

COMPARISON OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS OF HORTICULTURAL PRODUCTS IN AUSTRIA AND BAVARIA

Florian Kitemann², Markus Göttl², Andreas Gabriel¹, Klaus Menrad¹

a.gabriel@wz-straubing.de

¹ Chair of Marketing and Management of Biogenic Resources, Straubing Center of Science, University of Applied Sciences Weihenstephan, Straubing, Germany

² University of Applied Sciences Weihenstephan, Freising, Germany

Paper prepared for presentation at the First Symposium on Horticulture in Europe (SHE), 17th to 20th February 2008 at Vienna/Austria held under the aegis of ALVA, APH, BNL-SHS, DGG, GSHS, IOH, INRA, NJF, PSHS, SECH, SOI and the International Society for Horticultural Science

Copyright 2008 by authors. All rights reserved. Readers may make verbatim copies of this document for non-commercial purposes by any means, provided that this copyright notice appears on all such copies.

Comparison of customer satisfaction in different types of distribution channels of horticultural products in Austria and Bavaria

F. KITTEMANN, M. GÖTTL, A. GABRIEL & K. MENRAD

University of Applied Sciences Weihenstephan, Freising, Germany

Introduction

An enterprise can only be commercially successful if it succeeds in satisfying customers' needs thus resulting in repeated sales for its products or continuous demand for its services. An effective and efficient customer satisfaction management programme can be regarded as an important measure for maintaining existing customers and for winning new customers.

Material and Methods

Two diploma thesis carried out in 2006 at the University of Applied Sciences of Weihenstephan identified the needs, behaviour and motives of customers at different types of selling places for horticultural products. In addition differences between the Austrian and Bavarian customer structures in retail trade with horticultural products were extracted. A total of more than 1,500 customers of 25 different purchase outlets for horticultural products were asked about their purchase behaviours and their satisfaction with the performance of individual retail businesses in the two surveys. In order to get an adaptable analysis of the satisfaction rate, several categories of relevant buying criteria have to be evaluated by the customers. The criteria are representing the assortment and price policy of the retailers as well as the interaction with the customer and the design of the location. Since the scales of the two surveys were adjusted a direct comparison of the data sets can be accomplished. Furthermore, by including the assessment of the individual importance of the upraised buying criteria it is possible to calculate and compare the 'global satisfaction' in the different retailing shops.

Results

Managing customer satisfaction in horticultural firms can only be effective if meaningful retail performance indicators can be determined. Customer satisfaction significantly differs between garden centres, horticultural retail stores and DIY-stores and also between the Austrian and Bavarian customers of horticultural retail shops.

In general the level of the satisfaction values of the different categories in the Austrian traditional gardening stores is higher than in the Bavarian comparable enterprises except in the categories 'Plant quality' and 'Special offers'. The evaluation of the traditional gardening retail stores is evidently better compared to DIY-stores and garden centres in both countries, especially in the categories 'Plant quality', 'Assortment', 'Quality of consulting' and the location design criteria. Only for the attribute 'Special offering and activities' there are advantages for the DIY-stores and garden centres. Concerning the attributes 'Advertising and information' and the 'Price-performance-ration' the satisfaction levels are quite equal - two categories, which are regarded in general as advantages for the non-traditional retail sector.

The offsetting of all requested satisfaction values linked with their stated importance levels to a 'global satisfaction indicator' shows a high standard for all analysed retail types but also the discrepancy between the different distribution channels in the two countries. The value of 1.685 for the Austrian horticultural retail shops (for 1.000 is 'very satisfied' and 4.000 is 'unsatisfied') shows a marginal difference to the Bavarian traditional retailers (1.695). For the garden centres and DIY-stores the values for the 'global satisfaction' decrease considerably (1.816 and 1.838).

Conclusion

The customers of traditional horticulture retail stores were much more satisfied both in Austria and in Bavaria than the customers of DIY-stores and garden centres. Only 'Special offers and events' got a higher satisfaction rate in DIY-stores and garden centres compared to traditional gardening retail stores. The lead of the gardening retail stores particularly results from excellent consumer assessments of the plant quality and a better consultation of the employees. With the help of a calculated 'global satisfaction index' the value at the customers could be pointed out for all enterprises which have taken part in the survey.