



THE INTERNATIONAL
CUSTOMER SERVICE
INSTITUTE

THE BENEFITS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE CERTIFICATION

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THE INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD FOR SERVICE
EXCELLENCE





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Introduction

71%

Of business leaders believe that customer experience is the next corporate battleground

Shaw & Ivens

The UK economy is at a significantly low point. The second plunge into recession and the uncertainty surrounding the Eurozone has combined to leave organisations of all sizes and strength, and across all sectors, in survival mode and low in confidence.

Consumers are tightening their belts, and growth is slower than predicted (if there is any growth at all). Amongst this uncertainty, one thing is fairly clear....

More than ever, this is not a time to be losing customers.

But we all knew that anyway didn't we? And there is never really a good time to lose customers, whatever the economic climate. Everyone knows this, sure. But what are organisations really doing to ensure customers are retained and stay loyal?

Ask yourself another question, or maybe ask the one above in a slightly different way. Is customer service in the UK improving in the way it should be?

There were a number of issues surrounding the London 2012 Olympic Games, and the organisation of the event. Many of the question marks were in relation to the service that the UK provides.

Comedian, Sean Hughes, during a radio interview when asked about the Games, "the UK is rubbish at customer service and we should just accept it" or words to that effect. He felt there was a certain quaintness to this and it was typically British. But if he is right, then the poor standards of service are certainly no laughing matter.

It may be pushing it a little to say UK customer service is rubbish. But it hasn't moved forward in the last twenty years in the way it should. There are companies who have made huge strides and are reaping the benefits, but they are few and far between.

What of the rest? It varies but one fact remains. UK organisations are not fully, or even remotely, utilising the power of excellent customer service. They are missing out on the massive benefits and they are losing or disenfranchising customers every day.

And it needn't be the case.

Customer Service Excellence

The word excellence has been used in customer service terms for a long, long time. There were service excellence awards as far back as 1992.

Nowadays, lots of organisations say they are, or aspire to be, excellent. This can be found on their websites and other promotional material. But they are hardly going to say they want to be anything else are they?

In a world where there are those that do, and those that talk about it, what makes a service excellence organisation?

The common misconception is that it's one that gives the customer everything they ask for. Service excellence isn't about that although there is some merit in giving the customer what they want. After all they are the customer, the ones with the money and therefore building a strategy around customer requirements is a good starting point.

However service excellence organisations go much further than strategy. It's about creating an experience for the customer that covers their whole journey. So if an organisation has a vision, mission statement, strategy and values that strive to put the customer at the heart of what they do, they have made a really positive statement of intent.

Although they still need to make it happen.

The truly best practice organisations do it for real. They take these policies and put them into everything they do. They recruit, induct and train their people in line with their policies. They apply the same treatment to their products by asking 'is this what our customers want and need from us?' They have call centres and websites that make it easy for the customer to contact and interact with them. And they make sure that the processes that their people use do the same, and work for the customer's benefit not against them.

All of this creates an excellent experience. And throughout, the best-in-class organisations measure constantly and consistently so they know how they are doing and where things are going wrong.

Many people will look at the above and think it's quite obvious. And rightly so, because it is.

55%

Of customers would pay extra to guarantee a better service

Dedaqto research



“Know what the customer wants and values, and then combine everything internally to deliver it. “

It makes perfect sense. So much so that you wonder why everyone isn't doing it. The reality though is quite different.

70%

of buying experiences are based on how the customer feels they are being treated

Mckinsey

Plenty of organisations do some, but very rarely do all.

Companies have been involved in the assessment and judging of organisations for customer service awards for 15 years and have seen plenty of ways in which good practice is wasted because it only scratches the surface of what is really needed.

For example, there are a number of organisations who have a terrific mission, statement, a brilliant vision and set of customer driven values on the walls at their head office. And that's exactly where it stays – on the wall. The people have never engaged in any of it and if you asked them, the majority would not be able to tell you what it even said, even though they walk past it every working day.

There are the organisations that have fantastic processes and products, but haven't trained their people to use them effectively. Or worse yet, haven't trained their people at all. We have all asked a shop assistant for information on a product and felt we probably know more about it than they do.

Another example are those that have an amazing showroom or website, but haven't developed the products their customers need. Or vice versa, with a website that is unappealing or hard to navigate, or a showroom that doesn't show their products in a good light.

And finally there are the organisations that have great people but provide them with poor processes, technology or products. Sometimes all three. And they don't make any effort to engage with them in what they want to do. Incidentally, great people usually find a way to deliver good service in spite of these issues. But why should they have to?

There lies the problem. If you don't fit everything together then what you end up with is a mess, rather than anything approaching service excellence.



A 2%

Increase in customer retention has the same effect as decreasing costs by 10%

Leading on the edge of Chaos, Emmet Murphy & Mark Murphy

And an incredible amount of money is wasted if an organisation doesn't get it right. Just ask the company that puts all its staff through a huge training programme but doesn't train them in the right things.

Yes the ones that do it all have to work harder, maybe spend a bit more and they find it definitely takes longer to reach their objective. But when they get there, they stay there and find it's actually just the beginning. By this time, a continuous culture has developed and they keep on getting better whilst their competition is standing still.

Or wondering why the gap is widening.

What is Customer Service Certification?

80%

of firms would like to use customer experience as a form of differentiation

Forrester's: The State of Customer Experience 2010

"If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there"

The above line is often, mistakenly, quoted from Alice in Wonderland. In fact, it didn't appear in any Alice in Wonderland book but it's a fair observation nonetheless, wherever it came from.

Organisations need to look at service excellence as a journey because there are no short cuts or magic buttons. It can only be achieved with a long term approach and commitment.

And as with any journey there are two key components:

1. Where you are starting from
2. Where you are going to

A robust certification should provide this because it addresses both needs.

Any certification will need a solid, independent assessment phase. One that truly measures the current position and provides a detailed report that identifies what is good, what needs to be improved and most importantly, what to focus on.

At any time, but especially with an uncertain economy, organisations are not going to be able to find the resource, budget or time to deal with every single issue. The best focus on the things that really matter, and that their customers really value.

It is also crucial that an assessment checks and measures the right things. The areas covered must be ones that matter, and that make a difference to the customer experience. There is little point checking the minor details that no-one notices but ignoring areas that will determine if a customer comes back again.

This assessment of the current position, or a starting position if you like because everything beyond this point comes from here, will also ensure:

- An understanding of current performance levels
- An understanding of customer perception
- Knowledge of what customers really want, and which are most important to them
- Knowledge of the degree of people engagement because they will be the key to success or failure on the journey

70%

of customer experience
management best in
class adopters use
customer feedback to
make strategic decisions

- Understanding where the resistance and roadblocks will come from (so you can include them in your plans)
- There is context of how this compares against your competitors or simply against other service providers

The report and set of recommendations will be the cornerstone of a plan to move forward, usually over a period of around twelve months. It can be shorter or longer depending on how close to the goal of service excellence the organisation is. However, twelve months is a typical period because it provides enough time to plan properly, engage people and make the necessary improvements and test them.

After the changes are implemented, there should be an independent certification.

If a consultant has done the initial assessment and provided a report, plan and number of recommendations that have been carefully implemented (possibly with their support and guidance), they are not the right person to certify that the improvements are in place. After all, they are hardly going to criticise their own work.

A good certification process will have an independent check of the improvements before any certificate is awarded.

But there should be more to this phase than a certificate to hang on the wall or a plaque to display in reception (as nice as these are).

The certification needs to be an aspirational target. Having a goal of a standard that sets you apart from the rest will engage people and get them on board, because any journey needs people to be fully on board. You can't pull them along kicking and screaming.

When a certification is achieved, it is also something that can be used to benefit the business in many ways but particularly in terms of PR and marketing. We know that customers will pay more and come back time and again if they are guaranteed to receive great service – and a customer service standard is an independent, external seal of just that.

A customer service certification shouldn't be easy. Far from it.

It must make an organisation prove, without doubt, that they deliver service excellence and that they are putting the customer at the heart of everything they do. It must be robust and demanding, asking for evidence and data to back up the numbers.



And finally it should only last a maximum of 12 months after it is awarded. A lot can change in an organisation, in much less than a year. So a reputable certification or standard will ask that organisation to display that they are still doing all of the right things year on year.

Customer expectations are constantly increasing, so service levels also need to.

As former Campbell's
Soup CEO, Doug
Conant, once said, "To
win in the marketplace
you must first win in the
workplace."

Doug Conant, CEO,
Campbell's

The Key Benefits

The benefits of achieving certification against an international standard are numerous and will vary across different sectors and organisations. What does not vary is how valuable these benefits will be. The main benefits are as follows:

Making Cost Savings

Being excellent at customer service means you focus on what the customer wants. This also means you focus on what they don't want and if it's not important to your customers, should it be important to you? Organisations that have cut out the things their customers don't care about have been able to remove non-value-adding processes and put more resource onto the things that matter. They have also saved money and in the economic climate the UK is in, that's not a bad thing either.

96%

of unhappy customers don't complain, however 91% of those will simply leave and never come back

1st Financial Training services

Engaging Your People

It's hard to get everyone in an organisation committed and focussed on a single goal. But a certification for customer service excellence is one of those goals that people can buy into and engage with – because they can have a degree of control over it. People will always be the single biggest factor behind success or failure and if they are all working towards a common objective of being the best, or one of the best, for customer service this can galvanise the whole organisation.

Increase Your Performance Indicators

Whether it's an increase in new customers, increased customer loyalty, increased customer satisfaction, increased revenue or all of them, being excellent at customer service means that you see these key performance indicators going in the right direction. Just look at the top providers of customer service in the UK. They are all successful organisations doing well even in a difficult financial climate. Coincidence? Not at all!

The top four key performance indicators (KPIs) used by operationally excellent service companies



Enhance Your Reputation

Word of mouth is a very strong indicator as to how an organisation is perceived. But there are massive practical values including savings on marketing costs (look at how many people join First Direct on recommendation), customer loyalty (they don't want to risk leaving an organisation with such a great reputation) and winning new business. If you get a reputation in your field, and beyond it for that matter, you get a lot more besides. Your customers will be doing your sales and marketing for you.

A customer is 4 times more likely to defect to a competitor if the problem is service related than price or product related

Bain & Company

Differentiate From Your Competition

If a customer is choosing between you and a competitor and it's a close run thing, then offering that bit extra can make all of the difference. A customer service excellence certification tells potential customers what they can expect and will make them choose you because they want a supplier they can trust.

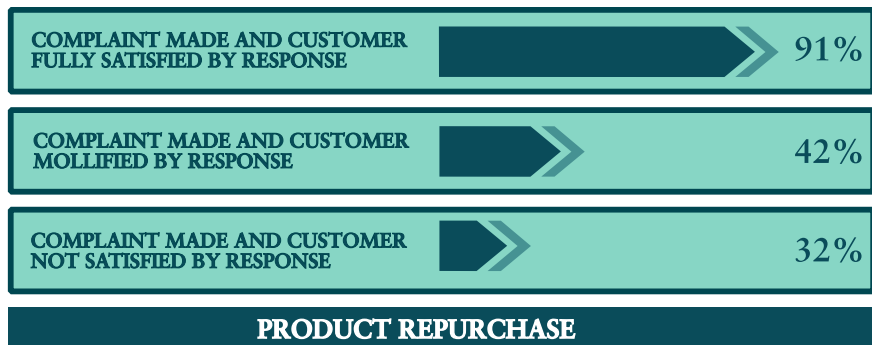
Be Consistent

A standard can help you to create a consistent level of customer service across the whole organisation. If everyone is working towards a common objective and guidelines, it will be much easier to deliver the same level of service, even if this is through multiple sites all over the country, or even the world. Business is becoming increasingly global and consistency between different countries is a big challenge that a certification can help to bridge.

Win More Business

With product and processes becoming more and more similar, customer service is one of the few areas in which an organisation can differentiate themselves and also stand out. When involved in bids or tender processes, having a certification can be a huge advantage. It is likely that, in the future, it will be mandatory for customer service standards to be a prerequisite on tender proposals. But even before then, if you are able to demonstrate an independently recognised certification it will put you ahead of many rivals in the bid process.

The percentage of people who repurchase based on how their complaint was dealt with





Grow Your Business Abroad

A customer service standard, and particularly one that is recognised globally, is a badge that can help you to sell and grow outside of the UK. International companies will look for indicators that reassure them that they can trust their suppliers. In an increasingly global marketplace, this is a factor that can maximise the potential for growth.



About TISSE2012

Engaged employees lead to better business outcomes. Companies with engaged workers have 6% higher net profit margins

Towers Perrin/Kenexa Research 2012

The International Standard for Service Excellence (TISSE) has been developed by The International Customer Service Institute (TICSI) with the objective of making it the global standard for quality customer service. The aim of TISSE is to enable organisations to focus their attention on the delivery of excellence in service quality while at the same time providing recognition of success through a formal third party certification scheme.

The International Standard for Service Excellence is implemented and certified by a global network of regional partners. As highly trusted partners of the Institute, they provide official recognition to all organisations committed to customer service excellence. An organisation that fulfills most of the requirements of TISSE can choose to be internationally certified by one of those partners.

TISSE holds the status of an independent standard. The details of this standard have been developed by TICSI and revised and approved by the Institute's Strategic Advisory Panel which include highly recognised customer service experts from each corner of the world.

There have been enhancements in TISSE over the years, which enable TISSE to remain current and competitive in an environment where changes in perceptions of service excellence are customer driven and therefore dynamic. Previous revisions of TISSE were known as The International Customer Service Standard (TICSS) and all future revisions will take place every two years.

About Ethos

Ethos is the Regional TICSI Partner covering the whole on the GCC. After being established in the UAE in 2004, Ethos has evolved into the leading provider of Customer Service Solutions in the Middle East. Ethos has a wealth of experience across a broad spectrum of industries in both the public and private sectors, from Banking, Oil and Gas to Federal Ministries.

As a Dubai SME100 Organisation, Ethos prides itself on innovative culture, developing a range of solutions from Feedback Management Solution (Jawebny), E-Learning (Learning Moments) and Mystery Shopping tools (KnowledgeTRAK) amongst others.

As the Regional TICSI Partner, Ethos has close links with other TICSI Partners across the globe in countries such as India, UK, Australia and Malaysia, meaning that Ethos is always at the cutting edge of the latest developments in Service Excellence.



About TICSI

The International Customer Service Institute was founded in 2005, operating from its headquarters in London and Dubai, however, represented all over the world through its global implementation and certification partnership network.

TICSI aims to inspire the achievement of the highest standards of professionalism in all aspects of service quality in every international market. With a need clearly identified for an independent organisation to set global customer service standards TICSI has created its own customer service standard (TISSE2012) as a cornerstone against which to compare.

TICSI was set up to collate and amass best practices in the service quality field and to provide the means for dissemination of the collected information to member organisations and individuals. With a knowledgeable and highly experienced team, service quality experts on a strategic advisory panel and worldwide partnership in Customer Service Excellence along with continuous research conducted into new practices and methodologies, TICSI is leading the field in global best practice in customer service and service quality.

TICSI is an innovative and progressive organisation that is the global customer service excellence thought leader. If you couple this with the further developments in the TICSI Solution Portfolio and the expansion of the Partnership network, the future of the Institute looks very bright.

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