



Delivering Unbelievable Customer Service

Research & Commentary from:
Gemini Vehicle Solutions Ltd
Gemini House
Stourport Road
Kidderminster
DY11 7QL
E: info@geminivehiclesolutions.co.uk
T: 01562 749390



What exactly *is* 'customer service'? How do we deliver it in such a way as to make it a genuinely differentiating factor? Are we even sure who our customers are?

These questions have been asked by companies large and small for several decades now but often with little discernible effect on the day to day activities of those same organisations.

In this paper we seek to describe some of the ideas, thoughts and practices that Gemini is embedding within the structure and culture of our business and which we believe will drive the Customer Experience to the next level of achievement

Focus on the Core

Delivering Unbelievable Customer Service starts with the core product or service that we design and sell. Implicit or explicit within the offer to the customer is a series of features and benefits – a hire car delivered on time, a repair completed to high standards, a management report produced according to specification.

Failure to deliver to at least the expected standards in any of these areas means that the ability to provide Unbelievable Customer Service is severely compromised – possibly fatally.

The traditional approach to Customer Service delivery with its focus on aftersales and 'attitudes' ignores what the customer *really* values – being provided with the promised goods or services at the agreed price and within the agreed parameters.

Understand the Real Offer

What do we think we are selling and what is the customer actually buying?

If the initial focus should be on the core product or services being offered then do we really know what the customer is buying? Ryanair continues to be one of the most successful airlines in the world despite a continuous run of bad publicity and a reputation for dreadful 'Customer Service' (as traditionally understood)



"Someone calling themselves a customer says they want something called service."

This is due in part because they know what they are selling and the customer knows what they are getting. The offer is clear and unequivocal and anyone who expects added value extras had better fly with someone else or be prepared to pay more

for the privilege (and it is made quite clear that it is a privilege!). Of course, the opposite is also true.

If your customer is led to expect a series of features, benefits and support elements within and around the core offer then you had better make sure that you provide them. Even the worst of Customer Service organisations can create legions of advocates if the product 'does exactly what it says on the tin'

As important as the physical manifestations of the product or service features are the emotional attachments. A 'hassle free claims experience' is often implicit in an insurer or agent offer and meeting these type of customer needs demands a different approach and 'feel' for the total customer service package.

Know Your Customer

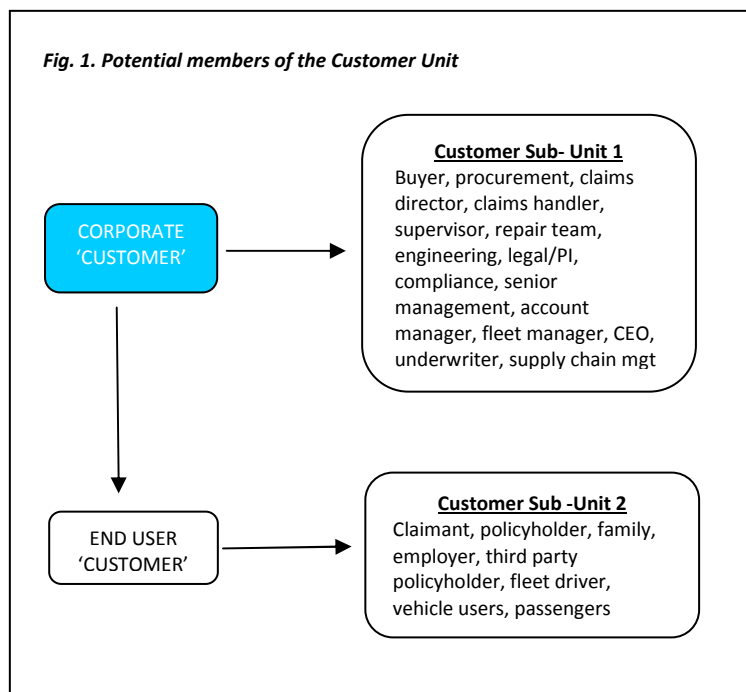
Who actually *is* the customer?

Arguably the customer is the person paying the bill or, perhaps, the end user of the product or service being provided. However, rarely is the picture that simple (even without endorsing the current fashion for describing work colleagues and suppliers as 'customers')

In any given claims transaction there might be several 'customers' who are all

demanding different things and each of whom has the right to expect Unbelievable Customer Service

To have more than one 'customer' involved in a single transaction is hardly a new concept but highlighting this issue serves to illustrate the point that delivering Unbelievable Customer Services across a single product or service generally involves potentially large numbers of people and other organisations- all of whom are expecting their share of the positive customer experience



Take Ownership

Not too long ago British Airways were unable to provide the hot meals and other extras that they had both implicitly and explicitly promised as part of their offer. The problem was caused by strike action amongst suppliers

Who then failed to deliver Unbelievable Customer Service in these circumstances?

The answer, of course, is British Airways themselves (who can even remember the name of the suppliers and the particular nature of the dispute?). The supply chain that is intimately involved in the delivery of different aspects of the product or service have no responsibility to the customer of the selling organisation.

They might have a responsibility to the selling organisation themselves but that is a different matter. The delivery of Unbelievable Customer Service lies firmly with the organisation making the product or service offer – no matter how many others might be involved in the delivery of different elements of the offer.

Seeking to deliver almost any standard of Customer Service will depend in part on supply chain appointment, controls and

performance, and the selling organisation must take responsibility for managing and developing this part of the value proposition. When did you last buy an apple from Tesco where any shortfalls in the products' freshness colour or packaging was blamed on a farmer in Kent?

Take ownership of the issues

Start at the Top

It almost goes without saying that embedding and delivering Unbelievable Customer Service will only happen when the leadership of the business is absolutely and totally committed to the concept *and the practice*.

The problem arises when a CEO is required to take a short term view of return on investment, expenses and current trading patterns whereas customer service



is almost always a medium to long term project. At the same time it has to be admitted that the returns from investing in customer service are very difficult to measure in practical terms.

The solution lies in not being a slave to customer service and there is a need to constantly challenge traditionally held views but – once the decisions have been taken – leadership starts at the top

It is also worthwhile remembering that Unbelievable Customer Service is not necessarily the same as being ‘the best’. Instead, it is about achieving the right balance between exceeding customer expectations and doing what is best for the business.

Arguably, the Ryanair reputation for truly appalling customer service and apparent disdain for their customers has actually got the balance right because customers are clear on what to expect (which is what they get) and the business is extremely profitable and growing in an immensely competitive industry

Challenge the Obvious

The commitment to delivering Unbelievable Customer Service does not imply unquestioning obedience to established mores and traditions.

In fact, it is the business that views things differently and takes a more radical approach that is most likely to gain from the investment and effort.



"Ok, how about this motto: 'If you are unhappy for any reason, we will feel really bad'."

We have already mentioned that Ryanair should not be condemned to relegation from the customer service league. Their core offer is almost bereft of any customer service elements and if that is what they provide and that is what customers buy then there is an argument that says that Ryanair should be at the top of the league!

In the claims and road traffic accident arena there may be better ways of working than the apparently simple concept of ‘improving customer service including, for example; elements of the claims service requiring additional customer fees; charging for 24/7 service; introducing more self service

options around claims notification;
customer generated traffic scene
photographs to speed the decision making
process;

Actions Not Words

How many businesses (especially in the financial services industry) proclaim their commitment to Customer Service and then:-

- Issue even basic customer communications that are incomprehensible to the very people they are corresponding with
- Have a whole series of hidden charges or exemptions that are rarely fully explained or justified
- Establish offshore customer communications centres in order to save money at the clear expense of a deterioration in customer service (and with little apparent regard for the latter)
- Set a delivery window (for, say, the timed arrival of a hire car) of either a.m. or p.m. as suits the logistics convenience of the provider

From the smallest examples of logistics delivery to the largest strategic decisions of corporate structures and management, one has to question where customer service really fits into the scale of priorities

Delivering Unbelievable Customer Service begins with the very first offer and concludes months or even years after the initial purchase.

Every style and content of communication, every conversation, every product design change, every aftersales call, every management report and all the thousands of other elements of running a business are an integral if sometimes unseen part of the Customer Service jigsaw

At Gemini Vehicle Solutions we do not claim to have all the answers but at least we are asking the right questions

For further information on the range of Motor Claims Support Services available from Gemini please contact us on:
T: 01562 749390
E: info@geminivehiclesolutions.co.uk