these traditional loyal clients – walking, talking billboards. It makes perfect sense to courteously communicate well in advance and provide suitable options.

The Tyrekicker: As a child, I'd go to the Sydney Markets with my dad, a farmer who sold his produce directly to greengrocers. His produce was excellent. My dad had many great traits but customer service wasn't one of them. I specifically remember when certain potential clients would rock up and start handling the vegetables with what I perceived to be a strong intent to purchase. I'd look at my dad and motion to do his stuff. His gaze would only budge momentarily away from his Italian paper. Not interested. Why? He made a call that this guy couldn't afford his produce. The potential walked off. He could not know for sure and he didn't. A lost opportunity to convert another, another's friend, another another's friend and so on, and so on.

CEOs and business owners are constantly looking at ways to target the market which allows them to maximize their margins and build a sustainable business in an ever-changing world. This is necessary. But always keep in mind your clients, current and potential. Yes, it's true you will not mind if the non-targeted/nuisance/low value customers all move on – after all, you have factored that into your plan. But, what you do not want is an army of disgruntled ex-customers or wannabe customers bad-mouthing your brand – especially in this age of social media. Plan, consult and communicate well. Treat all clients with respect, try to keep them all on board but if you can't or they just don't fit the new model, fine. Respect them, communicate well and provide alternatives – if they can't be clients, they'll be great ambassadors of your brand. Renovate and build but don't damage the foundations.

Joe Napoli, Principal Consultant, NLogic Management Services