

Perfectly normal

In our society, service has become something special. How strange the change. And how unwelcome.

Customer service is hard to find, which is why many brands tout the fact that they are “service-oriented”. At Ditzo, everything is better than at Datzo; at Interpolis, everything is, at least, crystal clear; at Jumbo, lines are always short; at ABN AMRO, it’s as if everything happens automatically; and UPC is making access to a world of experiences simpler, using the motto *Simply for everyone*.

Something remarkable is going on, really. Because in this way, you are positioning your brand on something that is actually a basic necessity: you are saying that your customer service is set up so that nothing will come between the person and your product or service. Shouldn’t that be a perfectly normal way of doing business?! Also, isn’t it a basic responsibility to have good customer service? It’s as if companies are finding it harder and harder to take responsibility. They are even shifting this responsibility away to consumers.

No claim

Responsibility is not only being dodged in terms of customer service. We can also see it, for example, in how companies deal with environmental concerns. More and more people are wondering why the output of green energy depends on how many people ask for it, and why no energy company has taken the responsibility (on its own) to supply as much green energy as it can. Or why a new nuclear power plant is being built, while, as of 2010, the citizens of Amsterdam cannot drive older cars anymore. Because in politics, too, we see responsibility being shifted towards the people – the politicians sidestep the ongoing discussion about respect by saying that it should start with the citizens, while the politicians themselves hardly take any action at all. In healthcare, too, responsibility is shifted away towards clients. Family doctors are hard to reach and the no-claim regulation encourages us to seek less medical help and figure things out for ourselves.

As the “institutions of power” pass the buck of responsibility, we see a social trend in which people are increasingly assuming responsibility for their own lives. For instance, we use the Internet to read up on the latest reviews before going to an electronics store. Or to digest medical websites before visiting our doctor. You can compare insurance schemes in detail online, before closing a deal. And when we go to a mortgage adviser, we know enough to avoid being sold the wrong kind of loan. More and more older people are thinking of ways to avoid spending their senior years in a

degrading home for the elderly. In a nutshell: the responsibilities that the “institutions of power” let slip are being taken up by consumers themselves.

If you assume responsibility for your own life, you expect others to do the same. It is time that companies realized that providing customer service is just another word for taking responsibility. In this sense, customer service is no longer a marketing opportunity, but a basic condition for doing business. This means that customer service cannot be seen as something special anymore. Because how can you claim that something is special when it is simply your responsibility?

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