

AS SEEN IN  
enLIGHTenment  
MAGAZINE  
APRIL 2016



# EVALUATING YOUR SERVICE

Every aspect of the way we interact with customers is changing, and customer service is yet another example.

BY MARK OKUN

Customer service today has expanded from being the helpful person on the end of the phone or a blind box email into the complete “customer experience.” While it was always the norm to handle problems as they came up, the connected consumer of 2016 demands that their experience be designed to be engaging, exciting, and proactive in the prevention of customer dis-service issues.

Not long ago customers had limited ways to interact with the folks in customer service. They could call on the phone, visit in person, or send a letter by snail mail. Today all those options are open, plus technology has created many others such as email,

instant messaging, video chat, social media, review sites, and texting.

Before the demands placed on us by our 24/7 society, customer service was between the store, the customer, and roughly 11 of the client’s friends. Today that same person can share their pleasant or not-so-pleasant experience with thousands of people in a matter of moments. It pays big dividends to put customer service at the front of the line as a pre-emptive measure rather than a reactive one.

#### WHERE TO START

Superior customer service begins at the top, with direction from the company’s leadership, and



Lucas Sconce  
Chrome or  
Brushed Nickel

# Norwell Lighting

[norwellinc.com](http://norwellinc.com)

800-822-2831



AS SEEN IN  
enLIGHTenment  
MAGAZINE  
APRIL 2016



“If you look after your staff, they’ll take care of your clients. It’s that simple.”

— Sir Richard Branson, founder of Virgin Group

extends well beyond the verbal dictates of wanting the customers to be happy. It makes no difference if the customer service you deliver is merely a façade to placate the client or a real desire to do the right thing. No matter the actual meaning, it will spread through the business like the silent mandate that it is with every employee carrying out the implied intent.

Maybe the age-old rule of customer service, “The Customer Is Always Right” should be “The Customer Is Always the Customer.” I think that the focus of customer service leadership begins with the employees first, the people who work belly-to-belly with the client. When employees are happy and thrilled with their jobs, they will expend the emotional energy needed to convert a new or disappointed customer into a raving fan. How can people dissatisfied with what they do, communicate faith, promise, or understanding to any customer either before or after the sale?

There are many ways to build a positive customer experience even when there are stumbling blocks. Some of these suggestions are simple to implement while others will require the use of resources — either time or money and sometimes both.

#### PRINCIPLE VS. POLICY

Having policies that can be interpreted as negative teach your employees to be negative. This can create the first bump in the customer experience. When creating your company policies, do you take

every possible situation into consideration as a customer would? Do your policies say “buy me with confidence” or “buyer beware?”

Rarely is bad customer service caused by employees; it’s often caused by the policies in place “to protect the company.”

You have probably heard the unbelievable stories about Nordstrom’s return policy. Some of the stories are PR; others are true. At any rate, the policy speaks volumes about a company that builds customer confidence and respects the thoughtfulness of the employees.

Officially, this is Nordstrom’s position: “We handle returns on a case-by-case basis with the ultimate objective of satisfying the customer. We stand behind our goods and services and want customers to be satisfied with them. We’ll always do our best to take care of customers — our philosophy is to deal with them fairly and reasonably; we hope they will be fair and reasonable with us as well.”

Start by having easy-to-understand policies that are simple and in writing. It should be a relatable mission statement to the customer that if they have a problem — no matter the cause — you will be there to help them.

Empower the people who work with the customers to make the necessary decisions to create customer happiness. It is very frustrating on the part of the client when they have to wait for the “higher authority” (aka “management”) to see if their request can be honored. The employee’s title should have no bearing on his/her ability to provide excellent and immediate customer service. *Everyone* must know how policy is to be interpreted, before and after the sale is made. Take a look at your company. Do your policies put your sales/service team at odds with the customer?

#### THE ABCS

There is a basic recipe for great customer service and it’s as simple as ABC: Always Be Courteous. These straightforward and obvious rules — patience, respect, and listening — are the minimum behavior standard.

Listen to the customer intently. When they are finished speaking, demonstrate your understanding by repeating their request using the phrase; “To make sure I am clear... (repeat the request).” Understanding the real problem goes beyond replacing parts or calming an upset client; it requires everyone to discover the root cause of the problem.

# Brilliant.

Better Homes and Gardens Special Interest Publications®

# lighting

Add  
Drama  
with Fresh  
Updates

CHANDELIERS  
SCONCES  
LAMPS  
CEILING FANS  
DIMMERS  
& MORE



Visit [americanlightingassoc.com](http://americanlightingassoc.com) for your free copy.

american  
lighting  
association



AS SEEN IN  
enLIGHTenment  
MAGAZINE  
APRIL 2016

One of the game-changers in the marketplace today is to replace the focus of selling the customer with that of an attitude of serving the customer.



Next, have speed-of-light response time. Set standards for your customer response time in every selling or service situation and make it each person's responsibility to adhere to them. A phone call or email contact has an expected response time of the same day, but the Internet of Things has impacted the current expected response time to every customer social media inquiry to 60 minutes or less. Does your current system support this new trend in service time?

Let's take a moment and touch on the social media aspect of customer service. Social media provides an endless way for consumers to praise or pummel our companies. The customer who adores your company deserves acknowledgment for their positive post, and the same goes for the customer who wants to air a complaint.

When the post is a complaint, make sure to reply to the poster in the same media thread. With the transparency the Web provides, we must address the issue quickly and with tact. Request in the thread that the poster contacts you for "more information" and provide your email address. The tone of all your responses is that of concern and assistance. When the issue is addressed with success, return to the original thread and thank the poster for his/her help in making your company a better place to shop.

**THE NEW WAY TO APOLOGIZE**

Customer service staff has long been trained to be empathetic with the person having the problem. While this is still a correct philosophy, the "old" instructions were to use phrases such as "I'm sorry,"

or "I understand," and "I apologize." Like any good thing, these phrases have been overused and lost the power they once had.

Rekindle the clout that each of those powerful statements of empathy once had by tying them to an outcome. It's not acceptable to say that you "understand" a situation without a plan to resolve it. Instead of repeated apologies, offer a solution after the first acknowledgment of the error. Try this: "I understand that this is a terrible problem for you, and I apologize. Let me see what I can do to take care of this for you immediately."

The expression of immediate action to rectify the situation will help in restoring customer confidence plus offers you a moment to collect your thoughts to help them. Stop the endless barrage of apologies and bring forth some solutions.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE AS ADVERTISING**

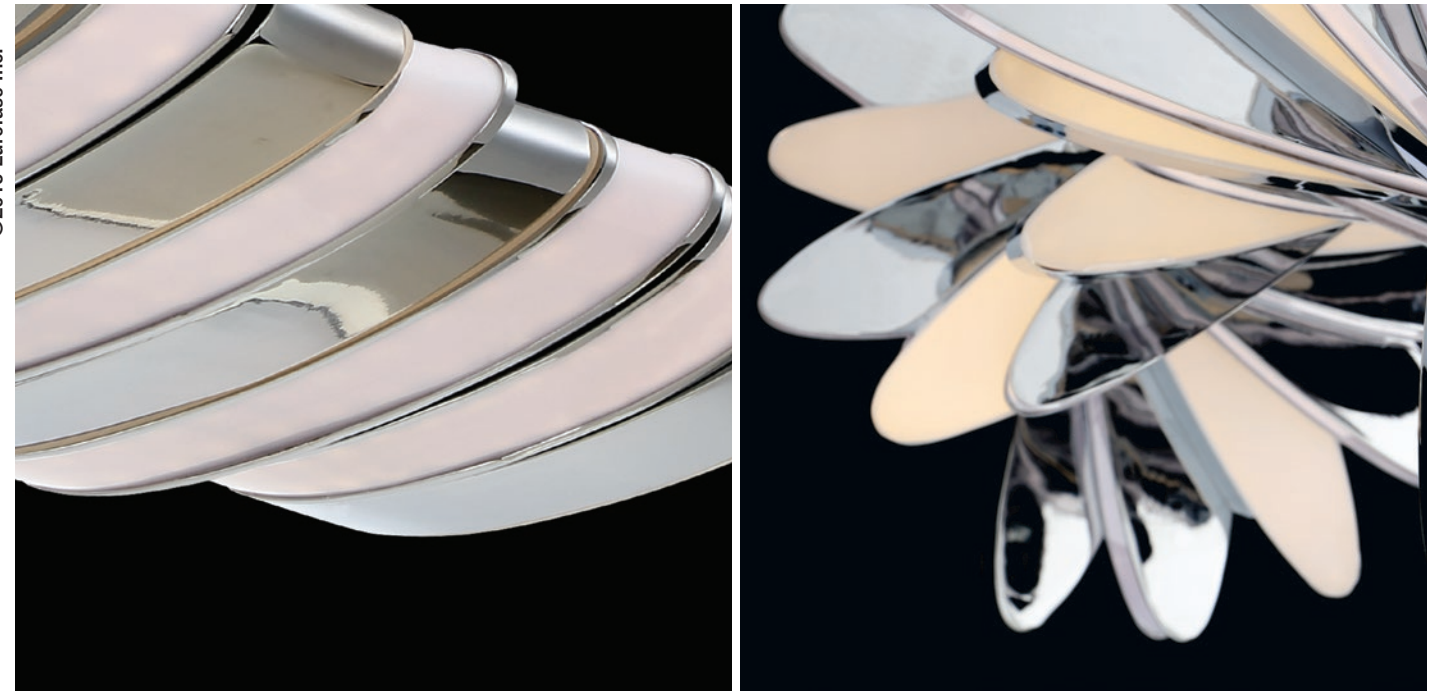
One of the game-changers in the marketplace today is to replace the focus of selling the customer with that of an attitude of serving the customer. The same communication methods are used, but the motivation comes from a different place. Customer loyalty is established from the feelings a customer has before, during, and after the sale. It is difficult and costly to regain a former customer's confidence.

I think of customer service as another form of advertising. It is much more effective and profitable to begin the customer's positive experience with a plan that is incorporated throughout your selling process. When they hit the proverbial bump in the road, go the extra mile and serve them with a smile. ❖



Mark Okun is a Business Contributor to enLIGHTenment Magazine and President of Mark Okun Consulting & Performance Group. He has more than 30 years of hands-on retail experience training and coaching sales associates in the lighting and furniture industries. [Mark@bravo-businessmedia.com](mailto:Mark@bravo-businessmedia.com)

©2016 Eurofase Inc.



Sections of rotating chrome and opal polycarbonate suspended by a chrome canopy



follow us on

DESIGN WITH LIGHT  
LIGHT WITH DESIGN