

NEWSBRIEF: CUSTOMER RAGE UP – SO TOO, STAFF STRESS, ABSENTEEISM, TURMOIL

A total of 61% of front-line service providers were subjected to *customer rage* in the 3 month period from 1 November 2021.

Such behaviour was defined as aggressive, abusive and physically intimidatory language and actions.

Some 82% had been exposed to rude and “inappropriate” behaviour and comments by consumers.

The highest instances of *customer rage* were at the point-of-purchase. It was almost four times greater than interactions related to the servicing of products and services which had been purchased earlier.

Most reported rage incidents occurred inside physical premises. However, its presence was also evident in telephone communications and, to a lesser degree, with on-line interactions.

These are among the key findings of a national on-line survey of 761 front-line service providers from the retail, tourism, hospitality and the service divisions of motor vehicle dealerships, electrical appliance sales, property maintenance and pet care sectors.

The study was conducted during the period 24-31 January 2022 (inclusive).

Most common perpetrators were identified to be “middle-aged males” (defined as perceived to be 25 to 50 years of age), followed by “middle-aged women” and “younger” (under 25 years of age) males. Identifiable causal factors:

- Long waiting times
- No available stock
- Access (including parking) difficulties
- Estimated restocking times
- Delivery estimates

Direct references by front-line service provider respondents to coronavirus issues of QR scanning, mask wearing, vaccination confirmation and social distances totalled 17%.

Commenting on the findings, lead researcher Barry Urquhart, of Marketing Focus, said:

“It was significant that the highest instances of *customer rage* were at the time of purchase. Clearly, consumer expectations were not being achieved and relationships with the service providers appeared to be lacking and transactional in nature.

An over-reliance on technology and AI (artificial intelligence) marginalises or removes the human quotient from interactions and engagements with customers and clients.

Subjective emotion-based evaluations represent up to 70% of the reasons why people seek out, prefer, remain loyal to and recommend companies, products, brands and service providers. Collectively, they are the pillars that represent and constitute value, and therefore competitive advantage. People are the central focus.

The major banks bemoan the continuing and increasing loss of customer loyalty as they progressively close branches, introduce more automated banking processes and encourage “account-holders” to transact online. Go figure.

Artificial intelligence is often unintelligent. It shows little or no understanding, empathy and care. It is process-driven, seeking internal efficiency, often at the cost of a loss of external effectiveness.

Telcos and motor vehicle insurance entities suffer from high “churn” rates, primarily driven by a lack of local human contact, which is typically reassuring, fulfilling and satisfying the ideals of “peace-of-mind” purchasing.

What is most lacking in customer service at present is “personal”. Service excellence costs. Poor or no personal service costs more, often the financial viability of the entity.

Time was a conspicuous presence in reported consumer inappropriate behaviour. This included expressions of frustrations about automated telephone answering services which did not provide immediate and ready access to local human service providers.

Customer rage at the point-of-purchase was almost four times more likely than in interactions relating to the servicing of previously purchased merchandise and services.

Just 9% of respondents had participated in training specifically related to dealing with *customer rage* and inappropriate consumer behaviour, during the calendar year 2021.

Forty two percent expressed a sense that their personal stress levels had increased since 1 November last year, 51% felt that the issue had contributed to absenteeism and a total 19% stated they believed customer rage has contributed to recent staff turnover rates.

Customer rage is clearly increasing. Businesses, big and small, in a diverse range of sectors, need to address, redress and train staff to overcome this significant presence in the marketplace.”

Barry Urquhart
Managing Director
Marketing Focus

Mobile: 041 983 5555

Email: urquhart@marketingfocus.net.au

Office: (08) 9257 1777

Barry Urquhart is the author of the two largest selling books on quality customer service in Australasia, “Serves You Right!” and “Service Please”. Marketing Focus has an extensive data base on differing aspects of service excellence, the customer experience and has developed an exclusive and unique 7 phase process, “Winning Over the Customer from Hell”.