

➤ The importance of excellent customer service

Introduction

Portakabin is the leading brand in its market. It hires and sells permanent and relocatable buildings to clients including hospitals, schools, government ministries, universities and businesses.

Its mission statement reflects its values:

'To provide peace of mind for our customers across Europe through quality buildings and services.'

Its market contains strong competition, so it has to work hard to remain as market leader. This case study looks at how Portakabin stays competitive by providing excellent customer service.

What is customer service?

Customer service describes what happens at the points where customers come into contact with the business. It is usually described as information, advice, convenience and after-sales service. The importance of customer service can be seen at all stages during the process of buying or hiring a building. Portakabin has Customer Charters for its clients which set out the high levels of service that each can expect.

Why is customer service important?

It is important that any business keeps its customers happy. This is because, financially, it costs five times as much to gain a new customer as it does to keep an existing one. As it operates in a highly competitive sector, Portakabin must offer excellent customer service or customers will go to rival businesses. Portakabin aims to provide what it calls 'legendary' customer service.

Customers can be external or internal. Internal customers are employees and departments within the company, all of which rely on each other. External customers are the hirers or buyers. Excellent internal customer service will be reflected in excellent external service. To encourage this, each department has created its own customer charter. For external customers Portakabin differentiates itself from the competition by providing a unique level of service which promises buildings on time, on budget, guaranteed and certified.

Market research

Market research is used to find out if customers are happy. Portakabin uses primary and secondary research. It surveyed customers to find out what made them return and found that the top factor was the quality of the experience. A customer satisfaction interview has been carried out over the last four years. Elements of customer service are rated on a scale of 1 to 10. Over the time period average scores have risen from 8.2 to 9. Individual responses are used to recognise and reward extremely good service.

Improving customer service

Improvements are published to staff in the staff booklet and the company's monthly magazine. Comments and praise from customers are also included. External customers can see the commitment to improvement through the re-launched Customer Charters.

Conclusion

In a competitive market, good customer service is vital. Portakabin uses all kinds of data to make sure that its customer service is continually improving and deserves the term 'legendary'.