

Title:

Customer Service in the Bottled Water Industry - Pure Water and the Customer Promise

Word Count:

736

Summary:

The bottled water business consists of the manufacturing and delivery of quality water in small packages or large containers such as 5 gallon bottles. Each individual bottled water company provides an implicit promise that it will manufacture and deliver the highest quality product on time.

Keywords:

Pure water, customer service, oxygenated water, bottled water, communication, customer satisfaction

Article Body:

Almost every company discusses, at length, the need for customer service and the significance of supplying true excellence to its customers. However, very few actually follow through with what it takes to attain this excellence. This is particularly true in the bottled water business since not all providers share the opinion that customer service is of the utmost importance in any business.

The bottled water industry services a wide customer base with numerous companies and individual clients. The industry is characterized by a small number of very large firms and a substantial number of relatively small consumers with specific geographic niches.

The Nature of the Business:

The bottled water business consists of the manufacturing and delivery of spring or purified water in small packages or large containers such as 5 gallon bottles. The product is delivered directly to the customer's site in either company owned delivery vehicles or through common carriers. Each individual bottled water company provides an implicit promise to its customers that it will manufacture the highest quality product and deliver that product at the agreed upon time.

Many, Many Customers:

The customer base in the bottled water industry is very diverse and ranges from

individual consumers with single bottle requirements to large multi-cooler business accounts with significant water needs. Each client has its own specific requirements, which are met by the company providing the services and product.

The Customer Service Promise and the History of the Business:

In the past, various bottled water companies have focused on process rather than customer service. Many firms acted on the belief that the delivery of a superior product completed their obligation to the customer. However, the customer service promise includes much more than a simple delivery of a quality product and requires additional services such as on time delivery, proper pricing, responding to additional delivery requests and other specific needs. One of the most important customer responsibilities is the ability to communicate their concerns not only to the customer service departments, but also to the heads of each company.

Current Status of the Industry (The Unfulfilled Promise):

Although the bottled water industry may seem rather simple, in reality, it is a very complex business. High quality water must be produced and delivered to the customer's location on time and as ordered. Often enough, customer requests change without warning, which is one reason why flexibility is important to the success of the bottled water company.

Frequently, the water needs of the customer exceed original expectations, which causes shortages . However, in order to avoid such a situation as this, the supplier would have already invested in the communication and stock infrastructure to meet all of its clients' demands.

For those suppliers who private label water as a means of customer advertising, the design, printing and durability of the label on the bottle is a critical factor. Therefore, companies creating labels of lesser quality in the design and printing of the labels clearly provide a substandard product to their customers.

Communication and the Customer Promise:

Many bottled water suppliers neglect the reality that proper communication channels serve as the basis for fulfilling the customer promise. An overall reliance on voicemail and/or e-mail, an inability to respond quickly to customer needs and the absence of true customer service assistance has created a negative impression of the industry for many customers.

A proper communication system has many technical elements but it should begin

with a willingness to include human contact in the communication link. No customer enjoys being dropped into the voicemail void, therefore, the bottled water suppliers that continue to prosper are the companies that uphold the customer service promises and guarantee personally answered customer service calls, which they promptly use to respond to client inquiries and concerns.

Accept Responsibility and Do What It Takes to Provide Customer Satisfaction:

There are many excuses for failure to perform but the bottled water suppliers who are truly world class are those who accept responsibility and persevere with their customer satisfaction guarantees. This often includes obtaining little or no profit on a particular transaction in order to fulfill the customer service promise.

Size is not the determinant in the customer service equation. Often, smaller companies are ready, willing and able to better fulfill the customer promise. Look for a supplier with a track record of not only achieving the customer promise but also one with a history of fulfillment of the promise.