

Customer Service for Hospitality and Tourism

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Preface

We've all sat in restaurants waiting interminably for a drink, fruitlessly hailing oblivious blinkered servers while patrons who arrived later are unaccountably served first. Finally, we are perfunctorily attended by a harried waitress who then tries to deliver everything at once to make up for the wait and get us out of the door in record time, muddling orders, delivering courses all at once and forgetting any particular requests in the process. Underwhelming service has become so common in restaurants, hotels, airports and other tourism and hospitality settings that when the service is actually smooth, friendly and accommodating, we are surprised and gratified. But in a competitive global retail market, it should not be like this. What happened to 'service with a smile' and 'the customer is always right'? How come, after all those customer service training manuals and courses and all the high tech gadgets which facilitate transactions, the computer still says no?

Providing high quality customer service should be at the top of every CEO's agenda. In the last few decades, businesses have changed dramatically as the economy has shifted from a dependence on manufacturing to a focus on providing timely, quality service. The service economy has been in full swing for some time now, driven by increased technology, globalization, de-regulation and changing consumer behavior, among other factors. Customer service is therefore more important than ever before, especially during difficult economic times when customers are looking to increase value for money and are less forgiving of mediocre service.

But despite its importance, quality customer service is the exception rather than the norm in many parts of the world. There are a number of reasons for this fall in standards. When economic conditions become more demanding, many organizations focus on cost cutting and acquiring new customers which invariably puts the relationships with their existing customers at risk. Quite often training budgets are the first to get cut. Also, many companies wrongly believe they are providing service excellence. A study by the Bain Company, reported in the *Harvard Management Update*, revealed that 80% of 362 companies surveyed believed they delivered superior service to their customers. When the customers of those same firms were surveyed, only 8% agreed. Nine out of ten companies who confidently assert the high level of their customers' satisfaction are completely misinformed. In addition, many organizations simply don't understand the significance of customer service, despite the exhaustive literature that has made the connection between service excellence, satisfaction and loyalty – and therefore profits. Customer service training is often viewed as a cost rather than an investment. Finally, even if companies recognize the importance of customer service, they don't know how to deliver consistent, high quality customer service on an on-going basis.

Given the critical importance of customer service for the tourism and hospitality sector, it is remarkable that (until now) there is no comprehensive text that deals with this important topic. There are a number of service marketing textbooks that are strong theoretically, but they only pay lip-service to the actual delivery of customer service. There are also many customer service handbooks with worksheets for practitioners to use, but they lack the theory behind the practice. So this book is useful for both students and practitioners as it explains not only the theory behind the importance of customer service but also acts as a guidebook for those wishing to put this theory into practice. In essence it is the 'whys' and 'hows' of customer service. By focusing on tourism and hospitality businesses, this text makes a unique contribution to the literature – no other book of this kind exists. In addition to making a theoretical contribution, the text will also be of great value to those planning to join – or already working in – the service industry, since customer service is critical to most businesses in this sector.

The book is easy to read, very current, and full of references to the latest research from both academic and practitioner literature. Chapters cover important topics such as the financial and behavioral consequences of customer service, consumer trends influencing service, developing and maintaining a service culture, managing service encounters, the importance of market research, building and maintaining customer relationships, providing customer service through the servicescape, the impact of technology on customer service, the importance of service recovery, and promoting customer service internally and externally.

An 'At Your Service' spotlight at the beginning of each chapter focuses on the achievements of successful individuals related to the art of customer service. In the middle of each chapter there is a 'Service Snapshot' – short, real-life cases to illustrate a particular concept or theoretical principle presented in the chapter. At the end of every chapter there is an up-to-date, relevant and detailed 'Case study', and as a collection, these case studies will cover a variety of sectors, organizations and regions. Designed to foster critical thinking, the cases illustrate actual business scenarios that stress several concepts found in the chapter. All cases have been developed following a personal visit or in-depth interviews conducted by the authors, and there is an international flavor throughout the book. Cases analyse customer service in the USA, South America, South Africa, Europe, Russia, Australia, China, Canada, Korea and Dubai.

The last chapter of the book is a handbook that practitioners can use to implement a generic customer service program. The handbook has a number of structured activities and each exercise is accompanied by a facilitator's guide that a trainer can follow (with an explanation of their purpose and learning outcomes).

About the authors

Dr Simon Hudson is an Endowed Chair in Tourism at the University of South Carolina. He has held previous academic positions at universities in Canada and England, and has worked as a visiting professor in Austria, Switzerland, Spain, Fiji, New Zealand, the United States, and Australia. Prior to working in academia, Dr Hudson spent several years in the tourism industry in Europe, and he now consults for the industry in North America. Dr Hudson has written five books. His first, *Snow Business*, written in 2000, was the first book to be written about the international ski industry, followed by *Sports and Adventure Tourism*, published by Haworth in 2003. His third book, *Marketing for Tourism and Hospitality: A Canadian Perspective*, has sold over 8000 copies, and is in its second edition. *Tourism and Hospitality Marketing: A Global Perspective* was published by Sage in 2008, and his most recent book, *Golf Tourism* was published by Goodfellow in 2010. He has written a number of journal articles and case studies on customer service. He is frequently invited to international tourism conferences as a keynote speaker and one of his specialist subjects is customer service.

Louise Hudson is a freelance journalist living in South Carolina (www.tourismgurus.com). She has collaborated with Dr Hudson on many of his books and research projects and co-wrote *Tourism and Hospitality Marketing: A Global Perspective* and *Golf Tourism* with him. Originally trained in journalism in England, she now writes for many publications including *USA Today*, *LA Times*, *Dallas Morning News*, Canada's *Globe and Mail* and *Dreamscapes Magazine*, *Calgary Sun*, *Calgary Herald* and *canada.com* network, *Edmonton Sun*, *Ottawa Citizen*, Canada's *MORE* magazine, *Sheen Magazine*, *Wink Magazine*, *Alberta Parent*, *Calgary's Child*, *Travel Alberta*, *Fresh Tracks*, *Alberta Hospitality* and *BC Inn Focus* magazine among others. With a side-line in the fashion industry, Louise has also collaborated with Dr Hudson in writing and presenting retail workshops and handbooks to help small businesses in marketing and advertising. She also runs fashion workshops at the University of South Carolina – www.hrsm.sc.edu/fashioncamp.

