



# **“Can I REALLY help you?” Customer Service - What was old is again new!**

August 22 2012 5:02 PM

Customer service is not dead, many are simply confused regarding its where-about.

The expansion of consumer “technology” has allowed businesses to reevaluate whether they need people to do certain jobs. The friendly cashier at the grocery-store has been partially replaced by self-check-out centers even our friends the bank teller and gas station attendant are not there to serve us. While convenience and cost play important roles in this labor switch, customer service is often lost in the transition.

It is important to remember that customer service does not and should not be completely jettisoned under a pile of shiny new technology. It is essential and quite possible to synthesis a harmonious relationship between tech and customer relations. Technology should be used as a means to accelerate the quickness and quality of the way a business already runs.

Often businesses can be blinded by the quick/convenient implications of technology, such as self-check-out, without realizing the overall quality of the customer’s experience of the store is being compromised. Likewise, often businesses only allow customers to contact them through a form on their website to prevent spam. While this module seems like it would work, this web-site form is all too often linked to a unused or forgotten email or a naive business person on the other end does not realize the opportunity to either build or squander his/her accountability and customer relationship.

Businesses will also look for ways to lower the cost of providing that critical point of attention. The reality is that you cannot replace a caring human voice. There are of course exceptions to this rule: Self Service gasoline, ATM’s, but they are far and few between. We have watched as answering machines, voice mail and voice mail greeting

trees have taken over the position of greeter and receptionist. As a result every one of us has found ourselves caught in that never ending maze of prompts unable to reach that ever elusive “human voice”.

Technology should be used to increase accountability, quality, and communication within a customer-business relationship.

In order to keep their customer base, the smart business owner will find ways to provide the immediate contact, responsiveness and support that their customers expect and deserve.

### **Quick tips for tipping the scales for tip top Customer Service.**

1. When upgrading technology, consider whether the overall customer experience will be compromised in any way.
2. Keep decision-makers/problem solvers easy to reach, to avoid building frustration. Avoid dead end phrases such as: “There’s nothing *I* can do about that.” If you distribute your email as part of your contact information, make sure to answer with the same urgency as a phone call.
3. Maintain accountability through transparent communication in all mediums that your business chooses to use. If you have a Facebook and/or Twitter for your business make sure to answer customer comments and concern as promptly as traditional means of communication. If you don’t feel like keeping up with these mediums, simply don’t use them. It is better to have quality communication than to have multiple lower quality means of communication.
4. Make sure your business’s technology is intuitive, or have staff readily available to humbly guide them through the initial learning curve.
5. Old school or new, make sure to give the extra effort to make the customer know you care and you value your relationship with them. A tweet responding to a customer’s complaint at 3 am might be just the extra touch of humanity they are looking for in this otherwise faceless sea of other businesses.

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