



Customer Service Insights for Sponsorship Success

What your customers do not tell you is just as important as what they do. In fact, in many cases, it is more important. Think about the restaurant, store or event you left proclaiming, “I will never go back.” Let’s go one step further – how many people did you share your story with?

People tend to think that customer service is simply common sense. That said, if “common sense” was more “common,” we would have a plethora of happy customers – internally and externally. Why do many companies, properties and events ignore glaring emails, aggravated customers and settle for mediocre?

The encouraging news is that most companies understand that customer service is *pivotal* to their success – especially in the event and hospitality industries.

No matter what your job title is, you are always “selling,” your event, venue,

services, ideas, YOU! Giving customers what they want and over delivering on their expectations is essential to achieving extraordinary success. Today’s customers are educated, opinionated and experienced. They are comparing you and your organization to blue chip corporations like FedEx and Disney. They have experienced outstanding customer service and they not only expect it, they insist on it!

So let’s begin with seven customer service “insights” that you can review with your team, offering your customers a refreshed and increased level of service.

1. First Things First – How Good Do You Want To Be?

The first question to ponder is – *How good do you want to be?* What is your mindset?

Sales is theater! Whether you are on the phone or in the presence of the client, you are “on stage.” This is your ROCK STAR moment! Think of the Disney experience – smiles, eye contact, engagement, warmth and cleanliness.

Peak performance starts with YOU! The customer service traits that you personally develop will stay with you as you grow in your career and move to other departments or companies. Customer service is a skill you can improve every day – with your family, friends, colleagues, event or venue attendees, vendors, and sponsors. Practice courtesy in the grocery line or when you purchase your morning coffee – put the cell phone away and engage with the person providing a service to you. Change their day with your positivity and you will change yours!

2. Oh...But The Web We Weave!

Who is more important, the customer or your employee? The answer is both! The front line is serving the customer. How are you serving the front line that is serving the customer?

It is your job to serve the employee (the “internal customer”) who is serving the client (the “external customer”). We cannot have two polar opposite personalities; this is no time for Jekyll and Hyde. If we are negative back stage and positive on stage, it will not be long until the word is out about you – and it won’t be a stellar review!

3. A Line For a Line

As event professional, Chuck O’Connor, of the National Cherry Fest is famous for stating, “When I see a line, I see a missed opportunity.” Customer service goes beyond the lines. When there are lines to park your car, to get into the event, procure an ID bracelet, purchase a beverage, enjoy a snack, seek relief at the restroom and you couple these experiences with no where to sit – you have a “customer unfriendly” event.

While there may be profit for a year or two, your attendees comprise the largest part of your audience and the reputation of your event will be that of unorganized, greedy, impossible or just not fun.

Look for the “lines” and other areas of improvement at your event and venue!

4. Survey Says?

When you take the time to create and execute a survey, whether internally or with the assistance of a third party research company, the results are important to read and heed. Yet so many event professionals will debate the survey (without the attendee who completed the survey present!) and come up with excuses for the lack of seating, long lines, uninteresting vendors, and loud music rather than seek a solution.

If you ask for an opinion – honor that opinion.

5. Under Promise/Over Deliver

Open a newspaper, magazine, or email advertisement and there are “promises” of grandeur when you purchase a product, attend an event, and dine at that award winning restaurant. We expect water view or mountainside hotel rooms based on the brochure photos, front row seats at concert venues, and close parking at the mall. When we raise expectations that we cannot meet through our advertising message, our customers are rightfully disappointed.

Think about what you can deliver and the additional services that you can add (without an additional charge!) to the product or the experience. In New Orleans, this “unexpected extra” is referred to as “*lagniappe*.”

For example, if you have sold advance tickets to your event, you may want to offer a special entrance and perhaps a special gift for that customer. If you attract a great deal of children to your event, create “reprieve areas” (restrooms, diaper change tents, seating and activities) in one or more areas of your site depending on how large a venue you have. Create a hospitality tent for your sponsors where they can relax with other partners and be treated special.

Think about things that you can do to add that unexpected “wow” to the attendee, sponsor and vendor experience. Remember, customers “expect” what they have purchased; offer “more” to exceed their expectations and cultivate RAVING FANS!

6. Mindset – Improvement

In the quest for providing outstanding service, we do not “arrive,” there is always a new way to “fluff the pillow,” or in the case of many hotels, a new kind of pillow to add to the pillow library!

At the conclusion of an event, presentation, or meeting, stop and analyze, what went well, what could use improvement

and next steps. If we simply slap ourselves on the back and state “great job”, we will not reach the next plateau.

In your analysis meetings – list “the good, the bad and potentials for improvement.” You do not have to find the solutions at that meeting, but you can ensure that the team you lead (or are part of) are all on the same page in regard to things that you did well and things that can be enhanced. Never stop learning!

7. Gratitude

My Aunt Joan always told us to “write a thank you note for a thank you note!”

Thank attendees for coming to your event, vendors for participating and sponsors for supporting the event. This can be done in several ways.

When attendees depart, say thank you and offer them a brochure and a discount for your next event or to a restaurant in town. Perhaps you have sponsor samples you can offer as guests depart – a hot or cold beverage, light snack or “goody bag” with items they will find useful in the future (lip balm, sunscreen, lotion).

Thank you your sponsors for participating in the event with thank you note after the event and again at Thanksgiving or the start of the New Year. If you host an Irish fest, send a St. Patrick’s Day card. If you produce more than one event, invite your sponsors to the other event with your compliments. Develop a minimum of quarterly touch points.

In the end, what are you really selling? You are selling your event, your venue, your reputation. Put your best smile on, shoulders back and walk on that stage! Game’s on!

As the Director of Corporate Partnerships for Newport Harbor Corporation in Newport, RI, Communications Professor at the University of Rhode Island, Active Board member, busy mother and wife, Gail implements “best practices” in customer service – signed, sealed and delivered – as best possible – every day! Drawing on over two decades in the Hospitality Industry, a leader in the Customer Service arena, Gail Lowney Alofsin shares her passion and best practices for sales, marketing and leadership through her educational and inspirational seminars. Visit www.gailspeaks.com, email gailalofsin@yahoo.com or call 401-640-4418 for more information.