

MANAGING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

BY

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INTRODUCTION

In any commercial organization, marketing is the bedrock of business. Though in the last few years, we have seen that marketing is being embraced even in non-commercial organizations like Churches, Schools, professional Training Centres, Hospitals, professional firms etc, but not in all cases are people practicing what is known as marketing. Marketing started from early man.

The Institute of Marketing defined marketing as: “The management function which organizes and directs all those business activities involved in assessing and converting customer purchasing power into effective demand for a specific product or service, and in moving the product or service to the final consumer or user so as to achieve the profit target or other objectives set by the company.”

The consumer is the ultimate in marketing. The consumer is the customer; he is the one that justifies all efforts of production. Without the customer, organizations are not in business. If consumers are not satisfied, they will not buy the product. Products may be tangible and intangible. As much as it is important be satisfying the consumer, that is the customer, it is also important that the company should be making profit from the whole deal since it is not offering a social service.

Organizations, should embrace the concept by Hung Davidson. In his book titled ‘Offensive Marketing’, he says offensive marketing “obliges a company to innovate continually, to plan what is best for number one, rather than following competition, and to respond to competitors’ moves by counterattack, not by imitation”. In its ideal form, it is profitable, offensive, integrated, strategic and effectively executed. At the risk of gimmickry, but in the greater course of good reader, recall that these five aspects can be summarized by the word; P-O-I-S-E:

‘P for profitable: proper balance between firms’ and consumers’ needs;

‘O for offensive: must lead market and make competitors followers;

‘I for integrated; marketing approach must permeate the whole company;

‘S for strategic: action related to long and short-term strategic plan;

‘E for effectively executed: speaks for itself.

“Marketing involves balancing the company, the integration of the organization and an exchange between the company and the consumer which is mutual. Because firms are offering services, the customer must pay for the services.

THE MIX:

Marketing mix means marketing strategies. The marketing person is used to the four Ps in marketing, which are:

- a. Product
- b. Place
- c. Price
- d. Promotion

That is the four angels on which marketing relies to succeed.

DEVELOPING TOOLS OF MARKETING:

Marketing is concerned with human beings, not about animals. In this introduction, let us take a look at the Maslow Hierarchy of needs, which includes:

- a. Basic physiological needs – They concern the bodily comfort and basic economic needs like food, clothing, shelter etc.
- b. Safety needs – Things that can protect human beings from danger,
- c. The need for recognition – To be accepted and loved,
- d. Ego – satisfying needs – For self esteem
- e. Self – fulfillment needs – Things that satisfy ambition and personal development.

A product can do more than one of the above. The modern marketer has learnt to follow the Maslow hierarchy of needs.

WHAT IS ADVERTISING?

The Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) defines advertising as “a form of communication through the media about products, services and for ideas paid for by a sponsor”. Advertising is used in all marketing efforts; it is very difficult to sell a product without the use of advertising.

Advertising is used for the following reasons:

- a) To launch a product;
- b) To announce a service;
- c) To promote a public service cause;
- d) To maintain sales of established products
- e) To attract new buyers;
- f) To secure an edge over competition;
- g) For direct selling;
- h) To introduce new package;
- i) To announce price change;
- j) To announce change in office location;
- k) To recruit staff;
- l) To make special offer;
- m) To invite inquires;
- n) To maintain sales lead;
- o) To remind consumer of existence of a product or service.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

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So long as you relate with the public, and you have something to get from the people, then you need public relations. It is a way of life. 'It is deliberate, planned and sustained efforts, to establish and maintain mutual understanding and good will between an organization and its public, (The Institute of Public Relations). From time to time we have a number of publics we must deal with which include:

- (1) The Customers
- (2) The Employees
- (3) The Shareholders
- (4) The Potential Employees
- (5) The Government
- (6) The Money Market
- (7) The Supplier of Services
- (8) The Opinion Leaders

The list can actually go on.

SALES PROMOTION:

Means activities rather than advertising, publicity and personal selling – which stimulate the interest of the customers in the company. These may include: Banners; Calendars; Coupons; Trade Fairs; Posters; Catalogues; Contests e.t.c.

PRODUCT LIFE CYCLE:

The Product Life Cycle has continued to play an important role in marketing of goods and services. A good organization must be able to monitor the Life-Cycle of her products. It is important because at a point the performance level of such product may be declining, but the company may not know why. If it is constantly monitoring the life cycle, it will know when it should 'pump in' more life into the product and when if necessary, it should drop the product from the product line. Unless it thinks that it has earned enough money from the product, and that there is no way it can pump more value into product, it is not advisable that it allows the product to die.

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BRANDING

William J. Stanton in his book, 'Fundamentals of Marketing' says: "The word brand is comprehensive. The word is a comprehensive term, and it includes other narrower terms. A brand is a name, term, symbol, or special design, or some combination of these elements, that is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers. A brand differentiates one seller's products or services from those of some competitors. A brand name consists of words, letters, and or numbers that can be vocalized. A brand mark is the part of the brand that appears in the form of a symbol, design, or distinctive coloring or lettering. It is recognized by sight but is not expressed when a person pronounces the brand name. Tide, Cadillac, and Monsanto are brand names. Brand marks are illustrated by gentleman on Quaker oat products and the red star of Texaco petroleum products."

Because a firm determines the taste of the consumer, then its brand must have some characteristics that will sustain the product. It cannot force its brand on the consumer. Branding is applicable in both tangible and intangible goods. But what it means is that the consumer is not satisfied unless the brand is available. A firm's service could be dry cleaning and that could be a brand. Just as a drink or a food item could be a brand.

The brand must suggest something about the product's characteristics, that is, some elements in the product. Once the brand clicks in the mind of the consumer, then it becomes a taste, anything less than that is not a brand. The customer is only loyal to the brand that can satisfy him. That is why we have brand loyalists. A college could be a brand. A flight on Virgin Atlantic is a brand; a meal in Mr. Biggs is a brand. It perhaps has its own uniqueness, environment and so on.

Every product must have a name and the name must be easy to pronounce. Without a name customers cannot identify what they want to buy in many cases. A name must not be corrupt, and must not offend the customers, otherwise they will not buy. A name must be easy to pronounce, must be short and must be presentable.

A firm must be able to distinguish its products from other products. And it must be able to register the name legally. 'Omo', a brand of detergent has been a household name for a long time in Nigeria, and as such could even be generic to some people who feel that all detergent has something to do with 'Omo'. 'Coca Cola' has created great brand over the years and 'Semovita' from Flour Mills of Nigeria is also a great brand.

Firms must be determined to create a brand that will last even in the face of competition and challenges as expected in the market place. Every product can be turned into a household product, but it takes effort from conception to delivery of the products to achieve such objective. All of the processes must be properly monitored and thoroughly delivered.

Complacency kills a product. Once the firm is complacent, the product is on its way out. The vision of the product, must be pursued. However, since the product is meant for customers, they must be carried along. A firm cannot produce products because family members feel it is great. They may buy, but their contribution is minimal. **The customer** must say it is right. Brand loyalty must be created from the product. If the **customer** is loyal to the brand it is great gain. Packaging is also important in managing a product. The package must be good, it must be attractive enough, it must protect the product, it must distinguish the product and it must also be unique and must not go as passing off, which is something that looks like package of another product. Branding is part of total marketing concept. Therefore other variable must be in place.

PERSONAL SELLINGS SKILLS

Selling means, getting a customer to part with money or other exchangeable things of value. If not money, it could be materials and goodwill.

Everybody in a business environment must therefore be marketing skilled. It is importantly because for the overall objectives of the organization to be achieved marketing staff must be able to help the company to push its products.

No matter the department all work as a team to realize the objectives of the organization. The organization has stakeholders, who are important people to the overall growth of the company. They are the people who will be affected by the success or otherwise of the organization.

In all that organizations are doing they must be able to identify who the stakeholders are and work with them without being told to do so. There are certain things that are expected of them whether told or not. Companies are not expected to teach employees everything. So they must learn certain things on their own.

When marketing, proper assessment of the customer must be made. Customers may be in the following profile.

1. Very rich

2. Above average person
3. Average person
4. Low income earner
5. No income earner

Whatever category of **customer**, they have the same characteristics or traits. Some of them include:

- Arrogance
- Demanding
- Impatience

That is not to say that some customers are not nice, patient and humble. Be warned to expect the most absurd behavior from a customer but if the opposite, it is bonus.

SKILLS AND EXPECTATIONS

Marketing people are expected to possess the following skills to succeed;

1. Communication
2. Negotiation
3. Dressing well
4. Self confidence
5. Continuing education and self improvement
6. Patience
7. Relationship management and human relation
8. Ability to listen
9. Humility
10. Selling skills
11. Perseverance
12. Self Motivation
13. Ability to compete
14. High energy level
15. Knowledge of the industry
16. Knowledge of operating environment
17. Success driven
18. Time management skills
19. Stress management skills
20. Team spirit and loyalty to the company
21. Leadership skills

22. Self appraisal
23. Product knowledge
24. Planning
25. Public Relations
26. Honesty, focus and commitment.

CORPORATE IMAGE

We will get customers because we have a good image. Image is the responsibility of everybody, from the driver to the gate men to the boss. Everybody's role is important in determining the image of the organization. The failure of one person affects the whole organization. So every hand must be on deck. Everybody should be committed to the progress of the company always.

In crisis or very tough situation everyone must come together to defend the organization. Colleagues should help one another to achieve the overall objectives of the organization. Everyone should stand for good things. There will be harvest time for good things. But sowing comes before reaping.

One should get himself accustomed with the products of the organization so that when people ask about the organization he will be able to discuss authoritatively.

The customer is the king. He is the one that brings the money to buy the product, he has worked hard for that money expectedly therefore he is proud of his exploit – i.e. earning the money, spending it is a pleasure for him, but he also wants the seller to relate well with him to spend it to buy a product or products from him.

The ability to relate well with him will determine whether he will come back or not. Ability to keep a smile in the face of provocation will make him to respect the company.

Ability to melt a very hard person will not only earn respect but will also earn reward for the company. Nothing will go unnoticed even when we think they are not noticed. Professionalism means commitment to performance and following the entire laid down rule.

Employees should not engage in self pity, and should avoid running down their organization, so that the public will respect them and the organization. Employees who wish to leave the organization should do so honourably without creating bad image of a firm from where they had earned a living. This leaves good record for further future interaction in areas of mutual interests and benefits. In life, some people are better than others and one should resist the temptation of running down

colleagues as a result of envy and jealousy. It is better to aspire to be the best without running others down. Cheerfulness and friendliness are invaluable attributes of a good marketer.

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER

Firms should think ahead of their customers, and get to know the customers more than they know themselves by doing a SWOT analysis on them.

S = strengths

W = weaknesses

O = opportunities

T = threats.

The understanding of this will enable organizations manage competently, diverse scenarios that may arise in the course of doing business. For each product the USP must be clearly identified by the marketers;

U = unique

S = selling

P = proposition

The understanding of the unique selling proposition of a commodity puts the marketer in a position to help the customer and satisfies him or her. In doing this, ego conflict must be avoided. The customer is allowed to talk freely and massage his ego as much as he wants; the marketer merely defends his own ego, but should never get angry with the customer. He should be calm whenever provoked and save himself the pains of reacting to provocation which is in a daily occurrence. The understanding of the customer helps in preparing to satisfy him. There must be proper and sincere communications between firms and their customers. Proper communication and presentation will;

- Arouse interests
- Create desire
- Generate conviction and
- Propel action

Marketing is not complete until payment is made.

Once the customer is known then he is prepared for, and adequate communication pattern is established with him. Communication means sending message and receiving feedback.

Marketers play key roles to manufacturers and businesses and in national development. They must realize the importance of their roles in national development and put in unrivalled commitment.

A business is set-up to serve the customer and nothing else. A business without a customer is a dead business that may not even be attractive to the sympathetic undertakers.

Kit Sadgrove, in his remarkable book 'Making TQM Work' says Customers are the people who buy the product – right? Well, that is partly right. In TQM, there are two types of customers. There are external customers. The most important people in the universe. And there are internal customers, the people in the organization who get products or services from someone else in the firm.'

ADDING VALUE

The external customer is the person who is interested in parting with his money to the product. He is responsible for making the product system function.

He only buys when he is satisfied. And consideration is given to what will make him to be satisfied. Every firm is in direct competition with rival organizations providing similar services always. No customer loyalty can be kept when there is no satisfaction.

The customer will only patronize the product if he can find it. It has been established that no customer will go out of his/her way to please a supplier.

An average customer is arrogant. He is aware of his/her position in the scheme of things. He has worked so hard to reach that position. He is parting with his/her hard-earned money. Firms must measure up to the expectation of customers always. One cannot afford to be arrogant to the customer. The customer has a choice.

Getting a customer and keeping the customer is a very difficult thing. But if proper process is followed that will be achievable with minimal stress.

Imagine a sales person fighting a customer, is it not odd? It is better for such a person to choose any profession where he or she can use the fighting skill, like boxing or judo.

No matter what, one must maintain calmness in front of a customer even if provoked. We do not have perfect human beings and nobody should use his own standards to measure behavior of other people.

Even when turning down customer, it should be done politely, let him know that in future he can still do business with the company, even if not directly, but being polite to him will surely offer another opportunity, while rudeness may close other opportunities.

Since the customer is that person who is willing to exchange his resources or money for goods or services, customer care is key to marketing management. Several times as a marketing person one will encounter very difficult customers, and most times still end up becoming friends. Psychologically many customers feel they are doing the company a favour, and if not the company, they can patronize other businesses.

Since nowadays no business seems to be enjoying monopoly, so care must be exercised not to offer the customer option of not patronizing the firm. The business could be anything from banking to bakery. But the most important thing is to remain in that business.

In a way, organizations may still encounter a customer somewhere else, the same customer turned away may need to buy some shares in the company tomorrow. Human memory could be short, but people tend to keep bad things in mind.

Sadly, some people do not have a forgiving spirit. No matter what, such people want to have their **pound of flesh** and that is that.

It has to be noted that customer relations is not only for marketing people. All departments that come across the customer must be involved. Everyone working in a business enterprise is also working to satisfy the customer.

Therefore, it is imperative that staff are trained in the art of customer relations, using experts in customer relations' programmes. As an extension, organizations should also acquire journals, books and multi-media stuff like video, audio cassettes that can help personnel to learn basic things in customer relations.

Organizations must ensure that they communicate with the customers always. Advertising will help in achieving this and also employing services of public relations to handle media relations tools.

The customers must know the products available and must before buying the product know what the product can do for them.

A physical product will appeal to customer if it is well packaged. Packaging will help the customer to pick the product in the first place. The package that can really please a customer is determined and made available to him. The packaging should not offend the customer in anyway, whether through colour or handling.

The customer must know where the product can be purchased. Sometimes some products are not sold because the customer cannot find where to buy the product. He can make do with the alternative.

Organizations should participate in activities that will bring them into contact with the customer always. Exhibitions or trade fairs could be an avenue for such. If participating in an exhibition, organizations should ensure that they get good personnel to man their stands.

Good intentions may be messed up by bad personnel. So care must be taken by organizations to ensure that personnel managing the stands are well briefed, and make sure also that products are seen where they are supposed to be seen. The shows must be standard, to avoid messing up the organization's image.

In shows that will attract customers rooms should be created for demonstration of the products. Let the expert be there to do the demonstrations for the customers.

Sometimes the use of media relations techniques like; photography, news conference, news release, media facility visits, feature articles, media briefing and so on will help to achieve set objectives.

No organization knows everything, and so may need the services of experts to achieve result in media strategy. If documentary films will be too expensive, consideration should be given to video production, which may not be that expensive. But the need for such must be determined before embarking on it.

Occasionally, customer's forum should be held. It is supposed to be social forum to interact with the customers. But in the process of doing that, organizations are making points; they may be solving a whole lot of customer's problems through such forum.

The way complaints from customers are handled will show how serious the company is in keeping the customers. The lodging of complaints by customers should not be taken badly, even if the complaints indict the company. The customer must be listened to and ensure that he is retained.

In retail outlet that keeps suggestion boxes in strategic locations, they should be checked always to know when a message is there.

Customers may need guarantee on product purchase. They should be given guarantee, but with check on all the legal implications attached to the guarantee, to avoid loose guarantee that will make the firm face litigation from different angles.

Some products will require after sales services, for such it must be provided. No one will buy an oven if he or she cannot be sure of getting it serviced here or getting the spare part there. If importing such products, provision must be made for technical back-up from the producers. And good provision for after sales services.

Things like brochure, leaflets or handbills should be provided to inform and educate the customers. They must be well produced. They do not have to be expensive, but they must be neatly produced, properly proof-read and edited.

The customers must know how they can reach the company. Hotline contacts must be left in the media being used by the company.

The customers can also be invited for work-visit to the premises. Let them see where the product is being produced, if possible they should meet people who are possibly working on such product.

Good contact must be maintained with dealers and distributors of the products. Dealers or distributors are part of the operational strategic planning. They meet the customers always. So they must be kept in contact with, and ensure that they get all the support that will keep good relationship going. Conferences should be organized for them and as often as necessary, they should be invited for meetings and to social get-togethers. They should be helped to train their staff and be supported with sales promotional materials.

Gifts can be given to customers. Gift has a way of keeping firms in the mind of people. It also sends signal that the firm cares.

When engaging in personal selling to the customers, he must not be over tasked. The customers are interested in doing other things. So the need for brief presentation always.

A product to satisfy a customer must satisfy the need of the customer. It means that enough research must be done to achieve these objectives. Sometime idea of a product can even come from the customers. It means that always the customers must be listened to. A study should be made of the gap that is existing in the product delivery at the moment.

The place where the customers are met must satisfy the following.

- a. Bringing the buyers and the sellers into contact.
- b. Offering choice of goods
- c. Getting the customers to patronize the products.
- d. Having acceptable price.
- e. Making constant sales.
- f. Providing back-up services-like advisory services.

Communication with customer is important always. This is either dubbed promotion or advertising which means paid form of communication to achieve marketing objectives of the business.

A good communication must be planned with the customer. There must be feedback always from the communication. Wrong message will send wrong signal to the customer. Sending wrong signals to customers must be avoided.

In relationship with customers, image is important. Image may be good or bad. But firms must endeavor to have good image always. Image may be premised on the following.

INTERNAL CUSTOMERS

The internal customer is staff of the organization. Kit Sadgrove on Making TQM Work Says “Every organization has internal customers. These are the people who receive paid work, or who carry out the next stage of the production process.”

To succeed in dealing with them firms must understand them. Communication is key here too. Let’s look at some factors that may help to relate well with the internal customers.

1. Meetings
2. Training

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4. Shop-floor talk
5. Relationship Building and management
6. Negotiation
7. Planning

Companies must be able to define the standard that will satisfy the external customers. Internal customers must be proactive. Staff turnover must be very low. A welfare policy must be put in place to help in motivating the internal customers.

The recruitment policy must be very good and devoid of discrimination. Firms should be able to meet the expectations of the internal customer. They are working with the organization to reach their own goals and the organization must not shy away from that fact.

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UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMER'S NEEDS, DESIRES, RIGHTS AND CULTURE

By

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INTRODUCTION

This paper would attempt to provide answers to the following questions:

- Who is the customer?
- What are the needs, desires, rights and culture of the customers?
- What are the challenges to manage the customer?

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- What are the Strategies for managing the customer? And
- What are the benefits derived from a well-managed customer?

2.0 **WHO IS A CUSTOMER?**

- Who are we producing and packaging products (goods or services) for? – the ultimate consumer or industrial users? A first timer or a regular user? A male or a female? Young or old? Etc.
- What is his socio-economic status – high or low? Rich or poor? Rational or irrational? Knowledgeable or non-knowledgeable, sensitive or not, etc.
- Where is he located – home or abroad? Urban or rural? Far or near?

It is important for every organization irrespective of its products/services, to identify who the customer is – who buys or patronizes its products. The need to know who the customer is can never be over-emphasized, since he is the:

- Reason for production/productive activities,
- Source of revenue, profit and growth of the organization,
- Major determinant of investment and production,
- Most important stakeholder in the business chain and
- Beginning and end of every business activity.

Marketing concept recognizes the customer as the reason for the existence of any business organization, and his satisfaction is the essence of production, whether of goods or services.

Gregory Stone, developed a now-famous topology in which shopping-goods customers were classified into four groups as follows:

1. The economizing customer: This customer wants to maximize the value obtained for his or her expenditures on time, efforts, and money. Is he or she a demanding and sometimes fickle customer, who looks for value that will test the competitive strength of the service firm in the market? Loss of these customers serves as an early warning of potential competitive threats.
2. The ethical customer: This customer feels a moral obligation to patronize socially responsible firms. Service firms that have developed a reputation for community services can create such a loyal customer base.
3. The personalizing customer: This customer wants interpersonal gratification, such as recognition and conversation, from the service experience. Greeting customers on a first-name basis always has been a staple of the

neighborhood family restaurant, but computerized customer files can generate a similar personalized experience when used skillfully by front-line personnel in many other businesses.

4. The convenience customer: This customer has no interest in shopping for the service; convenience is the secret to attracting him or her. Convenience customers often are willing to pay extra for personalized or hassle-free service; for example, supermarkets that provide home delivery may appeal to these customers.

The attitude of customers regarding their needs to control the product encounter was the subject of a study investigating customers' decision-making processes when they were confronted with the choice between a self-service option and the traditional full-service approach. Customers who were interviewed appeared to be using the following dimensions in their selection: (1) amount of time involved (2) customers' control of the situation (3) efficiency of the process (4) amount of human contact involved (5) risk involved (6) amount of effort involved and (7) customer's need to depend on others.

It is not surprising that customers who were interested in the self-service option found the second dimension (i.e. customer's control of the situation) to be the most important factor in choosing that option. The study was conducted over a variety of products, ranging from goods to services, from banks and gas stations to hotels and airlines.

3.0 CUSTOMERS NEEDS AND DESIRES

Arising from the above classifications are the customer's needs and desires:

- a. What does the customer need or want or desire?
- b. How does he want them – in what form and packaging?
- c. When does he want them? and
- d. Where does he want them?

The following questions must also be asked:

- What motivates the customers needs wants and desires, i.e. what determine his demand for a particular product?
 - a. Economic factors, e.g. income, price, competition, etc.
 - b. Psychological factor, e.g. perception, experience, attitudes, ego, etc.
 - c. Sociological factors “social class, reference group, status, etc.

- d. Cultural factors, e.g. race, religion, customs, electricity, etc.
- e. Spiritual factors, e.g. faith, belief, doctrine, etc.
- f. Other factors like legal, legislation and political factors.

The strongest argument for the customer's needs and desires is that investment, production and marketing should be contemplated and executed from the customer back to the factory rather than from the factory forward to the customer.

4.0 CUSTOMER'S RIGHTS

Customer's rights arise basically because of the fact that the requirement of marketing concept, to produce according to the satisfaction of customer's needs and desires are not fulfilled. In the absence of this and in the world of such business evils as poor quality, low standard, adulteration and faking, poor services and various trade malpractices, the customers has the right to:

- i. safety on use of a product,
- ii. protection against clear cut abuses e.g. cheating and outright fraud,
- iii. adequate information about a product and the producer,
- iv. protection against hazardous products / environment,
- v. legal and political protection and
- vi. protection against another customer.

In which ever case, it is imperative for the producers/service providers to begin to recognize and endeavour to meet such needs, desires and rights of the customer in order to win and retain him.

The determination of a customer's needs, desires and rights, and the motives behind his needs and desires enables an organization to:

- plan its production and marketing mix effectively and efficiently,
- brand its products and
- segment its market.

These are aimed at maximizing the satisfaction of the customer as well as the organizational goals.

5.0 CHALLENGES OF MANAGING THE CUSTOMER

The essence of understanding a customer and his needs is to enable the producer package the products to suit and meet his need and desires, with the intention of producing for the purpose of satisfying the customer, in order to grow the business.

This involves distinguishing a product from others with features such as: special taste, colours, brand/trade names/trade marks, packaging & labeling, location, etc, with a view to retaining the old customer as well as attracting a new/potential customer. This can be achieved through a well-articulated marketing mix and market segmentation.

5.1 MARKETING MIX

The needs of a customer are reflected on the following elements or Ps of marketing.

- i. **The Product Mix**
 - a. The product itself-a good or a service
 - b. The packaging
 - c. The branding
 - d. After sales services

- ii. **The Promotion Mix**
 - a. Personal selling
 - b. Sales promotion
 - c. Advertising
 - d. Public relations

- iii. **The Price Mix**
 - a. Product price
 - b. Prices of competing products
 - c. Discount allowed
 - d. Credit sales
 - e. Terms of payment

- iv. **The Place Mix**
 - a. Distribution channels and networks
 - b. Logistics modes
 - c. Frequency of supply to market
 - d. Attractiveness of location.

5.2 MARKET SEGMENTATION

In order to make marketing mix effective, there is need to segment the market i.e. divide the aggregative market into homogenous units, based on certain features, such as:

1. demographic factors such as age, sex, population composition and distribution, urban – rural distribution, family life cycle etc,
2. socio-economic factors such as level of income, education, employment status, level of economic development, etc,
3. socio-cultural factors such as racial composition, social class, religion, reference/peer group, Jones & Joneses, etc and
4. psychographic factors such as attitude, personality, motivation, etc.

The essence of market segmentation are as follows:

- a. designing and packaging a product for a particular market rather than for the aggregative market,
- b. channel resources to the most profitable market segment,
- c. determine the most effective promotional appeal and set appropriate time for the promotional activities and
- d. it is a customer-oriented way of looking at the market rather than the product-oriented way.

5.3 STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING THE CUSTOMER

Having identified who the customer is and what his needs, desires and rights are, the next question is, how do we manage the customer so as to retain him and possibly win others to our brands? Answers to this question are located in the following marketing strategies:

5.3.1 Standardizing a Customer Product/Service

Coke should be Coke, Pepsi should be Pepsi. If it is not Panadol, it cannot be like it. The key words here are standard quality, uniform quantity and routine.

5.3.2 Customizing the Standard Product

Providing a customized touch may endear a firm to its customers at very little cost. A hotel operator who is able to address a guest by name can make an impression that translates into repeat business. Hair salons have added many personalizing features (e.g personal stylist, juice, bar, relaxed surroundings, mood music) to differentiate themselves from barbershops. Tantalizer's effort to promote a made-to-order policy is an attempt to differentiate itself from Mr. Biggs make-to-stock approach to fast-food service.

5.3.3 Differentiation

The essence of the differentiation strategy lies in creating a service that is perceived as being unique. Approaches to differentiation can take many forms: brand image (e.g. Tastee Fried Chicken, Mr. Biggs, etc.), technology, features, customer and other dimensions. A differentiation strategy does not ignore costs, but its primary thrust lies in creating customer loyalty. As illustrated here, differentiation to enhance the service often is achieved at some cost that the targeted customer is willing to pay.

5.3.4 Making the Intangible Tangible

By their very nature, service often is intangible and leaves the customer with no physical reminder of the purchase. Recognizing the need to remind customers of the stay, many hotels now provide complimentary toiletry items with the hotel name prominently affixed.

5.3.5 Taking services Operations off-lines

Many services such as haircutting and passenger transportation are inherently “on-line”, because they can only be performed with the customer present. For services in which the customer need not be present, the service transaction can be “decoupled”, with some content performed “off-line”. For example, a dry-cleaning service could locate dispersed kiosks for customer drop-off / pick-up, thus consolidating orders for delivering to an off-site repair factory, which could even be located off-shore.

5.3.7 Reducing the Personal Element in Services Delivery

The potentially high-risk strategy of reducing the personal element in service delivery can be accepted by customers if increased convenience results. For example, convenient access to ATMs has weaned customers from personal interaction with live tellers and, consequently, has reduced transaction costs for banks.

5.3.8 Seeking Out Low-Cost Customers

Some customers cost less to serve than others, and they can be targeted by the service providers: for example, filing stations services. Another example of this strategy is provided by low-cost retailers such as cooperative societies, which target customers who are willing to buy in quantity, do without frills, and serve themselves.

5.3.9 Overall Cost leadership

An overall cost leadership strategy requires efficient-scale facilities, tight cost and overhead control, and often innovative technology as well. Having a low composition provides a defence against competition, because less efficient

competitors will suffer first from competitive pressures. Implementing a low-cost strategy usually requires high capital investment in state-of-the-art equipment, aggressive pricing, and start-up losses to build market share. A cost leadership strategy sometimes can revolutionize an industry, as illustrated by the success of MTN, Glo-mobile, NIPOST, etc. Moreover, service firms have been able to achieve low-cost leadership using variety of approaches.

6.0 CHECK-LIST ON PACKAGING PRODUCTS/SERVICES FOR THE CUSTOMER

- a. **Availability:** How accessible is the product/service? The use of ATMs by banks has created 24-hour availability of some banking services (i.e., services beyond the traditional “banker’s hours”).
- b. **Convenience:** The location of the service defines convenience for customers who must travel to that service. Gasoline stations, fast-food restaurants, and dry cleaners are examples of services that must select locations on busy streets if they are to succeed.
- c. **Dependability:** How reliable is the service? For example, after using a particular drug, does the sickness persist? A major complaint regarding automobile repair services is the failure to fix the problem on the first visit.
- d. **Personalization:** Are you treated as an individual? For example, hotels have discovered that repeat customers respond to being called by their names. The degree of customization allowed in providing the service, no matter how slight, can be viewed as more personalized service.
- e. **Price:** Competing on price is not as effective in services as it is with products, because it is often difficult to compare the costs of service objectively. It may be easy to compare costs in the delivery of routine services such as an oil change, but in professional services, competition on price might be considered counter-productive because price often is viewed as being a surrogate for quality.
- f. **Quality:** Service quality is a function of the relationship between a customer’s prior expectations of the service and his or her perception of the service experience both during and after the fact. Unlike product quality, service quality is judged by both the process of service delivery and the outcome of the service.
- g. **Reputation:** The uncertainty that is associated with the selection of a service provider often is resolved by talking with others about their experiences before a decision is made. Unlike a product, a poor service experience

cannot be exchanged or returned for a different model. Positive word-of-mouth is the most effective form of advertising.

- h. Safety: Well-being and security are important considerations, because in many services, such as air travel and medicine, the customers are putting their lives in the hands of the service provider.
- i. Speed: How long must I wait for service? For emergency services such as fire and police protection, response time is the major criterion of performance. In other services, waiting sometimes may be considered a tradeoff for receiving more personalized services, such as reduced rates.

7.0 MEETING THE NEEDS OF CUSTOMERS

Before an effective and sustainable relationship can be made between the services provider and his client, the former has to know in detail, the needs of the latter. It is the needs of the client that must be satisfied to ensure that the client is retained, not only for the present but also for the future. Client's needs may be personal needs, or business needs. Therefore the objectives of the service provider will depend on the client needs.

THE CIA EXAMPLE

What benefits are derivable from the membership of CIA?

Benefits derivable from the membership of CIA include the following:

- A. **To individual members:**
 - 1. recognition of the individual's managerial achievements with all the privileges of the institute's membership,
 - 2. opportunity to be identified by fellow members with the use of the Institute's emblems such as car stickers, bannerettes, etc,
 - 3. attractive discount enjoyed by members at the Institute's courses, conferences and workshops,
 - 4. access to the Institute's flagship journal and newsletter, and to other publications of the Institute,
 - 5. access to the Institute's facilities such as educational and professional films, particularly on administration,
 - 6. consultancy services to members at reduced cost,

7. opportunity to share membership privileges of national and international organizations through the Institute and
8. invitation to attend and participate in the annual Distinguished Management Lecture.

B. To Corporate Members:

1. keeping members well abreast of, and informed on developments within the economy,
2. regular supply of the Institute's periodical, and the newsletter,
3. freedom of members to use the Institute's film rental service,
4. purchase of management books and various publications and research finding of experienced and renowned authors, national and international, through the Institute's library mail order service,
5. opportunity to advertise, at a considerably reduced rate, in the Institute's journal and newsletter,
6. availability of a versatile and flexible research and consultancy service unit, accessible by both public and private organizations,
7. consultation on the Institute's Executive Selection Services and
8. nomination of participants to the Institute's courses at reduced rates.

8.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

My unequivocal findings are that only those who become attached to their customers figuratively and literally, and who move aggressively to make new customers, and create new markets – for new, matured and growing products alike will service in both the short and long run.

I hereby recommend the following model for creating total customer responsiveness:

The Guiding Premise

<p>Specialize/Create Niches/Differentiate/Customize products or services that create new market niches</p>
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The Five Basic Value-Adding Strategies

Provide Top Quality, as perceived by the Customer
Provide Superior Service/Emphasize the intangible
Achieve Extraordinary Responsiveness
Be an Internationalist
Create Uniqueness

The four capability Building Blocks

Becoming Obsessed with Listening
Turn Manufacturing into a Marketing Weapon
Make sales and Service Focus into Heroes
Pursue Fast-Paced Innovation

The Evolving Firm

Launch a Customer Revolution



IMPLEMENTING CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP STRATEGIES FOR ORGANISATIONAL GROWTH

BY

Introduction

Customer relationship refers to the methodologies and tools that help business manage customer's relationships in an organized way, It is a broad term that covers concepts used by organizations to manage their relationships with customers in a mutually valuable way, including collecting storing and analyzing information on customer satisfaction. This definition encompasses the processes that:

- identify and target the best customers, generate quality sales leads, and plan and implement marketing campaigns with clear goals and objectives;
- help the formation of individualized relationships with customers with the aim of improving customer satisfaction and providing the highest level of customer service to the most profitable customers; and
- provide employees with the information they need to know their customer's wants and needs and build relationships between the company and its customers.

Customer relationship management is a strategy and involves not just the Customer Relations department of the company, but encompasses all aspects of the business. It is a plan on how to maintain and keep customers. An organization must be clear about the purpose and approach it wants to create and maintain customer relationships. If the organization is not clear about its purpose, the company is just wandering aimlessly around and not maximizing its full potentials. This can ultimately lead to mismanagement and unstable profits.

Almost all firms have adopted customer relationship strategy in their bid to build loyalty, customer retention and achieve organizational growth. Too often, however, a customer relationship policy is ineffectual. In many organizations, customer relationship programme is developed as a standalone tactic instead of being seen and developed as a strategy.

It must, however, be appreciated that it is one thing to have a customer relationship strategy, it is another thing if it is not implemented and communicated to the entire organization. It is vital to communicate customer relationship strategy to all the people in all departments of the business and to

make sure that everyone is on the same page. This ensures that everyone remembers that the customer is at the forefront of the business.

The world is changing for businesses, whether they are ready or not. No longer can an institution simply create or repackage products or services and serve them up to customers. Instead, customers are demanding personally tailored products/services delivered on demand. Customers are expecting to get what they want. Customer relationship strategy creates a comprehensive picture of customer needs, expectations and behavior by analyzing information from every customer transactions.

2. Customer Relationship: Its Interacting Elements.

Customer relationship is the understanding of customer needs and wants and providing them with right customer service team that is appropriately skilled and motivated to deliver and aim to exceed the value that the customer wants and expects. The essence of customer relationship is to build a satisfied partnership between customer and customer service team (the organization). This can be expressed as follows:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Satisfied Customer + Satisfied Customer} \\ \text{Service Team} \end{array} = \text{Satisfied Partnership}$$

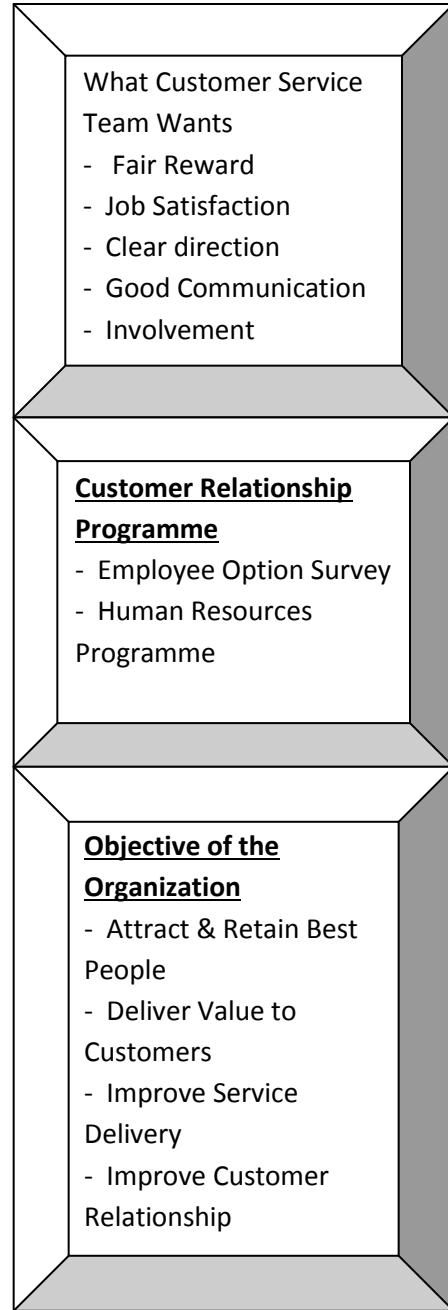
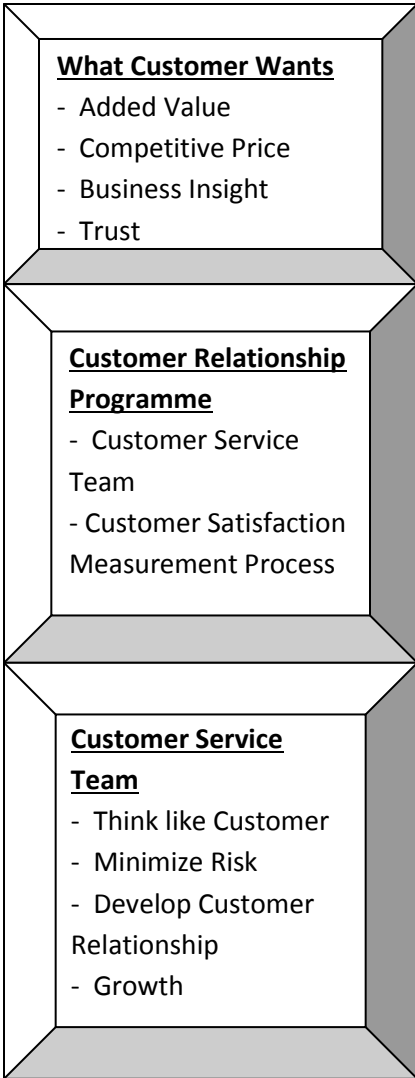
Satisfied customer requires customer service team to think like a customer, evaluate and minimize business risk and develop solutions for the customer through relationships.

Satisfied customer service teams are those who believe they are working for the best organization. They develop a sense of achievement and satisfaction from their work and feel they can receive reward, recognition and advancement for their efforts.

Whenever these elements are combined, the result is a satisfied partnership which is the goal of customer relationship strategies.

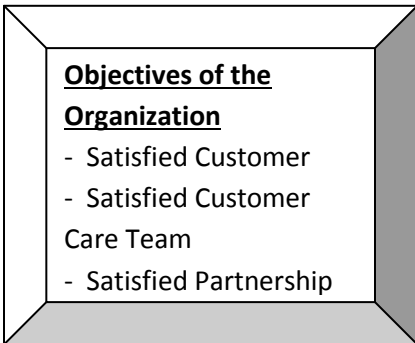
Fig. 1 Customer Relationship: Its Interacting Elements

Satisfied Customer



Satisfied Partnership





Customer relationship is a critical factor for keeping customers coming back and ensuring organizational growth.

3. **Benefits of Developing Customer Relationship Strategies**

The beauty of developing customer relationship strategies management is that it benefits both the customer and the business or service provider. Customers receive a higher level of customer service because their needs are met and anticipated, allowing them to relax through transactions that are often much quicker than they are used to.

The business benefits via improved sales, higher customer confidence and satisfaction and a more effective work environment. With customer relationship strategies, an organization can know what its customer wants, thus, it can provide the service or products the customer wants, keeping them as a repeat customer and gaining greater sales volume.

4. **Who is a Customer?**

A customer is commonly thought of as someone who buys something regularly from another individual or company. The word historically derives from “custom” meaning habit. A customer was someone who visited a particular shop, who made it a habit to purchase goods there and with whom the shopkeeper had to maintain a relationship to keep his or her custom” meaning expected purchases in the future.

From this simple definition and under customer relationship programme, the notion of customer refers to internal and external customer.

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4.1 Internal Customers

These include all persons who receive or make use of products or services provided by other staff in-house, sub contractors or outside suppliers of resources. Every person involved in the organization will at some time be an internal supplier who will be expected to meet the needs and expectations of other staff. They, in turn, will be customers of another internal supplier and will have needs and expectations of their own that should be satisfied.

4.2 External Customers

These include buyers and end users such as purchasers and users of products or services and the community at large, who in some ways, contributes to or participate in the service provided.

The place of customer cannot be over emphasized in a customer relationship programme and that is why customer relationship is at the heart of every business. Customers are the people who keep the company afloat. They pay the wages of employees. For customers to be loyal, they must be receiving satisfactory experiences from the service encounter.

But too often, organization members see customers as a nuisance, as difficult, even as incidental to the business. Whereas, a better understanding of the customer will lead to a better partnership and increase the likelihood of delivering what the customer perceive as quality service. Therefore, there is always the need to discover what customers' perceptions are and how well services and products meet these.

5. Identifying the Needs and Expectations of Customer

Customer needs may be defined as the goods or services a customer requires to achieve specific goals. Different needs have varying importance to the customer. Customer expectations are influenced by cultural values, advertising, marketing and other communications, both with the supplier and with other sources.

Both customer needs and expectations may be determined through interview, surveys, conversations, data mining and other methods of collecting information. Customers at times do not have a clear understanding of their needs. Assisting in determining needs can be a valuable service to the customer. In the process,

expectations may be set or adjusted to correspond to know product capabilities or service.

What creates a better and smoother customer relationship and partnership is the customer relationship and partnership is the customer perception that their requirements are being met. Customer's requirements can only be met when their specific needs are communicated and correctly perceived by suppliers. Customers requirements are known and agreed upon in the daily interface and those requirements must be met for the customers to be satisfied.

Customer surveys in the banking industry, for example, have revealed that customers want staff to be helpful, friendly, willing, attentive obliging, smiling, polite, professional and cheerful. They also want staff to provide efficient, prompt service; always keep customers informed; to respond to individual needs; to take ownership of customer problems and earn customers' trust.

It is therefore important that an organization must learn to listen to customers so as to get a clear picture of what customer wants rather than what the organization can do for them personally. Customers expect to get what they want and do not wish to hear reasons why the organization cannot meet their request. This is an important step in the management of customer relationship.

6. Customer Service Delivery

Customer service is a critical factor for keeping customers coming back and ensuring they will refer you to others. Growing the business will be a difficult task at least if an organization does not perform, meet and exceed customer's expectations and provide services or products that create customer for life. Customer service is all about customers' perception. Organizations must deliver on all the things (big and small) that affect the relationship with the customers. What makes customers cherish the relationship is the perception of the quality of service they receive and quality service is "everything an organization does to win, satisfy, and retain customers, profitably and thoroughly than the competition".

A business organization is in business to service customers because "without customers, it does not have a business, but a hobby". Therefore, customers are at the heart of the business and for an organization to survive, grow and continue to generate long-term profitability, the organization's focus must be on how to continually deliver excellent service which is the goal of the customer relationship

programme. Organizations must always concern themselves with whether customers are happy with their offerings.

Many organizations tend to pay too much attention on how much money they are making. They concentrate on the result of business not minding the enablers. They drive staff and put pressure on them to generate money thereby losing the concentration of serving customer and maintaining mutually beneficial relationship. They pay lip services to customer relationship programme and invariably do not grow the business.

The management of customer relationship to grow the business is not the sole responsibility of a particular department or the top executive, but rather all the organization members. It must be a shared responsibility of all employees. Everybody in the organization must feel part of it. Therefore, the first step in Customer Relationship Management is to provide the vision for the future. The vision is essential for the success of the process, but it has to be one that will excite and inspire people; something that individuals can “buy into”. The key then is to sell that vision to everybody.

7. **Customer Relationship Vision**

Customer relationship vision is critical to the success of any customer relationship programme and to achieve the desired results the vision must be clear and communicated to all and sundry in the organization. The objectives of customer relationship vision may include among other things:

- i. Creation of individual and collective employee’s commitment to customer relationship programme,
- ii. Commitment to prevention and controlling customer relationship actions that brings about customer complaint and dissatisfaction.
- iii. Continual review of customer relationship strategies in order to identify opportunities for better relationship that will foster organizational growth.

Example: Prudential Assurance Company Ltd, UK

The Customer relationship vision is tagged “Way of Life Vision”. The characteristics of the vision detailed to:

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- change the way people behave,
- reinvigorate the organization,
- introduce a common language among staff,
- get everybody involved,
- improve speed of service delivery and
- improve morale.

The company went further to explain its commitments to the development and maintaining customer relationship vision as follows:

- the customer is the reason we exist and the key consideration in carrying out our day-to-day business,
- the customer is the person or area to whom we are providing a service,
- everyone is a vital link in the service chain and the successful partnership between the suppliers of services and their customers is of primary importance,
- as individuals and teams, we demonstrate our commitment to our customers by getting it right first time and
- we would continually review, redefine and improve the quality of service we provide to meet the changing expectations of our customers.

It is important that companies that embrace CRM as a long-term strategic policy for organizational growth must create awareness among its employees about the vision and win them over. This could be achieved through awareness training.

Top management must show commitment to the vision and develop a style based on effective leadership. Lack of management commitment is often cited as the reason why customer relationship programme fails.

8. Customer Relationship Strategies and Interface with Customers

Service is the production of a satisfactory experience. Customer service involves a daily interface with a large number of employees and customers. Therefore, in managing customer relationship, the daily interface must be right every time and all the time. For an effective customer relationship management, it must involve consistently delivering satisfactory experience to customers.

Management can influence customers' perception by creating an appropriate image based on the reality of action taken to meet customer needs. This image presented by personnel at all levels, has a primary effect on the organization's relationship with the customers. Management should regularly review the methods used for promoting contacts with customers.

9. **Communication with Customers**

One of the strategies used in maintain a smooth customer relationship id communication with customer. This involves listening to customers and keeping them informed. Difficulties in communication or interactions with customers should be given prompt attention. Effective communication with customers involves:

- describing the service/product, its scope, its availability, delivery and cost,
- stating how much the service/product will cost,
- explaining the interrelationship between service, delivery and cost,
- explaining to customers the effect of any problem and how they will be resolved, should they arise,
- ensuring that customers are aware of the contribution they can make to service quality,
- providing adequate and readily accessible facilities for effective communication,
- determining the relationship between the service offered and the real needs of the customers,

the customers' perception of an organization is often acquired through communication with the employees and facilities.

10. **How to improve Customer Relationship**

Customer relationship is a critical factor keeping customers coming back and ensuring they prefer an organization to others. Growing the business may be a difficult task if the organization does not perform, meet and exceed customers' expectations and provide services/products that create customers life.

A company achieves this uniqueness by having customer relationship strategies that is superior to its competitors. This leads us to the question, "What does superior customer relationship strategies or programme mean?" while the details are industry and even firm specific, the basic principles can be generalized. The following list provides a good starting point for thinking about customer relationship strategies and how it can help an organization to survive and grow in this competitive world.

Here are some tips for improving customer relationship.

1. **Always try to exceed customer expectations** – When customer expectations are known, exceeding these will enhance the organization's reputation and leave a lasting impression. To achieve this, you must have a strong understanding of customer needs as these dictate expectations. Conducting a customer service survey will provide you with a true understanding of these needs. Managing expectations up front sets the stage for you to exceed customer expectations later in the relationship.
2. **Track changes in customer expectations over time** – Any successful organization must learn to identify and adjust to changing trends, many of which will be reflected in customer expectations. An organization can measure customer satisfaction using tracking research in order to monitor trends over time.
3. **Make a strong first impression** – The first contact with a customer (the "moment of truth") often sets the tone for their lasting impression of the organization. Customer Satisfaction Research shows how a customer feels about a transaction tends to be more important than the product or service purchased.
4. **Be accessible, approachable, and responsive** – if your customer finds it difficult to get in touch with someone in your organization, they are less likely to do so, and the prospect of developing a strong, long-term relationship built on customer service satisfaction is greatly diminished.

Make a habit of regularly reaching out to your customers to enhance customer service satisfaction and build lasting relationships.

5. **Determine how well the organization delivers** – Initial customer satisfaction research will provide a baseline against which to measure future improvement initiatives. Regularly conduct a customer satisfaction survey to help identify specifically what attributes of the product/service are of greatest importance to customers, how the organization performs against those attributes and how both change over time.

6. **Solicit input from your service personnel** – Most customer-contact employees are self-motivated to achieve customer satisfaction. They are the best source for identifying roadblocks to superior customer relations and what upsets customers most. Spotlighting and addressing these issues not only improves customer service satisfaction but front-line employee attitudes as well.

7. **Improve employee satisfaction** – Regularly conduct an employee attitude survey to measure and improve employee satisfaction. This will, in turn, have an impact on customer relationship management. More satisfied employees will provide better service and customer relationship.

8. **Roll Out The Red Carpet For Everyone** – If there is one thing people hate about customer relationship, it is getting treated differently from others. It makes them feel inferior and second-class. You should roll out the red carpet for everyone, but particularly those who do not expect it. If you roll out the red carpet for a billionaire, they will not even notice. If we roll it out for millionaires, they expect it. If we roll it out for “thousandaires” they appreciate it. And if we roll out the red carpet for “hundredaires” they will tell everyone they know.”

9. **Take Time to Know Your Customers** – The fast pace of modern living together with advances in technology have together put a non-human face on much of our customer service. If you can find a way to re-connect with your customers one-on-one, you will strike a chord with your customers that will be like a streak of gold. For example, there was a time in life when the doctor would come to your home to check on you if you were ill. You can imagine going down to your local pharmacy and having the owner greet you by name and ask, but they really wanted to know the answer and they took the time to listen to what you had to say. That is

customer relationship – taking the time to know your customers, really caring about how they feel, and wanting to go the extra mile to make sure they are happy.

10. **Be Easy To Do Business With** – One of the problems with many organizations particularly the public service is that the systems they use to save time and money are often devised for the organization's benefit and not the customers. As a result, the customer experience is frustrating and difficult. This needs to be reversed. Customers expect single source service. Customers do not want to be transferred to every unit of your organization to have their problems solved. They want to be able to do business with your organization with the slightest amount of discomfort. You must be easy to do business with.

11. **Go Out Of Your Way To Make Sure They Are Happy** – One of the most important things customers want from an organization is a guarantee that the product or service will work. So move heaven and earth to make sure it does. It is often suggested that you should not make people pay until they are fully happy. Instead of offering a money back guarantee, a service business can provide a guarantee to solve the customer's problem. For example, a plumber can guarantee to come back without charge as often as necessary to stop the leak. A landscaper can replace without charge any plants that do not survive for at least 6 months. A sales consultant can continue working without charge until the promised sales results are achieved.

12. **Work On Everything The Customer Experiences** – The customer experience is not just receiving the service or buying the goods. It is about all the other little bits and pieces in-between. Such as the manner of the receptionist, the state of the floors and tables, the attitude of other staff, the ease of parking, the tone of the notices, the smile or lack of it on the face of the checkout team. Be like the Mirage hotel in Las Vegas, U.S.A who have a slogan that says: "We spend 600 hours a week pampering the plants. Imagine what we would do for our guests."

13. **Believe In Customer Relationship From The Bottom Of Your Sour** – To become a great organization, you have to believe in customer

relationship from the bottom of your soul. It has to be part of the way you work.

14. **Committing to the Little Things** – Do not ever dismiss the power of all the little things. Together they can make all the difference and really make the customer feel great. Returning calls and emails in a timely manner. Providing useful information to folks on a regular basis. Showing appreciation for your customers through things like thank you notes, exclusive client-only briefings, and open house, etc.

These fourteen strategies provide a generalized approach for exceeding customer expectations – and achieving superior customer relationship programme. An ongoing customer satisfaction research programme will help to identify the issues facing your organization, as well as their relative importance to customers. Through such a programme, a full-service marketing research firm could help identify the specific improvements that will have the greatest impact on improving overall customer relationship management.

11. **Customer Relationship Mistakes Companies Should Avoid**

1. **Being placed on hold endlessly** – Do you love it when you call company and they place you on hold, leaving you to listen to their latest on-hold, recorded sales pitch, over and over again. Would you see it as a normal business practice for a retail store clerk to ask you to “wait a minute” while they disappeared into the back of the store for ten, fifteen, thirty minutes or longer? People do things over the phone that they would never do in person. It is bad customer relationship either way to leave a customer hanging without at least coming back to let the customer know how much longer they will be holding.

2. **Getting rude with a customer** – As the saying goes, even if the customer is wrong, the customer is always right. There is never any reason to get rude with a customer. If a customer gets rude with you, let them blow off steam and remember that their behaviour is not an attack directed against you personally. Always keep in mind that as long as you remain calm and in control, you can address the reason behind the customer’s anger.

3. **Ignoring a problem** – Ignoring a customer’s problem will not make it go away. The same can be said of fixes that work for the organization but not for the customer. Some customers have problems with a service or product that don’t fit comfortably into any category. Those are the problems that need special attention, not standard responses. Many organizations ignore this and try to use the “one size fits all” method of complaint resolution. Organizations and their officials must realize that their policy must fit the customer’s needs, not the other way around.

4. **Making the customer jump through hoops for a refund or exchange** - I recently had to return a product to an organization. Before the clerk refunded me, she asked me for all sorts of personal information. I refused to give this information. I explained that I hadn’t given this information out when I made the original purchase, and did not see the purpose in giving it out to get my money refunded. After 2 hours and a visit from a Director, they finally relented and gave me my refund. The time spent waiting on line, plus the time spent to get my refund, added up to 4 hours.

This company wasted 4 hours of a customer’s time, all in the effort to get information. If you have to disregard your customer’s time order to gather a marketing profile, you are defeating your long-term marketing goal, which is to retain a satisfied customer base that makes repeat purchases and guarantees organizational growth.

12. **Implementation Strategies**

Having understood what Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and strategies are all about, the benefits and ways to improve customer relationship, it is appropriate to think of how to make it happen. Responsibility for this should be clearly assigned to a person or a group of people, accountable directly to a top executive of an executive director level. It is the CRM coordinator who will develop and implement the customer relationship strategies. He implements policies, guidance and other information on CRM.

Implementing customer relationship strategies can best be illustrated as a ten-step cycle:

Step 1. **Creating a Vision for CRM**

The starting point is to create a vision that will be communicated to all and sundry within the organization. This has been exhaustively discussed earlier.

Step 2. **Appoint a Customer Relationship Management Coordinator**

The Coordinator plays a primary role by development and implementing a comprehensive and cohesive Customer Relationship programme.

Step 3. **Identify the Customer**

This is to establish who the recipients of the service or products are. This is not as straightforward as it may appear, since the organization's products/services may have a variety of customers whose requirements do not necessarily coincide. There may also be "indirect customers" whose needs must be taken into account. Identifying the customers will give the organization a clue as to their relative priority in determining levels of service.

Step 4. **Establish the customer's needs and priorities**

The customer's needs and priorities will be the starting point of setting standards. Since delivering on standards will involve decisions about resources, it is essential to have accurate information about what the customers want. This will require using objective methods which ensures that the views of all customers, including potential customers are represented.

Step 5. **Establish the current service baseline**

Accurate information about the current level of customer relationship is essential in order to decide where and how to enhance improvements in the current practice. How long does an average customer have to wait before being attended to? How long does it take to reply to letters or telephone enquiries? What resources are consumed in delivering a particular service or product? A thorough scrutiny of organizational arrangements, work processes and practices involved in delivering the services or products as well as the motivating and skills will be required to establish the current baseline.

Step 6. **Identify the improvement gap**

The improvement gap is the gap between what customers want and the level of existing customer relationship. Closing the gap is the ultimate aim of the improvement in customer relationship programme. Accurate identification of customer's needs and of the current service baseline will enable targets to be set

for improvement in customer relationship programme in a systematic, prioritized way, taking into account the availability of the resources.

Step 7. **Set Customer relationship Management Standards**

Once the improvement gap has been identified, standards can be set and progressively raised for closing the gap. CRM standards are commitments to provide a specified level of customer relationship to individual customers at any given point in time. Standards must cover customer's main requirements, e.g. response time, turnaround time, accuracy, the provision of information and dealing with complaints.

Step 8. **Get up for CRM**

Ensuring that service and product standards are met depends on the whole organization being geared up to support the commitments that have been made. The CRM programme approved by the management should set out how standards of service or products will be improved and how the organization will gear up to deliver them. For example, monitoring and reporting systems will be needed to enable senior management to check on progress and take remedial action where necessary.

Human resources training, supervision and appraisal systems will need to be refocused on customer relationship. In short, implementing customer relationship strategies is likely to involve significant changes in the organization. Managers at all levels, starting from the top should be made to account for ensuring that these changes are made.

Step 9. **Announce the Customer Relationship Standards**

When the foregoing steps have been taken, the organization will be ready to announce its CRM standards and launch its customer relationship programme. There is no single right method for publishing standards. The key is that all customers and potential customers must know and understand what level of services they can expect to receive and what recourse they have if the standard is not met.

Step 10. **Monitor delivery against standards and publish reports**

The final step is to check where services have met the standards that were set, to announce the results and to explain the reasons why the standards have fallen short of what were promised. The results not only complete the accountability hoop, but will provide valuable insights to guide further efforts to improve on customer relationship strategies in the future.

13. **Conclusion**

A disciplined customer relationship programme, which includes listening to customers and employees and positive actions to improve, usually results, in higher level of service, new work and profits. An effective customer relationship programme is therefore an investment which yields a return in form of profit and organizational growth and not just a cost.

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