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Customer Service has Five Quality Elements

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Roaming Gnome was tourism gold mine

As many of you may have seen or heard, the Travelocity Roaming Gnome visited Savannah recently to promote our beautiful city



Melissa Yao

as a top tourism destination to their national audience.

The objective of the Gnome's visit was to raise Visit Savannah's social capital. This promotion was a chance for us to take advantage

of Travelocity's leading position within social media (45,913 Twitter followers and 84,718 Facebook fans), and it offered us a fresh and engaging platform to use to spread our message of Savannah as a destination.

To say the Gnome was well received in Savannah would be the understatement of the year – people went crazy over the Gnome. His celebrity status generated a lot of chatter in Savannah, as well as on all Social Media networks for both Visit Savannah and Travelocity.

In fact, many Visit Savannah and Travelocity fans talked about how much they love Savannah and all of the Gnome's adventures – most of them can't wait to visit for the first time or for a return trip.

Many of the most popular attractions in Savannah were showcased online and in print through the Gnome's tour of Savannah, including Tybee Island,



The Crab Shack, Bonaventure Cemetery, Historic Downtown Savannah, The Lady and Sons, River Street, the Hyatt, Mrs. Wilkes' Boarding House, Churchill's, the Ships of the Sea Museum, the Chamber's Annual Taste of Downtown, the Historic Savannah Theatre, the Savannah Slow Ride, the Owen-Thomas House and many more.

During the Gnome's three day visit, at least 30 Savannah Chamber members/partners were impacted positively by interactions with the Gnome.

Online, Visit Savannah was impacted greatly in our social media statistics. More than 390,000 impressions occurred on our Facebook page during the visit.

On Twitter, @Visit Savannah

acquired 317 new followers in the week that the Gnome visited, and the @RoamingGnome account tweeted to over 14,080 qualified twitter travelers.

Travelocity also retweeted the information to more than 45,913 followers on their official Twitter page.

There are also custom photo albums on the Travelocity (Roaming Gnome) Facebook page, which reaches their 84,718 Facebook fans and generated a total of 180,458 impressions.

Their video with our Forrest Gump impersonator generated 49,531 impressions on top of that.

Travelocity's online numbers on the visit include 42 out-going tweets with 805 interactions with retweets. The total impact of the social media interactions and



Photos courtesy of Visit Savannah / Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce

Many of the most popular attractions in Savannah were showcased online and in print through the Travelocity Gnome's tour of Savannah, including Tybee Island, The Crab Shack, Bonaventure Cemetery, Historic Downtown Savannah, The Lady and Sons and River Street.

impressions translates to a 5 percent increase in followers for Visit Savannah both on Twitter and Facebook with 317 new followers on Twitter and 2,147 new followers on Facebook.

Additionally, we experienced great local and national media coverage with the Gnome's visit covered by CNBC, WSAV, WTOG, WJCL, South Magazine, blogs like "With a Southern Twist", The National Post Canada, and the Gnome was even on the front page of the Savannah Morning News.

Travelocity has been a key partner in driving tourism to Savannah, delivering 39,002 rooms sold into the Savannah market in 2010. This was an increase of more than 20 percent from 2009 or an impressive 6,500 additional hotel nights into the market.

Additionally, packaged room nights, including airfare, were also up 3.3 percent from 2009. The Roaming Gnome's visit to Savannah was a unique and successful drive of awareness and tourism to our city, reaching nearly 9 million travelers overall through Twitter, Facebook, email and media.

Visit Savannah looks forward to the additional benefits of a future visit as more and more visitors follow in the Roaming Gnome's footsteps.

For more information on the Gnome's adventures in Savannah, contact me at 912-644-6431 or MYao@VisitSavannah.com.

Melissa Yao is the vice president, communications, of the Savannah Chamber of Commerce and Visit Savannah.

Customer service has five quality elements

My last column discussed the importance of customer service and the critical role salespeople play in the service quality delivery process. I also discussed how difficult it can be to consistently deliver quality service.

I ended that column with a promise to summarize a stream of research that has identified five areas of service that, across industry, seem most important to consumers. I firmly believe addressing these five areas can enhance customer service in either the business-to-consumer or business-to-business markets. To deliver quality service, we must first know what customers value in terms of service.

While the specifics of customer service expectations vary from person to person, a stream

of research by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry that began in the 1980's has identified the five key components of service quality that customers tend to desire regardless of the industry. Understanding and focusing on these five components can help the salesperson deliver outstanding service.

The first component of service quality is reliability. In this case reliability essentially means consistency.

Remember how annoyed you were the last time you rushed to arrive at a business before closing only to find they had closed a few minutes early that day? Reliability suggests that a business will not close five minutes early and the salesperson will consistently deliver on any promises made to the prospect.

For example, if the salesperson promises to delivery a proposal on Wednesday, the proposal will be delivered Wednesday (or

before).

The second component of service quality is responsiveness.

In any ongoing relationship, problems are going to arise. When things go wrong, the customer wants to be able to contact the salesperson and get a timely response to the problems. The salesperson who cannot be found after the contract is signed does not have a place in today's relationship-driven sales environment.

The third component of service quality is assurance.

In this context, assurance suggests the customer feels safe dealing with a salesperson and his/her organization. Of course, the financial consultant must have the proper credentials, but they must also seem confident in their abilities.

In my own research with "expert" salespeople, I have often heard them talk about the necessity of selling themselves and

their own ability. In other words, assuring the prospect that they are safely in good hands with this salesperson.

The fourth component of service quality is empathy.

Regardless of the relationship, from physicians to auto mechanics, we like to deal with people and organizations that tend to care about us as individuals. The salesperson who doesn't take time to listen to the customer clearly shows a lack of empathy.

The fifth component of service quality is tangible aspects of service quality.

Tangible aspects of service quality are tangible items, such as the salesperson's office, car, clothes, brochures, etc., that suggest to the prospect the quality of service they will receive.

If we want to deliver good customer service, it is important we excel in each of these five components of service quality. While this may seem simplistic, we

often see salespeople and organizations failing in these areas.

For example, consider the financial consulting organization that uses cheap-looking collateral materials. Every aspect of that organization, from the salesperson's office and clothes to the brochures and letterhead (tangible aspects of service quality) should be carefully selected to send signals of success (assurance).

In short, in customer service as in so many areas of life, the devil is in the details. If you and your organization can excel in each of these five components of service quality, your customers will tend to be delighted with your service. A delighted customer tends to return and bring along friends.

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