

" The global village has evolved into an experience economy. This means that every product or service the user wants, maximizes the experience of consuming that good or service as value for their money."

The ABC'S of Consumer Satisfaction

One of the most striking things many people will say when viewing products in local retail outlets is, "Ah, made in Zambia...how good is it, really?"

This is a mixture of the "hangover" from a Eurocentric consumer attitude from which we as a nation have still not overcome in the past few decades as well as a genuine concern over the quality and standard of Zambian goods and services given their price.

As a country we have developed an inferiority complex in terms of our own products and services. This unfortunate fallacy that everything foreign made is better than anything Zambian is a situation which we must be able get past in terms of our thinking and more practically in terms of our product choices. However, it cannot be overemphasized that the quality of products or the consumer experience must warrant this faith in local bred goods and services. Consumer satisfaction ought to be at the core of any product.

From the producer's perspective, there are two main reasons why there should be tremendous focus on consumer satisfaction. The first is to avoid losing opportunities. Business gurus have in the past given the advice that your best advert is a satisfied customer. Word of mouth recommendations from happy consumers can grow a business to greater heights and should be something that business people aim to enhance at all times.

This reason is closely connected with the ability of local producers to better participate in larger value chains. Lucrative export goods particularly from the extractive industries provide an important opportuni-

ty for local businesses to produce inputs for these industries. This opportunity mainly hinges on supply capacity which can be met through SME cooperation, product quality, and affordable pricing which is in part the onus of government to provide measures to reduce the cost of doing business.

The second reason is that increasing the efficiency of service provision in the aim of consumer satisfaction serves to the benefit of the service provider in that they earn their money quickly and create room to serve additional customers and hence increase turnover and profit.

So then, here are a few simple but vital keys to consumer satisfaction for virtually all commodities or services regardless of the product being offered or a business is based in the country.

1. The First Cut is the Deepest.

The first impression of a good or service will most likely determine whether a potential customer will purchase it or not. The packaging of the most delicious Zambian snack in a not-so-glamorous foil cover can cost a business dearly. Local restaurants and other service businesses are notorious for neglecting this aspect of business. Many a time, when walking into a restaurant or internet cafe, one is greeted with a gloomy or uninterested usher and a waiter without any courtesy forgetting that customers have many options. Business owners ought to ensure that staff such as waiters, ushers, receptionists etc. understand that they are the first point of contact for the customer and can make or break the business transaction.

2. Efficiency and Innovation.

Time is potential money when used efficiently. Cus-

tomers want their goods produced or services delivered in the quickest possible way. The provider who can do that most consistently wins continuous customer loyalty, a better corporate image and greater profits from higher sales. This is the ideal scenario which determines who consumers will turn to at their point of need and which business will survive in the long run.

3. Absolute Personal Responsibility.

This point is directed more towards service providers and retail outlets. Whenever a product has a defect or a service has not been delivered as sufficient value for money, the way in which the case is handled by the business contact person is vital. If that person assumes absolute personal responsibility, they will take it upon themselves to ensure that everything reasonably possible will be done to ensure that the grievance experienced by the customer is rectified. This creates customer allegiance as opposed to the usual attitude that the customer's particular case is not their job or problem.

4. Highest Possible Quality.

The global village has evolved into an experience economy. This means that every product or service user wants maximize the experience of consuming that good or service as value for their money. It should be on the minds of producers and service providers that enhancing the quality of their goods to the highest possible level for the benefit of consumers is what will ensure their survival and sustainable growth in a harsh corporate environment.

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