



Customer Service Awards not for sale!

Grafton Whyte

The recently concluded Customer Service Management Africa Awards (CSMA) have elicited mixed responses from the general public and large businesses alike. Besides querying our methodology, some of the feedback suggests a misperception that CSMA Awards are allocated on the basis of 'paid-for sponsorship'. There have also been questions as to how some companies came to win awards, while they are hardly known or considered to be beacons of customer service excellence. The Harold Pupkewitz Graduate School of Business prides itself on being a serious academic institution with a reputation to protect we are not in the awards selling business. The HP-GSB is also a thought-leading institution and thought leaders often ruffle feathers of established thinking. We are now in the process of engaging an auditing firm to audit our methodology and our results. We are quite excited about this, especially now that we have collected two years' worth of data. With any survey you've got to make decisions about your sampling process and methodology; this is a national survey based on a national sample, and premised on internationally recognised methodology. It is also founded on the research work we have done as a graduate school, with the best thinking and capabilities in this area. Here are

the answers to some of your burning questions.

1. Are companies buying awards?

The response to that question is absolutely not. We are looking at customer service from a national point of view. The motivation for the CSMA was we were concerned about the poor level of service delivery in the country. One of the key drivers of poor delivery of service is a negative ethos towards customer service. It doesn't matter how much money you spend on bringing services to the point of delivery, if there is no customer service at the sharp end where the customer engages with the supplier, then you will waste money. Since only what gets measured, gets managed, we decided to measure the state of customer service in Namibia ourselves. We identified the categories the public spends most of their time and money on in both the private and public sectors. We went to 1500 homes and collected over 7200 responses on customer service across 15 service sectors; this sample is therefore a representative sample of the country- robust and authoritative.

2. Who paid for the National Customer Service Survey?

On the whole, the HP-GSB has paid for this data through seeking sponsorships and selling reports to companies. Only two companies sponsored the research directly, notably PwC, who weren't in

the survey at all and FNB Namibia- who did not win at all in their category. The point I am making is that not only were we objective but we took on the financial burden of this initiative. This is a national service; we are not only surveying private companies but government departments as well. The Government has not yet contributed any money to this initiative, but we are helping to make them accountable by comparing them with some of the largest companies in the country.

3. Why did companies that dominate the market fail to win an award?

One mistake companies make is they compare the surveys that they run internally with the national survey that we run. When companies conduct their own research (either personally or through an agency) the results are more prone to the 'halo effect'. Questions asked tend to reflect the areas of competency of the sponsoring company and the respondents tend to want to say what they think the researcher wants to hear. The sample may also be biased towards the sponsoring company. I'm not saying that the internal surveys are not important; they have their use because obviously you can go into more detail about certain issues than we are able to. But because ours is a comparative analysis across the industry, not on a specific company, it is more objective. The HP-GSB research is based on internationally recognised best prac-

tice and is less prone to the halo effect as the sample selected is representative of the nation. This makes it a very tough audience to win over. We take a cold and objective approach, and may visit customers or branches a company probably would not want us to talk to. However, the only way to really find out where things are going wrong within your service organisation is to buy the report and have the HP-GSB come and explain the results to your senior management team.

There is also an issue of consistency. For companies with large market shares, their customer service tends to suffer due to lack of consistent performance either among staff or over time. That is why it is so important to make service part of the organisational culture or DNA. If not, good service will be episodic.

4. What do the reports contain?

The reports give a high-level benchmark which compares a company's performance with the competitors in the sector. Among the many issues the report covers are: key drivers of service; points of customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction; net promoter scores; and ease of doing business with your company. The reports enable managers to implement remedial actions in their organisations to enable them to deliver better service. For more information, contact csmfrica.org or conference link on 061 251 014.

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