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Here's how to take your customer service from good to great

As we all know good customer service is the lifeline of any business. And providing it right every time decides whether you will stay in business for the long term.

M MUNEER | FEBRUARY 03, 2021 / 01:48 PM IST



Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay

In the aftermath of pandemic lockdown, many companies across industries including real estate, automobiles and others offered lower prices including GST. Lower prices apart, how many of these companies provide at least a bare minimum level of service? More often than not we are faced with not even the basic levels of service.

Telecom companies dropping our calls and making money on number of calls, hotels not waking up on time but yet having a long list of pillow choices in a menu card at the bedside, furniture sellers delivering items one week later than the promised delivery date, the list goes on.

When majority of our innovation is in copy-paste mode, we would have imagined the same to happen in service as well, right?

Exceptions are there, as always. But even for these good companies that deliver good service, sadly only a few amongst these have any incentive to deliver great customer service. As we all know good customer service is the lifeline of any business.

And providing it right every time decides whether you will stay in business for the long term.

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A company must do promotions and special offers to bring in as many customers as possible, but unless it can get some of those customers to come back, business will not be profitable for long. Worse, these companies who cannot deliver a good service should stay away from promotions since they will be publicising to new prospects, "Come, experience our lousy service!"

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What differentiates great customer service from good customer service? It is simply all about bringing customers back, and about seeing them off happier. Good customer service is a must for customers to come to you without major advertisements or promotions. But great customer service makes you profitable.

A great service company such as Emirates, Singapore Airlines or Marriot genuinely wants their customers to be happy in order to spread positive feedback about them, so that new customers may then try their service, and become repeat customers.

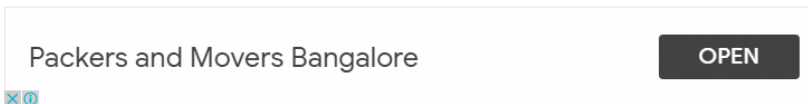


The essence of great customer service is all about sealing a relationship with individual customers and keeping them coming back again and again. Here are some ideas to move your good customer service to great (pardon me, Jim Collins):

Pay attention to what your customers say. Great service companies do this diligently. This means going beyond the sales pitch and understanding what the customer really needs. Unlike many companies we see around us in India, you should let your customer talk and show her that you are listening by displaying empathy. When your customer really feels that she has been listened to and you have empathised with her problems, she will tell at least 4 friends face-to-face and 100 in social media about the great service you have provided!

Pick up your phone promptly, and in case of automation, with least complicated IVR (Interactive Voice Response) systems. Today most companies use technology to deal with customer service. Citibank used to have 12 levels of IVR before a customer can reach a service representative. Nothing is more frustrating for a customer than being waited for 10 minutes to get to speak to someone. For really great customer service, have call forwarding, a two or three level IVR, and well-trained staff. You need to have someone to pick up the phone when someone calls your business. One of the reasons for the failure of Reliance Telecom in its first avatar was the long IVR process.

Be reliable. If you make a promise, make sure that it is delivered. Nothing frustrates a customer more than a broken promise. If you have told him that you would get a response or callback within 24 hours, you should ensure that. A DTH TV service provider promised me a resolution of my low signal issue within 48 hours and when I called after two days, the rep says they meant six working days of 8 hours each! Do you think anyone will ever trust a company that misleads you?



Be responsive and responsible. Train your customer service reps and other frontline employees to be responsive to all callers. You should remind them what great service is all about and what is not. Most importantly, you need to give every member of your staff enough information and power to make quick decisions in a given situation. At Marriott, even the bellboy can approve a room upgrade if he decides the customer has been inconvenienced in some way and is unhappy about it. Apart from all that, you also need to train your staff on how to deal with complaints.

Try to be helpful always even if there is no immediate business gain. Remember what Nordstrom, the premium retail chain in the USA known for its exemplary customer service, did? They have a very liberal return policy. And their sales force will even giftwrap an item you have purchased from their competitor, free of charge! Really great customer service means going beyond just making money. Remember that if you can be helpful to just one customer in an extraordinary way, she will spread the word far and wide. The legend is that, at Nordstrom, customer is indeed always right! What more can you do for great service!

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M MUNEER is the managing director of CustomerLab Solutions, an innovative consulting firm delivering measurable results to clients.

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FIRST PUBLISHED: FEB 3, 2021 01:48 PM

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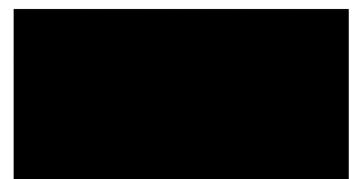


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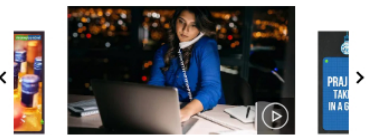
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