



You Can't Manage What You Can't Measure

by Andrew Klebanow

A fundamental axiom of business is that you cannot manage what you cannot measure and what can be measured can be improved. Few casino operators would discount the importance of customer service in today's competitive gaming environment. Property managers almost always cite their customer service as a critical factor that sets them apart from their competition. In fact, customer service often appears as part of a casino's mission statement or as a basis of its operating strategy.

To monitor customer service casinos often rely on comment cards that are placed around the property and are periodically tabulated. Casinos may also employ a more sophisticated version of comment cards in which a third-party provider prints, collects and tabulates customer comments. A monthly report is then made available. The fundamental problem with comment cards of any sort is that they usually only measure the

the very satisfied or very dissatisfied. They are not an accurate form of measurement.

The casino industry has a variety of tools to measure business performance. The food and beverage department monitors food cost, labor cost, pour cost and cycle time. In the slot department, managers examine coin handle, slot win and hold percentage. These are the tools that are used to manage the business. Yet when it comes to managing customer service, casino managers often rely on anecdotal stories, comment cards and the occasional customer letter to validate the delivery of outstanding customer service.

The general belief is that customer service is based on subjective opinions and cannot be measured objectively. The fact is that customer service can be measured as accurately as any other part of the business and that the delivery of outstanding customer service is not about hiring friendly employees. It's about establishing service standards and making sure that those standards are consistently met.

Establish Service Standards

The first step in measuring customer service is to establish service standards for each department. The General Manager and the department heads must establish service standards for each component of the service experience in each department. Examples include:

Casino/Slots

- Empty hopper filled within 8 minutes of notification to dispatch.
- Jackpots paid within 6 minutes of notification to dispatch.
- Cocktail offered every 15 minutes.
- Ashtrays emptied, debris removed and machines wiped down every 45 minutes.
- Slot host makes contact with non-carded player playing \$1 or higher game within 10 minutes of first wager.
- Every customer/employee contact is concluded with "thank you and good luck."

Slot Club

- Open an additional station when more than 3 people are online.
- Club rep fully explains how the club works and how to use card.
- Club rep states how many dollars must be wagered to earn a point.
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F&B—Steakhouse

- Guest greeted within 30 seconds of entering dining room.
- Cocktails offered within 2 minutes of being seated.
- Waiter checks back within 2 minutes after serving each course.
- Manager visits each table at least once during seating.

Once these basic standards are defined, departmental managers are tasked with achieving those standards by clearly communicating them to employees and by staffing appropriately. That is what being a manager is all about.

Service Measurement

Step II is measurement and customer feedback. The casino must measure each service outlet within the property to assure that standards are being met. To do this the property may employ outside evaluators who, acting as customers, monitor customer service using pre-determined service standards. These observers are often called quality assurance evaluators, mystery shoppers or spotters. It is better to use the term quality assurance evaluation over the other terms because a mystery shopper or spotter is often associated with theft detection. Quality assurance is not about theft detection. It is about assuring that employees are meeting the service standards that senior management has defined.

Using an evaluation form developed with each department's manager, the evaluator visits each service center throughout the property and assigns a numeric score for each part of the service delivery process.

In addition, the casino must get feedback from customers in the form of customer intercept studies. Surveyors intercept customers as they leave the property or a particular service outlet. They interview customers as they wait at Valet, leave a restaurant or enter the parking garage. They ask 12 questions, not fifty, and take only four minutes of a customer's time. They interview customers the day of their visit, not weeks later by phone or letter when memories are no longer fresh. Responses are promptly tabulated, charted and compared to prior periods.

Share the Results

Step III is to share the results with employees. It is a fundamental law of human behavior that people need to know how they are doing. Employees need to know how well they are performing at their jobs and they need feedback more often than during their annual performance review. They also need to know that management takes service standards seriously and that they are being held accountable to meet those standards.

Employees also need to know what customers think of the service they provide. Furthermore, they need to understand that a decline in service performance does not result in punitive action but is a tool for improving service. If customers or evaluators report that the wait for a hopper fill is too long then maybe there is a scheduling or an equipment issue that needs to be addressed. Until everyone in the department can meet,

review the results, and offer alternative solutions, managers may never know the reasons for a particular service problem. They may just blame it on poor performance.

Contrary to what many managers think, the vast majority of employees want to do a good job; they care about the service they provide. What employees need is accurate and believable feedback from customers and independent evaluators to know how they are doing.

Service Measurement

Chatty, friendly change people are wonderful unless you are the guy who is waiting to get change. A beautiful fine dining room is a great marketing tool but if the waiter has too large a station, cannot properly service his tables and his supervisor is never on the floor monitoring the dining room then the property failed to fulfill customers' expectations.

Smiling, friendly employees are an important part of the gaming experience but it is not what customer service is all about. Customer service is about establishing service standards, developing systems to deliver that service and ongoing measurement to make sure those standards are being met. ♣

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