

MONDAY, APRIL 12, 2010

## How Important is Customer Service?



In the legal industry, we know how important it is to keep our clients happy, to find ways to work with them that show them we understand their business and their pains. But how good is your firm's customer service, really? Generally, you're not the only one interacting with your clients, so do the other people at your firm who work with your clients give them the same level of attention and service that you do?

You may ask, how important is that, when I already work so hard on my relationship with my clients? Well aside from comments from general counsel [like we heard at the LMA conference](#), when they said that surprises in their bills made them wonder if their relationship-partner was reviewing them at all, I have two non-legal stories that I think illustrate why good, and bad, customer service can really affect your relationship with clients.

A couple of weeks ago, I was returning from [Social Fresh in Portland](#). For some reason, I'd chosen to take the red-eye flight, which meant that because I'd been there for less than 24 hours, I felt like it was 2:30am when we were supposed to board. The incoming flight was delayed because of weather on the east coast, and when they got there, it turned out that they were having some difficulty with the de-icing light on

the plane. The [Jet Blue](#) agents at the gate made an announcement, told us what the problem was and that they didn't know how long we would be delayed. They continued to update us at regular intervals until we finally were able to board and take off (on the same plane). I slept for a bit on the plane, and woke up when they turned the cabin lights on. That was also when they announced that the de-icing light had come back on, and because of the weather in New York, we had to land somewhere that wasn't experiencing icing conditions - Buffalo.

The Jet Blue agents in Buffalo boarded the plane when it landed, explained that we were going to disembark and to stay close to the gate so that they could keep us updated. The gate agent kept telling us when he planned to update us (in 15 minutes, etc), and then he would update us at that time. Despite the possibility that we could re-board the same plane, he started immediately checking after we'd disembarked to make sure that if the plane needed parts, we would all be able to get on the next available Jet Blue flight to Kennedy. And he announced, at the time he said he would, that the plane was, in fact, grounded, and we would have to go to another gate to get the next plane.

Though I was really frustrated about the delays, I was impressed with Jet Blue. They not only kept us honestly updated, they gave us regular updates, told us when they would update us again, and then actually met those deadlines. I always knew where I stood, and very quickly, I knew what the latest time was that I'd be departing Buffalo's airport. That service, plus having more legroom on the actual flights, will make me not only use Jet Blue again, but recommend them to friends and family. Going above and beyond to keep your clients informed, up-to-date, and well cared for not only keeps them happy and bringing their business to you, it makes them your advocates.

But then today, I had an unfortunate customer service issue. Every year, Ocean City, NJ is host to the Doo Dah Parade, a large part of which is the [Boardwaddle](#) - a parade of 500+ basset hounds. I heard about this parade a few months ago, and having a

basset hound, was hoping to participate. I contacted the Doo Dah parade organizers and was referred to the Boardwaddle organizers, who I emailed back and forth with to express my interest in registering on March 18th. They promised to send me a packet, then....nothing. No packet. The parade is this Saturday, so last week, I emailed them again to find out the status of my packet. I didn't hear back from them. I learned today (because my father called the Ocean City office) that the packets are now available online, but the deadline for registration was this past Saturday. Although I am not technically their customer, the Boardwaddle does raise money for the local basset rescue, and they will not be receiving a donation from me, or any family or friends who might have sponsored us. Their lack of regular contact with me means that not only do I no longer want to participate, but now I'm telling my friends and family how disappointed I am, and how poorly run I think it is (and whether it truly is poorly run or not matters less than the fact that I believe it to be, and am now sharing that with people). Are there times that a client's email to you or one of your colleagues may have fallen through the cracks, leaving them wondering how well run your firm is and how much you really care about them and their business? I did take the time to let the Boardwaddle organizers know how unhappy I am, but how many people will just quietly give you less and less of their business because of a perceived slight?

Client service is so important, especially in an economy where the main differentiator between you and your competitors is your relationship with your clients (and of course, often cost). Are you doing all that you can to make sure your clients know how important they are to you?