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Great customer care, inside and out: The impressions valet and garages have on customers

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You hear it universally in business. Everyone wants to promise great care. But who really delivers? Back in 1990, as an investment banking executive, I couldn't believe the poor quality of service I received at valet stops and in garages in Boston - even at four star hotels, Fortune 500 companies, and world-class health care institutions - businesses whose success seemingly depended on their ability to deliver great care.

It didn't make sense: I got great service on the inside, but something very different on the outside.

First and Last Impressions

Clearly these enterprises didn't understand that their valet and garage services are the first and last touch-point of customer care and therefore critical to the overall customer experience. The arrival touch-point sets the tone of a customer's entire experience, while the departure touch point is their last impression of a company.

As a successful executive, I understood this: I don't look at the ground rather than establish eye contact. Carefully considered arrival and departure touch-points result in new and repeat business. Unthoughtful ones mean lost opportunities and lost accounts.

Even if you impeccably serve the best foie gras, have the penthouse suite already turned-down, or boast the most sought-after surgeons on the East Coast, a sloppy arrival experience and frustrating departure experience will mean one less repeat customer, and another unsatisfied patron ensuring his/her friends won't be your clients.

If you're not paying attention to the quality of customer care in your parking and transportation services, then you're playing Russian roulette with your brand, reputation, and value - you're falling down on your business promise, no matter how good you're doing on the inside.

Ensuring the Whole

Customer Experience

Sadly, after 17 years and lots of evidence of the detrimental business consequences of not providing great care on the outside, I still see top-tier institutions ill-treating their customers at the curb side and in the garage. That's because most prestigious enterprises (understandably) spend the lion's share of their energy, time, and capital ensuring every final detail of the inside customer experience, while still (not so understandably) farming the outside customer experience out to a low-bid vendor, or leaving it to an already overstretched security department. For many, parking and transportation service is still an afterthought.

When your garage, valet, and transportation services represent such a significant capital expense, they should enhance your business, not kill it. These assets are critical to your brand, your reputation, your revenue, and your enterprise's overall value. Why put them in the hands of someone who doesn't understand your customer care goals? That's like handing your 401K portfolio

to a file clerk instead of an investment manager.

Your outside care should be managed with the same finesse, rigour, and business acumen with which your inside care is managed. Your outside should mirror and enhance your inside. That means:

1. Designing valet, garage, and transportation operations that directly support your overall business plan and help you exactly meet your customer service objectives;
2. Staffing these operations with people who understand your business plan, your objectives, and your brand and have the ability to deliver value, based on these criteria, in everything they do;
3. Continuing to evaluate your parking and transportation assets to ensure they're building on and enhancing the great customer experiences you aim to deliver; and
4. Not being afraid to make changes and adjustments to your service as your business goals evolve.

Taking care of the outside enables you to deliver on your business promise to customers from the moment they arrive, to the moment they part. For enterprises who know how to provide great customer care in their valet, garage and transportation services, the results are clear:

- * Guaranteed great customer experiences, inside and outside, from start to finish;
- * Enhanced brand and reputation at the curb side and in the garage;
- * Increased new and repeat customer rates;
- * Viral marketing - satisfied customers recounting their experience to others;
- * Improved value in parking and transportation assets; and

When you depend for your livelihood on marketing and selling great service, you need to make sure you're delivering it throughout your whole enterprise, and most importantly at the arrival and departure touch-points of the customer experience. That's why having a parking and transportation business partner, who can design, operate, staff, and manage your assets to maximize their value and deliver on your customer care promise, is critical to maintaining your reputation and building business. You've got to ensure care on the outside, if you want to keep building business on the inside.

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