

Define and Execute the IDEAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE



Apple. Zappos. Nordstrom. All of these companies are renowned for their exemplary customer service. So what makes them different? How did they create and maintain this reputation? Creating the ideal customer service experience starts with first understanding, and then predicting your customer's needs, and then incorporating a system to ensure that these needs are met for each and every customer. In today's age of impersonal technology, it's also about crafting an unforgettable experience that makes people feel special and valued. So how do the best do it?

Carmine Gallo, communication advisor and bestselling author of *The Apple Experience* (carminegallo.com) wrote about the five steps of service that serve as the foundation of Apple employee training.

1. **Approach customers with a personalized, warm welcome.**
Gallo noted that the customer's perception of their experience is formed in the first ten seconds of interaction. First impressions will guide the experience moving forward.
2. **Probe politely to understand all the customer's needs.**
Both closed and open-ended questions are posed to gather information about the customer and determine what product is the best match for them.

3. **Present a solution for the customer to take home today.**
Apple employees are reminded that they are there not to sell a computer, but to enrich the life of a customer.
4. **LISTEN for and resolve any issues or concerns.**
This is when the employee needs to listen and dig deeper into both the expressed and unexpressed needs of the customer in order to present the best solution.
5. **End with a fond farewell and an invitation to return.**
Give the customer a reason to return. Gallo said, "How a person feels when they end a transaction significantly impacts how they perceive the brand and whether they are likely to recommend the brand to others."

Micah Solomon is a customer service consultant who works with dental practices and other industries (available at www.micahsolomon.com, Micah@micahsolomon.com or via phone or text at (484) 343-5881). As a consultant, he encourages all businesses to benchmark the greats of customer service. Last year, he visited the Zappos facility and interviewed CEO Tony Hsieh in order to gain more insight on Zappos' celebrated customer service methodology. He wrote that the best way to understand Zappos and its approach to customer service is to study the chalkboard on the wall of Zappos' onsite contact center.

The board, called the "Daily Breakdown Report," lists just three categories of customer interaction along with the number of inquiries received and the average response time.

- Phonez
- Live Chatz
- Emailz

He noted that the responses were heavily weighted six- or sevenfold toward phone interaction and was told the reason behind this is because Zappos puts their customer service number front and center and encourages customers to call 24/7, versus many other companies that hide their phone number. The chalkboard also includes hand-drawn stats reporting the number of flowers, cookies, postcards and other "wow gifts" that have been sent to customers. The insight Solomon gained about Zappos' exemplary customer service wasn't about the gifts; their differentiator is the phone. To Zappos employees, the telephone represents human-on-human contact with customers and time spent engaging on the phone is encouraged and celebrated company-wide. This company wants to be the customer's friend.

Solomon also writes about Nordstrom's superior customer experience. He shares five lessons from Nordstrom that can be implemented in any business.

- 1. Hire right, and then empower your employees.**
Empower employees that it's their job to creatively come up with the right customer solutions.
- 2. Make it personal**
Send marketing emails from an address that can be replied to. Have real employees handle online chats and encourage an authentic response to customer concerns, not just script-based.
- 3. Charge what you're worth, by minimizing price as a consideration**
This takes guts and the ability to provide a safe, reliable and pleasurable customer experience that makes the price worthwhile.
- 4. Use technology to streamline the customer experience and achieve "digital parity."**
Every business needs to be as good as the best purely online companies.
- 5. Stay modest and always think how much better you can be than you are now.**
Modesty keeps a company open to improving.

While there are lessons to be learned and applied from the big-name companies that have spent many years and many dollars to build their customer service brand, every industry is still unique. Dental laboratory professionals struggle with small or non-existent dedicated customer service staff, product commoditization, price-pressure, and changing clientele dynamic. Similar to the big chains, however, there are certain elements of creating the ideal customer service experience that ring true across the board.

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Left: Distinctive Dental Studio's Custom Shade Room offers the warmth of an antique barber's chair. It is our desire to pay homage to the history of dentistry and the barber's chair is where it all began. Patients are delighted when they see the melding of the past with the technological advancements of the future. They take away an exceptional, extraordinary experience that cannot be duplicated by other laboratories.



Above: Distinctive Dental Studio's Custom Chocolate



James J. Gorgol, CDT
Distinctive Dental
Studio, CDL, President

Distinctive Dental Studio Ltd., CDL, Naperville, Ill., is a moderately sized lab that strives to provide the service and relationship of a "small lab" while also offering "large lab" resources of technology and education. Many of their clients are generated by referrals, attendance at their seminar series, direct mail, website, or by their outside customer service staff. James J. Gorgol, CDT, president of Distinctive Dental Studio and current Chairman of the Cal-Lab Group, shares a few things that have helped define their customer service experience.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is key. While there are many forms of communication available today, it's important to be the initiator in providing multiple opportunities for clients to provide feedback.

Gorgol said, "After a dentist has expressed interest, we send out an informational packet which is then followed up by either a phone call or a personal visit. Our practice care coordinator reaches out to get key information and after the case is modeled we call to ask their preferences regarding occlusion and materials. Once the case is completed a handwritten thank you note is sent along with a request for feedback. The first case is personally delivered along with a box of truffles with our logo embossed. At one month following the date of the first case a follow-up

letter is sent along with a survey asking their opinion and what they would like to see from us. We found that we have had to adjust our communication by customer age group. Younger doctors much prefer text and email which makes it tough to build a personal relationship. Whenever possible though we send photos to help visualize what the client is speaking about."

COMPETITIVE EDGE

Gorgol knows that his laboratory cannot compete on price and has established his differentiator of outstanding customer service, just as Zappos builds loyalty through providing that personal touch.

"Our customers see the value in the fees we charge," said Gorgol. "Three things we stress are 'Family Owned,' 'American Made' and 'We treat our clients like Family.' We also offer free pickup and delivery within our delivery zone (the greater Chicagoland area) and feature a no-fault warranty. I would much rather remake a case than lose a client by arguing over whose fault it is that we must remake a single BruxZir crown. The potential lifetime value of the client by far outweighs the need to 'be right.' Whatever your "mantra" is, tell your clients by word, through your literature, and in the way you do business. Most importantly, be consistent with your message."



New Image Dental Lab sales team

CONNECTION

New Image Dental Laboratory, CDL, Morrow, Ga., has also developed a reputation as a high-touch laboratory. Like many other labs, they send out welcome letters and questionnaires and place phone calls to discuss the first case and to gather preferences. Once a case is returned, a territory manager follows up to ensure expectations were met. So what makes them different? The drive to build connection.

“It is imperative that New Image clients know that we value them and that their cases are just as important to our lab as it is to them and their patients,” said Debbie Schmidt, Sales Manager. “In our case, we have a customer service team of eight people, including territory managers, in place to ensure that each client receives the same protocol and personal touch. But you don’t need anything fancy or expensive to provide a great customer experience, just time and commitment. Even with a small team, time should be made to acknowledge a new client and get to know them. We strive for long-term relationships so it is critical to establish a partnership early on.”

COLLABORATION

In addition to the New Image territory managers who are face-to-face with their clients on a daily basis, another important element woven into their

customer service team is the surgical assistant. The surgical assistant perfectly rounds off the customer service team by going chairside with the clients to help with the most complex to the simplest of cases. While every laboratory strives to provide the basic elements of customer service, the most impressionable ones will go the extra mile. In this evolving industry, it’s about establishing the lab as an indispensable partner and resource, and not just a company that provides a product.

“Many of our new clients are surprised at the level of customer service they receive from New Image Dental Lab,” said Fay Ashley, Director of Customer Relations. “It is quite a different experience from many businesses today and they are very appreciative of the personal attention.”

There’s a reason why certain organizations have a good customer service reputation. They defined the customer needs they wanted to meet, determined how to best execute their strategy and then consistently implemented these steps throughout all avenues of customer interaction in order to create the ideal customer service experience. In short, they earned it. Laboratories of any size, revenue and specialty can do this too. Start with genuine care for the customer and the rest will roll naturally from there. **JDT**



Fay Ashley,
New Image Dental Lab, CDL



Debbie Schmidt,
New Image Dental Lab, CDL