

Digitalisation or personalisation?

A guest article by Tim van der Pas

We search for information on websites, we book hotels and restaurants online, we use WhatsApp and e-mail all day every day and at some hotels we can even check-in/out by ourselves. Hooray! Automatization and digitalisation will help the hospitality industry... you'd think. But is the IKEA-Effect (Do-It-Your-Self) enriching or spoiling us?

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Some time ago, we had issues with the internet at our office. We called our telephone and internet service provider and it took about half a day to get to the right person. Before we hung up, we asked this person to give his direct phone number in case we needed him again. His reaction: "I can't give you a direct number, because we don't have any telephones here. We receive incoming calls via the computer". No phones at a telecom provider!

This must be some be kind of joke, we thought. After the conversation, an automatically generated email with a survey was sent. I filled it in with all zeros and I received a call back faster than the speed of light by the same guy! Apparently, he went to another department where they do have telephones. Hilarious or annoying?

Personal service, when done right, is incredibly powerful. Any company would value a loyal customer over a customer who only consumes your product or service once.

"People do not buy goods and services. They buy relations, stories and magic." As stated by Seth Godin.

Especially small businesses depend on loyal customers. It's hard to find these customers, especially

loyal ones. When you give customers a WOW effect by answering their questions, solving their problems, and understanding their needs, you'll be on the right track to get a good review and gain a loyal customer.

Here are some tips to personalize the customer experience:

Use names (both yours and your customer's)

Recent studies show that our names are so important to us that hearing them lights up an entirely different part of our brain compared to any other word. Customers will appreciate it when you use their name. Go the extra mile by using your own name, as this will make the interaction more personal.

Show your face

Put a face to a name. If you have the possibility, make an appointment to speak face-to-face. After this meeting, the contact will be more relaxed and personal. Always use a photo in your e-mail signature. No stock photo's, but a picture of yourself. Put photos of the team on the website and on social media. For example, www.efficienthotelpartner.com/who-are-we

Show your story

When using these images on your website and social



media, write a story with it. Tell something about yourself. This can be something personal or your opinion about an industry related topic. Write articles, columns and blogs about things you and your customer enjoy.

Know each customer's history

Any and every small gesture can help you build a personal relationship with your client. Here are some examples; "thank you so much for being a customer since 1999" or "I see that this booking is the same as last year. Do you also want the same wine gifts for the guests?" or "I noticed you chose the Pinot Grigio, this is one of my favourites as well!".

Learn more about your customers

It's not just about business. Try to connect with your client on a personal level as well. This will give you big opportunities businesswise. You will gain new business just because the customer is happy to give it to you. Some examples: congratulate them with their birthday, wish your customer a happy holiday, possibly give them some tips about the country they are visiting and ask them if they had a great weekend. This makes it easier to interact with your client as they will be more willing to give you (personal) information.

At Efficient Hotel Partner we use these tips to personalize our customer service and differentiate ourselves from our competitors. And it works! Our customers are loyal and they like to tell us about their weekend. A small example of our fan mail:



Social Media

Nowadays, social media can have a great impact on your company. Positive impact: Increase exposure and traffic, gain fans and generate leads. But also negative impact; increased customer power, negative public statements and unauthorized employees speaking on your company's behalf.

You and the customers can use social media in different ways:

-Social media is a great medium to learn personal details about your client.



Who is Tim van der Pas?

Tim studied leisure management at the NHTV.

After having worked at Koetshuis de Haar and Fort aan de Klop, he started working for Efficient Hotel Partner, an established and experienced agency helping you discover the best hotels and meeting venues.

For more than 2.5 years he has been helping clients organizing their events.

Inspired by his article? Read more here: www.efficienthotelpartner.com/author/tim

-It's a great medium to boost your image with positive comments.

-When you reply to a question or comment quickly, customers will feel that they are important to you. Which of course, they are.

-Customers also can leave negative comments, which are critical to reply to in a timely manner.

Poor customer service can be broadcasted publicly to the entire world via social media and customers are not afraid to use it. Sometimes, posting your complaint to social media is the only way to get the attention of a company. Small businesses can't afford a negative online reputation, because it may lose them customers. For small businesses, losing one client can have a big impact. If you did make a mistake, follow up and rectify the mistake as best as you can.

Social media are a great tool for providing excellent customer service, giving you even more control over your business image. Here are some examples of great customer service on social media: <https://blog.bufferapp.com/social-media-customer-service>

Two companies with excellent customer service, in my opinion, are KLM and CoolBlue. KLM is a king on social media: quick response time, funny, personal and problem solving. CoolBlue is customer service. All their drivers are happy and have noticeably followed a customer service training, they are playful (e-mail with waiting therapy when you ordered something), have quick response time on social media and post hand written cards.

Some people and companies think authenticity and handling things personally is old fashioned. The company I work for, Efficient Hotel Partner, is not one of those companies. We differentiate by offering personal service and our customers stay loyal to us for this very reason.

What is your best customer experience?

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