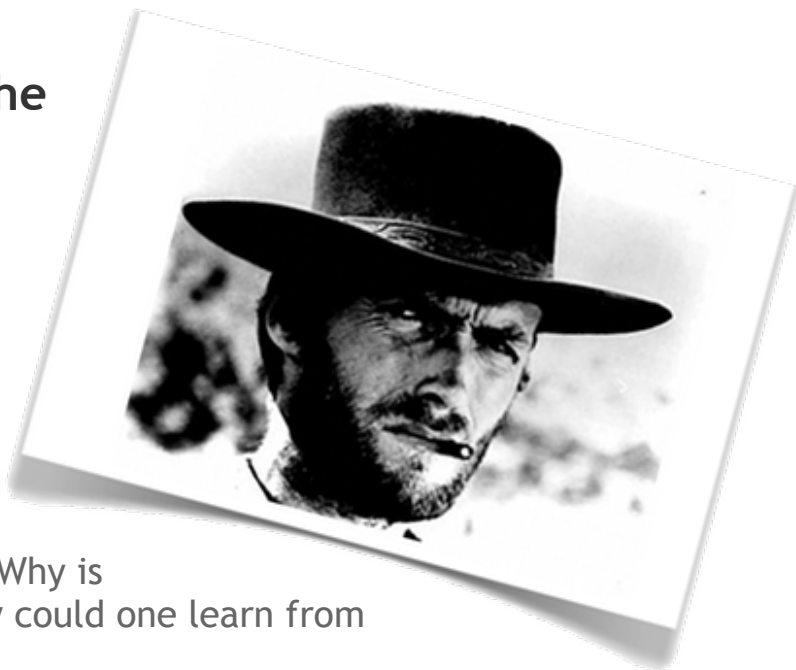# The good, the bad, and the ugly...

A rather rapid and very spontaneous blog this one. A frustrating series of calls with my broadband supplier got me thinking... Are their any industries or sectors with generally brilliant customer service? Are there any with generally poor customer service? Why is there the big difference, and how could one learn from the other?

My starter for 10, based purely on personal experience...please please please build on this. I want this page to become a living, breathing entity, and to start doing something about stuff that is wrong!

The good

How about *coffee shops*? Regardless of what you think about independents versus chains, or the taste differences between Starbucks and Nero, I'd really struggle to say anything bad about the instore service. My local Caffe Nero is quite "unusually" staffed, but I always feel welcome, involved, and cared for.

What other sectors (as opposed to individual businesses) are out there about which it is difficult to find complaints?

The bad

Banks. There appears to be a real division between some genuinely excellent stuff that happens (my last two business managers at HSBC, for example) and some shocking (pretty much everything I've ever had to do with Santander). The difference appears to be only partly about the organisation; a significant chunk is about the specific individuals you're in contact with.

Some structural stuff applies - call centres versus a real bank manager for example - but the individual plays a huge role as well.

The ugly

I'd put **telecoms** in here. The organisations seem far too big; internal structures are built for their convenience, not the customers; any training that goes on misses actually looking at things from the customers' point of view.

Why would you build a customer service operation that insisted your customer repeats (often lengthy) security information every time their call is transferred? Why have a broadband department and a telephone department and insist that a customer speaks to both about their one physical line?

I'm yet to find a telecoms provider that has done anything other than really, *really* annoy me, and I've tried a few!

One of the debates that was sparked but the original version of this aricle was about the relationship between price and service - one reader suggested that if you choose something on price alone, you should expect (or deserve?!) poor service. I countered with an argument that the two things need not be inextricably linked, and further, that a comparison of Jet2 versus Ryanair would bear my argument out.

I should note here that one commentator on the original article flew Ryanair last night - on a rather delayed flight - and I'm next flying with Jet2 at the weekend.

My argument was that these two organisations, both low-cost operators (although how low in comparison to each other is open to question as price clarity is tricky to find), nonetheless differ significantly in service standards; Jet2 being pretty good in my personal experience, and Ryanair being a company I will never, ever fly with again - I'd rather walk.

With my booking for this coming weekend, I had cause to contact Jet2 last night. I didn't want to use a premium rate phone number - the call centres were close at that time anyway - and I have a fear and loathing of most call centres anyway (HMRC VAT office is a noble exception - they are lovely people! No, seriously!).

Instead, because there was no obvious way of emailing "customer services" (they are not the only company to fall down in this regard), I decided to email a few specific people - the Chief Exec, the Finance Director, the MD and the Operations Director. A little bit of research enabled me to do so, and I pressed "send" at 10:30pm last night.

Before 8am, I'd had a reply from the Chief Exec. He thanked me for my email and had forwarded it to the customer service group. Just before 9am,

and again just after 11am, the General Manager of Customer Service called - I missed the calls as I was in meetings, which is another reason why I wanted to e-mail them rather than call. She then also e-mailed me, explained the situation beautifully, and wished me a good trip.

My thoughts

This process has interested me considerably...

- The issue I had with Jet2 turned out to be about a slightly misleading/unclear description of a charge - nothing particularly significant, no errors were made, and no-one is out of pocket. I'm sure the website can be easily amended to avoid this in the future.
- Despite my unorthodox approach, I was responded to quickly and with courtesy - that creates a positive image of the company in my mind.
- There would have been no need to "go to the top" if there had been the ability to e-mail customer services.

These things support some of my basic philosophies about customer service, specifically:

- The tone must be set at the top. The customer must be important to everyone, CEO down.
- If a customer complains or is confused, at least make an effort to see it from their point of view. You might learn something.
- Don't be afraid of your customers getting in touch - make it easy for them! You'll find they're much easier to deal with/placate if they've managed to communicate with you **when** and **how** they wanted to. It's good to talk!
- Customer service is not a cost. Doing it well reduces cost, improving the bottom line, and increases sales, improving the top line. Your happy customers are your best sales force.

Creating positive feelings in your customers' hearts and minds should be at the forefront of everything an organisation does. However "low-cost" an operator you are.