

SERVICE

old fashioned innovation

by Grant Woolliams
If technological innovation moves at the speed of light, and business process development at the speed of sound, implementation of customer relationship management generally seems, at best, to progress at walking speed.

Many businesses spend gazillions of dollars on technology that produces only opaque benefits to customers while they ignore the direct and bankable benefits that flow from direct attention to the oldest trick in the business bible - customer service.

And here's another old fashioned truth: inspirational customer service doesn't typically happen spontaneously. It requires systems, training, and respect. Respect? Now there's a funny business word. But here's why you might try using it as a business tool:

The MYOB Awesome Service Awards are designed to acknowledge and reward Kiwis in business who provide great customer service and they recently branched out from Auckland to cover the rest of New Zealand.

The first weekly winner outside Auckland was a recreational dive boat skipper, Evan Barclay, who works for Northland's Dive! Tutukaka (read about 'Awesome' Evan's service at www.awesome-service.co.nz)

Evan's employer has won various awards in recent years, including the Supreme New Zealand Tourism Award. Why? Here are a few service related insights from Dive! Tutukaka's sales and marketing manager, Kate Malcolm, in response to Evan's win:

"We are a family run business, and we work in a place that just inspires you, with people that have the same passion as you. We invest heavily in our staff, not because our business plan says to do so, but because it is the right thing to do. It works, it feels right, it fits with all of our philosophies about community, about people, and about respect."

So Dive! Tutukaka and Evan Barclay get what "respect" means. The problem is that while it is a relatively simple notion it is, apparently, quite difficult to implement. A simple starting point: acknowledgement that people we do (or might do) business with invest bits of their lives in the dealings we have with them.

Many companies just don't get this. Example: companies we call who affront and abuse us by keeping us on hold while telling us that "your call is important to us..." Each time you hear that say "liar." On a good day you'll only say it about 10 times before your time stops being wasted. You will quickly forget


how many times you had to say it. But you will long remember who the liar was, and their lack of respect.

Respect for would-be customers and clients is also, and graphically, demonstrated by the way we respond to requests from potential business clients and customers.

As a proponent of the MYOB Awesome Service Awards I have personally spent untold hours over the past year laboring (at the invitation of potential support partners) over detailed proposals that were sent off with enthusiasm and pride, and were simply never responded to.

It's a long list and I remember the companies involved. Just as many job applicants remember the discourtesy and lack of respect they are frequently shown by companies that don't even bother to acknowledge receipt of a curriculum vitae. Some are big corporates who spend millions peddling mass media messages about customer care that are so lacking in credibility as to be laugh-out-loud funny.

Obviously the opportunity to align with promoting the business and broader values of customer service resonated with the support partners below, and we are hugely gratified



to have them, and their brands aligned with the MYOB Awesome Service Awards.

But (and here's a funny thing) I remember very positively the corporate communications manager who, having reviewed a support proposal against available resources, had the courtesy to quickly pick up his phone and volunteer a "no" and explain why.

You can win hearts, minds, and business even when you say no politely. It's about having and showing respect.

* Grant helps administer the MYOB Awesome Service Awards that acknowledge and reward Kiwis in business who provide inspirational customer service. Go to www.awesomeservice.co.nz and nominate someone in business who has treated you like family.

The Auckland Chamber of Commerce has a three part course to equip your staff with exceptional customer service skills - Customer Service Secrets on the 5th, 12th and 19th of November. Call 09 309 6100 to register.