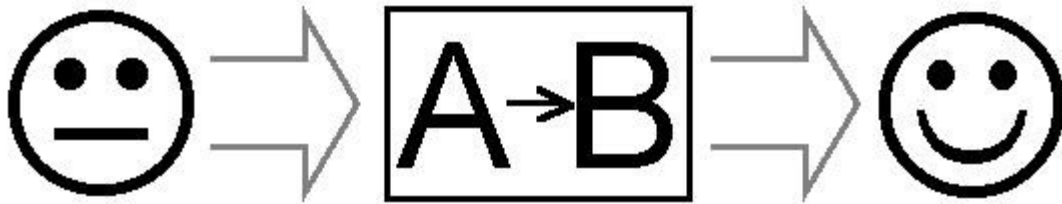


What's the Key to Client Service?



Making a Difference

[Steve Montague](#), August 1998

So what is it about McDonalds, Walmart, and Walt Disney? They're in typically low-margin, consumer-based businesses without major technical advantages, facing hundreds of competitors. Yet they not only survive - they thrive.

Sure these companies have high standards of customer service, cleanliness, courtesy etc. etc. But so do plenty of other competitors. I would argue that what these groups have that others do not - is not so much what they *have* but what they *'do'* for users.

What the successful companies **do** is make a difference to their customers' dining, shopping, or entertainment experience - and make a difference that 'fits' with customers' lifestyles.

Let's start with McDonalds as a prime example. There are other restaurants that are cheaper, serve higher quality burgers, are at least as efficient and probably are friendlier than McDonalds. So is their advantage just advertising hype or location (i.e., they're everywhere)? Not quite.

McDonalds is a winner because it **makes a difference** to people who are living modern lifestyles. People are typically in a hurry, they need something the whole family will eat, and it doesn't hurt to have a little toy or fun area to divert little ones. A meal at McDonalds makes a difference because it allows for a family to get on with their day and keep everybody relatively happy.

Of course this is why McDonalds has linked up with both Walmart and Disney. You can get on with your shopping or theme park experience without having meal time get in the way.

Walmart and Disney compete on similar but subtly different points. In the case of Walmart, the stores allow customers to avoid the stress of hunting for sales (they claim to always offer their best price) with wide variety and convenience. Walmart makes a difference by providing busy modern people with hassle-free bargains. You can get in, get what you want, and get out - without fretting that you might have paid too much.

Now what about Disney? It certainly isn't offering bargain entertainment. Disney's mission statement reads "*We create happiness for all people everywhere.*" In other words, no matter who you are, no matter what your sensitivities, Disney will try to find a way to create a happy experience. You won't usually get cutting edge movies, theme parks or products at Disney. You *will* get an experience designed to make you feel good.

So these consumer-service giants make a difference to 'people' by allowing users to enjoy *convenient* dining, *efficient* shopping, and *uplifting* entertainment. Yes they make a difference - but they do something more. They strive to do it every time. Now they have created two user effects - the convenience, efficiency or happiness **and** the predictability that people crave in our ever changing society.

Our lesson here is simple. Go beyond the 'simple' satisfaction scorecard mentality that plagues so many service quality initiatives. Figure out how your product or service makes a difference to users - then build your delivery around consistent processes to deliver that value.

For more on the above themes see [The Three Rs of Performance](#) or contact [Steve Montague](#).

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