



Customer service – the very hub of the organisation

Tony Hughes, MD, Huthwaite International

Eighteen months ago, it was clear that the buyer/seller landscape was evolving, with the quality of customer service moving up the corporate agenda as an increasingly important differentiator.

Yet since then, the credit crunch has bitten with a vengeance. And for many, one painful outcome has been to see their new business pipeline all but dry up – putting unprecedented pressure on customer retention as critical to survival.

And – in one sense at least, all this has brought into sharper focus something we have always known ... that customer service is not simply the reactive sweeper-up of customer gripes and queries.

Some of us have long recognised that customers want more than that from their product or service providers. Customer service excellence is about being proactive and giving customers *more* than they have asked for ... getting under the skin of their business and understanding their needs, so that you not only add value but actually *create* value at each touch point, thus making your business indispensable to their future success.

At Huthwaite International, we're strongly committed to the concept of 'Living Sales'. And that's about *everyone* in the organisation recognising the role they have to play in supporting the sales process – and nowhere does this apply more strongly than in customer service.

It means that customer service must be seen as part of the broader sales effort. It means that anyone touching the customer must go beyond simply satisfying their needs to seeking out opportunities for further business development.

And one thing's for certain: this will not only benefit your business, but your customers will appreciate it as well.

With ready access to the Internet, your customers have never been more knowledgeable about what you and your competitors have to offer. At the same time, they've never been more promiscuous and less loyal, happy to walk away if you don't match their high expectations of service.

The bottom line, both literally and metaphorically, is that customer service should sit at the heart of your sales effort, which in turn should sit at the heart of your business. That makes it the very hub of the organisation, without which the wheels of your commercial business cannot turn.

Now who could have said that five years ago?