

# FREE SAMPLE CHAPTER

"In a world of mind-numbing choices and little loyalty, Micah reminds us why caring about your customers (and treating them that way) is not just something that feels good, it's good business." - **SETH GODIN**

*"Micah Solomon conveys an up-to-the minute and deeply practical take on customer service, business success, and the twin importance of people and technology."*

— Steve Wozniak, co-founder, Apple

MICAH SOLOMON

Coauthor of *Exceptional Service, Exceptional Profit*

## high-tech, high-touch customer service



{ inspire timeless loyalty in  
the demanding new world  
of social commerce }

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# introduction

**marshall plympton** (not his actual name, although I was tempted) is the all-too-real proprietor of an “eclectic American” restaurant near our vacation spot in the central Carolinas. Marshall’s eatery has forty-seven reviews on Yelp, twelve on Google, and thirteen on TripAdvisor. The majority of these reviews are actually pretty positive.

Marshall, however, isn’t satisfied with his good reviews and has no interest in learning from anything constructive in the mixed ones. Instead, he responds to even the smallest online slight with outrage. *Outrageous* outrage. Here’s one example of Marshall responding on Yelp to a very mild critique:

If any other bleepholes [except Marshall didn’t type “bleepholes”] like “Jjhamie319” are thinking of coming to my restaurant, listen up: Please DON’T come. Just DON’T. I have enough work serving the rest of you people without this kind of grief. And Jjhamie319, so WHAT if your soup was cold. “Cold” is subjective. We are only three people in the kitchen, sometimes four depending on the season. Can YOU keep soup hot at YOUR house? Big bleeping deal that it was quote unquote “cold” twice. Don’t come in again—make your own soup. Hope you scald your mouth.<sup>1</sup>

*Marshall doesn’t need my book; he needs a new line of work, far away from customers. But for the rest of you, who’d like to keep your organization free of what could be termed “Marshall Lawlessness” and learn to get along with and win over today’s breed of customer, I offer this book.*

Social media blundering, even in milder forms than Marshall's, is one of the potential pitfalls of engaging with customers today, but it's not the only one. And the book you're reading is not exclusively about social media, because what an organization needs in order to avoid responses that evoke our clueless Marshall is much more than nuts-and-bolts training in social media. What's needed could be more properly termed *training in humanity*. Humanity training involves:

- ▶ Understanding customers and their desires, unformed and always-shifting though they may be
- ▶ Consciously building an extraordinary company culture
- ▶ Understanding, appropriately selecting, and engaging employees

And, of course, learning the special code of technologically clued-in commerce, including social media: how to respond, when to respond, and when, in fact, to keep your mouth (terminal, actually) shut. All of which I'll cover as we move through this book.

## forearmed is forewarned

It was behavioral scientist Nicolas Guégen who proved the power, literally speaking, of touch.<sup>2</sup> He demonstrated it definitively—and a bit creepily, I might add. His research experiments showed that giving a light touch on the arm nearly doubles your chance of getting what you want: convincing someone to join you in charity work, getting the phone number of an attractive stranger you've spotted on the street, getting the quiet newcomer in the meeting to take on a thankless project.

And most relevant to our subject, he proved that this tap can help convince a stranger to participate in a supermarket taste test and, ultimately, to buy your product. (Before we get *too* dependent on Guégen's work, I feel obliged to note that Guégen's research strays into some curious territory, such as determining, for female hitchhikers, the ideal

bust size to entice a male driver to stop.<sup>3</sup> So I'm not going to be using the full range of his research in this book.)

Of course, we can't actually touch our customers on the arm: It's not, as far as I know, possible to do over the internet, and it's prone to misinterpretation if done in person. Yet, figuratively, we do need to touch our customers if we're going to provide memorable customer service. And touching—reaching—your customers is what this book's about.

## a light touch at just the right time

I'm going to show you how to succeed at touching customers while keeping your technological edge, as well as how to make that touch more effective *through* your technological edge. You'll also learn how to use the right technology, people, and company culture to ensure that your touch is feather light—not intrusive or more than the customer wants, and always (and only) *when* the customer wants it.

The goal in all this is to touch customers in a way that builds true customer loyalty—loyalty you can bank.

The stakes are high. Since the advent of the internet, and, most specifically, the broad use of the World Wide Web starting in the mid-1990s, there's been a dramatic transformation of the competitive landscape. The changes wrought by these new communication and distribution channels are in many ways revolutionary, and they're causing disruptions akin to those of past revolutions.

For a parallel, look at the changes of the mid-nineteenth century. During this period the stability of rural and village life was thrown into disarray due to a host of technological advances, including those making it possible to preserve and transport food. Customers could now purchase edibles from across the country or around the world: The farmer in New England who had been able to count on a captive local market for whatever would graze or grow in his stony fields was now competing against topsoil-rich Illinois and lamb-friendly New Zealand. The result was a mass abandonment of farms throughout the region. The

transformation was striking: Go for a walk in the woods of New Hampshire or Vermont and you'll still see the proliferation of old stone walls and foundations that attest to the abandoned farms and homesteads of this era.<sup>4</sup> Or just remember your poetry. This New England exodus is the backstory of Robert Frost's stuck-in-his-ways neighbor still trying to mend a fence: He doesn't realize times have changed and the fence, at most, is now preventing runaway trees. There are no cattle to contain anymore.

You can't afford to be similarly left behind by today's transformational technologies. So many things have changed and continue to change in the world of commerce. For example, our sense of timeliness: What was plenty fast this time last year feels *draggy* now to the *very same customers* because of changing expectations brought by mobile technology, social media-induced restlessness, the incredible efficiency of vendors like Amazon.com, and other factors. It's crucial to invest brain cells, time, and money to keep up with what it takes to hold on to your customers, now that we're all playing on a global, digitally connected field.

## saying your business is "on the internet" is like saying it's "on the power grid"

And yet, and yet . . . before you go off the technological deep end and jettison all that is timeless in customer service, take at least a few shallow breaths: In today's high-tech world, where people can pay for their lattes with the wave of a smartphone, saying your business is "on the internet" is as mundane as saying it's "on the power grid." In other words, doing business in a digitally informed manner should be comfortable enough for your business that it becomes *background information*, just like having "electricity and all" (as long-ago folksinger Woody Guthrie creatively spelled it out) was for earlier generations. This has two implications. First, we need to bone up on what is essential and timeless in customer service and stop being dazzled to the point of distraction by all this newfangled internet stuff. And, paradoxically, we need to realize that the internet, mobile technology, social media, and

self-service technologies of various stripes are now, with absolute finality, integral to what customer service means today—and there is absolutely no turning back.

This is the tightrope I'll walk in this book. To put it another way, I'll bring you up to speed on everything that has changed in how customers expect companies to behave, and how to stay at the forefront of this revolution. Yet this isn't a book that throws the baby out with the digital bathwater, written by someone who thinks the Twitterverse comprises the entire customer service universe. This is a book that realizes that customers—how they behave and how they prefer to interact with you—fall along a wide continuum. The breathless generalizations and thoughtless clichés you hear every day in the technology and business press about “today's customers” are just that: generalizations and clichés. This book will teach you how to do business in our three-dimensional world—with customers who walk on two legs and type with ten fingers (or, just as likely today, with two thumbs).

Our idiosyncratic researcher Guégen was right: There is one thing all customers have in common, in this era and any other: If you learn to emotionally touch them, through a human-friendly website, via a correctly designed self-service kiosk, in person, or even by mail (remember mail?), that customer *will* respond. Learning to leave the correct imprint on a customer, whether in an initial encounter, when the customer honors you with a repeat visit to your company, or when she lets you know that she's upset, are key skills in this era, as in any other. Through these abilities, your organization builds crucial brand equity and avoids the danger of commoditization in the eyes of the marketplace—a danger that the ever-expanding technological and global-sourcing arms race has made more and more urgent.

## all you need to know in a rhyming nutshell

Your touch will be felt most powerfully, with the longest-lasting after-effect, when you keep your customer's personal, specific needs and desires in the foreground, ideally without prompting. This is what I

call *anticipatory customer service*. Here's what to strive for through people, systems, and technology, set in an admittedly dopey rhyme for easy recollection:

If you can anticipate  
You can differentiate.  
If customers feel at home  
They're unlikely to roam.

That, in a nutshell, is how you turn customer service into a competitive advantage that will sustain your business year after year. If you can *anticipate* what your customers want, before they ask for it, even before they're aware of or can express that they desire it, they'll never feel the need to go elsewhere. Your service is *anticipatory* when:

- ▶ Your product or service is what your customers are looking for—specifically what they are looking for—before they have to look elsewhere or raise their voices to ask you for it
- ▶ Your pricing, whether high, low, or in the middle of the marketplace, fits the model customers hold mentally of what is fair
- ▶ You *already* know details about your specific customers that are important to them, thus giving them a sense of belonging and saving them time and the need to explain themselves *and* you take the logical but rare next step of using these details to bring your customers additional value—for example, suggesting related purchases that suit them to a *T*.

## homeward bound

If you can make your customer feel *at home*—no, not a home like my old bachelor pad with a sink full of dishes and garbage that needs to be taken out, but a magical home, like the one where, ideally speaking, your customers grew up as kids, where the lightbulbs were automatically changed and the groceries in the fridge were chosen to fit their

preference, where they were missed when they went to school and welcomed back when they came home—why would they ever stray?

This homey image won't be entirely new to my readers. As discussed in *Exceptional Service, Exceptional Profit* (Inghilleri-Solomon, AMACOM 2010), this was a revelation of the Ritz-Carlton's founder, Horst Schulze, who graciously contributed to our book. Schulze, early in the days of building the Ritz-Carlton brand, working with a highly skilled team of linguists, parsed survey after survey to find out what his customers meant when they said they wanted his luxury hotels to be “just like home.” Ultimately, Schulze and these language experts discerned that his guests were looking for a business that functioned like a home run by a caring parent. I have yet to find a better archetype for how a business can build a customer experience that will command true loyalty.

## where tech makes loyalty easier

Here's the great thing: Technology can make anticipation and “home-keeping” much simpler, and much easier to reap dramatic benefits from. For example, custom-tailored, *automated anticipatory messaging* (see Chapter 10) helps you respond in advance (“pre-pond,” I suppose) to customer needs and would have been impossible before the digital communications revolution. *Anticipatory design* (see Chapter 4), used so extraordinarily by companies like Apple and Google, can help simplify your customer's life. Well-designed “My Account” and other *self-service technology* (see Chapter 8) has made it so many customers are willing, even eager, to do much of the work for you to keep track of their preferences and other details—information that, in turn, makes anticipatory customer service easier to pull off. Customers will let you know how to improve more directly than before if you keep your ear to your *electronic listening channels* (see Chapter 13), thus facilitating a much quicker feedback loop for future anticipatory service. And, once you delight your customers with anticipatory customer service, they can *spread the word much more quickly via social media* (see Chapters 11–13) than was ever possible in the past.



Technology, properly directed, is the faithful friend of the customer-centered company. But technology alone is almost never enough to bring a company out of the danger zone of being considered a commodity. Technology needs people—and a culture that supports those people’s best efforts—to effectively direct technology to the service of emotionally touching your customers. Providing great customer service in our technologically altered world isn’t a fundamentally different proposition than it was a decade ago, but it’s faster. More transparent. More twitchy. Unforgiving. Viral. Magnified. But still created by, and for, people.

Since people are central on both sides of the service interaction, that’s where we go first in this discussion, with a peek at today’s customer. Care to join me?

## how this book is organized

This book is organized into three parts. Part One, “Timeliness and Timelessness,” addresses the basics of doing customer service right, and what it looks like when you do it wrong, in any era. Part Two, “High-Tech, High-Touch Anticipatory Service,” begins to address what it takes to create a true loyalty-building level of customer service: by anticipating customer needs through the right people, culture, and technology. Part Three, “The Rise of Self-Service and Social Media—And Other Seismic Shifts,” extends the technological focus by covering in detail the trends of self-service, social media, and electronic customer input in general—and ways to stay ahead of competitors in these areas.

Within these sections, each chapter is followed by a Cliff’s Notes-style cheat sheet for your quick review and as a memory aid (put together by me, not by those selfless experts at the actual Cliff’s Notes who got you through *The Iliad*). This summary is called, inevitably, “And Your Point Is?” (If my point is *still* hard to decipher, shoot me an email at [micah@micahsolomon.com](mailto:micah@micahsolomon.com) or visit me at [customerserviceguru.com](http://customerserviceguru.com) and let me know how I can clarify it for your individual situation.)

part one

# timeliness and timelessness

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# chapter 1

## today's changed customer

### making lovemaking difficult

**customer service is like making love.** I know that sounds far-fetched, but bear with me here: It takes only a minute—or two—to get the general concept, but you can gainfully invest a lifetime in mastering the details. (And you'll never get the full picture if you only practice when you're by yourself.)

Mastering the fine points of customer service is a never-ending challenge in part because customer expectations and desires change all the time. In fact, they're different now from the last time you spoke with your customer—in this case, a frequent customer of yours I'll call Lorena Willis.

A bit after 10:30 on a wintry morning, one of your contact center operators answers an incoming from Lorena. Thanks to your processes, techniques, and support software, your operator, Pam Chang, has good historical data on Lorena, including what she bought from you last year (a built-in microwave and a set of professional ceramic knives) and general preferences, such as her preferred mode of shipping.

But there's a hitch: You actually *don't* know Lorena Willis anymore.

Like all of us, she's changed. She's changed since the recession. Since the internet became what seems like a 25/8 proposition. Since the explosion in popularity of mobile devices.

In what ways has Lorena likely changed? Let's take a tour through the dominant themes emerging in the marketplace—keeping our eyes trained on those that illuminate the ways your customer service may need updating.

## the most crucial customer “trends” today are individual changes

Before I become a master of all generalizations, I'm going to concede something rarely admitted in a trendspotting chapter like this one: The most important factors that have changed about Lorena, or any customer, are *individual* changes. Is she richer? Poorer? Recently single or newly married? Does she have a new pet or is she grieving for one that has died? No matter how big you grow, or want to grow, as a company, *individual* customers buy from you, not assemblages of customers, not slices of a market. Learning to treat individual customers as individuals, honoring individual preferences unique to that customer, is a key to business success. But being aware of underlying trends in the marketplace is also essential for the success of any business that relies on significant numbers of transactions and on forward-looking planning.

## customer trend #1: customers expect anticipatory technological behavior and aggregated information—instantly

My battery died recently on my aging Volvo, and with it I lost the stations that had been preset into my car radio. Afterwards, driving around manually selecting the stations I generally listen to (more or less just one *station*), I found myself irritated to have to dig up the long-

forgotten instructions on how to set a radio station into memory. After a few days, I found myself thinking, “Doesn’t my car *know* I want this station as a preset? I mean, I listen to it every day—the Volvo should be inviting me to add it to a ‘favorites list’ or some such.”

But my car was manufactured in 2004, and, of course, cars didn’t “think” that way in 2004. And neither did consumers. Believe me, *customers think that way now*: They expect devices—and companies—to, in effect, say, “Mr. Solomon, I note that you’ve been listening quite a bit to your local NPR station. Care to have me memorize it for you so you’ll not have to fumble for it while you’re negotiating a difficult turn?”

Customers now expect personalized, anticipatory technological behavior and aggregated information—instantly. To get a sense of how profoundly customer expectations have changed, look around. With the advent of mobile computing, a traveler can get the answers on her iDroidPhoneBerry® that the concierge or bellman or neighborhood know-it-all used to parcel out at his own rate and with varying amounts of reliability: What’s a good Italian restaurant within walking distance? What subway line do I take to Dupont Circle, and which exit is best from the station? My plane just landed—in this country, do I shake hands when I meet someone of the opposite gender?

While this bears some resemblance to the model in place only a few years ago—settling into a hotel room, pulling out a laptop, fumbling around for an Ethernet cable, trying to figure out how to log on to the hotel’s network—there are real differences. Specifically, the better consolidation of information. *Surfing* the net—going out on a net-pedition to *look* for stuff seems like too much work and too big a time investment for today’s customers. Today, customers expect technology to bring an experience that is easier, more instantaneous, and more intuitive. Customers want to type or thumb a few keystrokes and have the information they need served up for them concierge-style based on their IP address or satellite location and other useful clues. Consider Hipmunk—which lists travel options along with warnings about long layovers and other agonies, and shows hotels with precise proximity to

your actual destination. And GogoBot, where your own Facebook/Twitter pals have already rated potential trips for you. And of course TripAdvisor, with its user-generated ratings of nearly everything in the world of travel.

A study by Accenture showed a manifestation of this trend: Customers in a retail situation often prefer to look to a smartphone for answers to simple product questions rather than working with a human clerk.<sup>1</sup> The smartphone answers just seem to be faster and more accurate and sometimes, sad to say, come with a little less attitude. (We'll work on this attitude part when we get to building your culture and to hiring.)

Of course, the timeline of customer expectations in general has sped up radically. In addition to mobile computing and improved connectivity, Amazon.com is one of the key factors in this—making the level of what's in stock and available overnight absolutely unprecedented. Within *minutes* of placing your order, it's likely being slapped with a shipping label at one of the Amazon.com-owned or UPS-Amazon.com-partnered warehouses in one of many strategically located places in the country.<sup>2</sup> (And overnight fulfillment, of course, is only the beginning. YouSendIt, for example, a rapidly growing service that allows you to send enormous files nearly instantly, sticks it to the FedExes of the world with its slogan: "Overnight? *Are you kidding?*")

## customer trend #2: shame shift and values-based buying

"Shame shift" is a term I learned from Jay Coldren, Marriott International's vice president of lifestyle brands. It's a trend that's become a significant part of today's consumer psyche.

Before the economic downturn, the pride of being able to consume in a conspicuous manner—sitting in front of a many-inch flat screen, taking the family on a summer vacation to a center of tropical opulence—was considered appropriate and enjoyable by economically comfortable customers.

Now this same behavior may be seen as crass, even rude. The attitude has shifted from pride in showing off how much we can afford to shyness about consuming too conspicuously. But—and as Pee Wee Herman would've said, it's a "big but"—there's a huge exception.

"What we're seeing now is consumption being excused by 'attached meaning,'" as Jay puts it.

What is "attached meaning"? Think of the people you know who willingly pay five bucks for a cup of coffee, provided the coffeeshop gives part of that fiver to help the rainforest. This phenomenon is significant. A study of consumer habits confirms that shoppers are becoming "more deliberate and purposeful" in their purchasing decisions.<sup>3</sup> "Conspicuous consumption has given way to more conscious or practical consumerism" and "rampant deal-seeking is being replaced by more purchase selectivity."

Another study shows that *87 percent of consumers in the United States believe that companies should value the interests of society* at least as much as strict business interests.<sup>4</sup> Customers are demanding more alignment of company values with their own, and this customer sentiment is being expressed in buying choices. John Gerzema, chief insights officer at Young & Rubicam, told *Inc.* magazine editor at large Leigh Buchanan that, according to his vast database of consumer attitudes, *71 percent of people agree with the statement, "I make it a point to buy brands from companies whose values are similar to my own."*<sup>5</sup>

## customer trend # 3: timelessness over trendiness

One of the notable characteristics people seek in their purchases today is "timelessness"—a desire that has emerged from the recession at full tilt.

"When you consider layoffs, downsizing, delayed raises, and reduced hours, more than half of all American workers have suffered losses," Young & Rubicam's Gerzema notes.<sup>6</sup> "This very real pain has



driven us to reconsider our definition of the good life. People are finding happiness in old-fashioned virtues.”

Examples are everywhere: Urban and suburban women flouting zoning regulations to raise their own hens in their side yards; the practice of “cow-pooling” (where several families join forces to share in the purchase of a cow); or the surge in popularity of Hunter boots, the boots that the Queen of England wears when she walks her corgis: This footwear classic combines authentic story and excellent product and, as a result, has caught fire. Customers are looking for old standbys that can become hip again. A backstory—history—has become important to the consumer. “People are looking for things that are authentic,” says interior designer and web phenomenon Maxwell Gillingham-Ryan ([apartmenttherapy.com](http://apartmenttherapy.com)). The drive for authenticity, according to Gillingham-Ryan, “will resonate with people as long as we live in these times.”<sup>77</sup>

But we *are* living in these times, so don’t be fooled into thinking your customers will accept timelessness without timeliness. They want the twenty-first-century version of timelessness—on a timetable that matches the impatient standards of the digital generation. Inconvenienced in any way, they’ll usually lose interest. For example, Restoration Hardware is perfectly positioned for the timelessness trend—but it still needs to have an iPad app and be able to deliver overnight to the farthest reaches of its customer base. A Twinings Tea slogan nails the ideal, uh, blend we’re looking for here: “Your 15-minute break, 300 years in the making.”

## customer trend #4: customer empowerment

Customers feel newly empowered in their relationships with companies. They’re expecting businesses to respect that sense of empowerment—and they lash out at those that don’t. They expect that your company will make itself easy to contact and will respond to customer comments at a high and thoughtful level. Which I suggest you do.

Because feedback *will* be offered, whether you welcome it or not. It used to be that a peeved customer might drop by your shop and give the manager an earful. Or go through an extended search to figure out the correct address for an executive high enough to make a difference, and then sit down and write an angry letter. Later, the internet brought an increased sense of empowerment, with online comment forms and the ability to send instantaneous complaint emails.

Today, those methods are looking slow and outdated. Technology has created faster, more viral ways for consumers to make their annoyance felt. Exhibit “A” here, of course, is Twitter: Anyone who has enough people reading his tweets can get a company’s attention in a hurry with a cleverly or powerfully worded complaint, either within Twitter’s 140 characters or via a shared link directing followers to a longer post elsewhere on the web. Not only that, but the people who see it may resend it to their *own* Twitter followers (retweet it). Before long, one person’s complaint will reach enough people and elicit enough similar responses to make the company wake up and pay attention to the message of the original complainer.

Customers understand that this is empowerment at the speed of light. And they expect you to understand it too, to incorporate the empowerment expectations of customers into your problem-resolution process. In other words, understand that the playing field has flattened—or prepare to be flattened yourself. (Much more on this when we get to social media, in Chapters 11, 12, and 13.)

## customer trend #5: the greening of the customer

While the strength of the green trend will ebb and flow with time and varies in strength from customer to customer, it’s a clear underlying sentiment among much of today’s buying populace. And the younger the customer, the more “hooked on green”—so there’s no reason to think this trend will abate as the buying power of younger consumers

increases. In interacting with your customers, it's always wise to operate from the assumption that they'll have concerns relating to the environmental impact of your operation and their purchase. Those *unconcerned* with the environment will rarely be offended if you take environmental precautions, but those who *are* environmentally concerned will be upset by, for example, your business's excessive packaging, whether or not they do the favor of letting you know of their disappointment.

Awareness of environmental sensitivity should become part of the day-to-day thinking you put into customer service interactions. For instance, perhaps a particular customer who purchased a large item from you that arrived in less than perfect shape would prefer a discount rather than having a pickup and rerun of the order—because of his concern about the carbon impact of the return shipping. Or maybe your offer to throw in an additional, but not entirely needed, product as compensation for a delay will only grate rather than be appreciated.

## customer trend #6: the desire for self-service

Self-service, which includes everything from web-based e-commerce to IVR (interactive voice response telephone systems) to concierge-like self-help touch-screen menus in public spaces to passengers printing their own boarding passes at home before traveling, is a powerful trend in customer service, and companies that ignore it, pursue it reluctantly, or violate the basic laws of its implementation will be left in the dust. There are various factors driving the self-service trend: our round-the-clock lifestyle, a buying populace that is increasingly tech savvy, even in some cases the higher comfort level of socially anxious customers when doing business with machines rather than face to face or even on the phone. (The rules of doing self-service correctly are explored in depth in Chapter 8. Disregard them at your own peril.)



*Yeow.* How can you keep your knowledge up to date to meet the changing needs of your customer? Especially when every business's cus-

tomers are different from every other business's—and the best a chapter like this can do for you is to paint things in broad strokes?

The answer: *ask*. Once you've built true customer intimacy, as we'll spend much of this book together doing, you'll have the ultimate foothold into the future. Truly loyal customers earnestly want to share with you how their needs and wishes are changing. And how they want you to change with—and for—them.

Now, I don't mean "ask" as a pat answer. Keeping tabs on and understanding your customers is difficult, exhausting, literally endless, and often confusing. Think of the man in the *New Yorker* cartoon telling his companion while scanning the wine list, "I want Chardonnay, but I like saying 'Pinot Grigio.'" If customers willingly will buy what they don't "want" (and believe me, they do it all the time) due to some psychological drive—to impress, to try something new, for nostalgia, or even to roll particular French words like "Pinot Grigio" around on their tongues—how can you ever know on any kind of immutable basis what they really are seeking from you?

You can't really: There's no "set and forget" in customer intimacy, and that's a humbling thought. But it's also the basis of how you win the customer service game—by always asking. Always valuing empathy. Never trusting that your assessments from yesterday are sufficient for today. So, you'll have a couple of restless, even sleepless, nights keeping up. Do it well enough and your future restless nights can be in Bali, or Fenway Park . . . or wherever you choose.

## "and your point is?"

- ▶ You may think you know your customer, but in a sense you don't—because your customer's needs are constantly changing. The most important changes are individual (idiosyncratic to one particular customer), but it also helps to keep your eye on six trends affecting customer service:

1. Don't make your customers search for information; bring it to them—and right away. Customers today expect technology that brings an experience that is easy, instantaneous, and intuitive.
  2. Conspicuous consumption is becoming acceptable only when excused by “attached meaning,” leading to greater purchase selectivity. Shoppers are also demanding more alignment between a company's values and their own, believing that companies should value the interests of society as much as or more than strict business interests.
  3. Customers value timelessness over trendiness: products that have a backstory. Yet don't be fooled into thinking your customers will accept timelessness without timeliness: You need to keep up with the technological times and with modern pacing.
  4. Customers are feeling empowered in their relationships with companies. They expect businesses to support this sense of empowerment—and they lash out at those that don't.
  5. In interacting with your customers, it's wise to operate from the assumption that they'll have concerns relating to the environmental impact of your operation.
  6. Self-service is a giant trend, and companies that ignore it, pursue it reluctantly, or violate its basic laws will be left in the dust.
- How can you keep up your knowledge of the ever-changing needs of your customer? *Ask.*

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