

## Is Your Customer Service The Best It Can Be?

Customers expect their suppliers to provide a product or service that delivers what they want, when they need it, at a cost that they are prepared to pay and to a quality level that meets their expectations.

Enlightened businesses refer to this as the "Customer Promise". Keep your promise and happy customers will return to you for more of what you delivered.

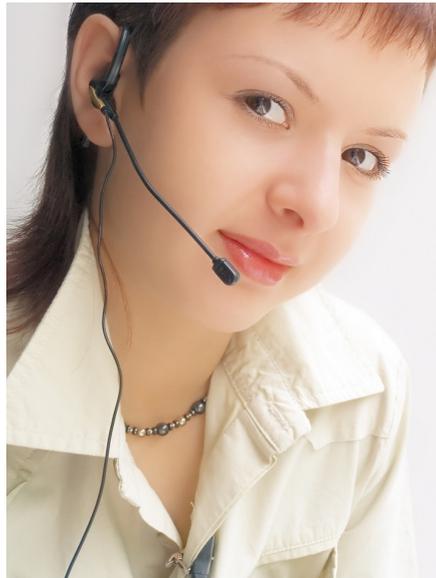
So how do you deliver what you promise? This breaks down into the following stages:

### Pre-Sales

When customers are looking for products and services, they look to the "Marketplace".

Make it easy for your target customers to find you, with effective positioning of your products and services.

- Have an effective marketing strategy in place
- Identify where your customers "go shopping"
- Undertake effective market surveys to anticipate their needs and wants
- Ask your existing customers what else you could do for them
- Make use of the internet and social media to get your business and its products and services out there
- Send out a newsletter with useful information pertinent to them on a regular basis
- Provide pre-sales support



### Sales

How effective is your sales process?

Customers want you to respond quickly when they want information or want to buy. Make sure that an order does not sit on your desk waiting to be processed. The quicker you get the order processed, the sooner you can deliver and the sooner you can get paid!

Customers want buying from you to be easy. Make sure you understand the complete "order to payment" process from the customers point of view.

More and more companies provide the status of customer orders on-line.

If you sell through distributors, treat them as you would direct customers.

Do you have an effective way of capturing customers' requirements? A good Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system will pay for itself many times over.

### Delivery

It is no good having orders if you don't deliver on time. Make sure you have the resources and processes to do so.

This is your supply chain and it can be the most challenging of tasks. If you cannot fulfil the order on time, communicate with the customer early.

### Post-Sales

Having sold to a customer, you need to take care of the customer. Respond to problems and complaints quickly.

A quickly resolved complaint can increase customer loyalty. Provide post-sales support as a way of cementing the relationship with the customer.

Seek customer feedback frequently. Do not forget your distributors. Keep them informed of what you are doing to anticipate their future needs.

Keep an eye on how the marketplace is changing. Internalise the customer within your own business by letting your people interact with customers, even those who do not normally see the customer.

### Conclusion

Customer service starts before your customers have ever bought from you.

Understand the total end-to-end scenario and ensure your customer promise is present at every point.

# Establishing What Your Core Competences Are



This article is focused on the human capital in a business and the concept of core competences of an organisation.

The core competences refer to the collective know-how a company has or wants to develop in a particular aspect of delivering its product or service. It is these "competences" which make it better able to compete in the marketplace.

The collective skills of various people in an organisation are usually a central part of any core competences it may have developed; these, combined with any technologies that may underpin it, form the competences. What makes them "core" is the fact that the competences are a crucial part of the company's ability to deliver its customer solution and compete in the market.

The concept of the core competences of a business was articulated and given currency by CK Prahalad and Gary Hamel in the Harvard Business Review, May-June 1990.

Their research sought to explain why companies outperformed and overtook their often much larger competitors despite fewer resources.

Their work showed that companies need to think about what competences they need and how they are going to develop them.

Because core competences rely so much on the skills and know-how of people, it brings so called "human capital" into strategic focus.

No longer can decisions be taken on pure financial terms, like cutting costs, if they damage a core competence which is underpinning a business's success or being developed for the future.

It is often said that "business is all about people". Let's define that a bit more precisely. A business depends on the attitudes and skills of its people.

You need both. Hiring people purely on their attitudes will not give you the skills you need. Hire people first and foremost for the right skills.

Attitude comes second, important though it is. Management sets the lead on the attitudes it wants. If it is grumpy, unfriendly, and unhelpful to those with whom it works, it can expect the same behaviour amongst the rest of the organisation. So set the tone you want for your organisation.

Nurturing the skills you want is just as important. The concept of core competences now takes on a strategic importance. Investing in the skills base of your organisation is of equal importance as investing in buildings, plant and machinery, technology and systems.

So in framing your HR policy, you should add in the strategic dimension of what your core competences need to be, to make the business successful.

A good place to start to do this is in a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. Your core competences should come out of strengths and weaknesses.

These are internal and only concerned with your organisation. External issues are dealt with by opportunities and threats.

If you need certain competences and have not got them, they should be listed under weaknesses.

Out of this list should come a clear plan of action as to how you will obtain them. Under strengths will be listed those competences which you feel you have and which matter to your competitiveness.

You will find your SWOT analysis far more meaningful if you use this approach.

You will also find on a practical basis, that by understanding your core competences, day to day decisions become much easier.

When you recruit, the decision should be framed around the competences you are seeking as part of your overall strategy.

Recruitment now takes on a whole new dimension, with strategic fulfilment a part of it.



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**Next month: Recruiting and Inducting People ~ Retaining and Removing People**