



**THE QUALITY OF SERVICE AS A COMPETITIVE DIFFERENTIAL FOR
CUSTOMER MAINTENANCE IN AN AUTOMOTIVE COMPANY IN IMPERATRIZ
- MA**

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ABSTRACT

In this research it was studied how the quality of service can be a competitive differential for the maintenance of customers in an automobile company in Imperatriz - MA. It became visible how essential this tool is in such a competitive market. In order to prove it, interviews were carried out with six employees and a manager. Data were collected through interviews, using the accessibility method. It is a qualitative and exploratory research, to facilitate understanding and make opinions clear. The intention was to make known the great relevance of the subject, and also to promote future major investments related to it.

Key words: Service quality. Competitive edge. Customer maintenance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, quality has become essential for success in any organization. The clientele becomes more and more demanding and the market more competitive. For total customer satisfaction, it is necessary to seek feedback from them to make sure that the product or service is in line with expectations. From this point it can be said that the good relationship between company and customer is intrinsic to excellence in service, since for there to be quality in service it is necessary to know the customer. It is assumed that a company has a competitive advantage when it offers advantages that make it stand out from its competitors. And quality in service can be considered as this competitive differential.

Based on this theme, this work has the following problem: “How does service quality become a competitive differential for customer maintenance in an automobile company in Imperatriz - MA? ”

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The main objective of the research was investigate how service quality becomes a competitive differential for customer maintenance in an automobile company in Imperatriz - MA. Then the specifics that aim to (i) identify the profile of managers; (ii) identify the profile of employees; (iii) ascertain the importance of quality in customer service; (iv) investigate the strategies that allow the maintenance of these customers.

2 WHAT IS QUALITY

Much is said about quality, but the real understanding on the subject, few have. Several authors talk about quality, trying to give people the correct understanding of what it actually represents.

The distinction of something of quality exists in day-to-day situations, when going to the market to buy fruits and selecting the best ones, for example. The separation of quality products is not something recent, it is unconsciously done throughout history.

Juran (1992) considers that what characterizes a quality product or service is the absence of deficiencies. The organization must propose to minimize product deficiencies as much as possible so that there is more and more excellence in quality.

Another interesting concept of quality is from the perspective of Crosby (1986), he states that if the product complies with its specifications, the product is of quality. It is observed that if a product is aligned with what is proposed by the manufacturer, it is fulfilling the expectations generated by the customer ...

3 QUALITY IN THE DEMING LIGHT

William Edwards Deming has a brilliant track record in the study of quality. The concepts created by him are approached in many places in a considerable way when studying

the subject. He is considered the father of the industrial renaissance in Japan, and still, as a quality guru in the United States. Deming is well known for his 14 point philosophy.

The author preaches that quality is the path to success, the less variability, the more quality one has.

According to Deming (1990, p.22), “quality is everything that improves the product from the customer's point of view”. Quality is intrinsically linked to the impression the customer has on a particular product or service. A curious fact is that the concept of quality may vary since the customer's needs may change.

Since the difficulty of translating customers' future needs is true, Deming seeks to be cautious about the definition of quality.

What is perceived is that for Deming, only the customer can define whether the service or product is of quality or not. The entrepreneur must search for research strategies with consumers so that their expectations are fully met or even exceeded.

4 COMPETITIVENESS IN THE MARKET

With the increase in competition, organizations realized the need to seek new strategies for customer maintenance. The customer who used to buy in a certain company even though he is not so satisfied, today companies offer a range of options capable of meeting their needs and exceeding their expectations.

Each client has a different personality, different requirements, since each has its uniqueness and peculiarity. Thus, they cannot be treated in a mechanical and unified way. It is necessary, first, to analyze the profile of each one.

A company has a competitive advantage when it offers advantages that make it stand out from its competitors. According to Schermerhorn (2007), achieving goals and offering excellent service and quality products is not always an easy task. However, when this is what we are looking for, it can become an important source of competitive advantage, which is certainly relevant for organizations.

5 QUALITY X RELATIONSHIP

In view of the multitude of products and services perfectly capable of meeting the needs of customers, relationship marketing becomes indispensable. And according to Las Casas (2012), this transformation process brought about a fierce competition with the competition. The companies started to see customers with different eyes, and valuing them through the strengthening of the relationship.

The good relationship between company and customer is intrinsic to service excellence, since in order for there to be quality service, it is necessary to know the customer. According to Hitt (2005), the relationship with the client is strengthened when the company adds value superior to him, thus, this strong bond becomes a competitive differential, promoting the maintenance of this client.

Having knowledge of the needs and preferences of its customers, the company has the possibility to work continuously to ensure that these are met. And you can be prepared for future needs. The positive results for the company are quite considerable when it establishes a lasting relationship with the customer.

According to Tschohl (1996), customers consider that all employees are the company. And this contact that is made at the time of service is crucial to create a bond and thus gain trust. This relationship between customer and company goes beyond good price and good products. It is linked to feelings involved at the moment in the service, and these will be recorded in the customer's memory, thus promoting their maintenance in the company.

6 NATURE OF RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

6.1 Nature of the research

6.1.1 Justification

It is noticeable that there are problems in relation to customer service in Imperatriz - MA. This research is valid and necessary as an attempt to answer the questions raised about this approach. Today the city of Imperatriz has a wide, dynamic market, with new auto companies settling in the region, and the quality of service, and the concern to invest more and more in tools that help the maintenance of customers is becoming increasingly

indispensable. . Most of the time, customers are difficult to win and easy to lose, so they cannot end the search for well-designed strategies to ensure their maintenance. The manager must always be one step ahead, look beyond the margin, have a holistic view, among others. Therefore, the relevance of promoting this research. It should be noted the situation of commerce in Imperatriz - MA with respect to quality in customer service in general, it is known that there are numerous deficiencies in this area, either due to lack of preparation, or lack of knowledge on the subject. Some companies have not yet paid attention to the fact that quality is essential, especially when it comes to competitiveness and maintaining customers. Much is asked about the value of the client, but little is done to optimize these relationships. even more when it comes to competitiveness and customer retention. Much is asked about the value of the client, but little is done to optimize these relationships. even more when it comes to competitiveness and customer retention. Much is asked about the value of the client, but little is done to optimize these relationships.

6.1.2 PROBLEM

How does service quality become a competitive differential for customer maintenance in an automobile company in Imperatriz - MA?

6.1.3 OBJECTIVES

6.1.3.1 General

Investigate how service quality becomes a competitive differential for customer maintenance in an automobile company in Imperatriz - MA.

6.1.3.2 Specific

- Identify the profile of managers;
- Identify the profile of employees;
- Investigate the importance of quality in customer service;
- Investigate the strategies that allow the maintenance of these customers.

6.2 Methodological Framework

6.2.1 Participants: Population, sample and selection criteria.

Concerning the research universe, it will be an automobile company in Imperatriz - MA. Related to the universe Lakatos (2008) comments that this is where the phenomena related to the problem occur. From this universesix employees and one manager will participate. Regarding the sample of participants, the accessibility criterion will be used, which according to Vergara (2009) is a safe method, as this criterion aims to obtain information through free access to participants, which in the past will not interfere in the research result.

6.2.2 Participants: Population, sample and selection criteria.

The most coherent type of research for the phenomenon in question will be qualitative and exploratory research, which aims to explore and investigate phenomena related to the problem.

For this, Gil (2008) says that exploratory research aims to facilitate understanding and \ or understanding, making appreciations and opinions clearer. Regarding qualitative research, Bauer and Gaskell (2003) say that this type of applicability makes the development of research more grounded and richer in information.

6.2.3 Instruments for data collection or generation

Interviews involving managers and employees will be conducted. Thus, Lakatos and Marconi (1999) say that both research methods and techniques must be adapted to the problem to be examined. Therefore, the researcher aims to develop the proposal of the aforementioned authors.

6.2.4 Procedures

Data construction will take place in the company's environment. A priori it will be clarified about the researcher's intention, as well as the research theme and objective, thus, each participant will have to sign the informed consent form to give more reliability to the research.

6.2.5 Data analysis strategy

The strategies used to analyze the data will be through content and discourse analysis. About content analysis Moraes (1999) mentions that it is instituted in a research methodology used to describe and explain the content of documents and texts, conducting the descriptions in a methodical, qualitative or quantitative way, helping a greater integration of a trivial reading.

7 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The survey was carried out involving a manager and six company employees. The manager interviewed is identified as manager, and employees C1, C2, C3, C4, C5 and C6. This is to ensure full understanding of the research findings.

7.1 What employees say

The data obtained together with their analyzes were divided into five categories. That are:

1. Employee profile
2. Conception of the importance of quality in care
3. Exposure of quality policies disseminated in the company
4. Existence of quality improvement programs
5. Identification of strategies used to retain customers

7.1.1 First Category - Employee profile

COLLABORATOR	GENRE	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION	OCCUPATION	WORKING TIME
C1	F	23	SINGLE	GRADUATE IN ADMINISTRATION	RELATIONSHIP ASSISTANT	1 YEAR AND 8 MONTHS
C2	F	22	SINGLE	GRADUATE IN ADMINISTRATION	RELATIONSHIP ASSISTANT	8 MONTHS
C3	F	26	SINGLE	ADMINISTRATION	RELATIONSHIP ASSISTANT	8 MONTHS
C4	F	19	SINGLE	GRADUATE IN ADMINISTRATION	RELATIONSHIP ASSISTANT	6 MONTHS
C5	F	20	SINGLE	GRADUATE IN ADMINISTRATION	RELATIONSHIP ASSISTANT	1 YEAR
C6	F	25	SINGLE	GRADUATE IN ADMINISTRATION	SERVICES CONSULTANT	4 YEARS AND 2 MONTHS

The table below contains data regarding the profile of employees in order to identify their characteristics for better analysis.

7.1.2 Second Category - Conception of the importance of quality in service

In the second category, he was asked about the importance of quality of care. And with respect to this question, C1 replied: “Quality in service is one of the most important tools of the company”. C2 states that: “Good service is essential in the company”. C3 explains: “Through this service, we can grow”. It can be seen that the first three respondents share the understanding that quality of care is important, and even more, it is a powerful tool for the company. C1 and C2 put quality as a strong point, stating that it is one of the most important and essential tools for the company, respectively. C3 sees the possibility of growth for the company when working with good service.

Still on the same question, C4 ensures that: It is very important because, the reason the company exists is to meet someone's need, and that someone is the customer. The customer has been wanting the need to be met, and if he doesn't have it, he won't be back ”.

C5 mentions: "If you don't have a customer, you don't have a company. We are very fond of the client ". C6 says: "Quality of service is the door for the customer, it is the first view that the customer has of the company". C4 shows the importance of being well served, and understands that the quality of care is in meeting the customer's need. C5 adds superior value to the customer when he says that without him there is no possibility of a company. According to C6's speech, it is possible to perceive the importance of the customer's first impression of the company,

Based on the employees' responses, it can be seen that they are aware of the importance of quality service to the organization, and this can be considered a great advantage for the company.

7.1.3 Third Category - Exposure of quality policies disseminated in the company

In this category, he was asked about the company's quality policies, and regarding this matter C1 states: "This policy is to serve well, always to treat the customer with patience. Our main policy is to satisfy the customer, it is always to serve well ". C2 says that: "Exceeding expectations, providing good service. Prioritize good service ". C3 states: "We have a policy of always satisfying you and always serving you with clarity". C4 mentions that: "The first policy is to provide quality service". C6 states that: "The preparation of the personnel who work with the service". Through the employees' responses, it was observed that the company is concerned with making clear the quality of care policies. This is important because in addition to having these policies within the organization, it is essential that the entire team of employees are aware of them. The objective of satisfying the client and always exceeding his expectations was clear in the interviews. In addition, there is a concern on the part of the company for this to happen, which demonstrates this is the promotion of specific training for the entire team.

7.1.4 Fourth Category - Existence of quality improvement programs

Concerning the fourth category, the question was about the existence of quality improvement programs. And on the C2 theme, he stressed that: "There are training courses focused on this, for quality of care". C4 "We have internal and external training as well, and in partnership with other institutions, Senac and Senai. This influences a lot, adds a lot to our

functions ”. C6 says that: "The call center is attentive to know where it needs to improve". C2's answer points to the existence of training to improve the quality of care, which is done internally and externally. It is important to seek knowledge abroad, it is enriching, to always be in search of new strategies and stay one step ahead. And this quest for continuous improvement is also demonstrated by the mention made by C6,

7.1.5 Fifth Category - Identification of strategies used to retain customers

Regarding this category, the question was about the strategies used to keep customers. C1 says: “We have the birthday campaign, there is a client who says: you were the first to remember me. This captivates the customer, he ends up becoming loyal because of these things ”. About this, C2 says: "We called to see if he was well attended, if the service was well done ...". C3 responded by saying: “On the customer's birthday we called and offered a free checkup on his motorcycle”. Regarding this, C5 says: “In the anniversary campaign we call to bring the customer to the store, and for him to see that we are always remembering him”. It is clear that the company invests in relationships with customers and that it is being used as a tool to maintain them. This concern for the client and these “treats” please him.

7.2 What the manager says

Regarding the interviewed manager, data were collected to identify his profile. And then some questions, as well as the importance of emphasizing service quality, if the company considers this quality as a competitive differential, it was asked about the strategies used to keep customers, among others. Regarding her professional profile, she claimed to be 30 years old, female, married, graduated in accounting. She has been with the company for five years and is the supervisor of quality and customer service.

The manager was asked about the importance of working, emphasizing the quality of care. And his answer was: “It is very important because the service is the gateway for the customer. If we do not provide good service, which is the gateway to the client, he will not come back. The service says a lot about the profile of the company and its service and about the final service ”. Based on this statement, the manager shows that the quality of service is something of great importance within the company. The concept of employees on the same

subject is similar to that of the manager, and this is a positive point for the team and for the company in general.

The second question was whether the company considers service quality as a competitive advantage. The manager stated that: "Yes, when I don't like a service, I don't come back. That's why we have a complaints center, to treat the customer when he doesn't like something. When the customer complains he has the intention to stay, when he does not complain, he simply changes suppliers ". Due to the fact that the company considers quality as a competitive advantage, we can see the commitment to not fail with the customer, to always be in contact with him to get feedback on the service and service. It is interesting the point at which the manager affirms that if the customer complains, it is because he intends to remain in the company, receiving constructive criticism generates growth if they are well received. And no one better than the client to do this analysis. It is better to keep the customer already won than to attract new ones. When the customer is well served he is kept in the company, and the manager has shown to be aware of this.

Then it was asked whether the company directs its efforts towards the continuous improvement of the quality of service. And in response he said: "We hold periodic critical review meetings, each customer complaint is dealt with individually". The manager showed that to know where to improve it is necessary to have the client's participation in this process. We work with a minimum percentage of errors in these analyzes. And as much as the results are satisfactory, there is always how to improve more. This is a positive point, the company should never stagnate thinking that it is already well enough.

He also questioned the strategies used to keep customers. The manager mentioned that: "Customer service training every year, with Senac staff and outside. Training through the concessionaire's internal HR, training employees in a timely manner, through feedback, training ... ". The strategies used are all focused on customer service. The training that is carried out in this sense is aimed at increasing customer satisfaction more and more, and keeping them in the company.

Therefore, it was asked how quality in customer service promotes positive and significant results. To this end, the manager said: "What we are most happy about when we know we are providing a quality service. It is when a client of ours speaks well of our products, speaks well of our service. This is the best advertisement, not radio or TV advertising. Our best advertisement, our best tool is our customer ". It is amazing what a satisfied customer can generate for the organization. According to the manager's speech, there

is mutual satisfaction between the company and the customer. Based on this satisfaction, the bond between the two is strengthened. And staying in this condition is very important for the company. It was seen that the team of employees is in tune with the manager, this based on all the information collected. And that is one of the key points to achieve the objectives.

8 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The theme addressed in this article was about quality of service as a competitive differential for maintaining customers in an automobile company in Imperatriz-MA.

Starting from the problem, how the quality of service becomes a competitive differential for the maintenance of customers in an automobile company in Imperatriz-MA. During the article the question was answered, and the method used proved to be effective for this research.

The specific objectives were also achieved, which were: (i) to identify the profile of managers; (ii) identify the profile of employees; (iii) ascertain the importance of quality in customer service; (iv) investigate the strategies that allow the maintenance of these customers. The general objective was also reached, which was to investigate how the quality of service becomes a competitive differential for the maintenance of customers.

This research was of great relevance to the business scenario of Imperatriz-MA. Concern about the topic has increased, and this work can serve as an incentive for other companies. It was seen that in fact the quality of service is a strong point for companies. And that even with such fierce competition and with an increasingly demanding clientele, there are ways to stand out.

This work had the purpose to answer the questions about the theme, and also to make companies seek to have this vision focused on quality in customer service. And being one step ahead in a competitive market like that of Imperatriz-MA.

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