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Customer Service Measurement Tools

Recently, a new casino opened a sizable expansion of its property, including a larger slot floor and new restaurants. Through a carefully planned opening marketing campaign, leadership announced the opening of its expansion to the regional community in print ads, broadcast media and direct mail.

A small group of wealthy retirees, comprised of three couples, were some of the recipients of this direct mail campaign. They had visited the old property and found the facility not to their standards. It was cramped and the restaurant offerings were limited to a small snack bar. However, the new facility looked much more appealing and they decided to give the place another try. Also, the attractive "free slot play" offer was just the hook to get them to try the place again.

Upon arrival, all six patrons visited the slot club booth to get their new slot club cards and redeem their coupons. However, there were only two staff members at the booth and it took ten minutes before the first person in the group was served. Although four people were members of the old slot club, the casino had a new casino management system and each player had to be re-enrolled. Customers were required to fill out a new application, writing their name, address and driver's license number, then present their driver's license to the club representative, who duly copied all of the information from the license, before issuing a new card. Once the card was printed, the club representative handed the card to the player, looked up and said, "Next!" One of the members of the group asked how to redeem his slot play offer and was handed a photocopy of the instructions.

After an hour of gambling the group headed over to the casino's three-meal room for a late breakfast. The dining room was beautiful. It had the look and feel of an outdoor garden and the sound of water at a nearby fountain enhanced the atmosphere. However, service seemed a bit slow and two people were served meals that were cold. It took a few minutes to get the waitress's attention and once they did, the food was re-cooked and served at the proper temperature.

The couples then split up, agreeing to meet at the casino's lounge later in the afternoon for a happy hour cocktail. One couple headed off to the Blackjack area while the others headed off to play the slots. The couple at the gaming tables received prompt beverage service with a server coming by every fifteen minutes but the slot players, particularly those playing the nickel multiplier games, found the wait for beverages excruciatingly long.

At 5:00 PM the group reassembled at the casino's lounge to discuss their day in the casino. The band seemed a bit loud so they decided to head over to the buffet for dinner before heading back home.

There was no line at the buffet and the hostess sat them immediately. Each member of the group took note of how beautiful the buffet looked. It was highly themed and was reminiscent of an Italian village. There were multiple cooking stations and islands displaying desserts, salads and breads. Once again though, service seemed inattentive. Also, none of the food items were labeled and some of the kitchen staff did not know what the items were either. One member of the group wanted to share their thoughts with the restaurant's manager but she did not see one in the dining room.

Finally, the couple left the casino and on the drive home, mutually decided that they would forego future visits to this casino and wait for their next trip to Las Vegas before gambling again. While they all agreed that the casino was indeed beautiful and the slot payouts were generous, the overall experience just seemed lackluster, particularly their experience in the casino's restaurants.

Measuring the Customer Experience

Unfortunately, this story is not an uncommon one in casinos. All hospitality institutions struggle to maintain quality service and deliver that service consistently. Even the most attractive gaming entertainment facilities with well trained employees must constantly monitor and measure service performance in order to assure that customers have a great experience each and every time they visit their property.

The time it takes to be greeted at the slot club booth, the time it takes to get a beverage on the casino floor, the temperature of the food served in the restaurants and the time it takes for a food server to check back at a table have one thing in common: they can all be measured. These are the functional attributes of quality service delivery. Unfortunately, too many casinos get caught up in other aspects of the service delivery process, such as making sure employees smile, greet customers and wish them "good luck," that they neglect aspects that are far more important: promptness of service, hot food and a clean and comfortable environment.

Establish Service Standards

The first step to assure guests of a consistent, high-quality experience is for each department head to establish basic service standards. How many minutes should a customer have to wait for hand pay? What is the goal for beverage service in the casino? What is the maximum length of time a customer should wait before being greeted by a food server in the restaurant? Each department head should have a clear vision of the service standards for his/her department. Those standards need to be defined, communicated to employees and the department needs to be staffed appropriately in order to meet those standards.

Monitor the Standards

The next step is to monitor each customer contact point in the casino and measure the performance of the employees relative to those pre-defined standards. This is done through a variety of means. The most common are so-called "mystery shoppers' who visit each area of the casino on an ongoing basis and measure performance against the property's service standards. Service quality is then summarized in periodic reports to property leadership who, in turn, forward those reports to supervisory personnel.

In addition, a casino that is committed to customer service should have in place a methodology in which customers are periodically interviewed about their experience in the casino. These are done primarily through intercept studies in which research personnel either interview customers as they are leaving the casino or arrange for a more in-depth telephone interview where the customer can better reflect on their gaming experience.

Fix It When It Is Broken

Even when there is a service measurement program in place, problems often persist. This happens for a number of reasons. First, property leadership often does not distribute results of mystery shopping surveys and customer intercept studies to supervisory personnel. These reports sometime sit on a shelf in the general manager's office and are never shared with supervisors and line staff. Even when they are, there is often no follow-up to see if remedial action has been taken. Worse, when the problem is a shortage of labor, supervisors are often prevented from staffing appropriately for fear that their labor costs would climb too high.

Every employee needs to know how they are doing and almost all of them want to do a good job. If there is a program in place that measures service standards, the results of those programs need be shared with all line employees. If not, then employees may never be aware that there are problems and will not implement remedial action.

The example described in this article occurs far too frequently in the gaming industry. Leadership goes through great lengths to develop beautiful gaming-entertainment experiences. Marketing then spends vast sums of money communicating those attributes to the prospective customers and delivers them to the casino's doors. However, it is the moment that the customer comes in contact with the employee and that employee delivers on the service promise that becomes the defining moment and ultimately determines if that visitor becomes a loyal customer. ♣

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