



Just A Moment...
IT Commentary

Customer Satisfaction

by Leon A. Enriquez

Consider the passage of time and its effect on the business process, and the emphasis on what the marketplace or customers demand.

In fact, the last 40 years of the 20th century has been characterised by rapid change.

The 1960s were a decade of mass production where manufacturing companies strove to increase output but often at the expense of quality. Goods were cheaper because of economies of scale but quality was a problem.

The period of the 1970s saw companies striving to differentiate themselves by the special attention paid to quality excellence while maintaining high production rates. Quality assurance and quality control helped achieve the degree of excellence issues for products or services.

By the 1980s, the focus shifted to product variety simply because every customer wanted their purchase to be different as compared to their neighbours. And this objective of offering variety was achieved by the introduction of flexible manufacturing systems.

In the 1990s, customers desired novelty, resulting in shrinking product development times and market batch windows. To meet customer demands, new products had to be introduced regularly, quickly and effectively. And this has been the favoured focus. No doubt, IT has played a significant part as a change agent in jump-starting the knowledge-based economy.



Customer Is King

Now, as we enter a new millennium and a new century, it is no longer enough for a company to maintain competitive advantage by the means exploited in the past. And organisations realise that they need to be constantly in a state of flux to improve their ways of working and business processes.

Yes, we have entered the age of innovation with a fresh perspective but with a sense of uncertainty challenging our aspirations. At the same time, we also grasp the lure of unlimited possibilities. And for the first time in mankind's history, the supply side outpaces the demand side of the equation.

Previously, the power of choice was dictated by the supply chains of vendors, suppliers and manufacturers who determined what goods or services to produce based on what they thought the market or customers needed. But the advent of the information superhighway and public Internet changed the basic rules of business. This consumer revolution has now put the power of choice back into the rightful hands of the individual customer.

Thus, the business world has become more open and more transparent because of the availability and accessibility of information at the potential customer's convenience just by a simple mouse-click. Power actually resides where it really belongs – in the hands of the individual.

Today, because customers as individuals, are more well-informed, have more choices and are quite savvy about what they want, there is an urgent need to customise products and services to suit the individual taste. To do so effectively, companies have to embark with a new initiative. And this is where IT can help deliver the competitive edge to touch your customers the way they desire, anywhere, any time.

Intense competition for customer attention, and the wide variety of alternatives available, and the Internet explosion have spawned unprecedented levels of customer choice. For example, with the profiling and monitoring of individual customer behaviour when they visit a website, the fundamental issue at hand, is to know who your high-value customers are and consequently, learn and know how to build and retain such profitable customer relationships.



For instance, IT software packages can keep track of interactions on a website and profile the preferences of each visitor to the site. The proactive follow-up action is obviously to put in place a customer relationship management system infrastructure. This new trend is to enhance the customer experience on a one-to-one personalised basis and be able to measure of customer delight at the point-of-contact or touch point.

Obviously, with the right solution in place, each interaction with the customer presents an opportunity to better understand the unique needs of each customer. By capitalising on customer information captured during each interaction whether through a call centre, face-to-face, or over the Internet, you as a service provider are able to tailor the right solution, service or product to cater to his or her needs without losing the human touch. This approach is critical to secure repeat business and establish a real sense of customer intimacy.

If you execute your customer relationship strategy correctly, you will increase your degree of success in each encounter. Chances are that the customer that you worked hard to obtain will remain loyal and be a repeat buyer for a long time to come. This is clearly epitomised by two words: customer satisfaction.

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