

The Customer Experience

How to get good service: Top Ten Tips



Background

Providing excellent customer service is a critical success factor for many businesses. A company's reputation, and its performance, depends on this. And yet a truly outstanding customer experience is often promised, but not so often delivered.

For consumers experiencing unacceptable customer service, there are numerous avenues of help. Several publications run regular advice columns on how to complain, or have consumer champions who will fight on their behalf for the service and experience they deserve. Then there are the blogs, forums, and consumer TV shows. As a business customer, however, there are few opportunities to raise concerns - which is frustrating, especially as spend is generally higher. So as a business customer, how can you ensure you receive good service?

Easynet prides itself on providing an exceptional experience for its customers, ensuring that they know they are at the heart of its business. The company champions customer service excellence. It wants to help other businesses to have an exceptional relationship with their business partners.

The first step in achieving this has been to identify what customers actually want, and what they believe makes good personal service. To source an accurate picture across Europe, Easynet and YouGov conducted a survey in seven European countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and the UK. They asked business customers to compare what they wanted from their suppliers with what they actually received, what they found annoying and who they talked to about their poor customer experiences.

Finally, Easynet asked which sectors we should look to as delivering outstanding customer service. And the results were fascinating.

It was clear that the key to success is to develop an open, honest business relationship with business partners - especially as this affects the service you provide to your own customers. In order to ensure your business relationships are as smooth as possible, it is important to put some good foundations in place. Here are some tips, based on what Easynet identified.

Top Ten Tips

Tip 1: Know what you want

Be clear of your strategic business objectives. What do you want this partnership to achieve, and how will it help you achieve your objectives? Do you expect your partner to plan, execute and deliver an entire programme, or just to support you? If you don't know, you can't expect a partner to know.

Tip 2: Choose carefully

Select your business partner carefully to begin with. Carry out a full Procurement process, and identify a shortlist of suppliers. Identify the key criteria you need them to fulfil - and don't forget to choose a business partner with the right cultural fit, that shows an understanding of your key drivers.

Tip 3: Ask for, and enforce a Service Level Agreement

When you and your company are looking to appoint a new business partner or to re-negotiate an existing contract, ask about Service Level Agreements. These agreements define the relationship between two parties: the provider and the recipient. It can provide guarantees of service, and can be a valuable resource for resolving any potential issues.

And don't just keep the SLA as a piece of paper. If your partner lets you down then you should enforce the agreement you have with them - otherwise why have an SLA in the first place?



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Tip 4: Hold regular reviews

Hold frequent reviews and use them to give feedback on the performance so far, what is going well and what needs to improve. Set targets, and work together to meet them.

Tip 5: Integrate the supplier into your company

The more your partner knows about your company, its culture and its method of working, the better the service they provide. Think of them as a virtual team member: give them strategic updates on your organisation. Ask them to hotdesk from your office occasionally.

Tip 6: Get involved

Those companies most committed to customer service have numerous opportunities for customers to get involved: customer boards, customer advocacy programmes, site visits, executive meetings and corporate hospitality events. Take advantage of these, and your relationship with your partner will inevitably improve: or at the very least, you will feel they are listening to you.

Tip 7: Do unto others as you would yourself

Treat the partner with respect, and be responsive. Return their calls, and dedicate time to them. Keep the promises you make to them.

Tip 8: Be realistic

Discuss your expectations with your partner, and identify how they are going to meet these. Be realistic: if you chose a supplier purely on a cost basis, you may always not be given the attention you demand.

Tip 9: Feedback - and feedback again.

If your partner has let you down, think about exactly where they went wrong. Decide in advance what outcome you want. Communicate this with the supplier, then work with the supplier to achieve that. But remember that it is important to recognise excellent service too. And always let them know how they're doing.

Tip 10: Learn a language

If your partner is based in another country and speaks another language, learn some of their language - just a few words demonstrate great respect, and can work wonders to improve a business relationship.