

5.1.6: Personalized vs. Standardized Service

Learning Objectives

- Compare and contrast personalized and standardized service

Now that we discussed different customer profiles, let's turn to different types of customer service. During The Industrial Age, the advent of mass merchandising introduced the concept of ready-to-wear garments to the fashion industry. Before industrialization, clothing was handmade. Each dress, shirt, pant, or suit was individually measured, cut, and sewn by a tailor to fit one person. This process was both time-consuming and relatively expensive for most people. Shortly after the end of World War II, ready-to-wear, or "off-the-rack," clothing made in factories became very popular, in part, because clothing manufacturers could make standardized outfits that were affordable and did not require any timely alterations. Most Americans viewed the standardization of the apparel industry as an advancement in service. (Source: [Design Quarterly](#).)

Service Standardization

A recent study from the Center for Leading Innovation & Cooperation suggests that standardizing services will continue to play an important role in further developing the service economy, which includes retail. By making similar services with different characteristics and structures comparable, service standardization promotes reliability, effectiveness, trust, and improved economic efficiency. The CLIC defines standardization as a process of unification, especially in terminology, capabilities of personnel, technology, and organizational processes. In essence, "standardization simplifies everyday life." (Source: [CLIC – Service Standardization](#).)

Retailers often employ standardization strategies in store layouts, purchasing, labeling, branding, and a myriad of other operational activities. Retailers standardize customer service specifically to ensure uniform quality of treatment of all customers, both internal and external. Some examples of customer service standardization within the retail industry include:

- ensuring product availability,
- emphasizing customer courtesy,
- safeguarding branding consistency,
- practicing pricing accuracy,
- demonstrating promotional responsiveness,
- and enabling overall service efficiency. (Source: [Customer Service Experts](#).)

Personalized Service

Ironically, many 21st century retailers might appear to be headed back in time, returning to the days of less service standardization and instead more personalized service. This, however, is not a business regression but instead another method of service differentiation. Personalization is a method of adding value to customer choice. In fact, personalization today often relies on technology to more effectively and efficiently implement a new range of services that would otherwise be impossible.

For example, the Container Store, a leading specialty retailer of storage and organization products in the United States, introduced a new "next generation" architectural design, merchandising strategy, and proprietary digital resources to its flagship store specifically to help customers accomplish their projects, maximize their space, and make the most of their homes on a personal basis. According to company officials, the technology components were chosen after many rounds of customer testing, which showed that customers' biggest hurdle in beginning a project was feeling overwhelmed. The store features 18 digital screens supporting customers as they shop, featuring everything from inspiration and tips, to an interactive design tool and even a new proprietary digital experience called The Organization Studio. This technology allows customers to upload a photo or video of their organizational challenge online, describe the challenge, and set an in-store appointment to meet with a store Organization Expert. The Organization Experts then present the personalized solution they developed for the customer free of charge and with no purchase commitment.

"We know that countless retailers are building digital tools and using them to innovate the shopping experience, but combining the human element with technology is when things really get powerful," said Val Richardson, Vice President of Real Estate at The Container Store. "The Organization Studio offers the convenience of an online experience and marries it with a personalized in-store engagement that offers a curated solution created by a real person." (Source: containerstore.com.)

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