

# Information Overload

Issue 64, January 2008

## Welcome:

Welcome to the January 2008 issue of Information Overload. I hope your break over the Christmas / New Year period was everything you hoped it would be, and eventful for all the right reasons.

As we start the new year, I would like to take the opportunity to say thank you for the comments / questions and discussions that have taken place as a result of I.O over the past few years. Also thank you to those people who have taken the information contained within its pages and disseminated it to a much wider audience, it is good to know we are still making a difference to the information profession world wide.

Following on from last month's edition on whether there is a place for libraries in today's electronically driven world, I would like to discuss the relationships we have with our customers.

We would like to thank you in advance for forwarding this edition onto friends, colleagues and other interested readers. Please note that all back issues of this edition, as well as our registrant resources edition can be read and/or downloaded from our web site – <http://www.iea.com.au/web/Publications> should any of the topics be of interest and use.

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## In this Issue we will be looking at:

- Selling yourself short
- Attitude can be everything
- Poor customer service can be costly
- A Thought to ponder

The phrase Customer Service tends to be that catchall notion that says you should treat everyone in the same manner that you expect to be treated. Taking this one stage further, we enter into Customer Relationship Management. Once you have obtained a customer, it is important to maintain and manage the relationship so they feel comfortable enough to come back to you, and hopefully buy whatever it is you are selling on a regular basis.

## Selling yourself short:

In the library and information profession it could be argued that we don't "sell" anything. We don't have any "thing" to sell, we're not into widgets, cars, houses, and white goods.

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In reality what you are selling is far more profound than that. In my opinion you are selling a number of things:

1. You are selling a concept or an idea.
2. You are selling the benefits relating to those concepts or ideas. If you think about it, you don't buy a heater because you want one, you buy a heater because you want warmth. You don't buy a drill, you buy the ability to make a hole. You go to an information centre to find "information" which will help you solve whatever problem you have. Be it, a gap in your knowledge base or a chemical formula for a new drug you are hoping to produce. Similarly you have a records management section so that you can find that piece of information at a later date (amongst other things of course).
3. You are selling yourself. It doesn't matter what kind of business you are in. People will do business with those people they like and trust. So:

**Why should people do business with you?** Of course if you are the only person in the organisation who manages the information centre / records management section then you would think that people would have to do business with you. But if you find people bypassing you, setting up their own filing systems, doing their own research and so on, it could be argued that you are not selling yourself as well as you could. How long do you think you are going to keep your job if you can't "sell" yourself and your services to the people with the money?

Before we go any further I would just like to mention that "clients" are anyone and everyone we engage with in a business capacity. They can be external clients – as in suppliers, or internal clients. But the way we deal with them is identical. You should be:

1. Genuinely interested in them: their needs, wants and desires.
2. Attentive to what is being said to you and what is being asked of you.
3. Welcoming – both your workplace and yourself
4. Communicative and speak well.
5. Working on your business as well as in your business. This includes actively marketing yourself and your services.
6. Willing to go the extra distance - customer service is not just about a one-off interaction, but establishing a relationship.

## *Attitude can be everything:*

We all tend to know poor customer service when we are on the receiving end, but don't think twice about inflicting poor customer service on our own customers.

If the organisation that you work for fosters a culture of under performance, then you are likely to have an attitude that says:

- It's ok to arrive late for work every morning and leave a few minutes early at night in order to "miss the traffic",
- Making people wait whilst you finish a telephone conversation,
- Ignoring your customers whilst you speak to your colleagues,
- Make too many personal phone calls during work time,
- Spend the first half an hour every day answering e-mails that do not need to be answered, let alone read,
- Chew gum,
- Fail to "deliver" when you say that you are going to,
- Pointing to something and telling them "It's over there" rather than taking your customers to the exact location,
- Having an attitude that says I can't be bothered to smile, or
- I can't be bothered to be polite,
- You are interrupting what I am trying to do;
- You are not important so go away until it's convenient for me to help you, and
- Fail to follow instructions.

We're sure that you can add a few more to this list, but these and others like them are prevalent in today's work environment. How many times have you been subjected to this kind of attitude? How many times have you walked away from a business transaction because the person serving you was in fact not doing his/her job properly?

Whilst we don't purposely set out to have a poor attitude that says I really don't care, and it doesn't matter if "that" doesn't get done until tomorrow. Procrastination, under performance and poor attitude can have a major impact on the customer service that we provide.

If you were your own customer, would you be happy with the service you received from yourself today? If you were honest with yourself, the answer would be probably not. If you fail to treat yourself with the professionalism that you deserve, if you have failed to impress yourself in any way today because of the poor attitude that you have towards yourself, how are your other customers likely to feel? I would hazard a guess that they would feel cheated, disgruntled and will probably vote with their feet.

So next time you are faced with making a decision about whether or not to serve your customers, ask yourself this one simple question – would I be happy with the service that I am about to give.

## Poor customer service can be costly:

How do you know if the service you are providing is not the best it can be?

Proxy indicators that something is amiss can include:

- Staff turnover is higher than the norm, and higher than the organisation as a whole;
- Customers will wait to speak to the person they like rather the one who gave the opinion they couldn't care less;
- Your budget is cut
- Management won't support additional budget requirements or projects
- Your collection is old;
- Your systems are antiquated;

- People bypass the system, continuing with personal silo's rather than adding to the corporate memory – simply because it's easier to do so, they know they can find what they are looking for, they have no idea how to use the new system and didn't receive adequate training. Add to the fact that the person who was driving the project decided to leave and it is no wonder a considerable number of projects fail within the first couple of years.

John T Self in the document “ Customer Service Facts and Figures” states:

- It can cost up to five times as much to attract a new customer than to retain an existing one;
- The average business never hears from 96% of its unhappy customers;
- For every complaint that is received, the average company in fact has 26 customers with problems, 6 of which are serious in nature;
- Of customers who register a complaint, between 54 and 70% will do business again with the organisation if their complaint is resolved. That figure goes up to an impressive 95% if the customer feels that the complaint was resolved quickly;
- The average customer who has a problem with an organisation will tell 9 or 10 people about it. 13% of the people who have a problem with an organisation recount the incident to more than 20 people;
- Customers who have complained to an organisation and had their complaints satisfactorily resolved tell an average of 5 people about the treatment that they receive.

<http://www.sideroad.com/cs/column7.html>

Which is always something to consider when you are “having a bad day”.

With many thoughts  
Lorraine

### A Thought to Ponder:

“Letting your customers set your standards is a dangerous game, because the race to the bottom is pretty easy to win. Setting your own standards – and living up to them – is a better way to profit. Not to mention a better way to make your day worth all the effort you put into it.”

*Seth Godin*