Rapid Customer Feedback

by Andrew Klebanow

Few in the gaming industry would discount the importance of customer service. Indian casinos have long been at the forefront in designing and implementing customer service initiatives. Greeters and ambassadors, whose sole job is to make customers feel welcome, can be found at many properties. Many Indian casinos have instituted customer training programs and others have made a commitment to total quality management in an effort to create and maintain a great service culture.

Notwithstanding these efforts, casinos, like all businesses, are susceptible to the occasional service breakdown. A jammed printer coupled with a slow response time, a poor dining experience, a long wait at the valet can easily impact a customer's perception of the gaming experience into one that is decidedly negative and negative service experiences can quickly become a reason for a customer to go elsewhere.

Casinos are particularly vulnerable to the effects of a service lapse. Virtually all casinos operate under the Pareto Principle or more commonly, the 80/20 rule. This principle states that, for many events, roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes. In business, this rule means that 80% of sales are derived from 20% of the customers. A cursory examination of virtually any casino database reveals that this principle holds true in gaming also. A loss of one avid and loyal player because of a bad service experience can therefore have a profound impact on the business. It is for this reason that casinos take customer service so seriously.

The means with which casino managers learn of customer dissatisfaction is not always efficient. Often it comes in the form of a phone call, letter or email. Sometimes an alert host will make a call to inquire why a customer has not been in for awhile. More often than not though, the disaffected customer simply changes their allegiance and takes their entertainment dollars elsewhere. What is often missing is a systematic approach to monitoring customer satisfaction and an ongoing dialogue that allows individual customers to express their opinions, both good and bad, so that casino managers can respond rapidly if there is a service lapse and share praise if there is a service success story.

Other segments of the hospitality industry have adopted new technologies to monitor customer service. Many hotel chains now automatically poll their guests on their lodging experiences. A common scenario is one in which a guest receives an email within 24 hours of check out inviting the guest to complete a survey. The guest clicks a link and completes the survey. These systems serve a number of purposes. They allow the operator to rate individual properties, they can be used as part of a compensation strategy, and they allow property managers to quickly respond to any service breakdowns.

Unfortunately, most casinos have been slow to adopt such technologies. First, the gathering and maintenance of email addresses continues to be a problem for many casino operators, which limits a casino's ability to maintain a dialogue electronically with customers. Also, because of the frequency with which many casino customers visit a property, managers may feel that a follow-up survey after each visit may annoy customers. Regardless, the end result is the absence of a system that allows for rapid feedback from casino customers.

Fortunately, technologies have evolved and systems are now readily available that allow casinos to maintain an ongoing dialogue with customers without being obtrusive and that solve the conundrum of invalid email addresses. These systems allow a customer to log onto the casino's web site, view their current offers, point values, comp dollar balances and provide those customers with an opportunity to share their opinions on their recent experiences, complete surveys or just vent their frustration. This rapid form of feedback allows the casino operator to quickly react to an individual's concern or detect trends that may have serious repercussions.

One casino that was an early adopter of this new technology offers a good example. The casino had in place a rudimentary kiosk system where customers could redeem bonus points for meals. In an effort to enhance service for their diamond level players, the casino instituted a policy where hosts would instead issue a comp to the players and personally walk them over to the buffet. The casino's motivation was to improve customer service, even if it meant higher labor costs. Management simply believed that the interaction between hosts and players would translate into a higher level of customer service for premium tier players. However, loyal customers quickly became incensed with the change. They had long gotten used to redeeming comps electronically and found the new system to be inefficient and frustrating. The feedback system that the casino had in place allowed customers to share their opinions and allowed casino management to quickly react to them. Moreover, since the system associated each individual's response to their casino rewards account, management was able to quantify the effect that the change in the comp policy had on the property's theoretical win. Management in turn was able to present to the tribe the actual cost that this service initiative would cost in terms of customer disaffection and was thus able to revert to the old comp system.

New technologies may seem impersonal and, at first blush, would appear to reduce the interaction between employees and guests. On the contrary, they offer casino managers a far more effective way to communicate with their players, poll them on their likes and dislikes, and get rapid feedback if a problem arises. ♣

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