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To know and satisfy tourist clients' needs – a premise for achieving superior quality services

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Summary

Clients' satisfaction should be the main objective of any tourist company, and this involves a good knowledge of consumers' expectations. Offering a high quality service is obviously based on fulfilling some requirements through which the service touches the level desired by the consumer.

Knowing the consumers' needs and expectations, as well as the perceptions related to the supplied service, should represent the quality management objectives of the services provided, that is, the conditions of providing performing tourist services.

The tourist orientation can assure a high level of satisfaction and it involves the identification of his desires and requirements with regard to the services offered, his proper informing, facilities and possibilities to choose the service that corresponds the best to his expectations. In order to win the clients' trust in the services offered – modifying the clients area of tolerance (that is, to enlarge it) the trained staff of service companies should be more sensitive to the clients needs, suggestions, dissatisfactions and preoccupations.

A highly important condition for achieving the objectives of satisfying clients is the service company employees' satisfaction. The trained staff is responsible to offer high quality services and satisfaction to the consumer, the latter's behavior being able to increase or decrease the name of the service company.

The staff's efficient leading objective – and of the service offering process – can be achieved by a successful practicing of internal marketing, that has in view developing the staff motivation and its stimulation in the effort to offer high quality services. The fundamental strategy of internal marketing is to form faithful clients from its own employees. Satisfying internal clients' requirements, the service company increases its ability to satisfy successfully external consumers' needs.

Clients' satisfaction should be the main objective of any tourist company, and this involves a good knowledge of consumers' expectations. Offering a high quality service is obviously based on fulfilling some requirements through which the service touches the level desired by the consumer.

Analysts proved that, at least five determinant factors influence a product quality. Some of them can be mentioned:

- **Correctness**, that is the firm's ability to offer properly and faithfully the promised service;
- **Receptivity**, that is the performer desire to help the consumer and to provide him the service promptly;
- Safety has in view the performer's ability to win the consumer's trust through the competence and kindness of its services;
- Individualization, that is, the concerns and efforts to give the deserved attention to each consumer;
- Tangible elements, that is, material facilities, equipment, staff and advertising materials proper to the service.

The analyses of the offered services performing manner allows the emphasizing of the following essential aspects that will influence in a positive or negative way the services quality:

a) The process of performing tourist services looks like commercial transactions between the offeror that supplies services, usually associated with consuming or using specific products and the tourist – the beneficiary of these services;

b) Tourist services character differs from one company to another, due to their different features. In other words, services are unique, their performing being influenced by the clients' individual preferences. Thus, we speak about personalized services that allow an "ad-hoc" chain of activities, so that they respond in the highest level to consumers' expectations.

c) The relations between tourist services companies' employees and the clients are interactive relations, so, the seller-buyer relations express the way in which is perceived the quality of the service performed by both business partners. The quality depends both on the tourist service supplier and on the performance quality.

In these conditions, the client perceives the quality not only from technical point of view, but also from functional point of view.

Tourist services consumers usually have three levels for appreciating service qualitatively, grouped according to the order of evaluation difficulty:

- desired quality: the characteristics of the desired services met by the client and that can be evaluated before their consumption;
- experimental quality: the characteristics of the services that can be evaluated by the client during and after their consumption;
- credible quality: the characteristics of the services that cannot be correctly evaluated by the client even after their consumption, services that are much trusted (a psychoanalyst services, religious services, a fortune teller's services).

According to this division, clients offer more importance to experimental and credible quality of services.

d) In most situations, the client appreciates subjectively the quality of services comparing them to similar situations, experienced in the past. From this point of view, different levels of subjective appreciation can be mentioned:

- excellent services – case in which, in the consumer's point of view, the quality of the services offered exceeds the qualitative level of his expectations;

- good quality services – the clients' expectations correspond to the level of performer's promises and/or his expectations correspond to the qualitative level of the services enjoyed by the consumer in similar past situations;

- satisfactory services – in certain stressing situations (for example in emergency situations) clients find more important one or more utilities offered by the services. In these situations, the client accepts as satisfactory the middling quality of services, if he perceives as allowable the limits of one tolerance area (the grey area), together with the required tariffs.

- corresponding services from a qualitative point of view – the consumer, influenced by his past experience, appreciates the offered services under the level of his expectations, in comparison with the required tariff.

Knowing the consumers' needs and expectations, as well as the perceptions related to the supplied service should represent the quality management objectives of the services provided, that is, the conditions of providing performing tourist services. Thus, a certain way of knowing consumers' expectations – in order to understand the determining factors – is a regular performance of marketing research that can supply the information necessary in order to set optimal strategies, meant to assure clients expectations satisfaction and over satisfaction.

Tourist orientation can assure his satisfaction increase by identifying his desires and requirements regarding the offered services, his proper information, offering facilities and possibilities to choose the service that corresponds the best to his expectations.

In order to win the clients trust in the services offered – modifying the clients area of tolerance (that is, to enlarge it) the trained staff of service companies should be more sensitive to the clients needs, suggestions, dissatisfactions and preoccupations. This approach efficiency certainly depends on the way in which the performers on the tourist market respect the following requirements:

- Establish an efficient communication with the customers;
- Present a correct image of the service and perform properly the promised service;
- Have a permanent concern for improving the supplied service in order to exceed the clients' expectations.

An efficient communication with clients determines them to become involved in the process of performing, reducing thus the complaints caused by the problems appeared during service production/consumption process. An efficient communicational system of tourist services companies – that supposes the access to services (offering all necessary information about the offered service), tourists' perceptions monitoring, in order to completely understand their expectations and requirements, the training of the performing staff in order to personalize the offered services, influence favorably tourists' tolerance and increase decisively their trust in the offered service.

In the services field, trust is dominant. Performing a reliable service means its correct performance from the beginning. Managers that establish operational standards of quality develop a culture of the firm that goes on the “do-it-right-first” principle. These managers can become famous for a reliable service through the following opinions:

- The conviction that 100% trust represents an achievable purpose that is worth fulfilling;
- Frequent and efficient communication of their trust to the whole staff;
- Faultless reward of the offered service;
- A permanent improvement of the firm's activity.

Staff's abilities necessary for the performing of a reliable service involve:

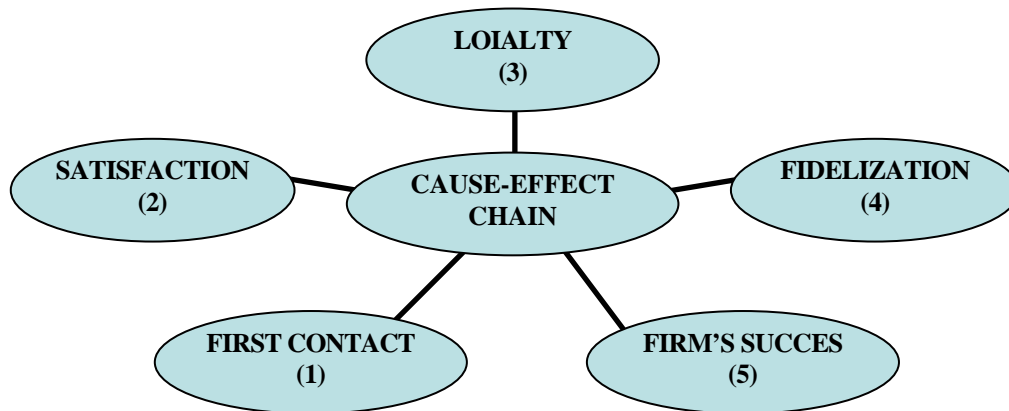
- ✓ Communication skills (encouraging clients to express their opinions, dissatisfactions, listening to clients attentively and patiently, admitting and assuming some deficiencies);
- ✓ Creativity (personalizing services, differential relations with clients);
- ✓ Competence (ability to contradict and persuade);
- ✓ Understanding the advantages expected by the client.

Most often, tourist consumers' dissatisfactions are the result of their mistrust in exaggerated affirmations about services offered by the company and about promises not respected. Explicit promises are represented by all the information conveyed by the company within promotional activities, such as: advertising, personal sales, etc, while implicit promises refer to the price of the service and the tangible elements of the performance.

Thus, we appreciate that, as a result of a growing concern for promoting supplied services, both explicit (proper advertising, personal sales) and, implicit concern (price level reflects clients' expectations, a correct image of the service characteristics) the performing companies can contribute to the clients' dissatisfaction elimination. Hence, tourist companies can increase their notoriousness and profitableness by directing their efforts towards guarantying and satisfying their explicit and implicit promises made to their clients – promises that should reflect exactly the desired service, not its ideal version.

A systematic and efficient pursue and control of tourists' satisfaction involves the development of a series of concrete actions on the part of the company performing services that form a cause-effect chain.

The mechanism for making efficient clients' satisfaction



After the conclusion of the first contact between the client and the service offeror there comes the consumer's evaluation of the quality and his judgment on his satisfaction. If there is a positive appreciation, or whether the consumer's expectations have been even exceeded, his loyalty for the service company increases, in the form of a favorable behavior for the quality of the services offered by that company. A loyal client expresses his intention to choose again, if another situation arises, the same service and the same company.

In case the client's conviction regarding the firm's ability to offer high quality services turns into repeated buying activities, he becomes a faithful client. A faithful tourist is a

constant source of income, on a long-term basis, for the performing companies, since the client advises other clients on the destination and the chosen services, too. Still, faithful clients are not a given present, they remain as soon as the tourist considers he receives a higher value – expressed in the form of the relation quality-price – in comparison to another company or destination that offers similar services.

To achieve the objective of having faithful clients is an extremely complex process and it involves the following actions on the part of the performing company:

- To come up with a strategy of achieving faithful clients, that is to establish the ways of making faithful clients (individual service offers, further services, direct-mails, clients clubs, telephone marketing, on-line orders, etc);
- To make up a data bases on clients, permanently dated, out of which to extract data about clients in order to be used within the measures taken for achieving faithful clients;
- To make analysis about clients' satisfactions, with the help of surveys regarding, especially, clients' satisfaction, their intention of repeating their choice, of recommending the services to other potential clients;
- To establish the performance standards, to establish quality rates in order to satisfy clients and a regular checking of their observance;
- To analyze the clients buying behavior, having in view the action of determining and interpreting indices related to the effective and observable behavior, such as: the possibility to buy again, the intensity of services consumption, the number of migration towards other service offerors.

Faithful clients have positive effects on reducing the costs of the company performing services, that is:

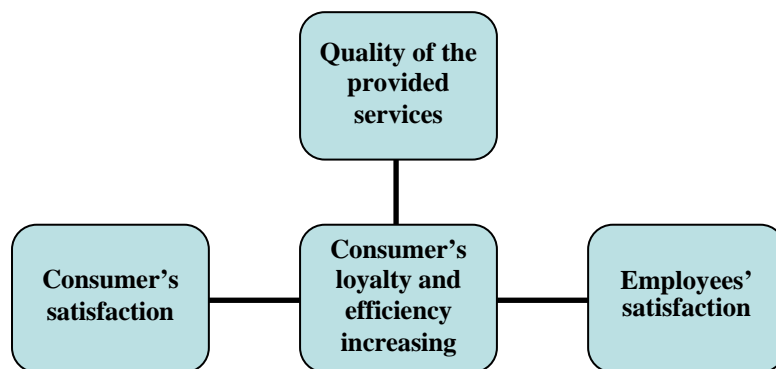
- costs connected to the relation with the clients, by concentrating their actions on the faithful clients;
- non-quality costs reduction, by involving clients in the process of improving services;
- to create possibilities of reducing transacting costs with the help of the new communication solutions (for example, making electronic orders, the internet).

A systematic management in this way also has a positive influence on the volume of performances and, implicitly, on the turnover. Thus, clients having a relation with the company are willing to accept higher prices than other clients, creating, thus, a possibility for the company to practice higher prices. Faithful clients are also characterized by a higher rate

of buying services, with positive effects on the volume of transactions developed in the company.

For a hotel operator tour, the existent clients represent the best opportunity for achieving a profit. If these clients need a permanent hotel service and they can obtain it from more offerors, then no other concept would be more important than relational marketing that is attracting, developing and keeping the relation made with the client. His main purpose is to create a “faithful client”, that is a content client that feels he receives a valuable service and who will come to the same hotel, willing to pay a higher price for his comfort.

The relation between consumers’ satisfaction and the service company employees’ satisfaction



The faithful client wants dynamic services, according to the employees, he wants to be recognized and to be taken care of by the staff.

Relational marketing art is determined by the value offered to the client. The client’s perception about the services offered after buying a service is determined by the service quality.

A highly important condition for achieving the objectives of satisfying clients is the service company employees’ satisfaction. The trained staff is responsible to offer high quality services and satisfaction to the consumer, the latter’s behavior being able to increase or decrease the name of the service company.

Employees’ quality influences the quality of the services provided by the company and also the social-economic efficiency of the services. Consequently, the success of a service company depends on the way in which managers lead with competence, imagination and creativity their employees.

The staff’s efficient leading objective – and of the service offering process – can be achieved by a successful practicing of internal marketing, that has in view developing the staff motivation and its stimulation in the effort to offer high quality services. The fundamental strategy of internal marketing is to form faithful clients from its own employees. Satisfying

internal clients' requirements, the service company increases its ability to satisfy successfully external consumers' needs.

The main directions necessary in order to assure own employees' satisfaction in order to increase results (and to diminish errors) refers to:

- ✓ a good knowledge of employees. Satisfying their expectations means that the ones who take decisions to understand first their desires and needs. Service companies concerned with this aspect have projected complex and dynamic systems to investigate their own employees;
- ✓ rewarding, offering an adequate motivation to employees, in order to stimulate them to work better, and to contribute to the making of the image of the firm. An efficient system of rewarding implies the existence of an efficient way of measuring the employees' performances that allows the identification of those who deserve to be rewarded and of those who do not. A performer actions evaluation should have in view his contribution to the company strategy and his observance of the firm vision on the level of supplied services;
- ✓ a proper training of the staff. This should have the character of a dynamic process, permanently developed and in relation with the amendments in the environment in which the company develops its activity. This approach will be also supported by a powerful informational support, the training process having to be done systematically, evaluated and corrected.

Certainly, the success of a service company depends on its staff, both first-line employees – that supply the service – and on those behind the scene, that assure the effective conditions for developing the process of performing services, also bringing their contribution to the image of the company among consumers. The contact staff is the only one capable to make tangible the services of the company and to diminish the risk determined by services fluctuation.

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