Welcome your unhappy customers

BY WAYNE ENS

"Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning."
– Bill Gates

I define a customer as "anyone who potentially affects our bottom line."

In broadcasting we have four distinct customer groups. We have advertisers, audiences, stakeholders and internal customers… our staffs. Each is interdependent on the other for our success.

On a per capita basis, your staff has the greatest impact on your bottom line. It is your staff that is responsible for the satisfaction and retention of all of the other customer groups.

A staff that is treated poorly will also treat your other customer groups poorly.

Your second highest-leverage customers on a per capita basis are your advertisers. These customers have never been faced with so much choice—cable, conventional TV, lifestyle magazines, new radio stations, direct mail, mass mail, daily newspaper, community newspaper, billboards, transit, transit shelters, Internet, and more.

Each and every one of your advertisers can use other media to increase their sales, and can stay in business without you. That is why you must manage their perceptions and expectations of your station(s).

Your shareholders also have more investment choices than ever before.

All of us invest a small fortune to measure audience satisfaction levels, called ratings. Concurrent with ratings, we also invest significantly in audience promotions. Isn't it time we also started to promote and measure satisfaction levels with our other "customers"?

To manage customer perceptions and expectations you must first measure them. Even once-arrogant auto manufacturers, such as Ford and GM, now measure and reward dealers for improving customer satisfaction levels. You should, too.

Many stations experience up to 30% advertiser attrition levels. If those stations could master retaining half of those accounts through improved customer satisfaction they could experience a 15% sales increase!

Most of us have seen the surveys that conclude it can cost six to 20 times as much to find a new customer as it does to keep an existing customer satisfied. Our business is no different.

Measuring and monitoring what each of your "customers" expects and receives from your company can be the first step in improving customer satisfaction and retention levels:

- All of your new accounts should receive a Customer Satisfaction Survey, from management or an independent third party within 30 days of their first order.
- All of your regular clients should be surveyed at least once per year.
- Conduct exit interviews with staff and clients who have decided not to renew with you. Like Bill Gates said, this can be your greatest source of learning.
- The golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have done unto you" is no longer sufficient to ensure customer satisfaction. Different customers have different expectations and varying definitions of "service excellence". Practice the Platinum Rule, "Do unto others as they would have done unto them"… find out what each of your customers want, then deliver.
- Always leave room in your promise to over-deliver. Just delivering is taken for granted. Over-delivery is appreciated and remembered.
- When something does go wrong, take responsibility. Don't blame another department or person. Just fix it.
- Have a 360-degree feedback policy for your internal customers as well.
- Identify all of the moments of truth within your company… all of the points where anyone from your receptionist to your traffic manager might have customer contact, then make certain you have training and written policies to enhance the customer experience.
- Recognize customer satisfaction and retention levels in your company with regular awards and praise. Celebrate each customer satisfaction success.
- Your top 50 clients and all of your employees can have annual one-on-one conversations with top management.
- Larger sales forces, with fewer accounts per sales person, will also allow you to super-serve your advertisers and enhance their satisfaction levels.
- Create a culture whereby cost per point, compensation levels or other monetary measurements are not the only measurements by which your customers measure your performance. If money is the only measure, a competitor will always sell for less or pay your employees more.

It was business guru Tom Peters who said, *"If it can't be measured, it can't be managed"*. How are you managing your various customer satisfaction levels?

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