

Getting your customer focus right: it is not rocket science

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In the last month article, I talked about the importance of understanding your customer and the difference between customers' demographics – statistical data about ages, marital status, place of residence etc, and customers' psychographics – qualitative research data about attitudes, beliefs and expectations.

I would now like to give you a few examples of the power of understanding customers' expectations. I also want to illustrate how the same person will require totally different shopping environments, depending on their frame of mind when visiting a particular store. Remember our '25-30 year old working female' from the last month's article? Let's go shopping with her!

Mathers

First, let's observe her going shopping with her 5 year old son, to buy him a pair of school shoes, as well as some casual shoes for herself. She goes to a family shoe store, as it is a one stop shop, and her purchases are of 'maintenance' rather than 'high fashion' kind. What would she likely be expecting? Think about yourself buying a pair of shoes.

It goes something like this:

1) You first spend time looking through the shoe displays

2) Finally you see a shoe that may suit you. You now must try it on.

3) You wait until a shop assistant becomes available. You then ask him/her to find and bring you the pair to try on.

4) The assistant disappears into the storeroom for what seems like a long, long time, finally coming out with your shoes in the box.

5) You try them on and they are too small/too big/don't suit you after all.

6) Go back to Step 1, 2 or 3. Repeat this exercise until you find the right pair of shoes.

Now, imagine doing this with a 5 year old kid? This is why the most important thing on our customer's mind at the moment is the speed



Burger bar interiors ... a design which addresses customers' needs, mindset and feelings.

and quality of customer service. We discovered that through observations, staff interviews and customer focus groups when we were researching a new concept for 'Mathers for shoes' some years ago.

Another aspect of this was that this long wait was not due to the sales staff being lazy or inefficient. Whilst customers waited in the retail area for what seemed to them like a very long time, we observed Mathers staff working really hard, running up and down the ladders in the storeroom, trying to find the right pair of shoes. That storeroom, by the way, was very big and occupied up to 40% of the overall store area.

What if we took most of the shoe boxes out of the storeroom and positioned them on the retail floor, above and below merchandising displays? And design moveable ladders that the sales assistants can use to reach the stock, in full view of the customers?

Here is what has happened:

1) Both the real and the perceived speed and quality of service have improved dramatically. Sales

assistants now spent most of the time in full view of the customers, going up and down the ladders or extracting the boxes with special long rods, instead of disappearing into the back room. It took much less time to locate the product. As well as that, there was a psychological factor at play - for all of us, the time drags on slowly whilst you are waiting in a queue, but always flies pretty fast whilst you are being actively served.

2) By positioning a mass of neatly arranged shoe boxes on the retail floor, we created a

more interesting and exciting environment and a sense of retail theatre. It also gave the store a feeling of abundance and good prices which was very beneficial for this middle market retailer.

3) By taking a big part of the stock out of the back and locating it in the otherwise non-productive retail space at the front, we have dramatically reduced the size of the storeroom and increased the productive retail floor area, without changing the overall floor area of the shop and therefore the rent.



This strategy, borne out of the understanding of how customers think, became the foundation for the new concept that included colours, finishes, merchandise presentation, lighting, signage and graphics.

The client reported sales increases up to 95% after the installation of the new concept. I am convinced that if we had just focused on colours and finishes suitable for a '25-30 year old working woman', these figures would have been not nearly as impressive.

Burger Bar

Back to our working mum. She is now meeting with her friend for a quick meal and a catch up during her lunch break. What are her thoughts and expectations? She is craving for a burger but can't help feeling a bit guilty about this food being too heavy, fattening, not quite good for her health. She wants to go somewhere casual, inexpensive, with a quick service. After spending hours at the computer, she would like an environment that would be different and relaxing.

One must take into account all these things, especially if, like our client, you are planning to open your first food outlet opposite a busy McDonalds in the CBD. Our response was a concept that

offers gourmet quality burgers and salads in an environment that would complement the menu and positively respond to customers' potential guilty feelings. Burger Bar ambience is fun, light, easy, casual and fast. The seating is designed so that the patrons

“I hope you will never treat your customer as a statistical number!”

feel relaxed, whether they are on their own, with a friend, or with a group of colleagues. Engaging and interesting graphics, breezy colours provide a respite from the office environment.

Our friend the working mum will enjoy this environment, which is so different to the previous example, because it responds to her totally different frame of mind.

J Farren-Price

Our 25-30 year old mum is now buying a watch for her husband's 30th birthday. This is a present that would last for many years, perhaps for the entire lifetime.

She wants something very special, a timeless design, the best possible quality. She is not sure how to go about the selection process, she is apprehensive about spending a lot of money, and - what if it doesn't work or if he doesn't like it? She needs

to find someone whom she can trust, who would treat her with respect and care, who would understand the importance of this special occasion, who would make her feel special.

In our design for JFarren-Price Jewellers, we responded

to these feelings and emotions. The special experience starts at the door where every guest is greeted personally by a trained consultant. The visitor is then invited to sit and relax in one of specially designed consultation areas, whilst jewellery pieces and watches are brought in for them to see. Several consultation areas offer different degrees of privacy. There are advice desks for a quick consultation, a semi-enclosed watch selection area and a fully private lounge room.

Attention to design detail in-store reflects the attention to detail in product selection and product design in their jewellery workshop. The main sales area has marble floors, sleek line contemporary advice desks, French baroque customer chairs, exquisite XVII century chandeliers and modern lighting. The lounge features Lois XVI furniture

alongside a 42" plasma screen that is used for demonstrating finer features of watches and custom-designed jewellery. The showroom expresses the essence of J Farren-Price brand – a mixture of the traditional values of best service and attention to detail, with the commitment to contemporary ideas, technology and designs.

The environment is a major contributor, along with the staff training, to JFarren-Price Jewellers' strategy of treating every customer like a royalty. We gave this retailer all the facilities and the required ambience to be able to make every customer visit feel as a special experience.

Summary

Same person – buying casual shoes for her child, taking a lunchtime meal with her friend, selecting a special present for her husband.

Three totally different sets of expectations, feelings and emotions. Three totally different design solutions.

I hope you will never again treat your customer as a statistical number!

