

## 5.1.10: Customer Expectations

### Learning Objectives

- Explain the role of customer expectations in determining the value of service perceived

Successful businesses work proactively to obtain information from their customers to ensure they are meeting their needs.

### Customer Feedback

Service quality generally refers to a customer's comparison of service expectations as it relates to a company's performance. A business with a high level of service quality is likely capable of meeting customer needs while also remaining economically competitive in their respective industry. Successful businesses who remain competitive and relevant in the marketplace work proactively to obtain information from their current or potential customer base so they can ensure they are meeting their needs.

No amount of discussing with professionals, friends, or colleagues will ever replace the information that a company can receive from a real customer.

The following questions are crucial when obtaining customer feedback:

- What does the customer like?
- What do they dislike?
- How can things be improved?
- Are their needs and expectations being met?
- How much will they pay for something?
- Is convenience important?
- Should items be packaged together?
- Is after-sales service critical?

Customer feedback can be collected by:

- **Asking consumers directly:** This tactic comes across particularly effective during the point-of-purchase at a retail store because consumers are being probed on their experiences while they are shopping.
- **Questionnaires:** Distribute one-page questionnaires that ask some key questions and encourage customers to fill them out. These can be mailed out as pre-paid postcards or emailed to consumers who give their permission to be contacted.
- **Focus groups:** This involves gathering a number of customers, sitting them down, and discussing a range of issues relevant to a company's business. The advantage of using this method over a questionnaire is that it will yield more detailed information and feedback, rather than "tick the box" style responses from a questionnaire. In-person focus groups and one-on-one interviews are helpful tools that provide explanation of product or consumer-related issues because you are going to the main source directly.
- **Telephone:** Some surveys can be conducted via phone. These yield a more private conversation exchange between the customer and the service provider.
- **Virtual online communities or private consumer panels:** Technology has made it increasingly easier for companies to obtain feedback from their customers. With the explosion of technology in the marketplace and the consumer's everyday life, many companies are now building their own proprietary online panels of consumers which give them unencumbered access to their target market on an ongoing basis. In exchange for their honest opinions and feedback, customers are incentivized for their time. Community blogs and forums also enable customers to provide detailed explanations of both negative as well as positive experiences with a company.

### Instant feedback

Recently, many organizations have implemented feedback loops that allow them to capture feedback at the point of experience. For example, National Express, one of the UK's leading travel companies, has invited passengers to send text messages while riding the bus. This has been shown to be useful, as it allows companies to improve their customer service before the customer defects, thus making it far more likely that the customer will return next time.

## Problem Resolution Through Excellent Customer Service

Ultimately, the best method of resolving simple problems – often before they arise – is through the delivery of excellent customer service. By ensuring a close relationship with the customer, knowing their wants and needs and avoiding any misunderstandings, a company is able to ensure that problems of a non-technical nature are minimized, often before they even arise. Any problems that do arise can be resolved with an attentive approach to the customer, ensuring that all will be done to solve the problem as soon as possible. When the customer knows that they are valued in such a way, they tend to be much more forgiving and patient with the company.

## Customer Support

Customer support is a range of customer services to assist customers in making cost effective and correct use of a product. It includes assistance in planning, installation, training, troubleshooting, maintenance, upgrading, and disposal of a product. Through effective and attentive customer support, any potential problems that the customer has with a product or service can be resolved quickly and cleanly.

### Automation

Customer support automation involves the building of a knowledge base of known issues and their resolutions to support incidents with delivery mechanisms, often by expert systems. A service automation platform includes a suite of support solutions including proactive support, assisted support, and self support. Automation of service organizations aim to achieve, for example, lower mean time to repair (MTTR). With automated support, service organizations can make their services available to their customers 24 hours a day and seven days a week, by monitoring alarms, identifying problems at an early stage, and resolving issues before they become problems.



Customer Support: AT&T Mobility provides technical support for some of its mobile phones through device support centers.

Automated assisted support enables remote access to sites that need instant problem solving. By automating the collection of information of devices and applications coexisting with the supported application, problems can be quickly detected and fixed.

Automated self support, automates the self support process, freeing users from self-help diagnostics and troubleshooting from online libraries or knowledge bases. Support automation solutions can be integrated with customer relationship management (CRM) systems and network management systems (NMS). They can also provide full customer reports to management by tallying problems and incidents that were solved mechanically to ensure compliance with industry regulations.

### Tech Support

Tech support refers to a range of services by which companies provide assistance to users of technology products such as mobile phones, televisions, computers, software products, or other electronic or mechanical goods.

In general, technical support services attempt to help the user solve specific problems with a product—rather than providing training, customization, or other support services. Most companies offer technical support for the products they sell, generally for

free. Others provide a fee for technical support or a fee for premium support services (no waiting in line or talking to a machine, for example).

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