

BurgerBarn* Blunder

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Abstract

A customer waits to be served by distracted staff members at an Auckland *BurgerBarn. Eventually the customer receives the food, only to find the wrong order has been given. Frustrated and running out of time, the customer returns the food to the manager and waits in line again to be served the right food, receiving a brief apology from the manager.

Key words: brand loyalty; evoked set; damage control; word of mouth marketing; price sensitivity

The Story

After a long night of dancing at one of the biggest concerts of 2015, my friends and I felt we deserved a treat for breakfast. Searching into our evoked set, BurgerBarn came to everyone's minds. The thought of a delicious BLT bagel and a cup of hot chocolate got us out of bed and into the car to find the nearest BurgerBarn. We ended up at one of Auckland's BurgerBarn (BB) outlets.

After rushing inside to place our orders, we stood at the counter waiting to be served. The two servers were standing around gossiping about their night, not seeing us until I called out, "excuse me". Without a pleasant greeting such as "how are you today" or even a "hello", the two distracted women told us to place our orders. I was unimpressed by the quality of service and the fact that they did not apologise for being oblivious to their work environment.

After a long wait, my number was eventually called. With a rumbling stomach I took my food and sat down, only to find I had not been served what I ordered. As someone who does not like eggs, I was not happy to see that I had been served a bacon and egg BBMuffin. Moreover, I was also charged for two drinks instead of just one. I took the food that I had just been served back to the manager, who was very quick to rectify the issue. I got the drink that I had paid for and the bacon and

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*Brands and names are disguised to protect individuals and corporate brands.

egg BBMuffin was swapped for the BLT bagel. He apologized for the mishap as handed me the food that I had actually ordered. Subsequently, I was left to eat by myself. The food was good, not great; but what else could one expect from a fast food restaurant?

I left BurgerBarn feeling angry at the poor service. Although I had eventually received what I had ordered, I was not compensated for the time lost while waiting for the problem to be fixed. Overall, this made my experience as a customer at BurgerBarn an unpleasant one. Despite the fact that it promotes itself as a “fast food restaurant”, my experience proved otherwise. As a result, I now rarely order meals from BurgerBarn, in order to avoid reliving this frustrating experience.

Strategies

Select (check) one of the following alternative solutions from five different possible strategies.

- A. BurgerBarn could apologise to the customer. It could also could provide staff training and have a system detailing how staff should greet and deal with customers.
- B. BurgerBarn could offer free drinks to go with the meal.
- C. BurgerBarn could provide a full refund for the meal.
- D. BurgerBarn could offer a 50% refund for the meal and apologise for any inconvenience placed upon the customer.
- E. BurgerBarn could give a coupon for future use at any BurgerBarn restaurant in New Zealand, such as a free BLT combo.

Surface Assessment

It is important for the South Auckland BurgerBarn to rectify the problem quickly in order to minimise the unfavourable impact on its brand. Negative word of mouth about this experience can result in a loss of brand loyalty. In order to prevent this mishap from occurring again, the best outcome would be for BurgerBarn to train the staff in customer relations and general conduct.

Deep Assessment

Customers of BurgerBarn find it important that their needs are fulfilled correctly and in a pleasant manner. This includes not only physiological needs, but also safety and belongingness (Davidson et al., 2014). The best option is to provide staff training and to have a system stating how staff should deal with customers at BurgerBarn. This would help provide consistency to all customers at BurgerBarn restaurants and improve employee performance (Frost, 2016).

Sincerely apologising will make customers feel more positive about the situation and remind them that mistakes do happen, and that the employees are sorry for such occurrences. This will also decrease the risk of customers spreading

negative word of mouth about BurgerBarn. Staff training improves employee performance and can decrease BurgerBarn's costs, as only food that is actually ordered will be made and served to customers. Other unforeseen outcomes will increase costs as they require the restaurant to give free products or refund money to the customers. In the long run, staff training will decrease costs and make BurgerBarn run more efficiently.

Based on the scale of BurgerBarn's international operations, the loss of one customer's brand loyalty will not affect the firm greatly, but negative word of mouth can damage its brand reputation as people pay great attention to negative comments (Previte et al., 2013). To deal with the dilemma and protect brand loyalty, staff training can show customers that employees do care about customer experiences at BurgerBarn, and that they want to help customers fulfill their consumption demands in a pleasant manner. Brand loyalty is crucial to BurgerBarn, as it makes customers less price sensitive; they will thus buy more products and pay less attention to competitors (Previte et al., 2013).

Multiple Choice

A. BurgerBarn could apologise to the customer. It could also could provide staff training and have a system detailing how staff should greet and deal with customers.

6 points. This is the most useful option as it prevents the problem from occurring again in the future, shows staff what is expected of them, and shows customers that they care about fulfilling their needs in a pleasant way. In the long run this will save BurgerBarn money and protect brand loyalty.

B. BurgerBarn could offer free drinks to go with the meal.

0 points. This increases costs for only one issue; it does not provide a solution to the problem of unprofessional staff; it merely mitigates it.

C. BurgerBarn could provide a full refund for the meal.

0 points. Providing a full meal refund is not feasible and creates unnecessary costs. The lack of an apology for the inconvenience will also make it seem that BurgerBarn is just trying rectify the problem quickly and does not care about the customer's experience.

D. BurgerBarn could offer a 50% refund for the meal and apologise for any inconvenience placed upon the customer.

1 point. The apology would make the customer who was directly affected feel more positive about the situation. However, a discount for the food is not necessary and increases BurgerBarn's costs.

E. BurgerBarn could give a coupon for future use at any BurgerBarn restaurant in New Zealand, such as a free BLT combo.

3 points. This option would make customers feel more positive about the situation, despite receiving no apology, as they would feel they have been compensated for their time and will be more likely to return to eat at a BurgerBarn restaurant. However, this option does not help to prevent the incident from happening again,

and so giving out vouchers may become a costly and common occurrence for BurgerBarn.

Editorial Commentary

In this story, the dissatisfied customer clearly expects more than a mere apology and correction of the order. She expects perceived justice. Perceived justice refers to the customer's perception that she was treated fairly during the complaint process. A mere redress (here, simply replacing the wrong order with the correct order) increases the customer's hostility and is likely to result (as indicated here) in passive aggression, a wave of negative word of mouth, and disengagement from the brand (loss of loyalty).

Why is that? It takes motivation to complain, and the complaint experience allows the customer to see how a business is keen to get, keep, and provide value to customers. It takes effort and courage to complain about improper service. In one way, it is a statement of trust: "I trust you enough to take the time and give you the opportunity to correct a mistake." As a brand owner, it is now the firm's turn to demonstrate its goodwill, loyalty, and value in return. "I value your patronage enough to go beyond the mere minimum to keep you happy."

Research indicates that only about 19% of dissatisfied customers complain. Of these customers, the majority will return to buy again, unlike their uncomplaining counterparts, who leave without complaining, never return, and take their business to a competitor. Thus, incredibly, customers offering proper complaints are good for a business. The moral of this story is to ensure that all levels of staff must be aware that damage control and service recovery are critical to a firm's long-term success. For a business, it is important to turn recovery into an art.

This case study also demonstrates that even young customers understand that they do not merely buy food at a fast food restaurant; rather, they buy the entire experience. From a slight adaptation of the famous words of super-salesman Elmer Wheeler, who said "Don't sell the steak, sell the sizzle," customers want more than the steak; they want the sizzle, too. The marketing executives at BB perhaps know this, but it has not filtered down to the front-line staff at the counters. Service workers at BB do not seem to "live it". The young customer in this tale expected to continue on following the previous evening's fun time, but was disappointed.

Life is stressful, complicated, and filled with demands for people's attention and time. Most customers equate time with money. Even young people feel that unexpected delays from service providers "have a cost." The fear of a repeat of wasted time prevents these once-loyal customers from returning to BB. Marketers are aware that time and attention are valuable commodities. One of the very core values of fast food is just that: fast!

Scholars Holbrook, Beatty Raghurir (2008) and Woodside (2008) believe that three factors should exist to create brand loyalty:

- Performance excellence. The product or service must do what it is supposed to do remarkably well.

- Self-connection. Beyond utilitarian functional performance, the brand should somehow make a personal connection with the consumer and reflect something about their personality.
- High involvement. The product or service offering needs to have some significance in customers' lives and thus keep them interested, as well as either cognitively or emotionally engage them in search, evaluation, and decision activities for when they relate to the product or service offering.

All three factors need to be present for brand loyalty to develop. For marketers, this means targeting customers who have a deep interest in and some personal attachment for the product (or service), either hedonic (pain, pleasure, fantasy, emotional response) or functional (purpose or use). If a business makes a brand promise (to be open 24/7 or provide food fast), then it must deliver on that promise every time and without fail.

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