



Received: 27-09-2023
Accepted: 07-11-2023

ISSN: 2583-049X

Completing Customer Care Services: Theoretical Basis for Vietnamese Companies

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Abstract

Customer care services play a very important role in enhancing the competitive advantage of businesses in general and testing service businesses in particular, helping businesses specialize and differentiate, and improve the image of your service quality in the minds of customers, helping to increase the number of loyal customers, attract potential customers, strengthen loyalty to existing

customers, thereby contributing to reducing the number of customers, business expenses for businesses. Customer care service is a key activity in a business's marketing activities to target the business's management activities at target customers, bringing outstanding satisfaction to customers when consuming services, with good quality customer care.

Keywords: Customer Care, Theoretical Basis, Vietnamese Businesses

1. Introduction

1.1 Basic Concepts about Customers

1.1.1 Concept of Customer

We live in an economy where the customer is king. This is the result of producing more than consumed. The problem in today's market is a lack of buyers, not a lack of goods. "Without customers, no company would exist." The comments of famous economist Erwin Frand have shown the great role of customers in all business activities of enterprises. Based on different approaches, we have many ways to define customers: CEO of insurance group PLC, Anthony Reizenstein wrote "Customer is a person who receives goods, services, or ideas from a seller or supplier. According to Sam Walton, president of Wal-Mart Corporation, "Customers are people who come to us with their needs, and our job (the job of salespeople) is to satisfy those needs". Although the definitions of customers are different in terms of language and expression, they still reflect the most basic characteristics of customers. From there we can derive the general concept of customers as follows: "An organization's customers are a collection of individuals, groups of people, businesses... who need to use the company's products and expect want to satisfy that need."

1.1.2 Role of Customers

Although the economic situation is currently in the recovery phase, it is still very difficult. As competition in businesses becomes increasingly fierce, the role of customers in businesses is increasing and strongly affects the survival and development of businesses. In the market, there are many suppliers for every product and service, and alternative products are also very diverse, which gives customers the right to choose. The business that provides the most suitable products and has the best care policies will be chosen by customers. If customers are not satisfied with the products or services of one business, they can always choose products or services of other businesses. Thus, businesses exist by providing goods and services to the market and they have no other choice but to compete for customers, the survival of businesses depends on customers. Customers have the role of consumers of products and services and bring profits to the business. Issues such as design, quality, quantity, price... businesses cannot decide on their own but depend a lot on the needs and tastes of customers. From there, businesses decide to invest and build production and business scales to suit their capabilities and meet market needs. "Businesses only keep money, customers are the ones who pay employees"-Ford Motor founder Henry Ford's comment shows the role of customers in all business activities. In difficult times, the role of customers becomes clearer: the more customers they attract, the more quickly and easily a business can overcome the crisis period.

1.1.3 Customer Concept of a Testing Service Company

The customers of a testing services company are organizations or individuals who use testing services to ensure that their products or services meet quality standards, safety, or comply with regulations, and industry-specific standards.

The Testing Service Company's Customers are Usually

Manufacturing Companies: Companies that manufacture products or equipment want to ensure that their products meet quality standards before they go to market. They hire a testing company to perform checks and tests to verify the quality and safety of the product.

Construction Companies: In the construction industry, companies need to check and ensure safety and regulatory compliance during the construction process. Testing services ensure that the building is built according to regulations.

Government and Regulatory Agencies: Government agencies may utilize testing services to ensure compliance with regulations and industry standards. Test subjects may also include organizations or individuals requiring testing for regulatory compliance.

Independent Testing Organizations: Independent testing organizations, such as laboratories or quality testing organizations, may hire testing services to verify the quality and reliability of results their testing.

Service Companies: Companies that provide various services, such as transportation or water supply services, may require periodic inspections to ensure that their systems and services are operating properly regulations and safety.

1.2 Customer Care

1.2.1 Customer Care Concept

Along with a correct awareness of the role of customers in the survival and development of businesses, today customer care is highly emphasized, ensuring the success of any business. Customer care is a competitive strategic activity of a business to reach and keep customers both rationally and emotionally. Investing in customer care is not a normal expense, but a long-term, strategic investment. External customer care is closely related to internal customer care.

Furthermore, customer care is not only a polite and friendly attitude when interacting with customers, but must also be implemented in every aspect of products and services provided to customers. Like Marketing, customer care activities also come from practice, through the process of summarizing practical experience and generalizing it into theory. So, we can relatively define it as follows: "Customer care is everything a business can do to satisfy the needs and expectations of customers. Customer care is serving customers the way they want."

1.2.2 Customer Care at Service Companies

For service businesses, the product they provide is the service. Due to its intangibility and inseparability, the product is divided into two layers: the core service layer and the surrounding service layer.

Core service: A service that satisfies the main needs of customers, is the main reason for customers to buy services and is the basis for choosing the type of service. For example, if a customer wants to hire a plumber, the core service that this customer wants to get will be the repaired water pipe.

Surrounding service: is a service that provides customers with additional benefits when using the service. This is the

basis for customers to choose service providers. The reason is because when businesses provide the same core service at the same price, surrounding values such as after-sales service and consulting will be considered by customers as a measure of the value received to decide to choose a supplier. Therefore, customer care is an important component in the process of providing customer service, a component of the product, and also a competitive weapon for businesses.

In competition, businesses will tend to try to minimize costs, but they always ensure a stable source of funding for customer care activities. Because the cost of care activities is cheaper than the cost of finding new customers while still contributing to the company's high revenue stream from returning customers. Therefore, companies are increasingly focusing on customer care activities to develop more strongly.

1.2.3 Purpose and Requirements of Customer Care Work

1.2.3.1 Purpose of Customer Care Work

Customer care activities are carried out by businesses to achieve three main purposes:

Firstly, to increase the competitiveness of businesses. As analyzed above, enhancing customer care activities means increasing the surrounding value of products and services. This will help businesses' products become more competitive. Advantages in product features or price can be leveled in a short time, but a business that possesses a good customer care culture will be very difficult to copy by competitors.

Second, customer care will bring satisfaction and trust to customers. Along with the increased value received, the level of satisfaction when using the business's services will also be higher. Enjoying a care regime and enthusiastic support from the company, customers will feel appreciated, thereby contributing to increasing their loyalty to the business.

The third purpose is to ensure business efficiency of the enterprise. Customer care activities will help businesses run more smoothly and increase business efficiency. For example, accepting many forms of payment will make it more convenient for business customers to pay, saving time for both parties.

Based on the information obtained through customer care activities, managers will outline appropriate customer care strategies and policies for each customer group as well as each specific stage, in order to meet the increasing needs of customers.

1.2.3.2 Requirements of Customer Care Work

The organization, management and implementation of customer care must be specialized to each department and each labor position. Every employee in a business has his or her own customers. That customer can come from outside or within the business itself. Therefore, management must equip employees with knowledge about customer care to bring greater efficiency to business operations.

The customer care department at member units must be organized on the basis of customer size, product and service characteristics, and production organization of the unit. Based on the characteristics of the nature, size of customers and the business itself to establish the most appropriate and effective customer care system.

The powers and responsibilities of the customer care department must be clearly and specifically assigned. Assigning responsibility to a department will help customer care activities be organized more professionally and with more investment.

In short, customer care is the duty of every member of the business. Raising the awareness and qualifications of the workforce regarding customer care is the responsibility of the unit leaders, the person in charge of the department, as well as each employee in the enterprise.

1.2.4 The Role of Customer Care

1.2.4.1 Building and Maintaining Customer Loyalty

As analyzed above, retaining an existing customer is much easier and more cost-effective than finding a new customer. Therefore, businesses today often tend to pay more attention to maintaining current customers than conquering new customers. And customer care activities will help them do that.

Take good care of customers, maintain current customers, satisfy customers and when needed they will return to use the business's products and services. Furthermore, customers often tend to be reluctant to change product and service suppliers because it takes time to find out information about the new supplier and bear risks if the quality of the new products and services is not as good as they are. old. Therefore, if businesses show the reliability of their products and services, and complete the care and after-sales work well, they will bring customers equal satisfaction and satisfaction, even higher than they expected. As a result, businesses will create goodwill and form habits of consuming their products and services among customers.

A study by the Technical Assistance Research Program-TARP [5, pg 65] on customer churn was conducted and the results were as follows:

The reasons why customers leave businesses are as follows:

- 3% is due to social reasons such as changing residence.
- 5% due to new relationships or friends at another business.
- 9% due to competition such as better price and use value of goods and services elsewhere.
- 14% are dissatisfied with the product and they believe that another company's product is better.
- 68% of customers leave businesses because they are not valued.

Thus, the majority of customers leave because of lack of care from the business, lack of proper attention, and lack of actions to show recognition and thanks for the values they bring to the business.

Customer care creates an invisible bond that binds and retains customers, helping businesses build a large number of loyal customers. With loyal customers, businesses will maintain a certain level of revenue every period, and can also increase revenue by introducing new products to loyal customers. The more loyal customers a business has, the stronger its development is.

1.2.4.2 Customer Care Contributes to Attracting Potential Customers

Although the object of customer care activities is current customers and the purpose is to maintain current customers, if customer care is good, it will also have a positive impact on conquering more potential customers. ability. That means if a customer is served well, they will tell others (family,

friends, colleagues...) about their satisfaction. Unknowingly, this customer advertised the business to potential customers. The image and reputation of the business are recorded in their minds, and the possibility that these people will come to the business when needed is very large. Attracting potential customers in this case is done indirectly through current customers-A free but quite effective advertising method.

On the other hand, it is also harmful if there is a customer who is dissatisfied with the business and complains to those around him about it. Normally people tend to complain more than praise, so the impact of these complaints is difficult to predict. The image and reputation of the business are negatively affected. At this time, not only will the business lose current customers, but the business will also lose the opportunity to gain a number of potential customers in the future.

1.2.4.3 Reduce Business Costs

Businesses can reduce a lot of costs if they perform customer care well. First, businesses will reduce the pressure from having to try to find new customers to ensure a stable revenue source for the company. To survive, a business must maintain a certain number of customers. This goal can be achieved in two ways: keeping existing customers or finding new customers. Every year, companies have to invest a lot of money in advertising programs to attract new customers. In fact, numerous studies have shown that it costs about six times more to acquire a new customer than it does to maintain an existing one. Therefore, if businesses do a good job of customer care and retain old customers, they will maintain a relatively stable number of customers, thereby significantly saving costs of finding new customers.

Second, for regular customers, businesses will reduce travel costs and advertise new products and services. Businesses only need to call, fax or send emails to customers to notify them of new products and services. Long-time customers can still place orders through this form.

Third, implementing good customer care will help businesses save time and money in the process of resolving customer complaints and questions. In response to customer complaints, if the customer care team works effectively, the problem will be resolved in the optimal time, avoiding prolonged complaints that cause discomfort for both parties.

1.2.4.4 Customer Care-An Important Competitive Weapon for Businesses in Today's Business Environment

The development of Marketing in general stems from one reason: competition in the market is becoming increasingly strong and fierce. The trend of globalization of the world economy has significantly impacted the current level of competition, not only within a country but also expanding to a region and the whole world. More and more domestic and foreign companies are appearing that can provide the same type of products and services. Attracting customers is a vital factor for the survival of a business

On the market, more and more suppliers appear, introducing products and services with similar quality and price, which gives customers more opportunities to choose. In addition to quality and price factors, customers increasingly pay attention to businesses' customer care activities. When a business cannot compete on price, customer service can be a lifesaver and become their competitive advantage.

According to a study by Cimigo Vietnam for ERC Institute, 87% of businesses believe that "Customer service is a key part of helping to compete in the international market". Customers are increasingly making careful and wise choices regarding services and goods. Products in the same segment usually have no difference in quality. However, sometimes, customers leave a business forever simply because of mistakes in the attitude and behavior of customer service staff, while these errors can be fixed. This has created opportunities for competitors to win customers. Therefore, businesses need to build effective strategies and competitive tools to survive and develop. And customer care is one of the most powerful competitive tools today.

1.3 Content of Customer Care Work

1.3.1 Form of Customer Care

1.3.1.1 Businesses Organize their Own Customer Care Networks

This is a form in which businesses organize their own facilities, facilities, human resources, locations... to outline customer care programs and plans. With this form, businesses will be proactive in customer care activities and be quick in collecting customer feedback. This requires businesses to invest in initial facilities, organize forces... If the business's capabilities are limited or the business is new to the market and must also focus on developing for other basic items, organizing a customer care network in this form will not be appropriate.

1.3.1.2 Enterprises Hire Other Organizations to Perform Customer Care Work

With this form, businesses can create many different customer care methods, have a wide customer care network and save human resources costs for customer care activities. However, with this form of collecting feedback from customers through many intermediaries, the accuracy and agility are greatly reduced and the cost will be more expensive than if the business organizes its own customer service customer care.

1.3.1.3 Enterprises Agree with Distributors so That They Can Take Care of Customers

This form has many advantages. Distributors are people who understand their products, customers, and technical facilities, so they have advantages in customer care. However, this form is probably only suitable for short-term plans. The reason is because businesses will be too passive in contacting and building relationships with their customers. This will lead to difficulties in implementing the company's long-term business development strategies.

Each business, depending on its size, organizational structure, customer base, market... will have different forms of customer care. Maintaining a certain form is not always the most effective and best. Choosing a suitable type of care is based on factors such as: Comprehensive ability, customer contact, control ability of the business, cost capacity of the business... In each period, In each different market, businesses can apply each form of customer care individually or in combination to create the highest efficiency.

1.3.2 Customer Care Methods

There are a variety of customer care methods currently used by businesses, each method has certain advantages and

disadvantages. To choose the most suitable method, businesses must base it on their requirements and resources. Customer care methods can be divided into the following 3 types.

1.3.2.1 Centralized Direct Care

Characteristics: This is a form of customer care at customer service centers. These centers are located in favorable geographical locations. The centers possess quality human resources and modern facilities to be able to perform customer care activities in the best way.

Advantages: Through direct communication, salespeople have the opportunity to understand customers clearly, recognize customer attitudes and then be able to adjust their behavior, with the support of specialized machinery and equipment. Especially modern, customers are cared for more carefully and enthusiastically. In addition to verbal language, there is also the impact of body language, which effectively expresses interest better.

Disadvantages: The cost of building a center is high, the number of centers is limited, so businesses can only locate in a few locations, where there is a large population and high customer density. That's why not all customers have the opportunity to come in person to receive service at customer care centers.

1.3.2.2 Direct and Distributed Care at the Customer's Address

Characteristics: At the customer's location, this form will be applied to large customer groups and special customers. The business sends a separate team of customer care specialists to the customer's address.

Advantages: Very high efficiency, proving the business's deep concern for customers. Customers will feel truly respected by the business because this form of care brings convenience in traveling and saves them maximum time.

Disadvantages: Requires businesses to have a large force of customer care specialists. Furthermore, this form of care also requires a huge cost to maintain. Therefore, customer care at the customer address is only applicable to large customer groups and special customers.

1.3.2.3 Indirect care

Characteristics: A form of customer care carried out through modern means of communication such as: By handwritten letter, by phone, via the Internet. This form is increasingly widely used with the development of communication means. **Human resources:** Need to organize a team of professional staff and establish a multimedia information system to serve customers.

Advantages: Brings benefits to both customers and businesses. Customers are served anytime, anywhere, without needing to go to sales points or customer service centers, without waiting for opening hours, they can sit right at home and still enjoy the service. Get the necessary information. Businesses can reach a wide range of customers at a cost that is not too high.

Disadvantages: The content of care activities is only information exchange. Without direct contact, employees cannot recognize customers' moods and attitudes, and cannot make them more satisfied. In general, the customer care efficiency of this form is not really optimal, especially for the support and care of large and important customers of the business.

1.3.3 Organize the Customer Care Apparatus

Each business is different and will have the most appropriate way to organize its customer care system so that the business's customers are best served. For each different customer group, there will be a suitable form of care, so the customer care apparatus is organized very flexibly in each business. Therefore, there is no unified model for organizing the customer care apparatus.

In every company or business, any department, division or employee has customers, be they external customers or internal customers. Therefore, customer care activities are a common activity of the whole company and need to be seriously implemented by everyone. The customer care apparatus needs to be operated throughout the enterprise, from managers to ordinary employees.

For external customers, customer care activities are undertaken by the customer care department or a department within the sales department. For internal customers, customer care activities will belong to all members of the company. Leaders need to build a good corporate culture to make this activity most effective.

The decision to choose the scale and structure of the customer care department in each business depends on many factors: product and service characteristics, customer characteristics, business capacity... In businesses large, with a large number of customers, the customer care department operates independently of other departments such as market research, sales, marketing, advertising... This helps staff to take care of their customers. Customers can focus on completing their tasks well. In small businesses, due to limited funding and human resources, customer service staff can concurrently handle other jobs such as sales staff, market research staff, etc.

The customer care department of the business is responsible for general management and coordination of all activities of specialized staff and sales staff. In 12 companies where customer care activities are given special importance, this department can be upgraded to the Sales and Marketing Department under the company Director.

To enhance the operational efficiency of the customer care apparatus, businesses today often build an internal customer care information system. In this system, the tasks and functions of the component departments are clearly defined, in which the customer care department plays the main role, responsible for coordinating the activities of other departments. Customer information entering the system (input information) is processed according to a unified, reasonable process to obtain feedback information (output information) in the fastest and most effective way.

1.3.4 Principles of Customer Care

Customer care activities of each business must also follow certain principles as follows:

1.3.4.1 First Principle: "Suitable to Customer Needs"

Sell what customers need - The main ideology of modern Marketing is also applied to customer care activities. Although customer care activities aim to add value to the core product, it only truly satisfies customers when it is necessary for the customer. Businesses cannot propose customer care content based on subjective thoughts but must rely on customers' wishes.

- Customer care content:

These are the specific activities that businesses will conduct

to serve customers according to customers' wishes. To do so, businesses need to regularly investigate and grasp the needs and desires of customers.

The more diverse and greater the level of customer care content, the more satisfied customers will be. However, implementing a customer care program also depends on the ability of the business (financial resources, human resources...), which means ensuring the customer care plan is feasible. Normally, businesses will decide on the content and level of customer care based on the following factors

- + Customer needs.

- + Competitors' customer care activities.

- + The ability of the business itself to respond.

The most basic thing is that businesses must balance between efficiency and costs.

- Level of customer care:

Shows indicators of quality, volume, scale, frequency... conducting customer care activities. A customer conference can include a few dozen or a few hundred customers, and can be held semi-annually or once a year. A souvenir gift for a customer on New Year's Eve can be just a postcard or a calendar, but it can also be a more expensive gift like a watch or a bottle of wine.

In short, businesses need to apply care activities appropriately to bring the highest efficiency with minimum cost. Building a customer care website to help customers place orders, change orders, pay... online or organize semi-annual customer conferences, although in theory is very useful, but is it really effective for a small business with a small number of customers? Therefore, businesses need to consider carefully when building a customer care system that is suitable for their customers.

1.3.4.2 Second Principle: "Suitable for Each Customer Segment"

Dividing customers into groups for care is similar to market segmentation in Marketing in general. Customer group division can also be based on differences in needs, personality, and behavior. Each market segment is composed of people who are relatively homogeneous in their needs and respond similarly to the same set of marketing stimuli. Market segmentation is the basis for businesses to best meet customer needs according to their capabilities.

However, the most important division basis that businesses often use is the revenue (profit) that each customer brings. Based on this criterion, customers are divided into: special customers, large customers, average customers, small customers... The purpose of customer grouping is to understand the needs of each customer. Group and identify key customer groups that need care.

In customer care activities, businesses often give special care to large customer groups. According to the Pareto 80:20 rule, a common rule in economic activities, 20% of customers bring 80% of revenue (profit). These 20% of customers play an important role for the business. By keeping this 20%, the business will maintain a relatively stable amount of revenue (profit). Therefore, based on the report on revenue (profit) at the end of each period, businesses must accurately determine the number of 20% of large customers to prioritize care. For these customers, the content of care activities must be more diverse and at a greater level. The older the customer, the more special care they receive. In addition, businesses can drill down to

identify the 10% or 5% of largest customers that are of particular interest.

Customer needs in terms of service as well as product needs are very rich and diverse. If all of those needs are met, businesses will have to incur large costs and unnecessary waste. Each customer group has a certain need. By grouping customers and understanding the exact needs of each group, businesses can both satisfy customer groups and limit costs.

1.3.4.3 Third Principle: "Suitable to the Stages of the Purchasing Process"

It can be seen that care activities bring regular convenience in all three stages of the purchasing process to help customers easily access, make a buying decision and then be convenient in use. products and services. Enterprises conduct these activities with the purpose of showing respect for customers, thereby improving customer satisfaction and strengthening the relationship between businesses and customers.

The buying process is often divided into three stages: pre-purchase stage, purchase decision stage and post-purchase stage. At each stage, customers have different concerns, so the level of care is also different. Customer care needs to be carried out in all three stages above with content and methods appropriate to the characteristics of each stage.

▪ Pre-purchase stage

At this stage, the need does not necessarily arise from customers, but businesses can proactively stimulate and create a desire for products and services. Businesses can use advertising forms such as newspapers, websites, flyers to provide information to customers. The customer care content at this stage is to introduce product features, prices, quality, utilities, instructions for use.

▪ Purchase decision stage.

After evaluating options, customers come to a purchasing decision. However, from the purchasing decision to purchasing, there are still obstacles such as: purchasing conditions, purchasing location, payment methods, after-sales services... To promote the purchasing process, businesses It is necessary to eliminate obstacles from the business side by arranging convenient sales points, diverse payment methods, and rich and attractive after-sales service content.

Another obstacle to purchasing decisions comes from customers themselves, their "fastidiousness". To win the hearts of customers, businesses must create a spacious, clean sales space with fully equipped facilities; Sales staff are warm, enthusiastic, knowledgeable about products, skilled in operations, agile. Customer care during this period must focus on creating maximum comfort and convenience. For customers when purchasing products.

▪ Phase after purchase.

For any business, the most important thing is not to find new customers but how to retain old customers, so that customers come back to continue buying and using the business's products and services. Karma. Customer satisfaction is not necessarily due to the core value of the service, but largely due to the surrounding services. These surrounding values have enabled customers to perceive service quality in a better way. At this time, customers feel that the business cares about them, so they begin to have sympathy for the business. And in the future, when customers have a need, they will immediately think of the

business that has satisfied their needs very well before. For many customers, after making a purchase, they also value the business's after-sales care and take it as a criterion for choosing.

Customer care activities at this stage focus on consulting and helping customers while using products and services and building relationships between customers and businesses, improving customer capabilities. Will return to the business in the future.

1.3.5 Criteria for Evaluating Customer Care System

The quality of customer care services in service providers is affected by three basic factors:

The physical environment of the service includes vehicles, service delivery equipment, ground conditions, buildings, service support facilities. Ensure good physical environment factors that bring about Comfortable and convenient for both parties to help customer care activities take place more effectively.

The quality of the organization providing customer care services includes the following factors: organizational methods, management, and policies of the enterprise for customer care activities. This is a group of professional factors that are considered the foundation of customer care activities.

Quality of people performing customer care work. This factor considers the capacity of customer service staff. These are the people who represent the company's image in the eyes of customers. A business that has good facilities as well as a perfect customer care program but lacks employees with skillful communication skills will not be able to bring complete satisfaction to customers. customers can. Therefore, this is a very important factor in determining the success of a business's customer care system.

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