THE VALUE OF CUSTOMER-FOCUSED COMMUNICATIONS

Andrew Careaga & Michelle Amos
2020 Brand Symposium
Sept. 29, 2020
Why customer service matters

- 65% of customers who have a fantastic service experience say friendly representatives who are able to solve their concerns are the most influential.
- 56% of customers admit to having lost their temper with a customer service professional.
- 8 out of 10 customers are more likely to become loyal if their problem is solved on the spot.

Source: The Training Bank
“The true test of a business’s customer service fitness is not when things are going right – but rather what is done when things go wrong.”

Steve Ferrante
How has COVID-19 flipped the way we live, learn and do business?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From this...</th>
<th>... to this</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dining out</td>
<td>Dining in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental sustainability</td>
<td>One-time use plasticware</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning/teaching/working on campus</td>
<td>Learning/teaching/working remotely</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-person events</td>
<td>Online events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drop-in counseling</td>
<td>Virtual counseling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phone-based customer service</td>
<td>Online customer service</td>
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Trust in the COVID-19 era

Students don’t fully trust their institutions or fellow students to keep them safe.

Returning students have a lower trust level than incoming freshmen.

Source: SimpsonScarborough National Student Survey, Part III, August 2020
Trust in the COVID-19 era

Returning students’ perceptions of their institutions’ COVID responses and communications have declined since spring.

How do you feel your college/university is handling the COVID-19 outbreak?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>April</th>
<th>July</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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</table>

How would you rate your college/university’s communication with you about COVID-19?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- I haven’t had any

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>April</th>
<th>July</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
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Source: SimpsonScarborough National Student Survey, Part III, August 2020
Returning students are more likely to have a positive overall opinion of their institution when COVID communications are rated as good or excellent.

Source: SimpsonScarborough National Student Survey, Part III, August 2020
How should we respond?

- Is our email auto-response voice as friendly as your telephone voice?
  - Avoid the “canned” reply
  - We are not robots 🐦
- Are we hiding behind the virtual to avoid personal interaction?
  - Pick up the phone
- Are we hiding behind “policy” or “protocol”?
- Are we empathizing with our customers and stakeholders?
  - Thank them – sincerely and up front
  - Express concern and understanding
  - Put yourself in their shoes
Chancellor Dehghani,

I am a parent of a second year student at S&T. I am not typically a parent who speaks out, however I wanted to mention a few things that have been weighing on me recently.

First, I would like to say that I appreciate the regular communication from the university since March. I understand that the spring was a confusing time for all, and there were a lot of uncertainties. The frequent updates are appreciated.

Unfortunately, with each subsequent communication, I see my son more and more discouraged. ...
Dear Ms. [Name],

Thank you for your note, and for expressing your views on the changing dynamics of our communications since COVID-19 disrupted our spring semester. Thank you also for sharing your appreciation for our attempts to keep you updated on what has been happening on campus as we prepare for the fall semester. Even though we have not had all of the answers, and have been required to adjust course somewhat over the past several weeks, we believe that staying in touch with you and your fellow parents is crucial – even more so now, as we all deal with an unfamiliar environment.

As I read your note, I could feel the anguish your son must be going through. It pains me that we are not able to offer fully in-person courses this fall due to the pandemic, and the last thing we want is for our students to return to campus discouraged or, worse yet, to hit “pause” on their education because of the mix of courses. ...
Social media: the voice of the customer

Frustrated with poor customer service

Buys ad (promoted Tweet) to amplify voice
Missouri S&T Class of 2024 Admitted Parent Group

Created April 10
676 group members
Parent Challenges

> Not able to visit college campuses
> Isolation due to COVID
> Feeling of loss for child’s senior year/activities
> Sudden switch to virtual learning for students
> Fear of the unknown
How We Met Those Challenges

> Provided virtual tours, visits, events, Facebook Live
  Dr. Goodman, Faculty, ResLife, New Student Programs, Current Students, and more

> Provided a platform for parent to connect with each other

> Provided a platform for parents to share their child’s accomplishments

> Provided open communication to parents

> Provided an outlet for parents to be heard
Things I Learned

- Communication is the responsibility of the communicator
- Do not take negative comments or posts personally
- People need to feel heard
- People want to be communicated with even if there is no new updates
April 10
Thank you for this group! My daughter ... is a Senior at Oakville High School in St. Louis. She attended the first PRO day and is registered for classes. She will be a chemical engineering major and is anxiously awaiting housing and roommate placement!

June 26
Anyone with a student from Blue Springs South that is going to be a freshman?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do these things</th>
<th>Don’t do these things</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... put in the hard work of communicating</td>
<td>... try to sell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... communicate frequently (SimpsonScarborough: 69% of returning students want more communication)</td>
<td>... over-communicate (it’s a fine line)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... make it personal</td>
<td>... rely too heavily on technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... think about secondary audiences. Who else is hearing your communication?</td>
<td>... try to be funny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... look for opportunities to help (navigate the bureaucracy)</td>
<td>... ignore the problem – or pass them along to the next point in the bureaucracy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Thanks!

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Michelle – amosm@mst.edu