

Customer Service and Lost Luggage: The Impossible Dream

Remember the comic strip character, Joe Btfsplk from Li'l Abner...the one with a dark cloud over his head signifying the Eternal Jinx. That's me! My last five air trips to the US and Canada have been doomed. What are the odds that in five consecutive trips the airlines would lose my luggage five times? Should I go out and buy a lottery ticket right now? Four of the trips were business, four of the losses were away from home, four of the trips were big brother carriers to the south, and four of the flights involved connections.

I think the Cosmic Joke is really a customer service lesson. It's a beacon pointing the way to potential new Cheryl Crumb & Associates customers! It's the basis for another customer focus story...the don'ts and more don'ts of service recovery.

Nobody likes to be the last one standing at the luggage carousel, looking longingly at empty moving tread, and then forlornly trekking to the baggage office. Even with this ominous beginning, there could have been some happy endings...but there weren't.

Let's start with a little empathy for the Baggage Department employees. Being a baggage handler must be a tough job. They live in a windowless world. The only people they ever see are those who are disconnected from their luggage. Smiling customer faces would be a rarity. It must be easy to mentally disengage from the customer as a human being with a loss; they become the "Aggressive Black Samsonite" or the "Screaming Taupe American Tourister". Still, that's no excuse to compound the baggage system error with a mega-dose of indifference.

Here's how one airline managed the situation. Missing were both bags, my clothes and my training materials. Yes, I know, it would have been smarter to carry on the latter, but I already had my laptop backpack, my purse and plane stairs rather than jetways to navigate, so I took a chance. Bad move. I was 4th in line with my claim. Not a good flight for others as well. My turn came when I heard "Next"... (which has become my new airline name). No eye contact, a form was pushed at me, and when asked the expected "describe your bag", my response of two blacks elicited a "Good Luck". Not a great start. She threw a preprinted sheet at me telling me to call the 800 number for updates. When I asked about

possibility of recovery, she shrugged her shoulders...still no eye contact. When I asked if I could have a local number to contact, she said that wasn't their policy. When I said I needed a toothbrush and deodorant, she said there was still time for me to buy some before stores closed if I hurried. The first 3 syllables of my next question were amputated. She turned, said, "Next" and I was dismissed. Once in my hotel, I called the 800 number. The automated voice asked me for my reference number. It didn't recognize the form's reference number and told me to check again. We went around this loop for three times, until the voice told me to call later and disconnected me. I fired up my laptop and checked the airline website. They still needed the same reference number. Foiled again. I hadn't felt so rejected since the Grade 10 Sadie Hawkins Dance. There was some semi-good news to this saga. At 3 a.m., the hotel reception rang me to advise that my luggage had arrived. Since flights don't do midnight landings, I wonder how long it sat in Baggage Purgatory?

Without regaling the entire sad litany on the remaining flights, here were a couple less than stellar "dishonorable mentions" from the baggage folks:

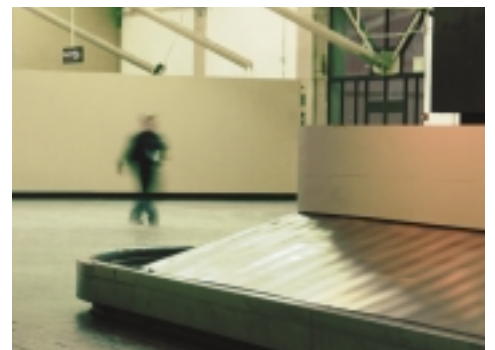
- On my 5th loss, upon telling my tale of woe, the baggage handler said, "Life sucks, doesn't it?"
- One flight back to my home city from no-nameville had me on a mini-me aircraft. Holding only 18 passengers (all with an aisle and window seat), the check-in agent asked me which bag was most important to me. When I questioned his question, he said that when the plane is full, they can only carry half the luggage. The rest will be shipped at a later date. While I admired his pro-activity and the warning, it took 3 days for my luggage to reach me.

Unfortunately, everybody has these tearful tales. Most service providers don't get up in the morning thinking, "I can't wait to see how many customers I can tick off today!", but they're successful with that goal nonetheless. Studies continually show that what customers most rebel against is the attitude of indifference displayed.

If any of you are in the difficult position where the bulk of your job is dealing with

upset customers, here are some tips to bring some sunshine back into your work life:

- Remember that your job is not processing papers or forms. Your primary role is to shift a customer's mood to a more positive place when bad things have happened. The only way to do this is to put yourself in the customer's situation. "Empathy" is a transformation of self. Be aware that the customer will sense if you are pretending empathy or spouting insincere scripted phrases like, "I know how you must feel" or "I feel your pain".
- It's not about fault or being right. In the moment of upset, fault is irrelevant.
- Blame and excuses will incite an angry customer into a raving lunatic.
- Appreciate the helplessness that customers feel. Give them information and options.
- Recognize that automation might be a time-saver, but when people are upset they need a human connection.



- Volunteer something, anything, to help them out. Anticipate what you might need if you were in the same kind of situation. This could include a personal phone number, the contact name of a real person, or a contingency plan they could take.
- Give them a personal heads-up as soon as a solution has been found. The longer the customer goes without information, the greater the level of anxiety.
- Remember that upset customers love to share their stories. Most will tell at least 11 other people, vilifying you totally. And, if they're professional trainers or writers, they'll tell thousands!

In those five situations, I would have loved to hear just one of the baggage claimers say to

Continued on page 26

BUTTKICKER[®] SILENT SUBWOOFER[™] SOLVES VEHICLE SOUND ORDINANCE ISSUES

Silent Subwoofer provides high quality car audio, with no exterior noise, virtually solving community noise ordinance issues caused by loud car stereo systems. Based on the patented technology used in the popular ButtKicker tactile transducer, Silent Subwoofer provides a musically superior alternative to large vehicle speakers and subwoofers.

The human body perceives sound through two senses: we hear sound, but we also feel sound, especially low frequency. People enjoy loud rock concerts, aerial bombs at firework displays - and loud subwoofers in their cars, because they desire to feel the sound pressure in their bodies. Sound that is felt is an essential part of accurate and pleasing audio reproduction.

Silent Subwoofer by ButtKicker is currently releasing products for the custom car audio industry. OEM test vehicles are also on the road with Ford, Toyota-Scion, GM, Visteon and Johnson Controls.

A motor vehicle contains inherent problems for quality sound reproduction. Extreme sound pressure levels cause offensive vibration, both within and without a vehicle. Silent Subwoofer, by ButtKicker solves these problems. In addition, with Silent Subwoofer, average factory-installed speaker systems appear to be premium, simply because the speakers are no longer required to produce excessive low frequency. And - when added to a premium system, the extended low frequency is breath-taking. The transducers are installed directly to the frame of the vehicle, producing no audible sound.

Go and take a look at their web site: www.thebuttkicker.com

CANADIANS ON HDTV

One in seven (14%) have an HD ready TV set, but just 40% of them have the Top Box to receive HDTV channels. Two in ten (19%) without an HD-ready TV plan to buy one.

SANDISK ADDS CRUZER MINI USB Flash drives TO LOW-COST SHOOT & STORE LINE FOR THE FOOD & DRUG RETAIL CHANNEL

Popular USB 2.0 storage devices will be sold at US \$12.99. Replaces floppy disk to store and transfer digital images, music, video and data.

SONY KEEPS APPLE'S IPOD IN JAPAN AT BAY

While Apple is still squashing Sony in Europe and North America, where the iPod has achieved iconic status and a big selling point is the availability of iTunes, an easy-to-use music downloading service that has not yet been launched in Japan, the company is doing better on its home turf. Launched worldwide in March and April, Sony's new lineup of music players includes several models equipped with flash memory chips able to store 256, 512 MB or 1 GB of data, and two players with hard disk drives.

IMAGE SENSOR FROM KODAK READY FOR CAMERAS & CELL PHONES

Eastman Kodak Co. is ready to launch an important new business that could help offset declining film sales and make the company's digital imaging products more satisfying and affordable.

The company's new three megapixel and five megapixel sensors, which will go by the name Pixelux, are billed as offering improved image quality, higher performance, and more features than competing products.

The sensors are made with a process known as complementary metal-oxide semiconductor manufacturing. CMOS sensors cost less to produce and can accommodate more of a camera's functions on a single chip, driving down costs. CMOS sensors are a massive growth market, mostly because of the increasing popularity of cell phone cameras. In-Stat/MDR of Scottsdale, Ariz., says that sales of sensors will top 800 million worldwide by 2008, with CMOS sensors growing 40 percent a year.

The Pixelux products are the outgrowth of an alliance with IBM Corp., which is making the sensors at its semiconductor fabrication facility in Vermont. Kodak has licensed homegrown manufacturing technology to IBM as part of the deal.

Continued from page 8 - Selling Ideas

meet the viewing requirements of that fixed-in-place television. Not so with flat screen products. Take the time to point out the variety of wall mount products which pull out, cantilever and twist, angle up and own. If possible take the customer to another area of the sales floor to demonstrate one of the products, and then identify how such a product may work well with their floor plan.

7. RECOMMEND SPEAKERS

Recommending speakers has become a very straightforward discussion based upon a couple of questions:

- Should the floor space in the entertainment area be used for speakers (front or rear) which sit on the floor?
- Have you considered wall mount speakers? (Women like these because they don't have to vacuum around them!)
- Would you prefer invisible speakers built into the wall and painted over?

Based upon the products offered by your store, the answers to these questions open the way for recommending and installing the audio portion of your customer's entertainment system.

Continued from page 23 - Lost Luggage

me: "Mrs. Crumb, this is certainly disturbing. No one wants to be in a strange city on a business trip wearing shorts and sandals. We have 2 more flights coming in from X City tonight, so there's a reasonable chance that your bags will be located. The next flight arrives at 8 p.m., and the last flight will arrive here at 10 p.m. Although this form has our 800 number, I know how impersonal that is. I'm adding the phone number to reach this desk directly. In the event that I'm not here, I'm also including the name of my co-worker. I'll let her know you might be calling. What time can we contact you at the hotel if the bags come in tonight? In the meantime, if it's a worst-case scenario and they don't come in, I'll give you a bag of toiletries and here's a list of some stores in the area and what they sell. We've also indicated the store hours. What else do you think you might need? It's most unfortunate when this happens. Traveling with luggage is stressful enough. We'll track it and call your hotel tonight to advise you of the status."

I still might be giving a seminar the next day in shorts and sandals, but I'd be able to give the attendees an example of good customer service, as opposed to bad.