

In today's competitive business environment success means keeping your customers. Price war and thin margins will only do that favor for you up to a certain point, where you hardly break even. After that point, keeping customers is a function of ensuring a great experience for them. When thinking about a brand we all have an idea of how it feels to experience it. When we do, we either feel satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Whether we stay with the given brand or switch to another depends on the level of satisfaction. But What is satisfaction in the first place? It is the extent, to which a brand has lived up to our expectations. And how does math come in the picture? Let's find out!



Brand Experience < **Brand Promise**

Mathematics is where equations abound. The level of customer satisfaction can well be depicted by simple equations. In case our experience of a brand does not live up to what we expected based on the TV ad, we feel **dissatisfaction**. If for instance, we were not treated very kindly at Mc Donald's, although the old slogan was "every time a good time", we will feel dissatisfaction. What is more, we will most likely tell 3 friends about our disappointment and probably switch to a competitor.



Brand Experience = **Brand Promise**

The case is a lot better if we get what we came for. Home Depot says "You can do it. We can help." Say we went to Home Depot looking for 2 x 4-s for the deck we are building. We have no idea where they are in the huge store, plus the best type of wood is also a mystery to us. If someone can help us find the right pieces of wood, we will feel **satisfaction**. In this case we will not tell friends about disappointment or about any thrills. We remain silently satisfied and we may still consider competitors.



Brand Experience > **Brand Promise**

Then again there are occasions, when customer service simply overrides the boundary of our expectations. This usually happens when an employee takes the initiative to act proactively in terms of customer service. Champ's Restaurants give their servers the option to surprise their first timer guests with a free "messy Sundae" dessert. The unexpected surprise exceeds expectations, has guests **thrilled** and most important of all wins customer loyalty. Thrilled guests are sure to return and they bring others along.

Obviously, this is the way all companies want to go, yet a lot of them get lost in the process. This is relevant in the B2B just as much as in the B2C aspect of service. In business to customer it means that front line staff shall do more than the bare minimum to win customer loyalty. There is no explicit rule of how to do so, there are multiple ways. A basic one is showing customer appreciation by saying "thank you for your purchase" and inviting the buyer back for a next visit. There are unique ones as well. To give an example, a European carpet and floor retailer called DIEGO expects front line staff to invite each customer for a coffee. For this they set up coffee machines and the unexpected invitation has people returning and speaking about the experience.

The B2B aspect of customer service is very much relevant to the lives of Mystery Shopping companies. Shopper firms shall not only speak great customer service, but shall lead by example. Exceeding the expectations of client companies wins loyalty or in other words long term business relationship. One simple way to exceed client expectations is to submit projects well ahead of the deadline. In this case it is essential to set a broad timeframe. For example by adding 4-5 days to what the project really requires. This way you can do the job well and still exceed expectations time wise. Another thing is giving a bit more than agreed on for no up charge. A 2 page Executive Summary of the main findings, or a trend diagram (including all results of an ongoing Mystery Shopping program) showing the progress made can do the job with low extra effort and high added value.

All in all, Philip Kotler Marketing Expert is right in the matter that "the best way to obtain a lucrative business is repeat selling". Nevertheless repeat selling requires exceeding expectations and going for the thrills.