

2 Exploring Customer Service in Travel and Tourism

Introduction

Travel and tourism is about people, all of whom have customer service needs. When you meet those needs, or better still exceed them, customers will want to return to you again and again. Customers will also tell others how good (or bad!) you are.

Whether you work directly with customers or behind the scenes, you will be involved in the challenging, exciting and satisfying world of providing excellent customer service. This Core unit examines what customer service is; the different customer service approaches used by organisations; different types of customer and their needs; and the skills needed to provide it. Completing the unit will help you to understand and provide excellent customer service.

How you will be assessed

Unit 2 is assessed internally, so the Centre delivering the qualification will assess you against the criteria. On completion of this unit you should be able to:

- 2.1 understand different approaches to customer service in different travel and tourism organisations

- 2.2 understand the needs of different types of customers in the travel and tourism industry
- 2.3 know the skills and techniques needed to provide good customer service in the travel and tourism industry
- 2.4 demonstrate customer service and selling skills and techniques in travel and tourism situations.

Assessment grades

The Edexcel Assessment Grid for Unit 2 details the criteria to be met. In general, to gain a Pass (P) you are asked to describe or demonstrate; to gain a Merit (M) you are also asked to compare, explain or deal with situations; and to gain a Distinction (D) you are also asked to evaluate and make recommendations.

2.1 Understand different approaches to customer service in different travel and tourism organisations

This section covers:

- what customer service is
- organisations
- processes
- resources
- policies.

What is customer service?

In this section you will consider organisations, their policies, processes and resources, and how these affect the customer service they provide. But first you need to ask an important question: what is customer service?

Every day, you experience customer service. It may be when you buy something in a shop, travel on a bus or go to a swimming pool; it may even be when you go to the dentist. Most of the time, you probably don't even notice it. Sometimes you will, either because the customer service you receive is particularly bad or because it has been especially good.

Please refer to the Talking point on this page. Did your group suggest any of the words in the diagram below when you brainstormed good customer service?



■ Examples of good customer service behaviours

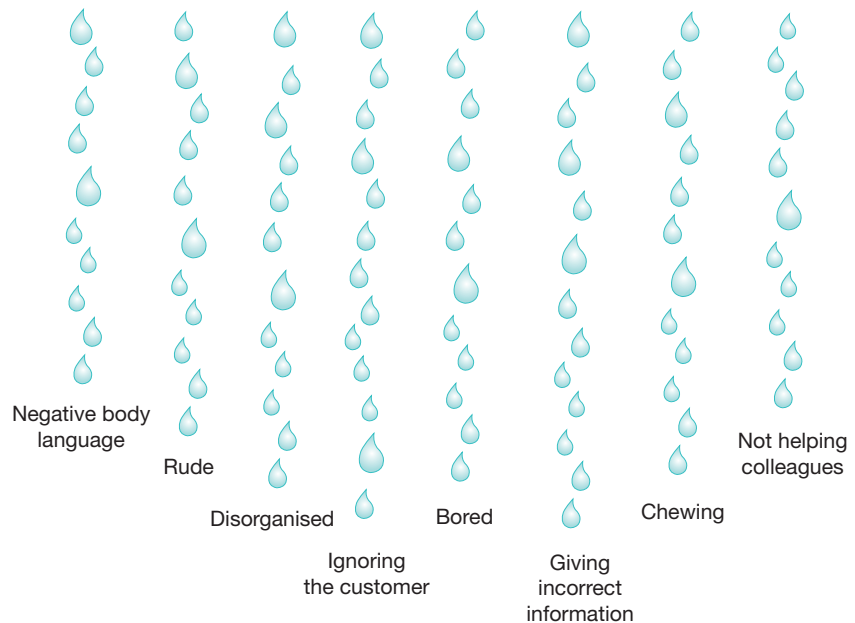


Talking point

In a small group, brainstorm as many words and phrases as you can to describe good customer service. Then, brainstorm as many words and phrases as you can to describe bad customer service.

Review the words and phrases you have chosen and, in one sentence, write a definition of customer service.

The diagram below shows some of the words and phrases your group might have suggested for bad customer service.



■ *Examples of bad customer service behaviours*



Case studies

Going the extra mile!

Passenger Agent Maria had a tricky situation at Toronto airport. An elderly couple who had been visiting their son and his family were checking in to return to the UK. Their son drove them 100 miles (160 kilometres) from his home, left them at Toronto airport and set off home again. When the couple tried to check in, they discovered they had left their passports in his car!

Maria could have taken the easy way out by telling them they could not travel until they had their passports. However, she wanted to help the distraught couple. Their son did not have a mobile phone so she asked if he had the car

radio on. He had, and they remembered the programme he was listening to. Maria called the radio station and asked them to put a message out to the son, to return to the airport. The son heard it and drove back to the airport just in time for his very relieved parents to catch their flight! Maria had gone the extra mile and had delighted the couple and their son.

- Write down as many reasons you can think of as to why customer service is important.
- Discuss your reasons with someone else in your group.

Customer service is difficult to define, partly because it is the customer who will decide what it is. The Institute of Customer Service defines customer service as:

‘The sum total of what an organisation does to meet customer expectations and produce customer satisfaction.’

So, everyone in an organisation (whether or not they have direct contact with the customer) should aim at satisfying the customer. However, if you only ‘meet’ customer expectations, they may feel that the customer service is alright but nothing special. What you must do is delight every one of your customers so that they will remember you, enjoy dealing with you, come back to you again and tell other people about you.

Customer service is important because...

- You must ensure that customers are so pleased with doing business with you, they will keep returning to you.
- You have to keep your customers away from your competitors.
- It costs five times as much to win a new customer as it does to keep an existing one.
- Dissatisfied customers tell others of their bad experiences and those people will avoid using your organisation.
- Your organisation needs to be able to compete on value rather than just price, i.e. customers are prepared to pay more for your product or service.
- Your organisation needs to be secure and able to develop, and so do you.
- You want the buzz you get out of providing excellent customer service!



Over to you

A customer bought a £1.00 loaf of bread from her supermarket. How much is that customer worth to the supermarket? Just £1.00? Give reasons for your answer.



Case studies

Ryanair will send staff to charm school

Ryanair's famously outspoken boss Michael O'Leary has performed the biggest U-turn of his career – by ordering his staff to be nice to his airline's frazzled passengers ... At two meetings in London, Ryanair executives revealed plans to focus on providing a kinder, softer approach to its customers ... James Freemantle of the Air Transport Users Council said: 'The slide show

and presentation was strongly focused on punctuality, behaviour by staff towards customers and a greater emphasis on understanding air travellers' needs. It's not just about cost anymore.'

(Source: Based on an article by Jerome Reilly, ©Jerome Reilly. *Sunday Independent* (Ireland), 8 August 2004. Reprinted with the kind permission of the author)



Key points

- Customer service can be defined as: 'The sum total of what an organisation does to meet customer expectations and produce customer satisfaction.'
- The customer decides what is good customer service.
- Customer service is important for many reasons, the most important of which is that you must ensure that the customer is so pleased doing business with you, he or she keeps returning to you!

Organisations

The travel and tourism industry ranges from giants with integrated businesses to small independent companies, and from those which supply the main goods and services to those which supply the support services. These include:

- transport operators – air, sea, rail, road
- accommodation – hotels, villas, campsites, holiday centres, etc.
- attractions – theme parks, heritage sites, activity centres, etc.
- secondary services – insurance, airport representatives, tourist offices, passport offices.

As you will have read in *Unit 1: The UK Travel and Tourism Industry*, some organisations (for example, tour operators) integrate services vertically and horizontally. This gives them control over each level of the products they market but leads to an underlying consistency in customer service across that integrated group. People operating small private companies may have a niche market and know many of their clients as regular customers, which helps give a more personal style of customer service. Large organisations may depend more upon systems to help provide customer service but, with the right approach and by selecting and training staff who have a real desire to provide excellent care to their customers, such organisations can also provide a personal style of service.

The same principles apply whether the organisation is privately owned, a public service or a voluntary organisation.

Processes

Organisations' processes require documentation. Documentation may include booking forms, customers' records, tickets, invoices, receipts, communications with customers and contractors, feedback forms and customer databases. Additionally, processes are needed to run the business, such as contracts of employment, pay and training records, and health and safety documentation. While many of these are computer-based, some remain paper-based. Documentation and record keeping require great care and accuracy. Much of it is required, or affected by, legislation, for example, the Health and Safety Act 1974 and the Data Protection Act 1998. (You can learn more on this subject in *Unit 6: Business Skills for Travel and Tourism*.)

Resources

Every organisation needs resources to be able to provide customer service. The initial resource may be finance, from loans and profits. This funds other resources, like accommodation, equipment and systems, all

of which will go toward establishing the style, level and quality of service. However, as this industry is a people business, the prime resource will be an organisation's staff. Care must be taken to provide sufficient staff who have a keen interest in providing customer service and who have the abilities, experience and qualifications to do so. How many staff are needed if there are peaks and troughs in the workload each day, or across the week or year? What might the customers expect the staff to be able to do? Are the staff able to speak a foreign language? Do they understand how to meet the needs of a disabled person? Can they get to work for a shift starting at 0430 hours? Do they have the right to work overseas?

Policies

Mission statements and objectives

Many organisations have a **mission statement** which describes their purpose, strategy, standards of behaviour and values. **Objectives** state what the organisation, or departments within it, specifically aim to achieve; how success will be measured; and the timescale for achievement. Specific targets may then be quoted, for example '5 per cent improvement in punctuality compared with the previous year'.

Mission statements have a major influence upon the levels and styles of customer service of an organisation; for example, an airline with the mission of being a computer-led business with minimal staff contact with passengers may decide to only accept Internet bookings and have self-service check-in at airports. This would require a different customer service approach to, for example, an airline with the mission of being the friendliest airline with staff available at every point of the passengers' travels. The first airline would invest in technology and procedures which enable the passengers to do things without human help; the latter airline would invest in selecting and training customer-caring staff, with procedures to support them. This does not mean one is better than the other; it merely identifies that there is more than one way to meet customers' needs.

Here are the mission statements of two UK airlines:

'To provide our customers with safe, good value, point-to-point air services. To effect and to offer a consistent and reliable product and fares appealing to leisure and business markets on a range of European routes. To achieve this, we will develop our people and establish lasting relationships with our suppliers.' (*easyJet*)

'To grow a profitable airline which people love to fly and where people love to work.' (*Virgin Atlantic*)

Responsive and proactive approaches

Just as it is important for individuals to be proactive and responsive to customers, so it is for organisations. They must anticipate changes and



Talking point

Discuss in your group the similarities and differences between the mission statements of easyJet and Virgin Atlantic. What impact might these mission statements have upon the levels and styles of customer service?

developments in their business and their customers. They must be alert to external changes (sometimes known as PEST – Political, Economic, Social and Technological) and take advantage of them. They also need to be aware of internal changes to the organisation. Many companies, such as Boeing and British Airways, conduct surveys to discover their staff's opinions. Issues might cover views on:

- how well the organisation supports them in giving customer service
- what is being done well
- what they would like more/less of
- their concerns.

Organisations must respond to the information so that customers and staff know action is being taken to improve its customer service.

Customer Charters

Many organisations describe their customer service policies in Customer Charters. These might include:

- what information the organisation will provide, how it will provide it and when
- the performance levels they will aim for (e.g. punctuality, quality)
- their payment and refund policies
- what they will do in the event of a disruption to arrangements (e.g. delays, cancellations)
- the compensation they will provide.



Key points

A Customer Charter tells customers the standards of service to expect, what to do if something goes wrong, and how to make contact. A Customer Charter/Code of Practice also helps employees, by setting out clearly the services their organisation provides. (Source: Institute of Customer Service. Reprinted with kind permission.)



Activity

Explore some travel and tourism organisations' websites. Have they published customer service charters (often found in the website menu under Customer service or About us)? Example organisations include Ryanair, United Airlines, South West Trains, Butlins (student pack), but there are many others.

- Compare several customer service charters.
- Are they specific enough and measurable, so that there can be no doubt what will be done for their customers?
- Is there anything which you feel is missing from any of them?

Procedures

How an organisation expects its customers to buy and use its products and services also affects the style of customer service it provides and the

amount of human interaction it has with its customers. For example, rather than visit a travel agent's shop, many customers use the Internet to research what is available and book their arrangements; organisations must therefore design dependable, user-friendly websites. Many passengers make their bookings on the Internet and take a reference number to the departure terminal, rather than obtain a paper ticket, to enable them to board. This is known as e-ticketing.



■ E-ticketing helps travellers to avoid the queues

Meeting consumers' individual needs

Passengers have a much wider choice between organisations and processes nowadays. Some budget ('no frills') airlines may offer a limited choice of methods to check-in. Other airlines may offer a choice of check-in methods, for example, at a check-in desk, using a self-check-in machine or via the Internet. Such differences between budget and full-service airlines do not mean that passengers should not receive good customer service. Passengers make a value judgement when they decide whether to travel on a budget airline or a full-service airline, but the human element should exist on both. The US budget airline Southwest is famous for the humour and friendly service given by its staff.

Hotels offer different styles and levels of service. Business people want fast check-in and check-out. Computer databases build information on customers' needs and preferences, so that they can be taken into account each time a customer buys from the organisation. This personalises the experience. The preferred room might be pre-allocated, with the key ready to hand over at a special desk in exchange for a booking reference and presentation of a credit card. Guests can check their bill on their in-room TV prior to check-out, and just drop their key at the desk as they depart.



Talking point

In your group, discuss why and how e-ticketing may affect the style and level of customer service given to passengers.

Training

Customer service doesn't just happen! The organisation needs to put much into place and adopt particular styles and behaviours to deliver it well. Part of this is continuous investment in its staff, to ensure they are *able* to give excellent service and *want* to give it. That means caring for staff, including providing training which will develop their customer service skills – just as this course is aiming to do for you.

Encouraging loyalty and providing rewards

Customers must feel the organisation is a great one to do business with. The organisation must do everything they can to keep all of its customers and should reward them for their loyalty. There are many ways to do so. Some organisations run 'Clubs' for their loyal customers which provide facilities like priority booking, special phone numbers, guaranteed seat selection, cabin or car upgrades, airport lounges, club magazines and discounts on future bookings. Membership is earned by the amount of money spent, the number of bookings made or the number of journeys taken. The greater the amount of business given by the customer, the greater the rewards might be.



Activity

Explore the websites of tour operators, airlines, coach operators, train operators, cruise and ferry companies. Discover those which offer loyalty schemes to their customers. Compare them. Look for common themes and unique ideas.

Feedback

Every organisation should have policies and procedures to gather feedback from its customers. How else could it learn what its customers like and dislike and how else can it be given the opportunity to put things right if they go wrong? You shall look further at gathering and using feedback later in this unit (see pages 81–2).



In summary

- Organisations may be small, large, independent, integrated, private, public or voluntary.
- Organisations need policies which start with a mission statement declaring what they wish to achieve and measurable objectives to aim for.
- Such statements have a direct impact on the level and styles of customer service each organisation wishes to deliver. They determine the approaches organisations have to:
 - being responsive and proactive
 - developing customer charters and procedures
 - developing their staff
 - encouraging customer loyalty
 - obtaining customer and staff feedback.
- Processes like record keeping are essential to meet the needs of the business and legal requirements.
- Every organisation needs resources, often obtained by finance. A key resource in the travel and tourism industry is its staff.



Practice assessment activity


P Level P1








Working in pairs, visit two local travel or tourism organisations. Obtain copies of their missions and objectives. Observe how they provide customer service. Seek evidence of their procedures, processes and training.

Levels P1/M1/D1

Make a presentation to the rest of the group:

- P** ■ describing how the two organisations approach customer service in terms of policies, processes and resources (P1) 

- M** ■ comparing the two organisations' customer service policies, processes and resources in respect of the customer service they provide (M1)  

- D** ■ evaluating the customer service provision of the two organisations and making justified recommendations for improvement (D1).   

2.2 Understand the needs of different types of customers in the travel and tourism industry

This section covers:

- different types of customers
- different types of needs.

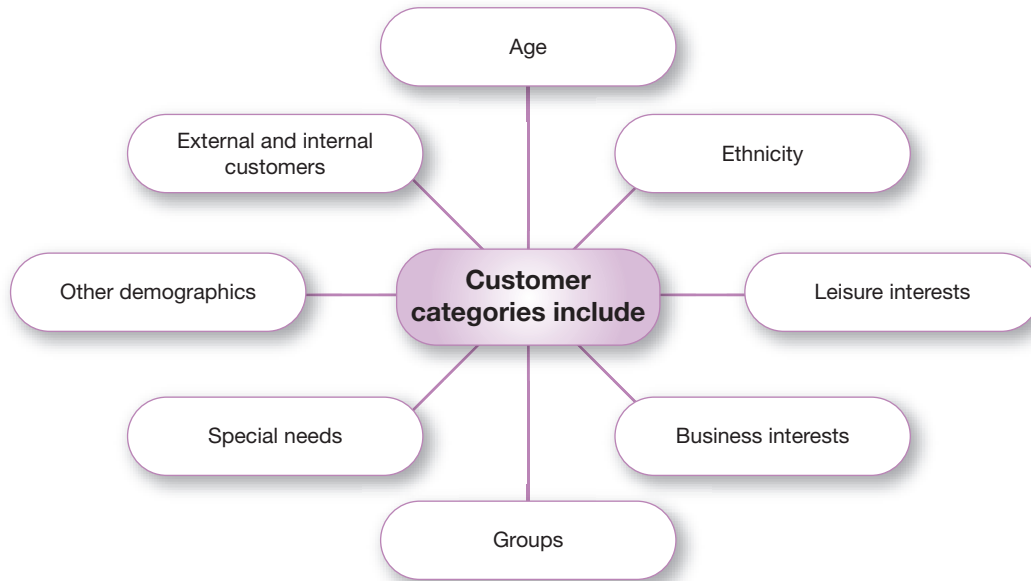
Different types of customers

To work in travel and tourism you must be willing and able to meet the needs of a wide range of customers.



Segmentation

Whether you call your customers clients, visitors, guests or passengers, their needs must be understood. To do so, you need to segment them. **Segmentation** is the grouping of people who have common characteristics (see also *Unit 5: Exploring Marketing in Travel and Tourism*, pages 172–3). The spider diagram below shows some of the customer categories which could be segmented.



Age

Many customers are children. They want to enjoy themselves but they might find their experiences a bit daunting, so they will be delighted to have someone they can relate to and who can give them help and assurance at the appropriate times. Facilities such as kids clubs in hotels, play areas at airports and in travel agencies are great for children but also meet a customer service need for adults who can be relieved from looking after them. Some adults without children may also appreciate 'child-free' zones.



■ Kids clubs meet both children's and adults' needs



Key points

- Muslims and Jews do not eat pork.
- In much of Asia, it is offensive to pat the head, as this is seen as the most sacred part of the body. Cabin crew should therefore be careful not to pass anything over people's heads.
- In northern Europe, greetings are quite formal, for example, a handshake. In southern Europe, a greeting is more likely to include hugging and cheek kissing.

The fastest growing segment of the UK population travelling overseas is the over-54 age group. The number of overseas visits made by this age group in 2000, compared with 1993, increased by 98 per cent (compared with 63 per cent increase for the 0–54 age group). With such growth, it is important that you learn how to give the older age groups customer service they value. The older generation generally prefers a more formal approach and welcomes the recognition that they have experienced more than younger generations. Don't assume that elderly clients are losing their mental faculties or physical abilities – Saga Holidays caters for those over 50 years. Its 'Go for it' range includes learning to scuba dive among the coral reefs of Borneo, wine tasting in South Africa and horse riding on a ranch in Arizona!

Ethnicity

Each person has beliefs, practices, traditions, languages and preferences which influence their way of life. These become the norm for that person, but they may not be the norm for other people, especially those with different cultures. Religion is often a strong feature of culture and can be a particularly sensitive issue. You should respect, learn about and respond to other people's cultures so that you understand their customer service needs and avoid causing offence.

Leisure interests

Why, where and how people travel, and the style of customer service they want, is influenced by the interests they have. Some will look for organised activities and entertainment. Some will want excitement; others will want a relaxing time. Some people will want to learn new things, whilst others will simply want to be with their family and friends.

- Someone interested in historic buildings may appreciate an expert on the subject who recognises the customer's interest and knowledge.
- Someone on a surfing holiday may want a guide with local knowledge to tell them where the good surfing conditions are, warn them of the dangers and share experiences with them.
- Someone on a gastronomic tour may expect knowledgeable, good-quality staff at fine-dining locations.

Business interests

Business people want speedy, efficient service. They need to have the facilities and support normally available at their home or office. A calm airport lounge with newspapers, computers and communication facilities would be welcome. Hotels providing communication and Internet links, same-day laundry facilities, 24-hour room service, and express check-in and check-out are valued. However, even business people need to relax, so they may become leisure tourists as well and want customer service appropriate to leisure tourists.

Each sector of the industry seeks ways to meet the needs of their customers, so the types of customer service will be different, depending upon the market segment.

Groups

Members of organised groups, such as orchestras and youth clubs, often already know each other. They usually have a group leader who may share with you the responsibility for communicating with the group. However, although there will be common needs, each member still has his or her own concerns and it is important to relate to them.

The other type of group is formed by circumstance, for example, the people in the group all happen to be on the same inclusive holiday or are all taking a guided tour. They probably will not know each other and will not have a group leader. You will probably be asked more questions by such a group as there is a wider range of needs and no group leader to help you. This can be challenging; you need to be alert to their individual needs and ensure they are met.

Customers with special needs

All customers have needs which are individual to them, but some have additional needs beyond those of most customers. These might arise because the customer:

- has a physical limitation such as being unable to walk or having a hearing or sight impairment
- has a learning disability
- has a severe language limitation



Talking point

In small groups, brainstorm what facilities and style of customer service would be appropriate for:

- young travellers on an activities holiday in Australia
- families on a beach holiday in Spain
- retired couples on a Christmas cultural weekend in Vienna
- women on a health spa break
- a businessman at a two-day meeting, night-stopping in a foreign city.



- *Travel destinations in various parts of the world provide suitable facilities for those who have a disability*

- is a child travelling on his or her own
- is a woman travelling with a baby and/or young child
- has special dietary needs or preferences.

All staff can help such customers, with care, empathy and a clear understanding of their specific needs. Some staff may be given training to help those with special needs; for example, learning sign language or how to assist wheelchair users or escort sight-impaired passengers. When caring for a customer with special needs, ensure you introduce them to the next person who will look after them, and explain what is needed.

Here are some examples of caring for customers with special needs:

- A ferry has a special car parking space for people with physical disabilities. It is next to a lift to the cabin deck, rather than stairs. A wheelchair is kept by the parking space. A trained staff member meets the passenger to assist them to cabin level.
- An airline has unaccompanied minor escorts at airports and during the flight. There is a special airport lounge with videos, soft drinks, nibbles and games. In flight, the children are given comics, games and tuck boxes.
- A holiday hotel has staff to look after and entertain children in exclusive 'kids zones' and to babysit.

Other demographics

Other demographic factors also influence the customer service needed. There are different needs between single people and families; women and men; children and adults. Sometimes, you may look after a VIP (very important person) like a film star or the chairperson of a major international company. These are very influential people and you may need to look after them in a particular way.

External and internal customers

External customers are those who purchase and/or use your organisation's products and services. The distinction between those who buy your product or services (the purchasers) and those who use them (the consumers) is important. Think of the parent with a child in a shop. The child pleads with their parent to buy some sweets. The parent is the purchaser and the child is the consumer. Both are important customers and can influence buying decisions.

Internal customers are those who work for the same organisation as you and who may need your services. That includes departments that need timely and accurate information from you, so that they can meet the needs of the customer and the organisation. Everybody in an organisation, whether they are in finance, operations, catering or any other department, is directly or indirectly serving the customer, so they deserve excellent customer service from you. They need you to be approachable, understanding, supportive, effective and efficient. Unless the whole organisation is working as one, with the customer at the heart

of all that it does, the customer will lose and you will therefore lose the customer.

Different types of needs

Information, advice, instructions

As the travel and tourism industry is a people business, you will spend much of your time giving information, advice and instructions to customers.

The customer's lament:

Hey, I'm ME!

I'm not the last customer you had.

I'm not the next customer you will have.

Please treat me as an individual with my own needs.

I'm ME!



■ Remember that each person is an individual



Activity

For each of the following jobs, list three pieces of information that are likely to be asked for frequently:

- travel agent
- theme park ride assistant
- on-board train manager
- historic house guide
- hotel receptionist.

Discuss your list with someone else in your group.

How did you do? You probably thought of questions specific to the job, for example, a historic house guide might frequently be asked 'Who painted that picture?' but don't forget the many types of non-job specific questions such as 'Where is the cafeteria?'

Increasingly, technology is used to provide information to staff and customers; for example:

- tour operators' computers provide information and booking facilities for their inclusive holidays
- transport organisations use computers to make reservations and to provide 'real time' information on arrival times
- heritage locations use visual and audio aids to provide information to visitors.

Health, safety and security

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 requires employers and employees to ensure a healthy, safe and secure environment for the public and employees. You should always be observant and report anything which could be a hazard, for example, a loose carpet in a hotel or trailing cables in an office.

Customers will seek advice on overseas health arrangements. During the SARS outbreaks in 2002–03, industry staff needed up-to-date information on the situation and preventative measures. They obtained much of this information from various government and medical organisations, communicated particularly by the Internet and leaflets.

Weather can affect health, safety and security, for example, hurricanes can result in flights being delayed or cancelled, hotels being changed and holiday arrangements being altered. Tour operators and airlines have emergency procedures and support systems which they activate when such emergencies happen. Staff must be well trained, calm and able to use their initiative to assist holidaymakers who are at or are due to visit the destination, and those who are concerned about relatives. World concern regarding international security and terrorism has heightened in recent years. Everyone in the travel and tourism industry has to be alert to security risks and ensure customers are briefed and given reassurance.

Assistance

Different customers need different levels of assistance. This may range from giving directions or carrying someone's bag, through to helping customers like parents and disabled travellers, who may need greater assistance than normally required.

Expectations

Remember that the customer will define customer service. This is due to factors such as their own experience, ethnicity and circumstances. However, all customers share one set of needs. They want you to:

- make them feel important – that means valuing them, treating them as an individual and anticipating their needs; using the person's name is one way to make the customer feel valued
- know your products or services
- listen and show empathy (understand how they feel).



In summary

- There are many different types of customer, who can be categorised in a number of ways.
- Each customer segment will have its own set of customer service needs.
- Each person within a segment also has his or her own needs.
- It is as important to give good customer service to the internal customer as it is to provide it to the external customer.
- Needs may be generic, e.g. directions, or specific to the job, e.g. babysitting.
- Customers may need information, advice and instructions.
- Employers and staff have legal responsibilities to customers and colleagues for their health, safety and security.
- Customers have different expectations but all expect customer service staff to make them feel important, know the products and services, listen and show empathy.



Practice assessment activity

P Level P2



Work on this activity in groups of three or four. You are the passenger agents dealing with the following situation and are face to face with the customers.

It's a foggy day at the airport. The flight to Milan is delayed overnight. It has 150 passengers. Hotel accommodation has to be arranged as well as transport to and from the hotels. Some passengers have people meeting them at Milan. Some passengers should have been making connections to other flights at Milan to continue to their destination. There are some families with young children and babies. There are 35 members of a Welsh male-voice choir due to sing in Milan tomorrow night.

In your group, decide:

- what different types of passenger you may encounter
- what their needs may be.

2.3 Skills and techniques needed to provide good customer service in the travel and tourism industry

This section covers:

- communication methods and skills
- selling skills
- presentation skills and personal presentation
- ways of measuring customer service.

Communication methods and skills

Effective communication is a major factor in customer service. This section considers types of communication and the skills and techniques useful in communicating well.



Case studies

Moments of truth

Jan Carlzon was the Chief Executive Officer of Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS). He realised that the reputation and success of SAS depended upon how highly the passengers judged their communication with SAS staff. That communication could be at any time in their dealings with the airline. It could be for any reason and by any method, lasting for several minutes or just a few seconds. He called these

contacts, 'Moments of truth'. He realised the airline had to do everything to ensure those 'moments' were highly successful. He said:

'These "Moments of truth" are the moments that ultimately determine whether SAS will succeed or fail as a company.'

- What did Jan Carlzon mean by a passenger's 'Moment of truth'?

Why do people communicate?

People communicate with others to:

- inform
- instruct
- seek information
- motivate.



Inform

You may be a holiday representative and need to leave a written message for a colleague or want to tell your customers verbally about the resort.

How did you do? Your message to Caroline should say who it is from, who it is to, when the message was taken, give the accurate detail of the message and state what Ahmed's extension number is.

Instruct

This may be a verbal safety instruction given by cabin crew. It may be a notice to passengers telling them what they cannot carry in their hand-baggage.



Activity

You have just taken a phone call from Ahmed. He wants Caroline to discuss the complaint from Mrs Harrison in his office at 11.30am. She is to bring all the paperwork about the complaint. She must call Ahmed by 11am on extension 2403 if she cannot make the meeting.

- Write a suitable message for Caroline.



Activity

You work in a three-storey tour operator's office. Your manager has left you a note:

'I've had the Fire Service here this morning. They've told us to get signs up about fire evacuation, pronto. Something about what to do if a fire is found, how to get out, where to go, what to do, what not to do. Apparently it's got to be clearly phrased and understood. Sort it out by this afternoon!'

- Create a written instruction which meets the needs set out by your manager. Your instruction must be eye-catching, clear and logical.

Seek information

Some of your verbal communication will be to seek information from a customer, so that you can respond to his or her needs. You may need to write a letter asking for information. A common type of written communication seeking information is a customer service questionnaire (see page 81).

Motivate

You may want to verbally encourage your customers to go on an excursion. You may want to compliment an employee on their good work, in writing.



Activity

Some words and phrases are motivational – they can make people feel good when used about them. Here are some examples:

- | | | |
|-------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| ■ caring | ■ friendly | ■ knowledgeable |
| ■ committed | ■ good humoured | ■ patient |
| ■ concerned | ■ helpful | ■ polite |
| ■ confident | ■ kind | ■ 'went the extra mile'. |

Choose some of these words and phrases to complete the following letter to an employee.

Dear Sameena,

I had a phone call from Mrs Simpson this morning, telling me how _____ you had been when she made a booking with you.

She told me she was travelling to visit a sick relative and was uncertain about the flight arrangements she needed to make. She said you were _____ and _____ and helped her in a very _____ manner. You were very _____ about Switzerland and _____ about what you were doing. Once you had helped her decide which city to fly to and had booked her flight, you _____ and found details of the train connection she needed to make.

Clearly, you were very _____ and _____ to help Mrs Simpson. I am very pleased to add my thanks to hers. Keep up the good work!

The style of communication

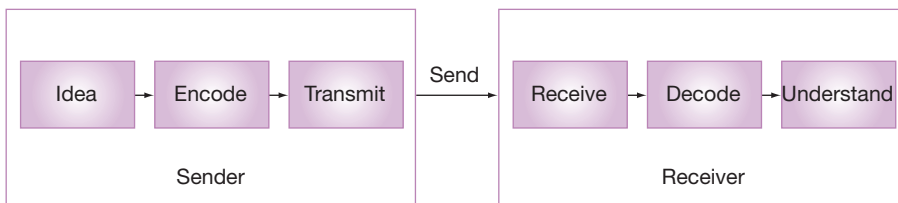
People use different styles of communication depending upon whether they are talking or writing to a friend, a tutor or a grandparent. Sometimes your style will be formal, sometimes informal. Different customers and situations also require different styles.

How do people communicate?

People communicate with each other face to face, electronically (for example, by telephone) and in writing.

Whichever way you communicate, the same process occurs:

- *Stage 1:* The sender wants the receiver to understand a message.
- *Stage 2:* The sender puts the message into a logical language and style.
- *Stage 3:* The message is transmitted.
- *Stage 4:* The message is received.
- *Stage 5:* The receiver 'decodes' (interprets) the message.
- *Stage 6:* The receiver understands the message and may respond.



■ *The communication process*

Communicating face to face

People tend to think that the important thing to do when communicating is to say the right words. In truth, the 'words' that are used are only one part of communicating – and it is this part which has the least impact!

- The words that people use account for around 10 per cent of the impact of communication.
- 30 per cent of the impact comes from the pitch and tone of the voice – this can be called 'the music'.



Over to you

How would you talk to a client:

- during a happy holiday experience
- who had a complaint
- if the hotel was on fire?



Talking point

Communicating isn't just about sending messages. It is also about receiving them. People waste a lot of time and create bad impressions by talking when they should be listening. If people listened more, they would gain more information more quickly and demonstrate greater respect for their customers. Everybody has been given two ears and one mouth – they should be used in that proportion!

- The part which has the most impact – 60 per cent – is body language; this can be called ‘the dance’.

Words

Customers gain their main impression of you in the first few seconds of communication. These are powerful ‘Moments of truth!’ ‘Hello’, ‘Good morning’, ‘Can I help you?’ are common opening statements but try to find ways to personalise the greeting. Use the customer’s name as soon as you know it (it may be on their ticket, their baggage label or credit card).



Case studies

Feargal Quinn founded the supermarket chain Superquinn. He believes in spending time with the customers. Once, he was assisting staff when a man and woman, with their son, came to the check-out desk. He bagged their goods and said, ‘Thank you Mrs Connolly for shopping at Superquinn.’ Minutes later, the customer returned

to ask Feargal to explain to her husband that they had never met before. He happily did so, and was asked how he knew the wife’s name. He explained that he had noticed the boy’s name on a nametag on his scarf. How’s that for observation!

Be aware that an older person may prefer formality and like to be addressed by courtesy title and surname, for example, Mrs Green. A young person may prefer to be addressed by his or her first name.



Activity

Write down opening remarks you might make to personalise your communication in the following situations:

- You are a coach escort. Among the passengers joining the coach is a woman with a young child eating an ice cream.
- You are a hotel receptionist and a woman wearing a wet raincoat and shaking water off her umbrella approaches you to check in.
- A man checks in at your desk with a lot of baggage. You notice the name Maurice Wesson on a label on one of the bags.

What opening remarks did you suggest? Here are a few you might use:

- ‘Hello, are you enjoying your ice cream?’
- ‘It looks as though it’s raining pretty heavily. Let’s get you checked in to your room quickly, so that you can change into some dry clothes.’

- 'You've got a lot of bags with you, Mr Wesson. Are you going away for a long time?'

The travel industry uses lots of jargon, for example, hotac, no-show, ETA. Don't use it when communicating with customers. They may not understand it and it is discourteous; so is the use of slang.

Overcoming language barriers

Sometimes people assume that others can (and should!) speak their language. This shows disrespect to customers. Be patient, listen and look for clues as to what the customer is saying. Be careful to use clear diction (speak clearly) and not to speak too quickly. Use your body language, or even quick drawings, to communicate. A useful aid to language is the use of symbols. These are often universal, so will be understood in any country.



- *International symbols. Do you know what each one means?*

Throughout your communication, think about what you want to say and how you will say it. Structure helps you manage the communication and demonstrates knowledge and confidence.

Pitch and tone

This is the 'music' of communication. The effectiveness of your verbal communication is powerfully altered by the pitch and tone of your voice. Varied pitch and tone demonstrates interest and enthusiasm. Flat pitch and tone demonstrates disinterest and boredom. You can vary the volume of your voice to create an effect. You might use a loud voice to communicate an instruction in an emergency, or a quiet voice to encourage a calm atmosphere.



Key point

- HOTAC = hotel accommodation.
- no-show = passengers or guests who fail to arrive for their flight or booking.
- ETA = estimated time of arrival

Body language

This is the important 'dance' of communication. Look around you. What does the body language – the non-verbal communication – of others in the room tell you? Do you see enthusiasm, boredom, anger, puzzlement or happiness?

- How would you feel if the escort on your excursion leant against the coach door, legs crossed and arms folded? This person would be presenting a 'closed' style. You might assume that he or she is bored, not interested in you and not about to give you a fun journey.
- What if the cabin crew member greets you on board with good eye contact, a smile and is standing upright? This person is presenting an 'open' style. You will probably feel that he or she is demonstrating interest, warmth and confidence, and that this should be a good flight.



- *Is this person interested or bored?*

A useful technique with young children is to crouch down to their level and talk to them about something of particular interest to them, for example, their teddy's name. This has a 'halo effect' – while you have established an exclusive zone for you and the child to talk within, those outside your zone will see you are relating to the child and recognise your caring approach.

Mannerisms

Think about how you speak and what your body is doing. Ask a friend if you have any mannerisms. You may be surprised. Do you 'um' and 'er', or use slang phrases like 'Gotcha!' or 'Y'know'? Do you put your hand in front of your mouth or stand on one leg? Stop doing it!

Non-face-to-face communication

Written communication

The same principles apply to written communication as they do for verbal communication. Think about what you want to communicate and who you are communicating with, and choose an appropriate communication style.

Electronic communication

You cannot use body language when using a telephone, so you must be skilled in using the remaining 40 per cent which comes from the words used and the pitch and tone of your voice. Standing or sitting comfortably, upright and alert, will affect the way you speak.

Confidentiality and accuracy

Customers expect organisations to treat information about them in confidence. That means not discussing any details about them or their arrangements with others unless for valid business reasons. This would include discussions about bookings they make, contact details and credit card information.

Do not make casual remarks about customers or release information to people asking about them. Airline staff are sometimes asked if a certain person is on a flight. The caller might say he is the passenger's husband and she has asked him to meet her at the airport. Staff will not release the information. That might seem unfair, but how do they know the caller is really her husband or that she wants her husband to know where she is?

Customers' confidentiality is protected in law. The Data Protection Act 1998 protects individuals from the misuse of computer data which is held about them. They have the right of access to that data, rights of compensation for inaccuracies or wrongful disclosure, and the right to have inaccuracies corrected.

Accuracy is very important. If you need to record or say anything which is supposed to be factual, make sure it is correct. Grammar and punctuation can easily change the meaning that you originally intended. Email is convenient and speedy; however, emails are not confidential and they can be misinterpreted, with the reader assuming a much tougher, less polite message than the sender intended. Learn email etiquette; this includes how to structure what you want to say and how to phrase sentences so that they cannot be misunderstood and demonstrate the appropriate style (for example, formal/informal, happy/concerned).



Over to
you

Is it possible to know if the person at the other end of the phone is smiling?



In summary

- People communicate to inform, instruct, motivate and seek information.
- Remember to *listen!*
- Electronic communication needs to be used carefully to ensure the appropriate style and content is communicated.
- The impact of communication comes from the words, the pitch and tone of the voice, and through body language – together, these make the words, music and dance of communication. Body language is by far the most powerful of these.
- There are many techniques you can use when communicating.
- You must be accurate and confidential when recording or using information.

Selling skills

Selling is not just about having a customer buy and pay for a product – for example, an inclusive holiday, a guided tour, a train journey. It is a key part of customer service and is part of promoting your organisation, which will encourage the customer to buy from you.



■ Shopping on board a ferry

The eight stages of selling

The eight stages of selling are described below.

- 1 Create an image.** Make sure you and your environment are creating the right image to attract the customer.
 - Is your appearance smart?
 - Is your office clean and your desk tidy?
 - Are the goods you want to sell or the brochures you want to offer in good condition and easily available?
- 2 Establish a rapport.** Create a favourable first impression. Be warm and sincere. Personalise the experience. Pay attention to how you communicate, including your body language. Don't get distracted.
- 3 Investigate needs.** Find out what a customer wants by asking appropriate questions.
 - Start with **open questions** (i.e. questions which start with *what*, *why* and *how*). These will give you a lot of information; for example, 'What interests does your daughter have?'
 - Continue with **leading questions**. These will narrow down the subject to give you more information; for example, 'If she likes travelling, where does she like to go?'
 - Move on to **closed questions**. These will give you specific information or confirm something; for example, 'Has she been to France?'
- 4 Actively listen.** Demonstrate that you are listening and have understood what has been said. Use your body language, for example, by nodding. Repeat key words and statements, for example, 'You said you like cruises, but only if they call at a different port every day.' Say encouraging things, such as 'Since you have already taken a cruise on the *QE2*, you know how enjoyable cruises can be.'
- 5 Present the product/service.** By now, you should know your customer's needs and preferences. Make sure you know your products/services. Select one or more suitable ones to offer your client. Choose two or three features which you feel will particularly appeal to the customer. Sell the benefits; for example, 'You said you like calling at a different port each day. This ship is a bit smaller, so it can get in to ports which the larger ships can't visit.'
- 6 Handle the objections.** Don't tell the customer that he or she is wrong but overcome the objection by finding something positive to say which addresses it; for example, 'I understand why you feel you might be seasick in a smaller ship, but don't worry, because this is a modern ship fitted with the latest design of stabilisers.'
- 7 Close the sale.** Watch for clues that the customer is ready to buy; for example, the customer might say 'That seems like the holiday I'm looking for' or 'Do you need a deposit?' When that happens, re-emphasise the benefits to reinforce the customer's comfort about buying and ask how the customer wants to pay.

- 8 After the sale.** Ask the customer if there is anything else that he or she would like to purchase. Remind the customer about when the balance is due, or tell him or her about guarantees, etc. Package the purchase well, even if it is only a ticket. Present it with a flourish! Follow up after the customer has used the product, to enquire if all was as he or she had wished, and encourage the customer to think about the next purchase.



Key points

- There are eight stages of selling.
- Good questioning techniques are important, using a range of open, leading and closed questions.
- Customer service skills and techniques are vital aids to successful selling.



Practice assessment activity

Levels P3/P5/M3/D2

In groups of three:

- P** ■ Prepare three copies of a pro forma with the eight stages of selling listed down the page. (P3) ✓
- P M** ■ Take turns in a selling situation. The first person is the customer; the second is the employee; the third is the observer. Agree a selling situation and have the employee sell a product or service to the customer, using each of the eight stages of selling. The observer will complete the pro forma, noting evidence of when and how each stage was used. (P5/M3) ✓ ✓
- D** ■ Complete the sale and then discuss what the employee did well. Evaluate your own performance and what you could do to make it even better. (D2) ✓ ✓ ✓

Rotate roles, think of another selling scenario, and start again until you have performed three different situations.

Presentation skills and personal presentation

Presentation skills

Many employees in the travel and tourism industry speak in public, for example, guides, cabin crew and holiday representatives. These may be formal presentations or informal announcements, to small or large groups. Often they will be made using a microphone; you should therefore seek opportunities on this course and elsewhere to gain experience of using them.



■ *Presenting to customers*

Preparation

Always think about what you are going to say and how you are going to say it.

- Plan a logical structure to your presentation.
- Prompt cards are useful but avoid standing in front of the audience reading them. They want to see your face, not the top of your head!
- Practise your presentation. Ask a friend to give you feedback.
- Check the location is suitable. Are any changes needed to it?
- Make sure you know how to use the equipment and that it works.
- Decide what to wear. Make sure it is clean and smart.

Nerves

- Calm your nerves by rehearsing.
- Have a 'plan B' in case anything goes wrong, for example, the projector fails.
- Take deep breaths.
- Tell yourself you look good and that your presentation will go well.
- Think of the audience as your friends.
- Go out there and enjoy it!

Presentation

- The first few seconds of your presentation will be the most powerful. Make sure your appearance and what you say in your opening sentences creates a positive image. Learn what you are initially going to say off by heart.

- Speak confidently! Make sure you are clear in both what you say and how you say it. Keep your face towards the audience.
- Avoid speech mannerisms.
- Use the pitch and tone – the music – of your voice to keep the audience interested.
- If you are using a microphone, don't put it in front of your face. The audience wants to see you, not a metal stick! Hold it a couple of centimetres below your chin.
- Use your body language to create a confident image. That will impress your audience and have a positive effect on you.
- Scan the audience and make brief eye contact with people in it.



Over to you

When giving a presentation, make sure everyone can hear you. You can do this by asking your audience directly or by looking for body language signs. What might these signs be?

Pace what you have to say. Don't rush it – it can be easy to speed through an announcement, especially if you have made it lots of times. What might happen if you rush a presentation or announcement?



Activity

You are a holiday representative in Barbados. It is 6pm and your clients have just landed after a long flight from Manchester, which arrived two hours late. You are going to make a PA announcement on the coach transferring them to the hotel which must include:

- suitable comment about the flight delay and how they might be feeling
- information about where the coach is going and how long it will take to get there
- information about the meal arrangements tonight.

Work in pairs, one to make the announcement using a microphone, the other to observe. Afterwards, discuss what the speaker did well and what he or she might do to make the presentation better, using the guidelines in this unit. Then swap roles and start again.

Personal presentation

Dress and grooming

Customers will judge you and your organisation on the image you present. Many organisations require staff to wear a uniform. This promotes the organisation and presents a powerful image. The organisation should give a demonstration and written briefing on how to wear the uniform, and rules and guidance about grooming, including information on acceptable hairstyles, make-up, tattoos, jewellery, etc. Look your best by ensuring you and your clothes are clean and smart.

Jacket (male uniform)

- May be worn fully buttoned or fully unbuttoned with uniform.
- Must be fully buttoned when wearing knitwear underneath as a warmth layer.
- Cabin crew in-flight gilet must never be worn underneath the jacket.
- Must not be worn draped around shoulders.
- Must always display relevant name badge and brevet.
- Must always be available whilst on duty.
- Collar must not be worn turned up.
- The 'senior' cabin crew member will make a diplomatic decision on whether it is 'jackets on' or 'jackets off' when boarding and when staff are visible in public places such as airport terminals, hotel lobbies, etc. Once that decision has been made all cabin crew members must present a uniform appearance. It is not acceptable for some crew to be wearing/not wearing the jacket in isolation.
- It is recommended that staff ask their dry cleaner to place metal foil or plastic button protectors over the buttons on their jackets to maintain their appearance.

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Personal hygiene

Good personal hygiene is essential. Take regular showers or baths. Use deodorants and perfumes appropriately. Make sure your teeth are clean and your breath smells fresh. You may be working in difficult environments, for example, in dusty streets, high temperatures or crowded aircraft cabins, so it is a good idea to take hygiene products with you to use throughout the day.

Body language

Always make sure your body language gives a positive and confident message. A list of body language dos and don'ts is given in the table below.

Body language Dos and Don'ts	
✓ DO	✗ DON'T
Lean forward slightly when listening to someone	Stand with your arms folded
Have a ready smile to use at appropriate moments	Place your hands in your pockets
Incline your head to the side to show you are interested	Chew gum
Use appropriate hand gestures	Fiddle with articles like pens, loose change or clothing

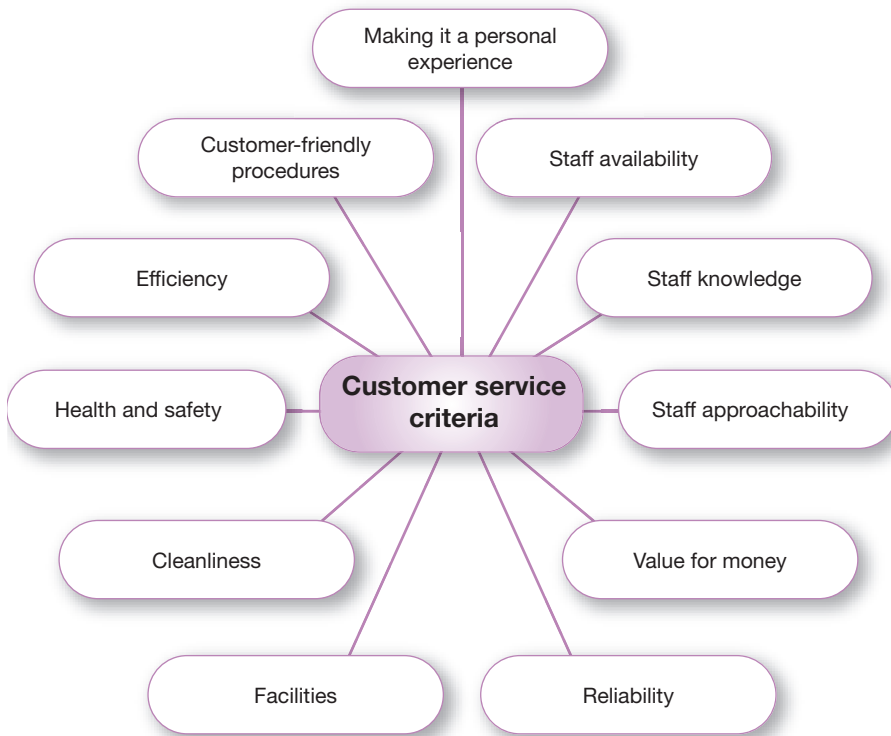
Attitude and behaviour

You owe it to your customers, your colleagues, your organisation and yourself to have a positive attitude and behave appropriately. You want people to value and like you. A negative attitude will affect the way that you communicate. Have a positive attitude – it feels so much better!

Ways of measuring customer service

In order to assess the quality of customer service provided, organisations must:

- discover what their customers consider important when they are assessing customer service, so that they know what to measure
- monitor their customer service to ensure that it is both what the customers want and to the level they want it
- encourage feedback from their customers, otherwise they will not learn what has gone wrong and will not get the chance to put it right, so it will keep going wrong.



■ Typical criteria for assessing customer service

Gaining feedback

There are informal ways to gain feedback, like having conversations with customers while they are with you or phoning them when they return home, as some travel agents and hotels do.

There are also more formal market research methods. The most common is the customer service questionnaire; this might be distributed during the flight, placed at the exit to the tourist attraction or left in the hotel room. Questionnaires give feedback on how the organisation is doing and also show customers that the organisation cares about them. Kuoni Travel is one example of an organisation which includes questionnaires on its website. (A link to this website has been made available at www.heinemann.co.uk/hotlinks. Enter the express code 2196P.) Once you have accessed the website, click on *Site Map*, then under 'Legal' select *Post Holiday Questionnaires*. Others, like airlines, use market researchers to interview customers as soon as their journey has ended, while their views about the holiday are still fresh in their minds.

When compiling a questionnaire, the outline criteria need to be broken down into specific detail to enable decisions to be made on *what* is to be measured and *how*. For example, cleanliness might include cleanliness of hotel bedrooms; measures might include waste bins empty, carpet clean, windows and mirrors mark-free, facilities replenished. These could be measured by observation. (You will learn more about this subject in *Unit 5: Exploring Marketing in Travel and Tourism*.)

SUNSHINE HOTELS					
GUEST SATISFACTION SURVEY					
Please rate the following hotel services/facilities: (5 = excellent, 1 = poor)					
1. Hotel lobby					
a. Cleanliness	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
b. Attractiveness	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
c. Availability of staff	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
d. Efficiency of check-in to your room	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
2. Your room					
a. Cleanliness	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
b. Attractiveness	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
c. Condition of furniture	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
d. Equipment provided (tv, radio, trouser press)	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
e. Lighting	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
f. Condition/cleanliness of bathroom	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
g. Room service and mini bar facilities	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
3. Hotel restaurant					
a. Cleanliness	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
b. Attractiveness	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
c. Quality of food	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
d. Range of dishes provided	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
4. Hotel staff					
a. Friendliness of staff	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
b. Helpfulness of staff	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
c. Availability of staff	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
d. Promptness of staff in attending to your needs	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
How satisfied were you with your stay at this hotel? (5 = very satisfied, 1 = not at all satisfied)	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you believe our services offered value for money?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>		
Would you stay with us again?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>		
Would you recommend us to others?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>		

■ *A guest satisfaction survey*

Quality and quantity of information

Organisations must check that the correct quality and quantity of information is provided. Examples include:

- hotels that train staff in local knowledge and provide information on local tourist attractions and events
- tour operators that provide essential information regarding customers' inclusive holidays but also supplementary information about the destination, etc., perhaps verbally, in writing or as a video
- holiday representatives who hold briefing meetings with clients after they arrive at the hotel.

Timing of service and information provision

Organisations must ensure that good-quality service and information is provided at the right time. For instance, airport operator BAA needs

passengers to know what items are forbidden in cabin baggage. To ensure passengers know this before they pack, it communicates such information through its website and newspaper advertisements. Other organisations may need to ensure that their customers receive notification of any changes to their inclusive holiday sufficiently well in advance, or that delayed passengers are given refreshments at appropriate times.

Appearance of the environment

Organisations must monitor the appearance of the work environment. If you arrived at a hotel where the reception area had flaking paint, an 'out of order' sign on the lift, dirty glasses on a table and last week's newspapers on a shelf, you would probably want to leave as quickly as possible.

Being proactive and responsive

Excellent customer service depends upon being proactive – taking action before the customer asks for it. Watch good shop assistants, cabin crew and waiters – they constantly scan their area, looking for clues that a customer needs attention and then checking with the customers that their needs have been met.

On a larger scale, organisations must show that potential changes in the business environment have been anticipated and ways to overcome or take advantage of them are planned. Customer service is always changing. As the public becomes more sophisticated, has higher disposable incomes and receives 'better' customer service, so it will change its opinion of what excellent customer service is.

To demonstrate reactivity, organisations must create ways to respond to customer and staff comments and ideas, and implement changes as a result.

Training

Organisations should review induction and refresher training, including product, technical and customer service training, to ensure employees can give superb customer service.



Key points

Good organisations:

- anticipate and recognise customers' needs
- provide timely and quality information and service
- ensure the working environment looks good
- are responsive and proactive
- train staff
- gain and act upon performance feedback.



Practice assessment activity

Levels P3/P4/M2

Work on this activity in pairs. Choose two organisations in different parts of the travel and tourism industry. Make a presentation to your group:

- P** a) describing the communication and presentation skills and techniques those organisations use (P3) ✓
- M** b) explaining how those skills and techniques enhance the customer service provided (M2) ✓ ✓
- P** c) describing the ways they do, or could, measure customer service in their organisations (P4). ✓

2.4 Demonstrate customer services skills and techniques in travel and tourism situations

This section covers:

- customer disposition
- location
- situations.

Customer disposition

A wide variety of customer service situations require skills, techniques and initiative, often in unplanned, fast-moving conditions. Customers will have a range of experiences which affect their moods and attitudes. Great, if they are happy – work with them to keep them that way! Unfortunately, some customers may have different dispositions, so how best to manage the situation?

Aggressive customers

Customers may become angry because something has gone wrong or because they are in a situation which they find frightening or worrying. Anger can turn to aggression, which needs a calm but firm response. Stay in control and get assistance if necessary. If other customers see that staff are in control and looking after the interests of all the customers, they will be more likely to support the staff.

Exceptionally, a customer may behave very aggressively, in an environment which makes the situation very distressing for others and potentially unsafe. Some organisations give advance warning to customers of the potential consequences of such behaviour. British Airways has developed a policy and statement entitled 'Zero tolerance on disruptive behaviour', specifying what action BA will take in the event of a passenger disrupting a flight.

Customers with complaints

However hard you and your organisation try, things will occasionally not be to the liking of the customer. Some customers are less able to handle unexpected situations than others, and they may turn their concerns into complaints. Few people like dealing with complaints but by having the right attitude and using the right skills and techniques, the customer can be satisfied, which will make you feel great. Surveys show that a customer who has been handled well after something has gone wrong can become the most loyal of customers.

Do not take complaints personally. Hopefully, the customer is complaining about a situation rather than about you. However, you represent the organisation with which the customer is dissatisfied, therefore you have to take ownership of resolving the problem.

Dealing with complaints

Adopt a friendly, helpful but assertive manner. Being assertive means explaining your position while respecting the other person's feelings and situation. It enables you both to feel OK and valued.

Initially, the customer will be climbing the 'anger mountain', pouring out to you what went wrong and how appalling your organisation is. It is important to stay quiet at this stage. If you try to interrupt or give reasons or excuses why something happened, the anger mountain is likely to keep growing and the customer will continue to complain angrily, and perhaps heighten his or her demands.



■ *The anger mountain*

Indicate you are listening by your body language, for example, nodding and the occasional 'Ah-ha' or 'I see'. Wait until the customer reaches the top of the anger mountain. By doing so, you will have allowed him or her the opportunity to tell you what went wrong, and to calm down.

Then it is your time to speak. Apologise and make it clear that you aim to find a solution. Ask questions; this demonstrates that you have been listening and also gives you the opportunity to get the detail you need, for example, 'You told me you gave your passport to the passenger agent. Can you tell me at which desk they were sitting?' Put yourself in

the customer's shoes. That will help you to understand how he or she feels and to understand how the situation may have arisen.

By now you will have gained most of the information you need so that you can investigate and resolve the situation. Once satisfied that you have the best solution, offer it in a positive fashion to the customer. It can help if you give him or her a choice as this shows that you are trying to meet the customer's needs. It also moves the customer away from thinking about what went wrong to thinking about what choice to make.

If further investigation is needed, take a contact for the customer, so that your organisation can respond later. Make sure that whatever went wrong does not happen again, either to this customer or any other. For example, if a rail passenger complains that a wheelchair is not available at the departure station, tell the staff at the destination so that the customer does not have any further problems, and tell your manager so that he or she can ensure it does not happen to anyone else.

Distressed or concerned customers

Dealing with distressed or concerned customers requires a calm approach, with patience, empathy and gentle questioning to establish what is causing the distress or concern, so that the problem can be resolved.

Section 2.2, on the needs of different types of customers, identified techniques to assist other customers, for example, those in groups or with special needs (see pages 58–65).

Location

Indoors or outdoors?

Different styles of customer service may be required, depending upon whether it is being given indoors or outdoors. For example, a tour guide in a historic house can talk quietly, and conversation between the guide and the visitors is easy. Video displays and hand-held audio guides often supplement the guide. Outdoors, acoustics are generally not so good so the guide must draw the customers close and speak very clearly. If possible, some information can be given in the hotel or on the coach before arriving at the destination.

Crowds and noise

Crowded and noisy environments like airports and railway stations can be a problem for transportation organisations. When there is disruption, passengers sometimes complain that 'it was chaotic and no information was given to us'. That is often because the situation is still evolving and uncertain, but also because face-to-face communication is very limited given the numbers of customers involved. Therefore, there has to be heavy reliance upon display screens and public address announcements, although customers tend to want personal assurance from a staff

member that all their concerns have been addressed. Patience wears thin and staff must draw upon their communication skills and initiative to minimise difficulties for the customers. It is important to identify and assist those who are finding the situation particularly difficult, for example, the parent with a baby or other special needs passengers.



Activity

Visit your local airport, ferry terminal, railway station or coach station. Look for customer service communication methods which are:

- face to face with staff
- using public address systems
- using customer self-help equipment
- display screens
- leaflets
- notice boards
- signs and symbols
- other methods.

List each method and note what purpose it is serving. On your return, discuss your findings with your group.

Other factors affected by location

Location doesn't only affect communication, it can also affect how formal or informal a situation might be; how clean the area is; or how busy it is, all of which may affect the type and level of customer service.

Situations

Some situations may be familiar and the customers' queries are easily resolved. Sometimes they can be more unusual or difficult, and initiative will be needed. In this unit you have learned how to give good customer service when handling:

- complaints
- selling situations
- customers needing advice and assistance.

Customers may ask a train operator employee the time of the next train; a travel agent for advice on what excursion to take; an airline passenger agent for help to get a message to a relative; a holiday representative for assistance with an elderly friend. In each case, the customer expects the employee to provide an accurate, honest, knowledgeable and helpful response. Staff should be prepared for the most frequent questions and know where to find the answers to the more unusual. If you are asked a question and do not know the answer, don't guess – ask a colleague or manager.



Problems

Customers' problems are very varied. Some staff give excuses for not helping customers, either because they do not want to bother or because they are not using their initiative. Don't be part of the problem, be part of the solution! It is your job to solve problems. Respond in a positive, interested and helpful manner.



In summary

- The method and style of customer service will depend upon many factors, including the type of customer, the location and environment, and the situation.
- Customers expect *you* to meet their needs, whether it is giving them information or advice, or resolving a problem or complaint.
- Don't take complaints personally but do take responsibility for resolving them.
- Remember the anger mountain; take steps to ensure the problem does not happen to this or any other customer again.
- Your motto should be, 'Don't be part of the problem, be part of the solution.'



Practice assessment activity

Levels P5/M3/D2

In groups of three, work on the following scenarios:

- an angry client has not got a sea view room, which she says she booked; the hotel has no record of this
- a passenger whose child has got lost in the terminal
- a rail passenger waiting for one of your delayed trains, who wants an alternative way to get to his destination at your cost.

Take it in turns to be the customer, the employee and the observer.

- P** **M** 1 Role-play the scenarios using the skills and techniques learned in this unit. The objective is to provide realistic and excellent customer service. (P5/M3) ✓ ✓
- D** 2 After 5–10 minutes, discuss how the scenario was addressed, what skills and techniques worked well, and what could be done to improve the performance. (D2) ✓ ✓ ✓

Change roles and undertake the next scenario.



Test your knowledge

- 1 Define 'customer service'.
- 2 Create a five-item customer charter for your local train company.
- 3 Discover what methods passengers on three different airlines can use to check in.
- 4 Consider three types of hotel clients with different needs. What are those needs? How can the hotel satisfy them?
- 5 Explain four reasons why people communicate.
- 6 Think of three occasions from the time a holidaymaker checks in for his or her flight to the time this person arrives at the hotel, when staff may wish to communicate with him or her. What would they want to communicate and how would they do so?
- 7 Describe the eight stages of selling.
- 8 Recommend three customer service factors which a cruise line should consider.
- 9 Give four examples of how location can affect customer service factors.
- 10 What are the three most powerful points you learned about customer service by studying this unit?

