

WHAT DO CUSTOMERS REALLY WANT?

One of the businesses I run offers an online survey which asks respondents to tell us what values are the most important to them personally. Since we started offering the service, lots of different people from many organisations have completed the survey and told us what their top five values are, from a list of fifty. There is one value which heads the list every time, no matter who is competing the survey, be it officers in The British Army or highly creative people working in an advertising agency, it is integrity.

We summarise integrity as «*doing what you say you are going to do*». The dictionary is more prosaic, it says «*adherence to moral principal; honesty*». If our results are a reflection of what people are looking for, then there is a whole market waiting to be tapped by businesses. But from what I see, there are not many organisations bidding to take that market.

Also the consumers of services don't seem to be too fussy about demanding integrity from their suppliers either. We might think we have become a bunch of complainers, but if so, we give up way too easily and don't enforce integrity on our suppliers.

What we have are pension companies who sell the idea of a comfortable retirement when really what they are doing, is lining shareholder's pockets and giving big bonuses to their directors. Customer service centres who are really there to process the people, who call as quickly as possible, sticking rigidly to a script which was written with the company and not the customer in mind. These are the big scale fallacies of "integrity" however, on a smaller scale the story is just the same.

How many of us can honestly say we do what we say we are going to do, most of the time? Also how many suppliers deliver every time on time? I don't know about you, but I can only name about three who do this, and strangely these three also over deliver on my expectations too. It seems that once the integrity of a supplier is sorted, they go on to greater things; the trouble is there are so few who tick this box in the first place.

The funny thing is that if we did do what we say we are going to do, life would feel much more enjoyable. We would feel less pressured and busy, and when we came to flop on the sofa at the end of the day, we could honestly say «*we have nothing to do*». That is the curse of wanting integrity from others: we have a nagging doubt that we don't deliver it ourselves.

So what is the answer? I think there is a two fold solution to this. Firstly we need to have realistic expectations. I used to use a design agency who had a sign up which said «*cheap, quick, good, choose any two*». I chose quick too often and now use another one.

Secondly, when we buy products or services, we could make a personal commitment to integrity and ruthlessly give feedback when our suppliers either deliver or not. What this means, is being a much more hands on consumer, being more careful when we buy things and whom we buy from by checking references and sources. In the end the payback will be massive. But it can only work if more of us live by our own code of integrity and more rigorously enforce this code on our suppliers and ultimately ourselves.

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KLANTEN HOUDEN OP EEN SLIMME MANIER

Customer equity is al geruime tijd een hot topic in marketingmiddens. De customer equity wordt bepaald door drie drivers, te weten ("Rust et al., 2000"):

- 1) Value equity (de perceptie van de functionele waarde/ resultaat);
- 2) Brand equity (de perceptie van de emotionele waarde);
- 3) Retention equity (de perceptie van de relationele waarde).

Het customer equity concept vormt een belangrijk meetinstrument om het effect van marketinginspanningen te evalueren. Het vertelt meer dan de harde verkoop- of winstcijfers. Ook al kunnen de verkoopsresultaten bijvoorbeeld door promotionele inspanningen gunstig evolueren, op langere termijn kan dit nefast zijn voor het merk of bedrijf. Een grondige analyse van de customer equity kan bijvoorbeeld aantonen dat vooral bestaande afnemers op de promoties reageren, wat op langere termijn kan leiden tot «subsiëring» van bestaande klanten zoals Hanssens het noemt («Hanssens, 2007»).

Daarnaast vormt het steeds meer denken in termen van dienst (service)prestaties in plaats van productprestaties een belangrijke uitdaging. Hierbij moet men zich focussen op de meest «relevante waarde-eenheden» van de klant. Het aantal leveringen «op het juiste moment» kan bijvoorbeeld op langere termijn veel crucialer zijn dan het totaal aantal gerealiseerde leveringen tout court («McGrath & MacMillan, 2005»).

Vergeet bij dit alles één ding niet: 70 procent van de trouw van een afnemer is gebaseerd op emotionele waarden (zelfs in business to business). Managers zijn mensen van vlees en bloed! De juiste ervaring op de cruciale «moments of truth» and «contact points» kan wonderen doen (zie ook «Berry & Bendapudi, 2003»).



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