

OXFORD CAMBRIDGE AND RSA EXAMINATIONS

Advanced Subsidiary GCE

APPLIED BUSINESS

F243/CS

UNIT 4: The Impact of Customer Service

CASE STUDY

PRE-RELEASE MATERIAL FOR JANUARY 2006 EXAMINATION

To be opened on receipt.

INSTRUCTIONS TO TEACHERS

- This case study **must** be opened and given to candidates on receipt.

INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES

- You **must** make yourself familiar with the case study before you take the question paper.
- You **must not** take notes into the examination.
- A clean copy of the case study will be given to you with the question paper.

This case study consists of 6 printed pages and 2 blank pages.

Lowen Holiday Park (LHP)

Lowen Holiday Park in Cornwall has been owned by the same couple, Norman and Charmaine Basset, since it opened in 1976. For the first few years, LHP was simply a field for camping with toilets and a shower block. Currently, the park occupies 28 acres and boasts four different types of static caravan, plus touring pitches for caravans and tents. LHP's facilities include:

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- a large licensed entertainment hall;
- a separate bar with large screen television;
- a café;
- a shop selling newspapers and groceries;
- a crazy golf course;
- a 20 metre outdoor pool;
- a go-kart track (currently closed).

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LHP has its own organised entertainment programme, whereby the visitors can join in with events and competitions, such as swimming galas and bingo, every day of their stay. During the evenings, local bands and artistes play in the entertainment hall until midnight. In addition, there is a club for children aged 6–14 where they can participate in supervised activities such as sports and arts and crafts.

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LHP is open from Easter to November. At the height of the season, LHP has a large number of staff employed on various full and part-time contracts. A few employees may stay on to work on maintenance projects over the winter but, because of the nature of the work, most employees remain at LHP for only one season. The longest serving member of staff, apart from Norman and Charmaine, is Sarah, the head receptionist. The majority of the employees are unskilled or semi-skilled, apart from the lifeguards and the cooks who hold the relevant qualifications.

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Dwindling visitor numbers

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When LHP opened in 1976 it hardly had any competition. Now, as Cornwall becomes a more popular holiday destination and farmers diversify their land from agriculture, the holiday park industry has become a highly competitive market. Eight other holiday parks have opened up within a 15 mile radius of LHP. LHP's biggest successes were in the late 1990s when visitor numbers were at an all time high and customer retention numbers were excellent. LHP won 'Best Holiday Park' in the 'Cornish Holiday Park Awards' (CHPA) four years in a row.

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However, the park has fallen on hard times. It is now approaching the end of November, coming to the end of one of the worst seasons LHP has ever had. LHP had previously relied on returning visitors, word of mouth and the CHPA but this was no longer bringing in business. Financially, it barely managed to break even. Consequently, Norman had spent a lot of money before the 2005 season started on advertising in national caravanning magazines and on LHP's own website. In February, he had tried to boost trade at The National Boat, Caravan and Outdoor Show in Birmingham, but it had not seemed to make any difference.

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Although LHP had done so well previously in the 'Cornish Holiday Park Awards', for the last four years it has not even made the short list. Visitor numbers went up slightly in 2002 when the outdoor pool was built, but have since dropped back down again. Norman is beginning to realise that it costs more to attract new customers than to keep the old ones, but even attracting new ones is proving difficult. He estimates that LHP will have two more seasons before having to close down if things do not improve.

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The Cornish Holiday Park Awards

In 2005, Charmaine checked the Cornish Holiday Park Awards website as usual and, once again, LHP was not shortlisted. She checked the categories closely and felt that LHP was good enough in some categories to at least be acknowledged. However, it was the way in which parks were selected that interested her the most (see **Fig. 1**). She knew from experience that there seemed to be a direct link between winning the award and an increase in visitor numbers and yet LHP just did not seem to be able to compete anymore. LHP's main competitor, Happysands Holiday Park, is only two miles away and has been open a mere four years. It has similar facilities to LHP and is more expensive. However, Happysands Holiday Park was going from strength to strength and had been on the shortlist for the awards every year since opening – and 2005 was no exception.

A poor start to the year

The 2005 season in particular had seemed to be jinxed right from the start. From the very first day of opening, the lifeguard, Gary, had been a problem. He frequently turned up late, and although one of his duties was to keep the pool side clean and safe, it was often dirty and covered in litter from the previous day. In one incident, a young boy slipped by the side of the pool and cut his head open. Gary said he "didn't have a clue what to do" and left it to the boy's mother to clear up. The pool's water quality needed to be tested on a regular basis but Gary often forgot to do it. Several visitors had suffered sickness and diarrhoea after swimming in the pool and, although it was never proved to be directly related, the local newspaper ran the headline about 'The Pool Pollution Peril'. This appeared just before August Bank Holiday, one of LHP's busiest times. Charmaine is not happy about re-employing Gary for next season, but finding a qualified lifeguard locally is difficult.

Investigations

Although the pool had been a big problem, it is only a small part of LHP – so where else was the business going wrong? At the start of the season Charmaine had put a 'visitors' book' in reception for holidaymakers to write comments about LHP as they signed out. This had not really been checked as often as it should have been and so Charmaine took it to her office to read. She saw that there were hardly any comments in it. However, when a few people did write, they all seemed to have the same issues. Charmaine made a list of these comments.

- The layout of LHP is poor, and it is difficult to locate where everything is. No maps seem to be available.
- On arrival, there is often no record of visitors' booking details and any correspondence 'allegedly' sent to the visitors had not arrived. This could be due to details not being typed into the computer properly or being disposed of without being stored securely.
- LHP advertises go-karts in its advertisements in magazines and on its website; this is a facility that few other holiday parks offer. However, the go-kart track had been closed all season due to it being waterlogged.
- There is no comprehensive list anywhere of what events and entertainment will be on in the entertainment hall. Visitors often turn up and hope it will be something they like. Even the staff do not seem to know the entertainment agenda from one day to the next.

Possible solutions

Charmaine felt that, overall, LHP had lost its customer focus. No wonder it was not winning awards! She felt that improvements had to start with the staff, and called a meeting one morning when LHP was quiet. After talking to the employees (who seemed very demotivated at the end of a long season) and explaining what she had found out, the staff came up with some ideas to be considered before the start of the 2006 season. These included the following suggestions. 95
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- Large signs that show the layout of LHP should be erected near visitor accommodation and smaller maps available in every caravan and at reception.
- Visitors should have a list of all the entertainment and events for that week on arrival. Staff should be kept informed.
- A new computer system should be bought and implemented so that customer details are kept organised and safe. 105
- The visitors' book should be checked daily and any issues mentioned should be dealt with immediately.
- If there are any changes to the schedule or facilities the visitors should be notified straight away, either by post, email or at reception when they check in. 110
- Formal training in customer service should be offered to all staff at the start of each season. Although they dealt with the public every day, some staff felt they lacked certain skills which would enable them to interact better with the visitors. Charmaine had seen some courses advertised in the local newspaper and later logged on to a local college's website for more information (**Fig. 2**). 115
- Every member of staff should also attend a monthly customer service training afternoon to refresh/learn new ways of enhancing the visitors' stay at the park.
- Hold a staff meeting once a fortnight to discuss problems with any aspect of LHP.
- Set LHP a target of at least being on the shortlist for the CHPA in 2006. 120

After the meeting Charmaine felt very positive – LHP seemed to have its focus back onto the customer – which was, after all, the reason why they were all there in the first place. However, it is one thing to plan changes, but another to implement them successfully...

The Cornish Holiday Park Awards

The shortlist has now been announced for the 2005 Cornish Holiday Park Awards – visit our awards page to see if your holiday park has been nominated! There are several new categories this year, including ‘cleanest park’, ‘staff helpfulness’ and ‘best facilities for children’. Find out next month who has won, and who will be crowned overall ‘Best Holiday Park!’

The Cornish Holiday Park Awards aim to reward customer service in the holiday park industry. We have been busy for the majority of 2005 making mystery visits and phone calls to establishments and experiencing holiday parks for ourselves!

We have also been following up on the recommendations submitted by visitors on this very website. If you have provided an excellent holiday experience from booking to checking out then you can be sure that someone will have filled in a nomination form. We get over 10000 visitors to this website per year searching for the ultimate holiday in Cornwall. The vast majority who revisit this site are so impressed by the service and treatment they have received from a holiday park, recommended by us, that they complete the online nomination form.

Fig. 1

Customer Service NVQ 2 Workbased

Where do I study the course?

At County College

What are the entry requirements?

Although you currently need to be working in a customer service based environment, there are no formal entry requirements. It is more important that you have a positive attitude and are interested in working with people.

Who is this course aimed at?

This course is aimed at anyone who deals with customers on a daily basis.

What does the course entail?

Within your job you will need to demonstrate that you are able to deal confidently with various aspects of customer service, including Telephone Techniques, Dealing with Change, Problem Solving and Communication.

How is the course studied?

An NVQ is broken down into units; within each unit you must prove that you are competent in each topic area covered in the unit. This will be done through workplace assessments and examples of your work.

What can I do after this course?

After successful completion of this course it is possible to progress onto Customer Service NVQ 3 where you have the opportunity to develop your skills even further.

Fig. 2

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