

Viewpoint

CLOSE

Customers Defect When the Silos Don't Connect

Dysfunctional relationships drive customers away.

by [Jeanne Bliss](#)

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The fact of the matter is, it's the unusual organization that's set up to let people think and act collectively on behalf of customers. We're stuck in our silos, making independent decisions, taking isolated actions for the purpose of executing our discipline, achieving good numbers, and earning a good review. Of course the customer experience doesn't happen neatly down each individual silo. The customer experiences a company horizontally, *across* the silos. And the customer becomes the grand guinea pig, experiencing each variation of an organization's ability, or inability, to work together. This is the breeding ground for the lack of respect customers feel and the discontent they have with us.

Stranger Than Fiction (This Stuff Really Happened)

An automotive company began to charge customers for loaner cars regardless of what car they had purchased, how old or new the vehicle was, or how many vehicles the customer had purchased. An insurance company cancelled a customer's service for non-payment, and then solicited that customer the next day for a different product. A packaged goods company sent out empty boxes to customers who had purchased out-of-stock products and then sent the product later under separate cover. Each of these occurred as the outcome of separate silo objectives intersecting and falling in an awkward heap on customers' laps.

This is the gift we give our customers every day. They receive the defaulted experiences that come together in a dimwitted chain of events that has the customer wondering "Do they talk to each other?" "What are they thinking?" and "Why do I have to take this anymore?"

Customers vote with their feet and decide if they will stay or leave based on their perception of how much we value them and how we treat them. And more are leaving every day just because of our inability to do the basic blocking and tackling of delivering our products and services to them. The use of the term customer rage is on the rise for good reason: An increasing number of Americans report being extremely upset with how a serious complaint of theirs was handled by customer service, according to a November 2004 survey by the Customer Care Alliance. Specific findings include:

- 73 percent of customers who had a product or service problem experienced what the CCA termed customer rage, a 5 percentage-point increase from the group's 2003 report.
- Only 16 percent of the respondents said they felt completely satisfied or received more than

they asked for. More than half of the complainants felt that they received nothing from the companies that caused their problems.

- More than half of the respondents decided never to do business with the company again, or threatened to talk with management. One quarter of respondents raised their voice, while 6 percent used profanity.

Five Ways to Keep Your Customers

What customers really want is simple, and that is for companies to keep their problems to themselves, and to provide a seamless experience to them when they call, contact, communicate, or go to buy something. To stop customers from running out your door, begin to do these things:

1. Eliminate the customer obstacle course. We deliver discontinuity in the experience where the organizational breaks exist. It is in these hand-offs that customer failures occur, in this customer Bermuda triangle that we've created. Simplify the road map for customers. Make it clear for them how they can do business with you in a way that's actually beneficial to them.
2. Desilo your Web site. Our Web sites are often the cobbled together parts created separately by each company division. Figure out collectively how you will serve customers on your Web site and deliver an on-purpose brand experience.
3. FIX (really) the top-10 issues bugging customers. You can probably recite the biggest customer issues right now. Do something about them. Customers read the lack of action as lack of caring and certainly lack of respect. We all overthink what the customer effort should be. Start by striking these top-10 things from your corporate wide to-do list.
4. Help the front line to listen. It has been programmed to get a certain output. Sometimes this means closing the call within a time frame, and often it includes some kind of cross- or upsell goal. It may be to meet with a quota of customers in a certain time period. Let them be human, give them the skills for listening and understanding, and help the front line deliver to the customers based on their needs.
5. Deliver what you promise. The customers have to strong arm their way through the corporate maze just to get basic things accomplished. They're exhausted from the wrestling match, they're annoyed, and they're telling everyone they know. And, oh by the way--when they get the chance, they're walking.

So, companies out there, you better get your act together for customers. Learn how to play together well in the sandbox. If not for your own sanity...then do it for your customers and (hmmm) for your company profitability. Because your dysfunctional relationships are driving customers away!

About the Author

Jeanne Bliss has been arm wrestling corporations on behalf of customers for 25 years. She is the author of *Chief Customer Officer: Getting Past Lip Service to Passionate Action*, which documents her journey and provides CEOs with a dose of reality. Please visit www.customerbliss.com

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