

MYSTERY CLIENT AND CUSTOMER SERVICE IN MODERN ORGANIZATION

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Deal with the world as it is, not how you'd like it to be.

Jack Welsh

Summary: The purpose of this article is to present a marketing research method called a „Mystery Client” as a tool of building customer relationships in the organization. Currently, it is not enough to have service at the excellent level, it is time to create an excellence in the customer experience. One of new instruments to achieve this target is to conduct a mystery shopping method in the organization. This technique can be a very useful method to stimulate a change in many fields, especially it is seen in the customer service field, that will leverage an organization to a higher grade and will allow it to work out a competitive advantage on the market. This method is also introduced to achieve the full satisfaction of buying goods and services by the client.

Keywords: mystery client, customer service, client experience, organization

Introduction

In the contemporary organization it is obligatory to see a customer as a main stakeholder on the market. That is why marketing research is crucial as it turns out that different methods in the form of interviews, surveys, market analysis, market segregation and its segmentation or the precise positioning of the target customer make the possibility to identify the needs and requirements of the client, which are necessary for the proper product and process design. Therefore, the analyses should be conducted fairly and repeated to update them because only in this way it will be possible to correct the design of the product, pro-quality strategy of the organization or the quality policy's improvement. At the output of the process is the client and due to the fact marketing tools are becoming important and necessary in the process of evaluating the effects of customer satisfaction, its objections to the product or the service, ideas and suggestions for changes. Many organizations try to build very effective and permanent customer relationships and they introduce different strategies.

Solid customer relationship is becoming the only way to compete it in all business areas. After reviewing numerous definitions proposed by various authors the following definition can be suggested as an explanation of the main business strategy on the market: “the firm’s activities that are oriented towards creating and maintaining long-term relationships with their customers to obtain their loyalty and satisfaction” (Landroquez, Castro, Cepeda-Carrión, 2011, pp. 1141-1159).

These days building client relationships are to be supported by the various research instruments such us: CRM strategies and other applications, customer satisfaction surveys, sophisticated software applications as sales force or SAP Business Intelligence and similar. Nevertheless, also relatively new research technique for evaluating customer service level should be also considered by the management of the organization. This technique is called a “Mystery Client”.

Mystery Client as an organizational improvement technique

The Mystery Client technique is a very useful managerial tool for monitoring performance and improvement inside the organization. It can be used as an evaluation instrument to measure the impact of the quality programme implemented there. In literature, It is also called as “mystery customer” or “mystery shopper”, “secret client”, “mystery guest”, “phantom customer”, “virtual client”, “anonymous customer” or “fake customer” research method.

The main slogan of the MSPA¹ is:

“Mystery shopping = measuring service quality, performance and the customer’s experience”²

In the 1970s, between 25 to 35 per cent of banks with over \$300 million in deposits used mystery shopping programmes (Leeds, 1995). Fast food companies, such as Kentucky Fried Chicken, Domino’s Pizza, Burger King, Del Taco, Taco Bell, and Arby’s, all have mystery shopper programmes, in some cases since the early 1970s (Erstad, 1998, pp. 34-38).

In practice for decades, mystery shopping has been gaining in popularity. The literature especially on-line is very rich in explaining why this research method is very much recommended for various businesses (Manolica, Roman, 2012, pp. 105-112). You can learn if your sales people and customer service employee are

¹ The MSPA (Mystery Shopping Providers Association) is the largest professional trade association dedicated to improving service quality using anonymous resources. With over 400 member companies worldwide, our diverse membership includes marketing research and merchandising companies, private investigation firms, training organizations and companies that specialize in providing mystery shopping services. Member companies work with their clients to establish mechanisms to measure and improve levels of service.

² www.mspa-global.org (23.11.2014).

proficient in explaining and demonstrating products or services. This will allow managers to measure if the increase in sale and services can be achieved.

The method of “Mystery Client” belongs to a group of the field marketing. It is used mostly for checking the quality of customer service based on qualitative and quantitative criteria. The method is based on the technique of the participant observation and the “hidden person”. The person conducting the examination passes himself off as a customer. He is called an auditor. His role is to carry out an audit visit at the selected point of customer service, e.g. in the shop, restaurants, cafes, cinemas, hotels or at the stores. After selecting and training the controller “plays the role” of a client and collects data on the process of providing the service. During the inspection he keeps track of the natural reactions of employees during normal conditions of their work. The term of the research and the identity of the auditor shall not be shown to the working employees in the audited organization. The aim of the study is to identify the strong and weak points of the people serving clients as well as the quality of the services they offer. “Mystery shopping” is a tool to assess the actual quality of customer service implemented by the company’s employees. It also allows the analysis of the standards set up in the company and their obeying.

According to MSPA (Mystery Shopping Providers Association) reasons for using “Mystery Shopping” method by the organizations is:

- examination of promotion
- merchandising or brand exposure
- diagnosis of training needs
- examination of competition
- comparative analysis of distributors
- motivation so reward for the exemplary service
- the quality of services provided to citizens (www.mspa-global.org).

Mystery shopper programme can be also used in staff appraisal. It enhance human resource policies such as encouraging employee participation, creating a positive motivational environment, building team spirit, identifying training needs providing feedback and linking performance to rewards. It is also important to consider this technique as a “fear factor” (Erstad, 1998, pp. 34-38).

Before using this instrument the staff needs to be fully aware of the research being conducted, what is a purpose of this type of research, how the process will look like and how long it will take. It is a management role to explain how the results will be evaluated and how the evaluation will reflect any organizational decisions. The staff should be ensured that the purpose of this this research method is not to discipline them but to evaluate the processes and procedures due to improve or amend them. The result of the research can be used to prise the best and most helpful and efficient staff members but not to punish anybody. This method can help the weaker links of the service chain to examine what does not work properly, why it is like that and help them to improve the situation.

The other and very important reason for mystery shopping can be benchmarking of the competitors. Some organizations may wish to test their major rivals for their ability to respond to needs and demands of customers. This will help the own organization to learn about the existing market environment and build or amend a strategy toward both customers and competitors. The result can help firms to become proactive about compliances. Mystery shopping can bring managers at all levels and front-line employee in touch with customers' needs and perspectives. It can build a team and show the people that they are part of the bigger structure and their role is an important part of the company's objectives and that they are achievable (Manolica, Roman, 2012, pp. 105-112).

This method bases on the well-trained people who behave as normal customers but their role is to enter the organization as a customer, precisely observe, memories and report back what is going well and what needs to be improved in the service processes and procedures offered (Hesselink, Wiele, Van Der, 2003, pp. 24-35).

In the research terms it is a form of a participant observation. The mystery clients tries the customer experience first-hand with the instruction to test methodically, usually against a specific service standard. They complete a report on their service experience, often using numerical rankings on a series of statement prepared in advanced (Calvert, 2005, pp. 24-35).

"Mystery shopping" programs are valuable as:

- most customers who have unsatisfactory experiences will not complain, they will just never come back
- dissatisfied customers are likely to tell many others about their experience, who in turn probably will avoid doing business with the offending merchant
- the use of mystery shopping to provide independent and impartial feedback reduces any perception of favoritism in incentive programs
- mystery shopping helps determine whether customers' actual experiences are as intended
- shopping programs can identify areas of training which need improvement and can identify areas of training that are working particularly well (www.mspa-global.org).

Customer service and client experience on the market

Customer service is to satisfy clients' needs during making purchases, and excellent customer service is one that exerts on them lasting and good impression and is much more than a simple courtesy. Excellent service is to become for the customer a positive and long-remembered experience. It also means meeting their expectations and needs in such a way that the organization has been recognized as a unit which is worth doing business with. Excellent service is also searching for the unusual and unexpected ways of pleasant customers' surprising to experience only nice contacts with the organization.

That is why in the customer service it is necessary to describe what a customer experience is and what are the rules of it.

According to consulting company Beyond Philosophy “a customer experience is an interaction between an organization and a customer as perceived through a customer’s conscious and subconscious mind. It is a blend of an organization’s rational performance, the senses stimulated and the emotions evoked and intuitively measured against customer expectations across all moments of contact”. The experts provide information that:

- A customer experience is not just about a rational experience (as how quickly a phone is answered, what hours open, delivery time scales, etc.).
- More than 50 percent of a customer experience is subconscious, or how a customer feels.
- A customer experience is not just about the ‘what,’ but also about the ‘how.’
- A customer experience is about how a customer consciously and subconsciously sees his or her experience (www.beyondphilosophy.com).

There are six laws of customer experience:

1. Every interaction creates a personal reaction.
2. People are instinctively self-centered.
3. Customer familiarity breeds alignment.
4. Unengaged employees don’t create engaged customers.
5. Employees do what is measured, incented, and celebrated.
6. You can’t fake it (Tempkin, 2010, p. 2).

According to Disney Institute customer are willing to pay for the experience. The economic value is moving from commodities through goods and services, towards experiences. This implies that organizations must look for more differentiations in their markets and have to satisfy the demands of each individuals. The only way to create positive customer experiences is to have a perfect balance and integration between processes (in order to produce the service and the product), settings (the environment in which the experience is performed) and employees (the people who have to create relationships with customers). The integration and balance of these three inputs have to be aligned with the service standards or service excellence goals (Disney Institute, 2001).

Satisfying customers is a company’s ability to create a true teamwork among all departments of the organization: customer service, sales, marketing, finance, logistics, and etc.; to encourage every individual for the constant awareness that customer service is in everyone’s interest. This emphasizes the importance of customer service as a common responsibility (Wereda, Grzybowska, 2013, p. 164). That is why it is important how the organization can manage the customer experience in regular contacts during the client service. The process of selling is differentiated by many aspects of client’s behaviour and it is connected with the status of the customer’s segmentation as demographic aspects (table 1).

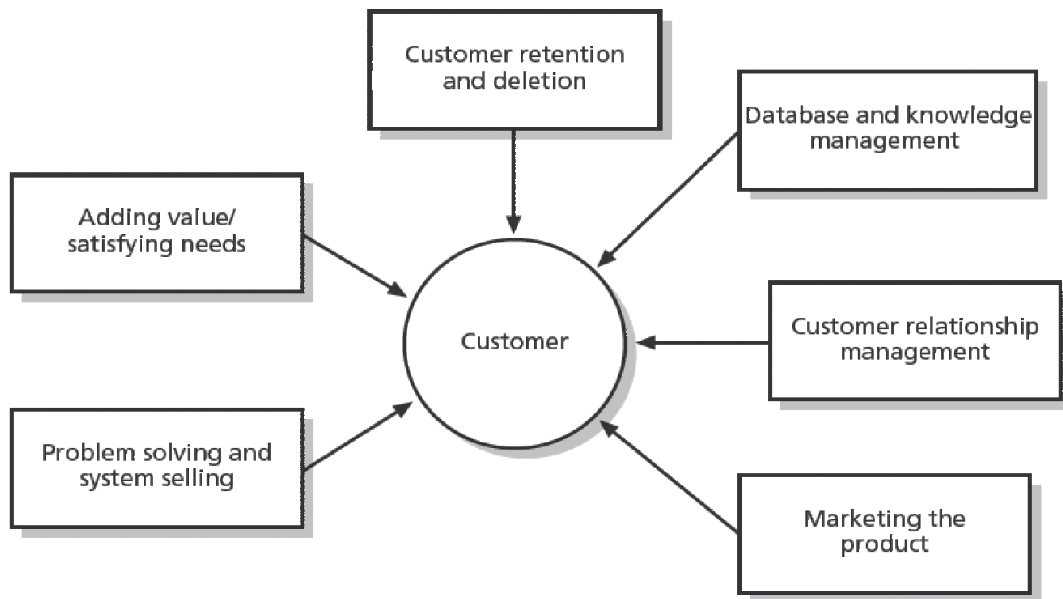
Table 1. Customer service and experience and segmentation of the client

Demographic Differences	
Physical <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boys and girls • Size • Age 	Ethnic and cultural <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food customs/ preferences • Religious practice • Geographic region • Vegetarian
Health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weight concerns • Body image • Allergies, diabetes • Other types of disease • Vegetarian • Special needs students 	Socio-economic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-income • Middle-income • High-income
Age and emotional maturity	Lifestyle <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physically active • Sedentary • Socially active • Health-oriented

Source: Own research based on conference materials

Many positive or negative customer experiences depend on the selling people. Contemporary selling requires a wide array of skills. Salespeople who do not understand these characteristics will be ill-equipped to tackle their jobs. The characteristics of modern selling are given in Figure 1. There are many aspects of customer orientation but the fact is that building relationship with clients has many factors and elements. One of the most important is customer relationship management³ which requires that the salesforce focuses on the long term and not simply on closing the next sale. The emphasis should be on creating win-win situations with customers so that both parties to the interaction gain and want to continue the relationship. For major customers, relationship management may involve setting up dedicated teams to service the account and maintain all aspects of the business relationship (Jobber, Lancaster, 2009, pp. 6-7).

³ More about the topic in: W. Wereda, *Zarządzanie relacjami z klientem (CRM) a postępowanie nabywców na rynku usług*, Difin, Warszawa 2009.



can be very useful to stimulate a change in many fields and areas, both in business and public organizations.

TAJEMNICZY KLIENT A OBSŁUGA KLIENTA W NOWOCZESNEJ ORGANIZACJI

Streszczenie: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawianie metody „Tajemniczy Klient” jako narzędzia do budowania relacji z klientami w organizacji. Współcześnie nie wystarczy osiągnąć wysokiego poziomu obsługi klienta, istotne staje się wykreowanie doświadczenia u klienta, które będzie dla niego odczuwalne jako doskonałe. Jednym z nowoczesnych instrumentów, które pomogą organizacji osiągnąć taki cel, jest metoda badawcza „Tajemniczy Klient”. Ta technika pozwala pobudzać organizację do zmian w różnych obszarach – szczególnie jest to zauważalne w obsłudze klienta – dzięki którym stanie się ona konkurencyjna na rynku. Metoda ta ma za zadanie również doprowadzić klienta do osiągnięcia przez niego pełnej satysfakcji z zakupu produktów czy usług.

Słowa kluczowe: tajemniczy klient, obsługa klienta, doświadczenie klienta, organizacja

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