

## CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PARTNERS

## What Really Constitutes an Excellent Customer Experience?



Josh Bernoff of Forrester presented a topline summary of his company's latest Customer Experience Index survey in a recent issue of *AdAge*. The study disappointingly reported that only 6% of the 154 companies included in the study were rated as "excellent"!

Based on the headline: "Numbers show marketing value in sustaining good customer service" you might be surprised at some of the companies that were rated among the top 11 – we were. The leaders did include a classic example of a caring culture, USAA. But there were also some surprises: Costco and BJ's, for example. These, self-service, warehouse style, big box stores with lengthy checkout lines are surprise customer experience leaders. Joining them was the totally automated Amazon juxtaposed with the comfy chairs and helpful clerks of 'bricks and mortar' book merchants Borders and Barnes & Noble. Finally there were the mass merchandise discounters: JC Penney, Target, and Kohl's – stores where it's often difficult to find an associate to ask a question or receive help with merchandise.

So what were Forrester's 7,700 survey respondents thinking? Were they really literally responding to the three scoring questions: 1) How well did a company **meet** your needs? 2) How **easy** were they to do business with?, and 3) How **enjoyable** were they to do business with? Or, are there other mitigating factors involved? For example, why aren't marketers known for customer service (Nordstrom, LL Bean, etc.) represented? Our interpretation is that the consumer-respondents must have used some additional logic in calculating their responses. They may have been applying their own value equation. For example, survey respondents may, in their own minds, have prefaced each question with: "For the money you pay and in comparison to other alternatives..." .

Perhaps expectations are playing a role here. Promise very little, deliver a reasonable experience and you may become an unsung hero. Create an image as a citadel of service and you can easily disappoint. (Mr. Bernoff expounds, that in a recession, providing low prices and a better-than-expected experience may be a prescription for success. But is that what we really mean when we think of excellent customer service?)

In either event, we're distressed that organizations might define customer service by so contritely operationalizing it (meeting needs, easy and enjoyable). We hope you don't fall prey to that trap. At Customer Experience Partners we've explored the wealth of touchpoints and experiential components that comprise **the** customer experience. To learn more about Optimizing your Customer Experience give us a call, or visit our website:

[www.customerexperiencepartners.com](http://www.customerexperiencepartners.com)

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