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# Would you like fries with that?

In the age of e-mail communications, internet shopping and SMS, have we forgotten about the people? Customer service can be the single most important factor in differentiating between the good, the bad and the ugly, yet it is often found on the scrap heap, discarded in favor of technology, finance and competitive advantage.

Studies conducted by the United States-based Technical Assistance Research Programs, Inc. show that the average dissatisfied customer will tell between eight and sixteen people of their experience. More than ten per cent will tell over twenty people of the bad service. In an industry area that is quite small, such as the library and information sector, it does not take long for the word to get around.

The words that we use in communicating with customers in a face-to-face envi-

ronment contribute only seven per cent to the message that is perceived by the customer. Tone accounts for a further thirty-eight per cent while the greatest proportion, fifty-five per cent, is attributed to the body language of the service representative. Telephone communications do not have the benefit of body language, so in this scenario the words make up fourteen per cent of the message and tone accounts for a massive eighty-six per cent [SkillPath Seminars, The Conference on Customer Service]. What we say to a customer is important, but how we say it and what we look like have a far greater effect. Think of the different meanings that a simple word like 'Oh' can have. By varying the tone and facial expression alone we could be sad, surprised, questioning, disappointed, disgusted or delighted!

Service is not just about 'doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.' Customer service goes further than this and is about exceeding the expectations that a customer places on your business. By living up to your promises, taking an interest in the customer and having clearly defined and measurable standards, you can not only create a level of service, but raise the bar.

With increasing demands on LIS professionals to prove their worth, the secret is giving the customer what they need, which is not necessarily what they ask for! Strange as it may seem, a customer will often ask for a particular product or service simply because they know someone else who used it successfully. Wherever possible, add value to the service you deliver.

Customer service is dependent on three things: customer-friendly policies set by the organisation's executives, training offered to the staff, and the attitude of the staff about their own organisation as generated by the way their company treats them. [Good customer service is no longer enough, 13 January 2002 <http://management.about.com/library/weekly/aa042699.htm>] So, the responsibility lies with each member of the organisation.

Remember to smile, even when you are on the phone, deliver on promises, and keep in mind that the customer is always right. Even if the customer is wrong, don't tell them; just fix it for them! ■

## Things to remember

- It can cost up to five times as much to attract a new customer than to retain an existing one.
- The average business never hears from ninety-six per cent of its unhappy customers.
- For every complaint received, the average company in fact has twenty-six customers with problems, six of which are serious in nature.
- Of customers who register a complaint, between fifty-four and seventy per cent will do business again with the organisation if their complaint is resolved. That figure goes up to an impressive ninety-five per cent if the customer feels that the complaint was resolved quickly.
- The average customer who has a problem with an organisation tells nine or ten people about it. Thirteen percent of the people who have a problem with an organisation recount the incident to more than twenty people.
- Customers who have complained to an organisation and had their complaints satisfactorily resolved tell an average of five people about the treatment they receive.

John T. Shelf, Customer Service Facts and Figures  
(<http://www.sideroad.com/cs/column7.html>)