

Would YOU Do Business with Your Company?

By Randi Busse

When was the last time, if ever, that you saw firsthand what your customers or prospective customers experience when they attempt to do business with your company? If you don't know what kind of interaction they are having with your staff, now would be a great time to find out.

The best fleet and the most affordable rates don't mean everything. Those won't get you long-term clients. However, if you want to book the business the first time and every other time after that, you need to ensure that each and every touch point a customer has with your company is a good one, whether it is with the reservationist, dispatcher, chauffeur, or your customer service department.

Taking a step back can make a huge difference in the daily operations of your service. Business owners are very busy and can't listen to every call that comes into their businesses or ride along with every chauffeur. There are ways to experience these things in order to gain a new perspective. Test calls are a way to hear what your customers experience when they contact your company. As a customer service trainer, I routinely make test calls into companies to see what kind of service is being provided to prospective customers. You would be amazed at what I sometimes hear.

Let me tell you what happened when I called some of you. You answered the phone either in a disinterested or aggravated tone or by shouting "Limousines!" In most cases, I didn't even hear the name of the company in the greeting, let alone the name of the person I was speaking with. You made it all about money by only giving me the price and nothing else that would differentiate you from all of your many competitors. You didn't ask me if I wanted to book the business, and you actually seemed like you were in a

rush to get off of the phone with me. You didn't make me feel special, important, or valued as a prospective customer.

Clients want to do business with companies that care about them as individuals, not just as customers. When you make me feel like you care about me, I want to do business with you today and likely in the future as well. Customers decide very quickly whether or not they want to do business with a company. First impressions are lasting impressions. What impression are you making?

Here are some areas of your operation that you should be focusing on to improve the customer experience:

Achieving Proper Phone Etiquette

What happens when a customer calls you? Are they greeted by a live person with a friendly voice who is happy to help them? Or are

"When you greet your customers like old friends, they feel good about their experience with the company."

they greeted with: "Your call is very important to us; your approximate hold time to speak with a representative is 5 minutes"? What are your hours of operation? Most people work and may not be available to call you between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Can you accommodate them? When I call you outside of normal business hours, will I reach a live person or an answering service? And if so, how quickly will you return my call?

If my call is answered live, will I feel like I am an interruption to someone's day, or the reason they are there in the first place? Will the person answering my call rush me off the phone, or will they take time to build rapport with me? Will they immediately blurt out the price after I tell them where I want to go, or will they provide me with the benefits of traveling with your company? Will they actually ask me for my business, and do they even care if I give it to them?

A proper phone call with a prospective client should go something like the following:

- Phone is answered with the clear annunciation of your company name, and the staff member's name, and with a smile. An example would be, "Thank you for calling ABC Limousine, this is Randi, how can I help you?"



- When the customer tells us why he is calling, your immediate response should be, "I'll be happy to help you with that." Then you'll want to ask appropriate questions so you can make the right recommendation to him.
- When you have all of the information you need from him, tell him, "Based on what you've told me, I recommend..." This is not the time to blurt out the price. You want to talk about the benefits of doing business with your company. Include things such as the fact that you've been in business for 25 years, that your chauffeurs are all uniformed and professionally trained and tested, and that your car will arrive fifteen minutes before the scheduled pickup time. These things help you differentiate yourself from your competition.
- Only after pointing out these priceless aspects of your service can you begin to talk about price. Quote the rate and then, without missing a beat, say, "Let's go ahead and schedule the reservation." At that point, you've earned the right to do so.



Making a Positive First Impression In Person

When I am greeted at the airport what will I see? Will your chauffeur be attentive, or will he be on his cell phone? Will he be chatting with other chauffeurs, so engrossed in conversation that I feel like I'm invisible? Or will he be glad to see me and be genuinely happy to help me?

Do you and your employees know your customers' names? If so, are they using them? Or are they addressing them as "Sir" and "Ma'am"? Dale Carnegie once said, "There is nothing sweeter than the sound of thine own name." Personalizing the experience will make customers want to do business

"Are you treating a complaint as the gift that it is (to correct a problem) or as a nuisance?"

with your company.

When you greet your customers like old friends, they feel good about their experience with the company. Over the course of doing business with your customers, you learn things about them. Why not use that information to personalize their experience? Creating client profiles that each reservationist can access is a helpful tool. Profiles can include the client's children's names, what newspaper he likes in the vehicle, which chauffeur he prefers, and even personal details like his anniversary or favorite sports team. It's important that the customer's experience is consistent, no matter which of your employees is taking care of him. Make sure your employ-

ees are all on the same page when it comes to how to treat your customers.

Conveying a Positive Image Online

When I visit your website, can I find what I'm searching for? Is it professional looking and easy to navigate? Is your contact information prominently displayed, or do I have to hunt to find it? Can I make a reservation online? If so, how long does it take to get a confirmation? Do the links on your website work? If it's too hard to find the information I'm looking for on your website, I'm probably not going to stick around very long. I'm going to let my fingers do the typing and Google another company to take me where I want to go.

If I read about your company online or in the newspaper, what will I find out? Who is talking (or writing) about your company? And more importantly, what are they saying? Are

"If it's too hard to find the information I'm looking for on your website, I'm probably not going to stick around very long."

they complimenting your cars but bashing your service? Are they singing your praises or complaining about their experience? People like to talk and they are going to talk whether it's good or bad. What do you want them saying about you and your business? Online there is a forum for everything, and your potential customers are ready to read all the good, bad, and ugly details. Are there testimonials on your



website from happy customers whom you have served well? This is a great section to have on a website. Ask your clients to visit the site and post a testimonial or send them regular questionnaires to rate your performance. They will appreciate the fact that you are always trying to improve your level of service for them.

Resolving Complaints Quickly

What happens if I have a complaint? How do I report it? Will I be told that it's not your company's fault? Will the person answering my call take ownership and responsibility for the problem? How quickly will the problem be resolved? Will I have to keep calling back to check on the status? If and when the problem does get resolved, will your company follow up with me to ensure that I am happy with the outcome? Are you taking steps to correct the problem so that it doesn't happen again to me or another customer? Are you treating a complaint as the gift that it is (to correct a problem) or as a nuisance? Did you know studies show customers are actually more loyal to a company that "rights a wrong" when it's done quickly and without blame?

Chauffeurs

Here is your company's front line. How closely do you monitor it? When your car pulls up to my home or business, is it 15 minutes early or 5 minutes late? Is the car clean and shiny both inside and out, or does it need a good washing? Is the chauffeur professionally dressed and groomed? Can he communicate with me in English? Can he answer any questions I might have? Will he have the necessary paperwork filled out beforehand, or do I need to wait for him to complete it once we get to my destination? Is the chauffeur actually happy to take me where I want to go, or is he just happy when I do go?

Owners need to ensure their chauffeurs know what is expected from them, from the moment they get into their car until the moment they drop off their passengers. It's a good investment to implement a ghost rider program to provide you with feedback about the passenger's experience with your company. Their insight can be very valuable and help you improve the overall experience your passengers have with your company. If you've been too entrenched keeping the business running in this econ-



omy, then an outside perspective is recommended.

I don't have to tell you that there are many companies that provide the same services that you do. If you make it hard for customers to do business with you, will they? If you don't take care of your customers, someone else will. It's not just about the price, the cars, or getting me to the church on time; it's about the total experience I have from start to finish.

So now I ask you, would YOU do business with your com-

“Clients want to do business with companies that care about them as individuals, not just as customers.”

pany? If the answer is no, you've got work to do! If the answer is yes, can you take me to the airport? **LD**



Randi Busse is the president of Workforce Development Group in Amityville, N.Y. Her company provides training to improve the customer experience, increase customer retention, and generate more revenue. Busse is also a member of the Nassau Suffolk Limousine Association. She can be reached at (631) 598-5598 or randi@workdevgroup.com, or visit www.workdevgroup.com.