

my clients for booking me on this particular airline.

But it got me thinking about how companies do silly things like this that have such an exaggerated negative effect, and that brings me to the main theme of this article. You see, when we examine and analyse customer complaints it always seems to be the smallest things that are a great source of irritation.

- Businesses that advertise special promotions – and forget to tell their branches.
- Radio stations that do live broadcasts – but listeners are constantly interrupted by silence or poor signals because the technicians didn't do their homework.
- Chips and cracks in crockery and glassware at restaurants, (never mind disgustingly awful toilets where we imagine our kids will pick up at least ten diseases.)
- Websites and computer programmes that just don't do what they should do because they weren't properly tested. Alternatively, not having a Plan B when your tills or credit card facilities go off line.
- Petty rules and policies that get directly in the way of customer satisfaction and delight. A classic here is the rule that says customers cannot have breakfast after the strict deadline of 11:00.
- Endless delays for no identifiable reasons, without any explanations to customers, and where solutions to deal with bottlenecks seem to be exceedingly simple – to customers, at least.
- And my ultimate frustration: poorly trained staff who have no idea how to deal with customers' questions and problems, and who don't have the courtesy to even greet you, never mind just being nice.

Silly things often have an exaggerated negative effect. When we examine and analyse customer complaints it always seems to be the smallest things that are a great source of irritation

CUSTOMER
FEEDBACK
SUPPORT
INNOVATIVE
QUALITY
EXCELLENT
FRIENDLY



There are countless more examples of similar things, and you have to understand that there are seriously negative consequences for your business when they happen. If you are going to make your customers sweat and jump through hoops just to spend their money in your business, understand that they will seek alternatives as soon as they get half the chance.

Thus, on the one hand there are so many small things that are such a great source of irritation and frustration for customers.

On the other hand, guess what are the greatest sources of delight and excitement for customers? Again, it's mostly about little things...

- Those moments when you noticed something about them, (like their tan from their recent holiday,) and mentioned it to them.
- When you showed appreciation for their loyalty by simply saying thank you while you smiled at them and showed positive body language.
- When you complimented them on their wonderful taste in clothing or the impeccable manners of their children.
- When you told them that you would take personal responsibility for solving their problem even while reassuring them that it would all be fine eventually...

- And then when you dealt with the problem or complaint with urgency.
- When you displayed the 3 Es: Empathy, Energy and Enthusiasm.

All people are emotional and when you are able to pull at their heart strings, you will succeed.

In a world of shockingly poor business leadership where customers feel alienated and isolated from the people they have to deal with; where most customers feel upset by the way they are treated; when they are suspicious of all of the organisational decisions to save money that business managers tell them is "for their own good"; when they anticipate that no transaction can occur without a big fight; when they worry that your company is busy doing damage to them or to society at large in the chase for profit; then you have the opportunity to shine like a beacon of hope in the sea of their despair.

Take a critical look at your business from your customers' viewpoint, and ask yourself: "How do these little irritations create far more havoc than we anticipated, and what do we have to do to kill them?"

(With apologies to rock band Blink 182, from which this article's heading was ripped off.)



Aki Kalliatakis is the managing partner of The Leadership LaunchPad, a company dedicated to helping clients become more customer driven. He can be contacted at (011) 640 3958, or via the website at www.leadershiplaunchpad.co.za