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# The Right Service

Jo Michel looks into the errors organisations make in their customer services

**W**hy do so many cultural and leisure organisations get customer service wrong? It is the primary focus for most customer facing departments such as Ticketing and Front of House, yet we consistently send the wrong message.

Only the other day, I had an experience with a large cultural organisation that on the face of it was providing very good customer service, their team was efficient and polite but instead of providing solutions they presented obstacles. Eventually, after following a number of set procedures we were able to find a solution, but the experience wasn't made easy for me, the customer, or I suspect for the organisation.

So what are we doing wrong? Most cultural organisations work by the same principles, listen to the customer, try and understand their grievance, come to a resolution within the framework of the principles of the organisation and if you need help escalate the issue to a supervisor or manager. The problem I think is that customers also know that this is the process and have an expectation of a favourable outcome.

In most cases, a favourable outcome is exactly what we want customer service to achieve for both customers and the organisations. But why do we always talk about customer service as a response to a negative action.



If organisations are creating good customer service environments, the level of issues would decrease. Customer service should be about ensuring that every staff member is equipped to answer the questions that they will be asked about the venue and its area; events; restaurants; and bus timetables. Alternatively, they should know how to find the information quickly and easily, and feel empowered to take that extra few minutes to understand a customer's requirements or discover how they can make their visit better.

Many customers are time poor, therefore, customer service is about reading the signals from the customer and providing the level of service that is right for them. Being efficient and effective for someone who only has their thirty minute lunch break or having a longer conversation with Mavis who last saw this play 30 years ago. Finding the right attitude and dealing with each customer in the manner that is fit for purpose is good customer service.

Increased data capture and emphasis on customer relationship management by most cultural organisations, means that they have the tools available to understand their customers better. They now have the capacity to know that one patron likes a chat about the play she is booking for, or that

another prefers an aisle seat.

As Customer Service advocates we should be learning from other industries. I have been in many meetings where someone mentions the 'Amazon experience'. While some feel Amazon goes too far, no-one can deny that Amazon does what we all would love to be able to do. They use the data that is captured by each customer's transactional and browsing experience and turn it into informed recommendations, upselling opportunities and ways to enable us as customers to get more out of our experience with Amazon.

And why aren't we as an industry using the data that we capture to facilitate a better customer experience in our organisations? We should be utilising data segmentation and CRM tools to inform our customer service processes. Most organisations capture a huge amount of information about the customers; we know who they are, where they live, how often they attend events at our venues as well as information about their preferences for communication.

Yet despite this, most organisations don't spend time analysing that data and using it to inform their commercial decisions and their programming. The data can be a rich source of information about how our customers interact with the organisation.

Marketing and development departments are utilising data to segment and tailor communications but what about our frontline services? Surely, our Box Offices and Front of House teams have as much need to understand the customer relationship, if only to enable a better experience for both the customer and staff member. Remember knowledge is power, we should start working smarter in all aspects of the customer service ratio.

Enabling frontline staff and improving attitudes of these staff towards customer service will increase both staff satisfaction and customer satisfaction. All too often I have seen organisations have extremely low expectations of their frontline staff. They are generally the last to be informed of changes to a production, cast or creative decision and are not encouraged to attend dress rehearsals or other opportunities for engagement with the creative aspects of the organisation.

When all staff are engaged and feel included in aspects of the organisation outside their role responsibilities, they will be more likely to promote and speak positively about both the organisation and the productions.

Another opportunity arises with encouraging staff to experience the local area and gain an understanding of what the area has to offer, discover the public transport options, know how long it takes to walk to the nearest station. I have often conducted an excursion with new staff introducing them to the important facts about the theatre spaces, but also to give everyone a chance to learn about other areas, such as local restaurants, which can also give an added benefit to the customer.

By empowering our frontline staff and creating positive and proactive customer service attitudes we will be more successful in developing relationships with our customers and producing advocates for our business. Isn't that what most of us are aiming for?

#### **Five tips to improve Your Customer Service attitude**

- Train staff in all aspects of your organisation
- Make sure staff understand expectations, protocols and processes
- Empower all staff to be proactive and informative
- Use your database and CRM to understand your customer needs
- Don't promote a response or customer service department – live the attitude

***Jo Michel is Director of the Michel Consultancy. This feature is adapted from an article written for The Ticketing Institute.com***