

# THE HUMAN FACTOR

## CUSTOMER SERVICE AS COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

If you are a retailer today, there is no doubt that you are keeping a close look at how the current socio-economic developments around the globe are impacting your business. Consumers are more product savvy and price sensitive than ever and the retail industry has probably never been more competitive. Customer service is often the most overt differentiator for retailers and knowing how to encourage and engender a positive customer experience is business critical.

### The Cornerstones of Retail Customer Service

Customer service is a major focus area for any retailer – it's often the difference between winning and losing a customer, between building or destroying reputation. The four cornerstones of customer service have never been more in focus: people, products, brand and technology. At Maidenbower Consulting, we believe it is the first - people – that is the most imperative today. In the retail industry, customer service is constantly exposed due to its high visibility to millions of customers. There's no hiding behind terms & conditions or an automated call centre. It is the retailers' employees that are responsible for perception, shopping experience and brand communication – all vital to win customers and improve sales.

Brand, product and technology have all come a long way but they are often only as good as their creators have made them. People, on the other hand, are subject to the human factor and therefore both volatile and dynamic and as such, they have to be dealt with in the most sensitive and detailed manner. This can only be addressed by supporting those in store through professional training and development. Before we go into this, let's examine the other corner stones briefly.

#### Brand

Most people know the brand value of retailers because of their intense marketing and PR drives. You know whether a retailer is positioning itself as a luxury, family or discount brand and you shop accordingly.

#### Product

As with the brand, people are relatively familiar with the products a retailer offers and many shoppers go back time and time again as a sign of trust and comfort.

#### Technology

The last few years have seen an explosion in retail technology, ranging from RFID and contactless payment to self-service checkouts and virtual shop assistants. All these are enhancing the customers' shopping experience. Technology can be seen as a key tool to climbing out of the recession. According to a recent survey by Gartner, 62 per cent of CEOs say that IT-enabled changes will be central to plans regarding life after the credit crunch.

#### People

Employees are where retailers have to pay particular attention when it comes to customer service. Firstly, because of the fact that a customer wants and needs knowledgeable, informative and friendly people-to-people contact during their shopping experience - it's part of human nature. Secondly, because employees can bring together the three other cornerstones (brand, product and technology) and turn them into the ultimate shopping experience for the customer and the best sales asset for the retailer. Good retail employees have strong product knowledge and can make tailored recommendations to customers, they master the technology to make the shopping experience seamless and their knowledge of the retailer's brand values, culture and style ensures that the shoppers feel comfortable in their chosen environment.



## THE MAIDENBOWER CONSULTING APPROACH AND PHILOSOPHY

Mastering all of this is not an easy task and it can only be achieved with the right preparation. At Maidenbower Consulting we understand this because we have delivered numerous development programmes and workshops with outstanding results and high levels of satisfaction. We specialise in some of the most advanced areas, such as self-service tills, where customer service is under high scrutiny and is often a make or break strategy for the retailer. A good shopping experience highlights both the innovation of the technology and the trust of the employee but poor customer service will damage the reputation of both the retail brand and technology.

To ensure maximum success, our philosophy focuses on four stages:

### 1. ANALYSE

To gain a better understanding of your retail business and environment, one of our trainers visit retailers onsite to gain an insight into the business needs, the services and products offered and the immediate training requirements

### 2. DEVELOP

We then create a bespoke course that is relevant to the staff and is presented in a style that fits in with the corporate culture, using language and examples that relate to the delegates. We focus purely on the issues that are important to retailer and the way they work.

### 4. REVIEW

Reviewing the success of any training is imperative to provide a clear view of the adoption of the new skills and suggest recommendations for improvement to future programmes. We gather individual evaluations and feedback from delegates, team leaders and instructors in order to benchmark the session against our quality standards and support a cycle of continuous improvement.

### 3. DEPLOY

We deliver training onsite or at a convenient location. Supportive instructors coach staff through interactive training sessions, ensuring the skills learned can be used immediately at work to improve the customer experience and the store's efficiency.

Paul King, Managing Director at Maidenbower Consulting, said "The training and development of retail staff is the most important aspect of ensuring customer service success. You can have the fanciest shop in the world or the leading technological innovation but they mean very little without a person who understands them and knows how they relate to the customer.

Investing in training leads to increased sales and enhanced brand reputation and in today's extremely competitive climate it's more important than ever to have staff that can deliver value for both the retailer and the customer. At Maidenbower, we take this very seriously."

- Better customer experience ensures faster checkout and can cut an average queue time by 50%
- Technology can improve customer service by freeing assistants to engage eye to eye with customers
- Investing in skills can help staff build rapport with customers and make customer service really work
- Supporting customers at their Moments of Decision is critical to build comfort in the shopping experience
- Training sustainability can be achieved by benchmarking and sharing information to improve efficiency
- A positive customer service culture can deliver more than any other aspect of the retail environment

Nobody understands customer service like the retail industry.  
And nobody understands the retail industry like Maidenbower Consulting.