7 Guest Service and the Guest Journey

Angela Anthonisz, Tim Heap and Lorraine Baker

Introduction

In an experience economy, people want to consume services that provide memories rather than simply functions, so in the spa industry, as in all service sector organisations, it is vitally important to fully understand the needs and aspirations of your customers. The customisation of the experience is therefore essential to avoid problems in even the most basic customer services. The key to success is in recognising the needs of guests before, during and after their visit, and is therefore process driven. The industry does have the benefit of each spa having its own guest profile, which makes the fine tuning of the individual's spa experience much easier, as it is often based upon an existing profile of the consumer's needs and wants.

The industry is within a competitive fast moving environment and so the constant monitoring of those changes is imperative for the sustainability of a company. The change of emphasis from a model of spa, to wellness and spa is a classic move by the industry to reposition itself in a growth area of the service sector. It is then imperative to assess and predict the changing needs of the guests in order to maintain a spa that exceeds the goals and expectations of those guests. Consumption emotion, which is seen as an emotional reaction that an individual has in response to product consumption or service experience (Richins, 1997), must be linked to the quality processes which in themselves create the spa experience (Lin and Mattilda, 2010).

The guest experience

Traditionally the planning and quality of the emotional experiences have been monitored by the spa management team, conducting monthly reviews, both internal and external in terms of services, staff interaction, retail options and operational structure. Analysing both the positive and negative strategies used in the competitive market has traditionally been the rubric upon which to create a spa that more intuitively understands and reacts to the guest's needs and aspirations. The problem is that in the current environment this is seen as being old fashioned and reactive, and not proactive, as everyone is waiting for everyone else to move. This can lead to inertia in existing provision, and act as a barrier for new entrants into the market.

As with many service sector organisations, spa businesses have built up historic structures, policies and procedures ('the way we have always done it') and employees too often simply accept and inherit those practices, or guidelines, on how work is performed, from their predecessors. This acceptance of the status quo means it is difficult to challenge current methodologies, improve users' experiences or create efficiencies (Hammond *et al*., 2006).The same is often true with regards to the hierarchies that exist within spas, which in turn reinforce organisational behaviour and often produce unique environments in relation to the service encounter. This familiarity has often been welcomed by customers, but in today's marketing environment guest choice and guest loyalty are seen as part of a much more complex process.

This chapter reviews the processes involved in the guest service and guest journey and their association with the guest experience. This is encapsulated in the concept of customer journey mapping (CJM) as related to the consumer decision journey (CDJ). Lingqvist *et al*. (2015) explain that there is a sequence of events in the consumer decision journey where customers experience touch-points through which they interact with the service organisation, and where they review the purchase process. It is important therefore that those touch-points are identified and listed in the service exchange process for the specific spa, treatment and/or product. By understanding the spa guest touch-points, management can then work with team members to employ tactics that foster service innovation. The aim is obviously to enhance customer service provider interactions and so to improve the guest experience associated with each touch-point.

Each touch-point is then part of their horizontal customer journey map which is linked to the process timeline. Each touch-point, which can be many faceted within the spa guest, should then include a vertical axis that includes the emotional journey of the customer. This may include their thoughts, beliefs, feelings and emotions which are difficult to observe, and therefore to measure in accordance with a process timeline (Lingqvist *et al*., 2015). That measurement was attempted by Lo *et al*. (2015), when looking at hotel spa experiences where they found that responsiveness was the most important determinant factor in explaining positive

emotions from service quality, followed by reliability, empathy, and tangibles. This emotional emphasis transforms CJM into a very specific management tool namely, an empathy mapping exercise (Tschimmel, 2012).
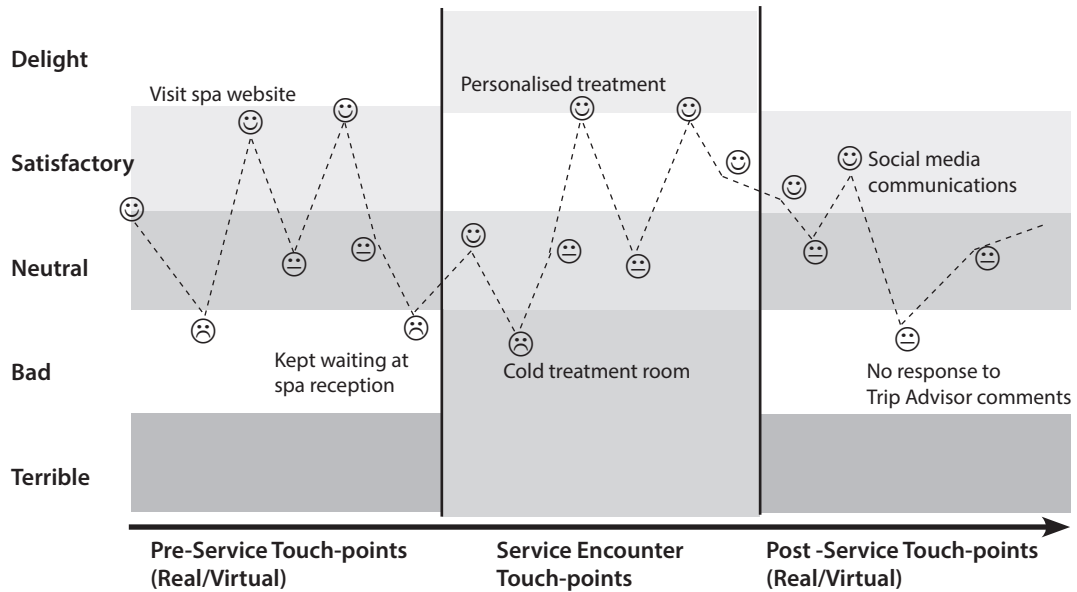

Figure 7.1: Customer service touch-points

Identifying and measuring those empathetic responses may, perhaps, only come with the level of experience of the spa employees. The importance of customer expectation and satisfaction in the spa industry are the key ingredients in maximising customer loyalty and driving business growth, so it is essential that they are identified. The industry has traditionally relied upon adopting industry standards across the sector for service level to define product related guest service standards. These are then often benchmarked against competitors to assess the spa's competitive position.

The number of customer touch-points, and hence potentially reduced control of the experience, requires firms to integrate multiple business functions, including information technology (IT), service operations, logistics, marketing, human resources and even external partners, in creating and delivering positive customer experiences. So it has become increasingly difficult for firms to create, manage, and attempt to control the experience and journey of each customer (Edelman and Singer 2015; Rawson *et al.*, 2013). It is easy to make the point that customer experience measurement is essential for identifying and actioning insights, but it is more difficult for the industry to create meaningful metrics on guest experience from so many touch-points. Brakus *et al.* (2009), for example, identified that customer experience measurement needs to test sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural patterns so to examine the relationships between brand experience and brand personality, satisfaction, and loyalty.