

# EDITOR'S FORUM

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## Find Your 'Holy Cow!'

**Turn a valueless business phrase into an experience that will define your business.**

No introduction, no names. When the phone picked up, I started right in.

"What is this noise?" I yelled over the incessant beeping, holding my phone up to the radio. I don't really know why I did that, since I was using the car's Bluetooth and the sound wasn't actually coming from the radio, but rather from the installed radar detector speaker. At the same time the two blue LEDs took turns lighting up my car's interior. With the factory red dash lighting, it was like getting pulled over, just inside-out.

I figure my dumb phone holding was either because of the frustration of not knowing what was going on, or the surprise that, at 11:36 p.m. California time on a Thursday, some guy named Brian in Chicago actually answered the phone.

"It's the speed alert," he said, with all the patience I wasn't feeling. "It looks like you may have accidentally set it."

Sure enough, I slowed to under 70 mph and the sound stopped. Yes, I was speeding. A little bit.

"How in the heck did I do that?" I said, now feeling even more out of my depth. It's not fun to have electronics in your car that intimidate you.

"Well, if you're willing to pull over and park somewhere safe, I'd like to stay on the phone with you and get you fully set up and calibrated."

"Right now?" I asked.

"Sure, right now," he answered.

Holy Cow.

Whenever I interview a retailer or vendor for a story, I ask them why customers do business with them. The inevitable answer is some form of "We have great customer service." The term itself is something you hear and see every day, from just about any company that wants your money. Add to this the fact that the selling world has expanded from the old days of neighborhood shopping to worldwide access. Because it's so overused, most customers see "customer service" as useless jargon; a statement that adds no value to the buying experience.

So when this guy is willing to stay on the phone with me, I oblige. For the next half-hour, he walks me through every feature of the system, recommending settings based on where I live and how I drive. It wasn't just a "turn this on; press that button"

conversation. Every step came with an explanation of what the feature controls and why I should set it a certain way. Then he left me with a number to text if I had any further questions.

After this service experience, businesses are going to have to meet a pretty high standard to get my loyalty.

So what does it take for you to get *your* customer's loyalty? At KnowledgeFest we talk about and teach ways to stand out; to do something extraordinary. But we're not pioneers on the idea: the most successful companies in the world have figured out how to leave customers with one BIG impression point that they forever associate with the brand. When I think about Apple, I think "Those guys look like everyday people who are smart, easy to talk to and willing to help." That's their marketing magic.

During my conversations with retailers, the biggest obstacle to offering extraordinary service is cost. They base their answer on the equation of profit margin for the sale versus labor, parts and additional time.

But expand that equation a bit. What do you spend on marketing to get a new customer versus keeping an existing one? What's the amount of lost investment in educating a customer and not having him or her return? And if he or she goes to your competitor, what additional business do you lose if your competitor makes a better impression and this person writes a glowing review on Yelp? This is the real equation you are measuring against. Suddenly some extra service doesn't seem all that expensive.

Listen: what works in some stores, businesses and industries may not work for others. But this really isn't about comparing our business and our industry to others. It's about how customers are trained by marketing in what is so-so service and what is excellent service. And they are taught that excellent service puts them first as an individual, recognizes their need and meets it with a personalized solution. You want a true mission statement for your store? Put that sentence on your wall.

Time for an out-of-the-box (excuse this additionally overused term) meeting. What is the most insane thing you can do to get a customer to think "Holy Cow!" about your brand and your service? Put the question to your staff. Have a few laughs about some of the more "out there" ideas. But then hone in on the ones that make sense for your business, and take a chance. You may just find the thing that customers will never forget most about you, so make it good! ☺

*Solomon*