



# The New Age of Customer Impatience

Customers now expect top quality service in an instant. **Bill Payne**, Criticaleye Board Mentor, explains what this means for businesses and why many boards have been slow to adjust to an 'I want it all and I want it now' world

In this digitally connected age of unlimited choice, price transparency, time famine, channel anarchy and frenetic multi-tasking, we can't wait for anything anymore. Instant gratification is the name of the game.

We want products 'now', services have to be fast and flawless and extra upgrades frequent. When we snap our fingers, we expect a rapid response. It's what 'we want' that matters the most and if we're not happy, we will go elsewhere, expressing our disappointment however we please.

This poses fundamental questions for directors and executives in terms of how they think about customer service. Of course, there are a range of responses to assist customers with queries or problems (self-help on the internet, calling for a chat, emailing for help, webchat, speaking to a member of staff directly), but a complex picture is emerging in terms of what customers deem to be 'good service.' Recent research suggests that if a web page doesn't load in less than three seconds, we are off looking elsewhere.

The time has come to recalibrate the way in which we calculate service metrics as businesses cannot afford to be stuck with old fashioned, obsolete measurement process tools and analytics. We can't compare the calculation of customer satisfaction scores (CSAT) in 2014 to how we did it in 2004 - and by CSAT I include Net Promoter Score (NPS) and Customer Effort or whatever means you choose to measure in.

A lack of consistency around service highlights how behind the times many >



boards are in grasping what it is customers want and why organisations need to be set up differently. For instance, why does a rail company send an automated email back from a help desk declaring it will reply in 28 days (if they reply at all), when an airline can turn around a response in four hours? Likewise, how can one telco commit to fixing broadband in 48 hours when another says it will take ten days (and is 48 hours actually good enough anyway)?

Customer service is an area which directors need to be giving some serious thought. Here are ten simple actions to take your business to the next level in 2014:

### 1. Executives Must Be Customers

Unless executives know what it feels like to be a customer, how can they appreciate what is really happening? There should be no excuses here. Every executive needs to be a customer of their own company... period.

Don't be afraid to arrange workshops for senior staff to have them experience the customer journey. Have them use all your channel connection points – there's no harm if they feel frustrated; in fact, it can inspire solutions. Ask them to visit the frontline staff and experience the 'I want it all now' world in action.

I often test this out in the boardroom. It can cause tension but it's worth it. For instance, I recently worked with a very well connected non-executive director who had never sampled the food and drink of the company he worked for. Was that important? Well, yes, he was on the board as the 'customer facing' NED. He winced when we showed him some of

the feedback from customers on the web and changes were quickly made.

### 2. Know Your Brand Strength

Position your service strategy in alignment with your brand values. It's more critical than ever to understand sentiment trends from all channels if you're to fully appreciate how customers perceive you.

The market leaders use every conceivable type of feedback, whether its observation, comment or criticism, to gather intelligence which is then used to shape and polish their customer interactions.

### 3. Map Out the Customer Journey

Many companies still rely on traditional customer surveying rather than taking advantage of the rich information flow available in social media, blogs and interest groups. This has to change as companies now have to measure satisfaction along every channel on the customer journey, not just at the touch points.

Take Amazon as an example. Despite our cynicism ten years ago, it has built a brand on customer excellence and used advanced analytics to make us feel good about their offers, with the result that we spend more. The ethos of CEO Jeff Bezos is simple: he will periodically leave one seat spare at a conference table and inform attendees that they should consider that seat occupied by their customer, 'The most important person in the room.'

It needs to be the same for every business. Learn how customers are

coming to you, make the concerted effort to know what they're looking for and constantly modify your business processes to keep them satisfied.

### 4. Make it Easy

Don't make the all-too-common mistake of hiding away web links, phone numbers or creating a poorly named Twitter handle. Make contact points obvious and easy to follow so your customers can access you through whatever channel they choose.

Nothing frustrates a customer more than if they can't connect with you easily and quickly from a point of their choosing... not yours.

### 5. Turn Contact into Opportunity

How do you equate any metric you use, whether it's CSAT, NPS or Customer Effort, to the revenue and cost model of your business?

Increasingly, organisations are waking up to the fact that if channels are linked and information is used effectively, any customer contact can be turned into a revenue opportunity. If you're creating conversations and building relationships, it far outweighs the cost of providing the service (over 80 per cent of the customer contact centres in the world only take inbound calls and miss the chance to cross-sell and upsell... this is a huge missed opportunity).

### 6. Use Data to Develop Insight and Action

Big data has an impact if it's used contextually to create 'big insight'. Employ people with deep analytical and mathematical skills who, when necessary, >



are capable of taking a heuristic approach, to work alongside your brand strategists and customer service experts. Get them to deeply examine customer behaviour, track performance and use insights to retain and grow your best customer relationships.

For those of you old enough to remember, we used to call this operational research. The trick today is to place analytical, data savvy people across your organisation and develop a culture where fact shapes opinion, rather than vice versa.

The net result should be more revenue and profit and/or lower cost to retain or win customers. In other words, you'll be on your way.

### 7. Experiment with Customer Interaction

It's wise to have a flexible approach whereby you can add additional channels or adjust existing ones. These can be modelled using process simulation software, allowing you to experiment with service provisions. We use computer simulation in just about all other walks of life so why not simulate customer interaction in your business? I recently saw a client reduce their service costs by 30 per cent while increasing revenue and customer satisfaction scores simply by remodelling their service regime.

### 8. Cascade the Message

Educate all your employees and service providers on what your customers want and expect. Everyone should be singing from the same song sheet. Your customer ethos has to be known off-by-heart in your organisation so that every touch point makes the right impression.

You have to empower your customer facing employees so satisfaction levels are where they need to be, which will mean investing in training and development (remember, education doesn't stop – it needs to be ongoing).

### 9. Behaviour is key

We can behave differently in the digital world compared to the physical world. We wouldn't tolerate GPS wrist bands in a high street store, or security guards following and logging our every move, but we allow cookies on our desktops to do exactly that. We may say we don't like this form of data collection but very few folk make any effort to purge browser cookies after every session. Research now actually shows that highly informed customers want you to know as much about them as they know about you, but they also only want you to have a single view of them. So work out how to get personal data only once.

For those of you who think ahead, we might be entering the age of Personal Data Management, where we actually own and control our own data passport and sell this to companies. So, be ready for the new wave.

### 10. Be Consistent

We may crave instant gratification but we also want it in a highly consistent manner. This is particularly challenging for organisations with a more traditional set-up, whereby collaboration between departments, or even within a department, can be difficult (think of the introduction of digital specialists into established marketing teams). Yes, breaking down silos and established 'fiefdoms' may be tough to do, but that's not a good enough

reason for companies to be holding off on making changes which will stop the rot caused by inconsistent levels of service.

The 'I-want-it-all-and-I-want-it-now' behaviour of customers, consumers and clients is only going to accelerate. If a business gets it wrong, that rather cute, antiquated notion of 'customer loyalty' will count for nothing. They will be seduced by competitors which provide gratification that bit faster, easier and cheaper. Only companies that recognise this and use service dynamics as a means to give us what we want, when we want it, will be leaders in their field. ■



**Bill Payne**  
Board Mentor  
Criticleye

Bill has lived and worked in US, Asia and Europe, across strategic, operational and sales roles in consulting, business services and outsourcing. He redefines business and technology models, driving considerable revenue and profit growth in highly complex, multicultural, transformational markets and industries. He is also a NED at Tekcapital (which commercialises university Intellectual Property) and a Venture Capital Partner at Octopus Investments. Bill is an Honorary Professor at the University of Lancaster and the University of Surrey and is a board coach to several digital start ups.

Contact Bill through:  
[www.criticleye.com](http://www.criticleye.com)