

Getting Back to Basics with Modern Technology: Accuracy, Timeliness, and Customer Service

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Abstract

A customer placed an order for a restaurant take-out on the Internet. The order was for four meals to eat at a dinner with friends on January 23, 2015. Everyone was particularly looking forward to the Chinese dumplings. When the customer went to pick up the order at the agreed upon time, the meal was not ready or even started. When the customer got the meal home, it was discovered that egg rolls had been added and charged for, too. Unfortunately, the Chinese dumplings had not been included, but the receipt showed that the customer had been charged for dumplings as well. What should the restaurant do?

Key words: customer service; online ordering; order accuracy; overpayment; restaurant management

The Story

A customer placed a take-out restaurant order on the Internet for a dinner with three friends. Everyone was looking forward to the Chinese dumplings, in particular. The website and email confirmation had stated that the order would be ready for pickup in 20 minutes. After 20 minutes, the customer arrived at the restaurant. The cashier was surprised and went to the kitchen. After a few minutes, she came back and accused the customer of not placing the order. The customer was frustrated and considered leaving the restaurant immediately, but there wasn't time to travel to an alternative restaurant and place a new order. Instead, the customer explained that she ordered it on-line and showed the cashier the emailed receipt on her Smartphone. The cashier said that they would fulfill the order right away and went back to the kitchen. When the cashier brought out the order it was 30 minutes from when the customer had first arrived at the restaurant. The customer paid, but didn't check the accuracy of the order or the receipt. When she arrived at her friend's home and started distributing the meals, they were disappointed to discover that there were egg rolls they didn't order, and no dumplings were included. However, dumplings and egg rolls were on the receipt. They considered going back, but the weather was very

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cold outside and they were hungry. Instead, the customer called the restaurant to report the problem with the order, and also reminded the restaurant of the order delay.

Solutions

Select (circle) one of the following alternative solutions:

- A. The restaurant should apologize and provide a 10% discount on the next order.
- B. The restaurant should apologize, deliver the dumplings immediately, and provide a cash refund for the egg rolls.
- C. The restaurant should request that the customer go on-line and provide a written statement on the restaurant's website describing the problem. The restaurant will promise a response once the statement is received.
- D. The customer should receive a full cash refund upon return to the restaurant the next day.
- E. The restaurant should identify the source of the problem leading to the original order not being received, put in place a checkpoint where a restaurant staff member confirms each order has been filled accurately prior to it leaving the kitchen, and provide customer service training to its customer facing staff. The restaurant should apologize and assure the customer that such mistakes will not happen again. They should also deliver the dumplings without additional cost, and offer a 10% discount on the customer's next order.

Assessments

Surface Assessment

There were three different errors in customer service that occurred: (1) the restaurant staff did not pick up the original order from the Internet, (2) the cashier assumed that the customer did not place an order and was accusatory with the customer, and (3) the order once received was not accurate. The only solution that addresses all 3 mistakes is solution E. Solution E is the best answer. However, solutions B and D would also likely lead to the customer being satisfied with this particular order.

Deep Assessment

The restaurant industry is under increasing pressure to provide value, excellent customer service, excellent quality food, and modern service options. In this case, the restaurant was offering a modern on-line ordering service, but missed the order. It is important when putting in place new technology to develop processes to ensure the technology is utilized both efficiently and effectively. In this case, an assessment is needed to understand why the order wasn't picked up and to ensure that future on-line orders are received quickly each time. What was worse for this customer was the attitude of the cashier and the fact that she blamed the customer for the mistake.

Diners expect to be treated well, even when picking up a take-out order. When a restaurant makes a mistake, it is important not to attempt to hide it or make excuses, but for there to be an acknowledgement and an apology. Customer service training is clearly needed for the cashier and should be considered for all customers facing staff in the restaurant. Order accuracy is a basic restaurant service where any error is not acceptable. Restaurants need to ensure that there is a system in place to double check all orders prior to the order leaving the kitchen. Choice E provides the most strategic option that not only addresses the current customer's concerns, but prevents the issues from reoccurring in the future. As a result, the restaurant will be more likely to have repeat customers and long-term customer loyalty.

Solution Points Awards for Multiple Choice Selection

Select (circle) one of the following alternative solutions.

- A. The restaurant should apologize and provide a 10% discount on the next order. 1 point: The customer may be satisfied with this solution. However, it doesn't address the disappointment over not having dumplings, or alleviate the customer's concerns about future service.
- B. The restaurant should apologize, deliver the dumplings immediately, and provide a cash refund for the egg rolls. 2 points: The customer may be satisfied with this solution. There is an additional time delay prior to delivery, but an apology has been given, dumplings have been received, and there has been a reimbursement for the overcharge. As long as the apology was perceived to be sincere, the only concern that may remain for the customer is whether or not their next order will be ready when they arrive.
- C. The restaurant should request that the customer go on-line and provide a written statement on the restaurant's website describing the problem. The restaurant will promise a response once the statement is received. 0 points: This solution leads to more delays, and exacerbates the customer's perception of poor customer service. Furthermore, part of the customer's complaint is the inadequate response to a submission on the website (i.e., placing an order that wasn't picked up or prepared). This solution is likely to anger the customer further.
- D. The customer should receive a full cash refund upon return to the restaurant the next day. 1 point: This solution is likely to please the customer assuming they are available to return to the store the next day; however, it is not a fair solution for the restaurant given that 4 meals were provided and consumed.
- E. The restaurant should identify the source of the problem leading to the original order not being received, put in place a checkpoint where a restaurant staff member confirms each order has been filled accurately prior to it leaving the kitchen, and provide customer service training to its customer facing staff. The restaurant should apologize and assure the customer that such mistakes will not happen again. They should also deliver the dumplings without additional cost, and offer a 10% discount on the customer's next order. 6 points: This is a

“customer delight” solution, because it addresses all 3 errors the restaurant made with this customer (i.e., the order was not received, the rudeness of the cashier, and an inaccurate order), and prevents similar problems from occurring in the future. In addition, the restaurant provides a benefit to the customer in the form of a 10% discount. This solution, in its entirety, is of a reasonable cost to the restaurant as well.

Your points score for this case study: _____

Editorial Commentary

In this story, the customer ordered four takeout meals with dumplings on the Internet, but the restaurant missed the order. In addition, they insisted that the customer didn't place an order. The customer was frustrated and angry. Once the order was ready and taken to the customer's friend's home, they discovered that it was also inaccurate. Dumplings were not included, although there was a charge for dumplings. To make matters worse, egg rolls were added to the order with an additional charge. The dumplings had been the part of the meal everyone was looking forward to, and as a result all four friends were disappointed with the meal.

It is easy for a restaurant to modernize by providing, e.g., an internet-based ordering option. However, what is often overlooked is putting the necessary processes in place to ensure that customers will continue to have a positive experience, and that restaurant staff will be empowered to use the new technology efficiently and effectively. In this case, an internet-based ordering system was put in place, but the order was never picked up. An assessment is needed to determine what went wrong here. Was it a system error, an internet outage, an employee error, or a lack of a clear process or technical solution ensuring that all orders are picked up in a timely manner? Once the cause of the problem is found, the correct solution can be put into place. Until then, a message that online ordering is temporarily out of service should be placed on the webpage. Modernizing restaurants can be a great way to reach out to technically savvy potential customers, but only if the overall customer experience with the restaurant results in a high degree of satisfaction.

Order accuracy is a basic service in the restaurant industry that is directly linked to customer satisfaction. Given the importance of this service, it is essential that there be a process in place for double checking all orders prior to their leaving the kitchen, regardless of whether they are take-out orders or table orders. Order accuracy should be a top priority for restaurants, which will benefit their bottom line.

The good news for this restaurant is that the customer did not have any complaints about food quality or overall value, which can be difficult to change. Providing customer service training, adding a check for order accuracy, and ensuring that all internet orders are picked up in a timely manner should be relatively easy changes for the restaurant that will help ensure that future customers are satisfied and remain loyal.