

Improving your tradeshow experience by improving your customer service perspective

In October I had a week and a half's vacation to the land of my birth, England. I was there to attend my aunt's 40 wedding anniversary party(which was to be held in the 14th century castle- <http://www.courts.fsnet.co.uk/guyscliffe.htm>). One of my favorite things to do in England while I am there is to visit the stadiums of all 92 professional soccer teams, which gives me the chance to see a lot of England. This time my travels took me to the southeast coast(Bournemouth- <http://www.bournemouth.co.uk/>) to London, to the northwest shore of England(Morecambe) and across the Pennine mountains(<http://www.settle-carlisle.org/gallery/index.cfm?viewImage=434>) into North Yorkshire. I guess I just like driving on the other side of the road...

I ruminated about customer service while I was traveling, which you only seem to notice when it stinks. Unfortunately, the general level of service in the UK is far below what I am used to in the US, From the 'greeting' I got at Europcar to get my rental car at Heathrow, I was reminded that I needed to re-calibrate my expectations and prepare for trouble....

It reminded me of how customer service makes a big difference at an event when you are exhibiting. I felt that a review article on service was therefore necessary, since it is easy as a supplier of goods and services to forget about how you come across in the booth, so here goes....

What do I recommend you do to improve your customer service at an event?

- Look your customers in the eye, and smile. When the customer is 'in your space' make sure that you focus only on them;
- Engage your customers-join in the fun! When you are busy at an event, can you speak to attendees and and join in at evening events, sit in on sessions and lunches or do you 'do your own thing' and rush back to your hotel for room service? My broader concept of being part of the markets you serve rather than just being a 'servant' to it is a key differentiator for your brand;
- Behave in the present, more than the future. Before I became 'enlightened', I always had my eye on the next show, rather than 'enjoying' the current event (which may have been 14 months in preparation). Not being present is obvious to your customers and not welcoming to them;
- Treat all visitors to your booth with equal respect.
- Design your booth so it is welcoming not closed and hard to get in. The worst example I can think of here is a memory of a 10' x 10' booth where

the staff was standing arms folded in front of the booth(where they were blocking the entrance to the booth) frowning. Very daunting.

- Keep a friendly countenance, body language communicates a lot. Women seem to be better at being conscious of this, so we men have something to learn.

What strikes me about the above is that they cost little or no money to implement, just a change of focus. Feel free to contact me with your successful booth stories and good luck!

PS I ended up having an excellent customer service experience at a butcher's in North Yorkshire(<http://www.huntersofhelmsley.co.uk/>), from being welcomed by the owner when I walked in to being made to feel as if I was the only one in the store, I was reassured that all is not bad in the UK in the service world!

Warwick Davies is an internationally known consultant who helps event organizers, associations and academic centers turn unprofitable events into profitable events. His clients include organizers in the information technology, healthcare, biotechnology and executive events markets. Previously, Warwick was responsible for internationally recognizable event brands such as Macworld Conference and Expo, LinuxWorld Conference and Expo, and the Customer Relationship Management Conference and Exposition worldwide. He can be contacted at Warwick@theeventdoctor.net