3 Lessons From a Customer Service Failure



Every brand touchpoint matters.

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One of my best friends recently led an industry event. I couldn’t be there to support him in person, so I thought I’d find a way to have a surprise waiting for him in his hotel room when he arrives.

Simple, right?

Wrong.

I picked up the phone to call the resort where he’s staying. After playing phone tree navigation, I reached a live person.

The conversation went like this:

(A muffled, annoyed-sounding, soft voice that you can barely understand answers.)

“Thank you for calling the XYZ resort. My name is (inaudible). How can I help you?”

Me: “Good morning! I have a friend staying at your property for a conference and I’d like to have a surprise gift of some sort waiting for him in his room when he arrives.”

Her: “You can deliver it to the front desk and we’ll put it in there.”

Me: “I am not at the hotel, nor in the city. I want to buy a gift that can be waiting in his room when he arrives so he feels special.”

Her: “So you’re going to have something delivered to be put in his room?”

Me: “No. Doesn’t your property offer a menu of gifts that could be in someone’s room upon arrival? Food? Wine? Balloons? Something like that.”

Her: “Oh, you’re talking about *amenities*. What would you like to have in his room?”

Me (about to lose it): “I don’t know what your property offers. I looked on your website for information or a menu of options, but wasn’t able to find any.”

Her: “I can fax you a list of amenities.”

Me: “I don’t have a fax machine, can you email it to me please?”

Her: “I can, but then you won’t be able to buy anything. We only accept card information for payment via fax.”

Me: *slams head against desk*

Based on this one phone interaction, I will never give my business to this property. It could be the nicest hotel, with great ratings, and exceptional service once you're on site. But, this single interaction eliminated that possibility – and it's one of the brands in my preferred loyalty program.

A transaction that should've taken 15 minutes or less took nearly two hours from start to finish.

Every brand touchpoint is important. Every interaction is a chance for your employees to communicate the experience that your brand provides. If you don't want to fall flat like this major resort brand, here are three key lessons all businesses can learn from this experience.

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The voice on the phone matters

If you're going to allow customers and potential customers to interact with your brand via phone, realize the person taking that call that is often the first live, human communicative touchpoint a customer – or potential customer – experiences.

The rate, the tone and the pitch of the voice of the person speaking matters. A lot.

In my experience, it was a rushed greeting. The voice was soft. The tone was annoyed. (And I still couldn't tell you her name.)

I was excited to make this call. Excited to place an order and give this business money in an area where their margins are high. Eager to spend $200+ on products that likely cost them $20 so that my friend could feel special.

Immediately after being “greeted” by someone who, I felt, wanted to be doing anything else, my mood started to shift.

Take the time to train everyone who answers the phone. The last thing you want to do is provide an experience for your customers that literally kills the mood and creates dissonance with the impression of your brand that the customer had in his/her head before this interaction.

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Industry jargon is a language barrier

Reading through my phone dialogue, you can see how long it took before the representative was able to tell me “amenities” was what I needed to ask for. I don’t know about you, but when I think of amenities, I think of what products will be waiting for me on the bathroom sink, or if there will be a fitness center or spa at the facility.

There’s no way I would’ve known I needed to ask for amenities.

If your representatives aren’t trained to communicate outside of industry or brand jargon, you’re missing the mark.

Imagine if this line – blending both what I requested and the resort’s jargon – was inserted into the conversation instead:

“I’m happy to send you a list of gifts – and amenities – that we can have waiting in your friend’s room. I’m sure he’ll love whatever you pick!”

Talk about a mood changer! Even after my excitement had plummeted from the initial parts of the interaction, something like this would’ve revived me. I would’ve felt that we were on the same page. I would’ve been eager to look at the list. And I guarantee you that I would’ve spent more money.

Don’t put unnecessary language barriers between you and those you serve.

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3. Don’t let your processes inconvenience your customer

Look at your processes. How you take orders. How you answer calls. How you distribute products. Whatever your business model is, I encourage you to really examine your processes. Are they convenient for you? Are they convenient for your customer?

Then, one step further, how does the process make your customer feel?

In the case of my example, if you’re using fax to accept orders and credit card information, you’re likely missing the mark on both accounts.

Plus, if you’re a brand that’s trying to communicate a luxury experience for a modern traveler, using antiquated forms of technology that inconvenience a large portion of your customer base isn’t a good move.

What do your processes communicate about your brand?

As much as possible, let your customer control their purchase journey. The more they feel in control, the safer and more secure they’ll feel doing business with you. When people feel safe and secure they make faster decisions, and decisions that often result in purchasing more than originally planned.

In a semi-perfect (and very realistic) world, I would’ve been able to go online, view the “amenities,” purchase the gifts, set a scheduled time for delivery, enter my credit card on a secure platform and get a confirmation when the order was

placed in my friend’s room.

A lot of businesses stress over innovation – offering new products, building something new, etc. In reality, sometimes the biggest innovations that can occur are in terms of a customer experience. And your processes are a massive part of that experience just waiting to be disrupted.

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