

The Twelve Essentials of Customer Service Recovery

Customer service recovery is the process that kicks in when customer service goes wrong. It is not and should never be considered a containment exercise but an opportunity to show the customer how good you really are.

Anyone can give OK customer service provided there are reasonable systems and processes in place and provided staff have a basic level of common sense. But when it comes to recovery, most organisations fall down as they haven't built recovery situations into their processes.

This blog looks at twelve customer service essentials. You need to make sure that all these are in place or your customer service recovery process will become your customer service disaster process.

The whole of your customer service recovery process needs to be built into your strategic and operational systems so it is part of day to day customer service. These twelve essentials apply to all customer service plus day to day customer service recovery and specific marketing campaign customer service and recovery.

Customer Service Recovery 1 - Identify and clearly communicate the strategic goals of your customer service

What are you attempting to achieve here? How does this fit with the strategic goals and core purpose of your organisation? Whatever it is, communicate it clearly with your customers.

"create value for customers to earn their lifetime loyalty" Tesco



"We are Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen." Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company



"Treating people fairly"

Waitrose

Customer Service Recovery 2 - Create and communicate the same customer service message to all staff in the business

This is really about how you do it. If I work for your organisation how do I interpret the word “fairly” or the word “value”? What is it I need to be thinking, saying and behaving?

What about staff who are not in external customer facing jobs? Do we leave them out? I hope not. They all have customers. Their customers may be the people who have direct contact with external customers so it is essential they work with the same messages. Everyone in the organisation needs to breath the same message. We are all role models to each other as well as to our customers.

I’ve lost count of the number of organisations I’ve worked with where the senior management claim exemption from the values and from the training. Senior management are the main role models within the organisation. People won’t live the values the way they are written. They will live them the way senior managers live them. The message people will receive from senior managers is, “This is the way we do things around here. So do what I do, not what I say”.

Customer Service Recovery 3 - Brainstorm all eventualities and have them covered

So you’ve decided to run a promotion, campaign or special offer.

Firstly create your campaign on paper and then walk through it with all your “thinking hats”. Finally, think of all the ways your customers can abuse, scam or get round the rules of the campaign and then have them covered.

Zappos thought through their customer service philosophy. They don’t let anything get in the way. Here are their Values:

1. Deliver WOW through service
2. Embrace and drive change
3. Create fun and a little weirdness
4. Be adventurous, creative and open-minded
5. Pursue growth and learning
6. Build open and honest relationships with communication
7. Build a positive team and family spirit
8. Do more with less
9. Be passionate and determined
10. Be humble



Check out more at: <http://about.zappos.com/our-unique-culture/zappos-core-values/deliver-wow-through-service>

And read some interesting customer service stories about Zappos here:

<http://www.businessinsider.com/zappos-customer-service-crm-2012-1>

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Zappos approach to customer service recovery is to be creative and unconventional. What a great way to free employees up!

Customer Service Recovery 4 - Never reduce the promise

Look at what happened in Waitrose. They launched their free coffee, tea and newspapers for Waitrose MyCard customers in the UK. The campaign has proved to be so successful with millions of people becoming MyWaitrose cardholders and taking advantage of the free drinks and newspapers each day.

But then they introduced a condition that customers must spend a certain amount to qualify for the free newspaper. Then some stores started insisting that only one free drink could be given to each customer present, rather than for the customer and their spouse as previously. So some stores changed the rules and others didn't. Chaos broke out with customers confused about what they could and couldn't do. One store started to ration the empty coffee cups.

A manager at Waitrose admitted to me that the campaign had been too successful!

And on top of all this, what then happens to the brand. It becomes damaged as the message given out is more about taking things away from the customer than giving.

Once a campaign is launched it should never be reduced. It will create far more damage than the loyalty the campaign is intended to create.

Waitrose underestimated how successful the campaign would be and when it took off they then punished customers for being so loyal. It will take a while for the brand to recover from that.

Customer Service Recovery 5 - Make sure everything is joined up

The intentions of your customer service processes and philosophies must be clearly communicated to all staff at all levels so that everyone has the same clarity of understanding throughout the organisation.

Customer Service Recovery 6 - Train all your staff in customer care and customer service recovery

At Zappos the call centre staff go through seven weeks of training to before they are left on their own to talk to customers, and they never use scripts.

No pressure on phone call times for Zappo employees. That would go against their customer service philosophy. Recently they broke their longest call time ever with a phone call which lasted 8 hours and 47 minutes!

Customer Service Recovery 7 - Make sure T & Cs are clear and precise

Back to Waitrose for this one. Whilst everyone is confused about what customers can or cannot have (and are therefore not focused on customer service recovery but on what the rules are) the terms and conditions printed on their website remain unchanged and do not reflect the message being given to their customers. This is also a bad example of Customer Recovery 5 above.

Customer Service Recovery 8 - Listen to your customers

So something has now failed and your customer is complaining.

- Listen to what they have to say
- Do not interrupt them
- Do not make excuses
- Show empathy without being patronising
- Ask questions so that you can learn something
- Apologise
- Ask them what you can do to make it right for them

Customer Service Recovery 9 - Measure and monitor everything

Every campaign must have a set of target outcomes. Monitor and measure so you always know what is happening.

Monitor all social media and respond immediately.

Tesco were recently re-fitting their Wellingborough store. They had decided that rather than close the store for a couple of weeks they would carefully work around the customers. The intention here was to still provide the same level of service.

Although the aisles were narrower, and therefore felt busier, they still managed to offer the same range of products. Extra staff were on hand to guide shoppers to products which were not located in their usual positions.

Despite some inevitable frustration from some customers, the checkout staff were excited about their pending new look store and very focused on making sure the customer experience was positive. They were clearly aware of the potential negative impact the disruption could create and were all ready for it.

Printed signs were positioned around the store which explained to customers what was happening and when each phase would be completed.

I sent out a positive tweet following one visit, which was responded to very quickly by Tesco. They carefully monitor social media so they can communicate immediately with their customers.

At Waitrose they also monitor social media and if they pick up on anything negative they take it offline until it has been dealt with. Sensible perhaps, but it can leave you feeling that they only went offline to stop people hearing what you had to say.

Customer Service Recovery 10 - Don't assume your brand will save you

Arrogance and complacency are your two biggest enemies. Don't rely on the brand to save you. The brand is only as good as your last press story, your last customer tweet, your last tripadvisor customer entry.

I remember designing a negotiating skills course for a company buyer within a large, high profile, household name company a few years ago. He had resisted the need for this course. "Why would I negotiate?" he asked me. "Because of our company name, I expect people to come to us with their best price". "They do," I replied. I then had to explain to him why they came to him with *their* best price, and why he needed to put himself and the team on a negotiating skills course.

Customer Service Recovery 11 - Remember, customer service is a behaviour not a process

The offer of a £5 voucher (Waitrose) or a free meal – excluding drink (Prezzo) should not be seen as the solution. By all means provide these but not as a means to shut the customer up. They will still have their negative perception of your brand, so you end up £5 down and no better off in response.

Customer Service and customer service recovery are all about behaviour not process or procedures. Consider the customer service rep at Zappos who went to a rival shoe store to get a specific pair of shoes for a female customer who was staying at the Mandalay Hotel in Las Vegas because Zappos had run out of stock on this design.

And I guess Zappos can have the last word on behaviour. Their approach to customer service is that it is all about:

“Happy People Making People Happy”

Customer Service Recovery 12 – Your recovery solution really must recover
As a result of experiencing appalling customer service and very low quality food and food preparation at Prezzo, Wembley I was offered a three course meal for 2 people (excluding drink) by the store manager who said that they were too busy to give good customer service

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and good quality food! I passed his comments back to their head office and was assured my feedback would be acted on and that this was not the Prezzo standard. The three course meal offer was upgraded to include house wine.

We took our replacement meal at the Milton Keynes store. They were expecting us but still managed to serve us poor standard food and salad leaves which should have been disposed of at least a week earlier. Their recovery process suggested that their priority is more about cost, rather than satisfying customers.

So my Conclusion?

Well done Tesco

Must try harder Waitrose and Prezzo.

Adrian Green

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Train all your people in customer service, customer service recovery and managing behaviour
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If you would like me to experience your customer service then all you have to do is ask.