

STOP Trying to Delight Your Customers

Get the basics right first.



*"To really win their loyalty, forget the bells and whistles and just solve their problems. Because consumers punish bad service more readily than they reward delightful service."
HBR, 2010:116*



How to "delight" customer?

One of the best Harvard articles I've read in a decade is "[STOP Trying to Delight Your Customers](#)".

It now also makes perfect sense why my last seven mystery shopping experiences (with a hidden camera) were all horrific -- you should see the photos of the onstage front-desk service providers. What's more, all these companies had spent heavily on staff training to "delight" the customer. What 90% of companies are promising is a thin veneer of icing on a dung-ball -- it looks great until we bite into it. Here's the neuroscience:

- Our emotional brain (limbic system) latches **three times harder onto negativity than positivity (3:1)**. It's our ancient survival mechanism of looking out for snakes, big cats and things that could hurt us. Today, our primeval brains are still on the lookout for bad experiences; they just aren't snakes anymore but business interactions.
- We need a "positivity ratio" of three delight experiences (touch-points) to cancel out one negative experience. Therefore if you get one "basic" experience wrong, you need to spend heavily on three expensive "delightful" touch-points. Exactly the same goes for your personal relationships -- drop your wife once, and you owe her 3 bunches of flowers to negate the 1 bad experience.

So here's the rub. If you have any hope of delighting customers, first get the basics right (most companies can't). First get the birthday cake perfectly baked (basics), before you attempt to put expensive icing, candles and cherries on top (delight factor).

Lastly negative word-of-mouth spreads at least 100% faster than positive word-of-mouth. "Only **23%** told 10 or more about the positive service, but **48%** told 10 or more about their negative experience (HBR, 2010)."

References:

Dixon, M, Freeman, K and Toman, N. "STOP Trying to Delight Your Customers", Harvard Business Review, July-August, 2010, p.116.

Baumeister, R.F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., and Vohs, K.D. (2001). Bad Is Stronger Than Good. *Review of General Psychology*, 5 (2001): 323-70