

## IS GREAT SERVICE A FREE PRIZE IN THE BOX?

Yes and no. Ideally, customers will take great service for granted. Then again, reality is a completely different issue. Especially in Central Eastern Europe, where great service comes as an unexpected shock to the long-neglected customers. For those of you who are familiar with the works of Seth Godin, especially the book titled Free Prize Inside, I have two quick thoughts. Firstly, you are probably on the right track with whatever your business may be. Secondly, you may skip the first two paragraphs of this article. Those of you who have not yet read Free Prize Inside, I have two suggestions: first, is that you catch up on that piece as soon as you can. Two, read the first two paragraphs, which will make you want to read the book - no doubt.

### Seth Who?

Seth Godin is probably one of the greatest marketing thinkers of our time. His name is widely acknowledged in the world of marketing, not to mention his publications. Seth Godin is the best selling author of multiple modern marketing books, such as Permission Marketing, Unleashing the Ideavirus, Purple Cow, and recently Free Prize Inside. His books have appeared on the Wall Street Journal, New York Times and BusinessWeek bestseller list. To find out more, visit [www.SethGodin.com](http://www.SethGodin.com).

### The Free Prize Inside Phenomenon

In a world where most customers feel confronted and overloaded with advertising, it's no wonder they put up a resistance, and become skeptical towards most marketing communication efforts. This also explains why people tend to rely more on friend's suggestions and word of mouth (WOM). The core idea of Free Prize Inside is: "Do something remarkable and the word will spread". It's not a gimmick, but a real innovation. A Free Prize is a cool twist that doesn't cost a fortune, yet it revolutionizes the way people think about your product or service. Why the name Free Prize Inside? Remember when cereal producers first came up with the promotion where you could find a free prize in the box? You would have bought your cereal anyway, but this one small thing made it more irresistible than ever. That was the first time that marketing happened within the product instead of billboards or television ads.

Another great example for FPI is a recent one. In 2003 Amazon.com announced that they were going to stop advertising as such. No more TV or magazine ads. Instead they invested the advertising budget into free shipping of products. Marketers were staggered, and many proclaimed the death of Amazon. After a year, the company's sales results showed 37 percent increase. International growth was up by an astonishing 81 percent. Amazon could report its first ever non-holiday profit due to the change in marketing tactics, putting marketers in disbelief. Once again, making marketing happen within the product, or service, is like a free prize found in a cereal box, in the eyes of customers. Obviously, it is far more attractive to them than unjustified promises made in an ad.



## Free Prize Inside of Customer Service

So how does customer service come into the picture? Through the experience of customers of course. In all businesses where the brand experience is in connection with the way one is treated, customer focus is a must. In post-modern societies, most buyers are aware of their importance in terms of their spending habits. Therefore, they expect appreciation. In contrast, less-modern societies of Central Eastern Europe provide markets with unaware customers. As a result of being neglected for so long, they are accustomed to poor service, and simply make due with less. Low expectations towards a purchase experience speak volumes about the region. This is an opportunity for businesses to create a free prize inside, by ensuring great customer service. Exceeding low expectations is easy. Then again, doing so provides quantifiable results. Great service unquestionably does the below listed favors for your business:

- Has buyers thrilled with your business
- Wins new customers as the word spreads
- Creates customer loyalty and repeated selling
- Results in increased revenues

All in all, Central Eastern Europe is in a transitional period, characterized by slowly awakening customer self-esteem. Now is the time to add "free prize inside" value to your business by implementing a customer care program.

## A Powerful Way to Make it Happen

If you're thinking that the implementation of a customer care program implies changing the attitude of front-line employees, you are right. In fact, it will require significant commitment from your side as well. In markets where customers are used to poor service, front-line employees are accustomed to providing it. Fortunately, there is a solution. Evaluating current performance of your employees is the first step.

The most suitable methodological tool to do so is called Mystery Shopping. Mystery Shoppers visit your business units, imitating an everyday purchase situation. During their visit they unidentifiably evaluate customer service and report on it after they leave. In this case, your employees do not know who the evaluator is, thus the shopper experience perfectly resembles an average purchase transaction in your business unit. The results of the survey will point out the weak spots in your sales procedure, and identify specific training needs. Repeated use of Mystery Shopping has a significant controlling effect on your employees. Once they know -and you have to let them know-, that their performance is measured regularly with secret shoppers, they will have no option but to perform well with every customer. Now, if you think Mystery Shopping is an unethical way of spying on people, think again! Professional service evaluator companies gather in associations that provide very strict ethical guidelines for the protection of your employees as well as their shoppers. All you have to do is make sure your Mystery Shopping company is a member of such an organization.

Following the above steps, you as an executive, will be able to add value to your business that customers will see as an unexpected surprise, or in other words as a free prize in a cereal box.

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