

## CUSTOMER DELIGHT - A MYTH OR REALITY : SOME REFLECTIONS

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*You will be judged by what you do, not what you say*

*-Anonymous*

### ABSTRACT

In to-days context, it is not enough if the product meets the functional requirements of the customer, it should also meet certain other customer expectations like the behavior/attitude of the person who provides service to create the **customer delight**. The companies shall address the enablers [technical and behavioral] for customer satisfaction for business growth with utmost importance as they are interdependent in nature.

In this Paper an attempt is made to understand the concept of customer satisfaction / delight, apart from finding out why business loose customers. Further, based on the author's experience, as a customer, a case is made out to adopt a strategic approach and focus on customer experience if the organizations are serious about creating customer delight. Lastly few suggestions are made to ensure customers delight a real and not an elusive one.

Key Words: Customer delights behavioral aspects, Kamakshi approach, Customer experience, and customer service and follow up to create customer delight.

### INTRDOUCTION:

In this 21<sup>st</sup> century the digital revolution has transformed the economy in to a new economy which empowered the customer with the new set of capabilities such as access to greater amount of information, wider variety of available goods and services and greater ease of interacting with the

service provider and creation of new customers. Further, in to-days context, it is not enough if the product meets the functional requirements of the customer, it should also meet certain other customer expectations like the behavior/attitude of the person who provides service to create the **customer delight**.

First of all we need to understand that the customer satisfaction is the combination of both technical features & human behavioral aspects. The quality management only addresses the systems and processes; service addresses the customer service independently. In to-day's new economy, it is essential to address the enablers for customer satisfaction for business growth with utmost importance as they are interdependent in nature.

### What is Customers satisfaction/delight?

It is a given fact that businesses are sustained by customers and satisfied customers keep a business afloat while delighted customers make it grow by leaps and bounds. Former President of the Royal Scandinavian Airlines Jan Carlzon wrote in his book *Moments of Truth* –

*“Anytime a customer comes into contact with any aspect of a business, however remote, is an opportunity to form an impression.”* It is at these moments that a company either causes customer delight or customer dismay or in most cases of successful companies “customer satisfaction”.

Let me first define customer satisfaction and customer delight and then later illustrate them with some of my personal experiences as a customer. When performance equals expectation there is satisfaction and when performance exceeds

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expectation delight is experienced and when it grossly falls short, it results in customer dismay.

**Now, coming to the customer satisfaction, it can be represented as follows:**

Customer satisfaction = Performance Features + Behavioral Features + Price

Performance features address the issues on conformance to the standards and variability and the behavioral aspects of service provider deals with the following components of service which is a major enabler for the growth of the business as indicated in the research.

1. Responsiveness- Readiness of employee to provide service.
2. Courtesy- Respect, Friendliness of contact personnel
3. Timeliness- Delivery on Time, First Contact Resolution
4. Complete Resolution- Listening to customers
5. Communication- Speaking to the Customers in their language [Empathy]
6. Credibility—Taking Ownership in Resolving the complaint.

If customer experience matches customer expectations it leads to customer satisfaction and if customer experience doesn't match Customer Expectation, it leads to Customer dissatisfaction. On similar lines if it exceeds expectation leads to Customer Delight. That is the prime concern of the organizations. If that is so

***What is the right way to approach customers?***

**Right way to approach customers**

How do we get a consumer to buy our product or how do we get our employee to stick to our company. There are basically two approaches in this regard to be adopted by any company first to create satisfaction and then delight. The most common approach is the **Kama approach**. Kama is the love-god who shoots arrows that will spawn desire in the heart of hermits. Kama seduces rishis like Vishwamitra with apsaras

like Menaka. This approach means stirring the most primal instincts of man – hunger, greed, lust.

This Kama approach works if one visualizes the customer as a rishi who aspires to be a deva, constantly craving for the next best deal. Shoot one arrow, get one apsara to do her dance, offer instant gratification, lower prices, hike incentives and boom – you have success i.e., instant consumer conversion or instant employee satisfaction. But for how long? Sooner or later there will be another apsara in the market – a competitor offering a lower price or a higher pay packet. The rishi who was seduced by one can easily be seduced by another.

**So lust can never create loyalty.**

On the other hand there is **Kamakshi Approach** in which we visualize the target not as deva, a common god, but as Maha-deva, God spelt in capital. This God (Lord Shiva) refused to fall for Kama's cheap tactics; he opened his third eye and reduced Kama to ashes. But he did marry. Not a nymph, but Kamakshi, she who contains Kama in her glance.

We are all aware while Kama thinks of Shiva as a prey to be struck down by an arrow; Kamakshi approaches Shiva with awe and reverence. While Kama believes in instant gratification, **Kamakshi thinks of lifelong loyalty**. In the Kama approach, the focus is on lust (Prince/incentive) rather than the bride (product/organization) or the groom (consumer/employee). In the Kamakshi approach, the focus is firmly on the bride and the groom. What does the bride actually offer? Why? What does the groom seek? Why? Can there be a true wedlock, or will it just be a casual affair? This means fewer discussions on trimming the cost and more discussions on consumer insights and employees feedback. This means effort and proactive activities and not simply reactive promotions. This means actually looking at the soul of Shiva, not just his senses.

**Need for Strategic approach:**

In other words organizations need to think strategically and creatively. Usually entrepreneurs especially those who pioneered a technology or a

process tend to fall in love with the product and lose all focus. Henry Ford's insistence on producing only black T model cars is a good example. Theodore Levitt, who gave management the term **marketing myopia** back in the 1960s- a concept which remains totally valid and current even to-day, illustrated this simple but profound idea with the famous instance of American railroads, which saw themselves as being a backbone of industrialization and of the economy, as indeed they had been for a century. But they lost sight of their primary function to fulfill a need for convenient mode of transportation and failed to see potential competition from airlines and the motorcar.

By a strange irony, **South west Airlines** the most successful low-cost, short haul, airline in the world, clearly sought to treat the motor car ( and not other airlines) as the competition and creatively positioned itself against the target customer who would otherwise use his own car. *So companies ought to remember that their best-loved products exist ultimately for a purpose*, which itself might be changing right under their noses without they realizing it. In other words, they must see business as a way of providing something for someone else to pay for and to value. Therefore, to be internally focused, and to think of the advantages and benefits of any product or service in one's own terms (*rather than the customers*) is bound, sooner or later, to become a self imposed trap or imprisonment of the mind.

**Focus on the customer experience:**

Many organizations limit themselves to the products and services that they make, without realizing that it is the total customer experience that matters most in differentiating yourself and delighting customers. Focusing on the customer experience requires organizations to think holistically about every single customer touch point and every stage in the customer lifecycle. It also demands a total quality approach to designing and improving the customer experience, so that customer delight becomes reality.

Further, marketing has traditionally thought of its activities in terms of the infamous four P's (product, price, promotion and place). This functional view of

marketing activities fosters the mistaken impression that marketing functions are independent silos. Instead, marketing activities should be conceptualized as a set of logically related value-creation processes. In this regard it may be worth recalling what Prof. Mohanbir Sawhney of Kellogg School of Management had to say:

*"Drawing insights from the business process reengineering literature, I believe that marketing needs to be organized around processes not functions like channel marketing audience marketing or product marketing. These value-creation processes include the processes for understanding defining realizing, delivering, capturing, communicating and sustaining value"*.

OK all this is fine but **why a business losses customers?** With a view to find out this vital aspect we have undertaken a survey of 150 customers, by administering a questionnaire, coming out of retail malls after completing their shopping. *The results of the survey are presented as under.*

**Why a business losses customers?-the survey results**

As per our survey on lost customers by major companies, 14% have left for better product, 9% for cheaper product, and 68% left because of poor service (service provider's attitude) which can be easily avoided by designing effective customer service processes which enables the company to respond. *The survey clearly demonstrates the significance of soft service quality in relation to product quality.*

Reason	Percentage
Dissatisfied with the Personnel's attitude	68%
Disappointed with the quality of the product	14%
Find the price too high	9%
Adopt new habits	5%
Move	3%
Die	1%

Source: Survey conducted by the author

It is in this context that we need to stress on the service quality part, as 68% of the customers desert the service provider. The behavioral/attitude component of service is a major determining factor on the growth of the company which complements the performance for complete customer satisfaction/delight.

### **But where is the service?**

All of us are well aware that retailing today is tough. Too much competition and too many big guys who can roll over you by offering cheaper prices and more goods are a big part of the present retail equation. But we have a weapon. It's called **customer service**. And good customer service means the customer is always king (or queen). And that involves doing whatever it takes to make them happy.

*Let me narrate some of my experiences in this regard:*

**a. Departmental store X:** This store has perfected the neutron-bomb theory of retailing. You remember the neutron bomb - it was designed to kill the people but leave the buildings. In other words, it has lots of merchandise but no sales help that can be located.

But I was determined to find the sales help, and with my diligent searching I made a discovery. There are several "hiding places" in the store I visited - spots ostensibly on the sales floor but out of sight of the customers - where the sales people hang out. One was giving another a back rub. In another department, a small group was happily chatting away. But they were not to be interrupted by me, so I went on my way. They also didn't seem very happy to see me. Even in these stringent financial times, it doesn't cost much to smile. I wonder how much merchandise is walking out of this stores front door without being paid for. No one shoplifts while they are being waited on. So may be they could cut their shrink by attending to customers.

**b. Departmental store Y:** Recently I went to a men's departmental store to look at a sport

coat. I did find a sales person who began to help me when the phone rang. He answered it. Must have been a great call. After about five minutes listening to him talk on the phone with his back to me, I left. The message implicitly sent: Whoever was on the phone was more important than the potential customer standing there waiting to be helped. No wonder sales of this store are down 10%. *High prices and no customer attention is a bad combination.*

**c. Departmental store Z:** There is a pretty large store in my local mall, so to find what I was seeking, I needed to ask people. Big mistake. No one seemed to know where anything was. Well, that's not entirely true; some of the other customers were actually quite helpful. Couldn't blame the sales staff - many were new to the store, and I doubt they had received much, or any, training.

### ***So what did I learn in my brief shopping excursion?***

First, I hate to go shopping as it has become a thoroughly unpleasant experience. Second, lots of friendly customers helping each other out, since the sales staff is either nonexistent or would rather not be bothered. All these show that **service does matter**. Further, when we take a look at the customer satisfaction ratings given by different agencies we find that they correlate closely with market share and financial performance.

Many people forget that it's easier to retain a customer than it is to acquire a new one. Loyal customers are easy to market to, spend more and shop more often. The old 80/20 rule applies to most small retailers as the top 20% of your customers are indeed providing 80% of your revenue. So we all agree that customer service in to-day competitive environment is very much important if organizations intend to satisfy their customers and create customer delight. In this regard it's worth picking up some thing from Mr. Barack Obama, the US President.