

Providing good customer service is key to surviving down economy

January 22 2010

The recession and the recent holiday shopping crunch have brought further into focus the true importance of receiving good customer service. Americans are being more careful than ever about how and where they spend their money. A new report from the Center for Services Leadership at the W. P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University reveals advice from some of the top names in business on how to keep customers happy.

"Services have become a driving force in economies around the world, with less growth happening in products and manufacturing," says Stephen W. Brown, executive director of the Center for Services Leadership (CSL). "That's why we formed the center in 1985 as a response to the unique challenges that companies face in this arena. Some of the highest-level executives from our member firms contributed to this new report, which is meant to be a real guidebook on how to create and deliver valuable services and how to provide great customer service."

The center is now world-renowned with many big-name member firms, including Boeing, Charles Schwab & Company, Harley-Davidson Motor Company, Hewlett-Packard Company, Honeywell Aerospace, IBM Global Services, Marriott International, Mayo Clinic, PetSmart, Sony Electronics, Southwest Airlines and State Farm Insurance Company.

The center's new report "Research Priorities for the Science of Service" will be featured in next month's edition of the prestigious *Journal of*

Service Research. The report is designed to help boost both customer satisfaction and company profits. It is the result of 18 months of in-depth interviews and surveys, including contributions from more than 300 executives and academics.

"Marriott contributed to this important effort because we are committed to delivering extraordinary service experiences for our guests," says Julie Moll, senior vice president of portfolio strategy and research at Marriott International, a CSL member company. "With the world so much in flux, brand leaders must embrace new approaches to understand and deliver on consumer values -- and to assess where it makes the most sense to invest. For example, with the increasing impact of both social media and consumer reviews on the Web, brand marketers have both a challenge and an opportunity to ensure that the live service experience not only lives up to -- or exceeds -- its promise, but is also compelling and 'buzzworthy' enough to provide a viral push."

Among the premises of the report is that "all businesses are service businesses" and that services dominate the economies of advanced countries. As a result, governments, academic institutions and businesses are calling for an increased focus on the science of service to direct and support emerging business models.

"In the past 10 to 15 years, there has been an increase in the reliance on service business revenues within product-based companies like Boeing," says Joe Shaheen, director for the Defense and Government Services division of Boeing, a CSL member firm. "The combination of the strained market and economic conditions has provided companies with the unique opportunity to engage and adjust, leveraging their current capabilities and focusing on the design of customer-centric service solutions for existing and new customers. This report comes at exactly the right time to help with these efforts."

More information: The Journal of Service Research (published by SAGE) published an online version of its article on these efforts this week at jsr.sagepub.com/cgi/rapidpdf/1094670509357611v1 .

Provided by SAGE Publications

Citation: Providing good customer service is key to surviving down economy (2010, January 22)
retrieved 25 April 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2010-01-good-customer-key-surviving-economy.html>

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