



An introduction to managing and measuring the quality of customer experience and satisfaction in IPM

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Part 2:

Measuring the quality of customer experience and satisfaction

1. Introduction

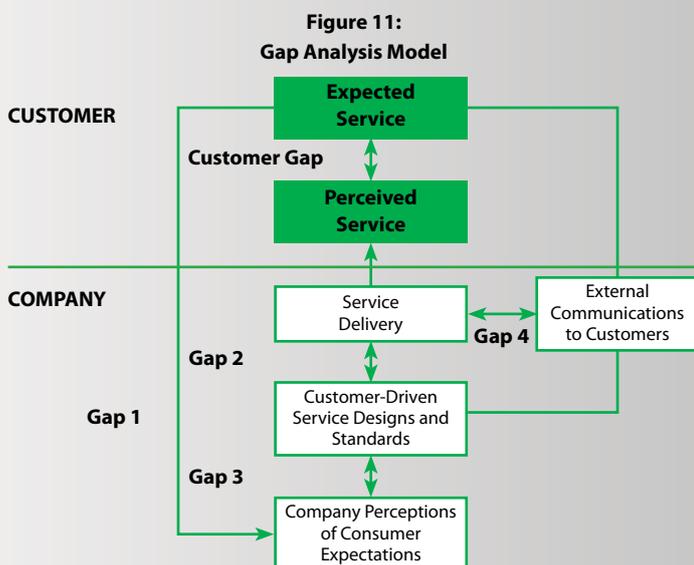
As indicated in Part 1, Pest Control companies are coming more-and-more to the realization that the only way to ensure sustainable profit, growth and well-being is the provision of IPM through a deliberate process of managing customer experience to ensure customer satisfaction. A pre-requisite to managing customer experience is measurement. Part 2 of this series is dedicated to this topic.

2. Measuring the quality of IPM experience

Quality of experience is an elusive construct and due to its intangible nature, measurement and management of IPM experience is difficult.

• Gap analysis model

Parasuraman et al (1985) facilitated understanding of the concept of service quality and the factors that influence it by identifying four gaps that occur in companies and cause quality problems. The four gaps lead to the fifth gap namely difference between clients' expectations of service and clients' experience / perceptions of services actually received – this is defined by Parasuraman et al (1985) as service quality.



Source: Bitner, Zeithaml & Gremler, 2010.

o Gap 1: Not knowing what customers expect

Gaining knowledge of what customers expect from pest management companies is considered as the most critical in providing a great customer experience. To provide an experience that customers perceive as excellent the company must know what customers expect. Not knowing what customers expect could mean losing them to companies that exactly understands customer's expectations and it could also result in the incorrect allocation of resources.

This gap is caused by four factors:

- Insufficient marketing research
- Inadequate use of research data and findings.
- Lack of communication between management and customers
- Unsatisfactory communication between management and customer facing staff.

o Gap 2: Wrong customer service and experience standards

Once management know exactly what customers expect from the company they go about setting service quality standards. However, in spite of the knowledge of what customers expect management may not be willing or able to put systems in place to match or exceed customers' expectations. The result is (a) lack of resources committed to service quality for example, absence of training aimed at improving service, not rewarding staff and management who improve quality of services and a lack of focus on improving service; (b) a perception of these standards can't be applied in this company (it's infeasible) for example management believing it can't be done, the company's systems and procedures cannot be adapted to meet expectations of customers; (c) inadequate standardisation for example every time the customer has contact with the company the experience and the service is different; (d) inappropriate or absence of goal setting for example goals are based on organisation standards and not client standards and expectations.

This gap is caused by the following factors:

- Absence of a formal process for setting service quality goals of what the company wants to achieve for service quality.
- Poor service design.
- Absence of customer-defined service and experience standards
- Absence of company measures to determine if customer service and experience standards are being met.

o Gap 3: Service performance gap

The third gap in the model indicates that even when guidelines for performing services well and treating customers correctly do exist, service of high quality may not be a certainty.

This gap is caused by the following factors:

- When employees don't have the information or necessary training to perform their jobs adequately and thus don't have the skills and training necessary to satisfy customers; poor employee-technology job fit; inappropriate evaluation and compensation systems; lack of empowerment, perceived control and teamwork.
- Failure to match supply and demand such as failing to smooth peaks and valleys of demand, inappropriate customer mix, over-reliance on price to smooth demand.
- Customers lack knowledge of their roles and responsibilities and are unrealistic in their demands.
- Problems with service intermediaries such as channel conflict over objectives and performance, channel conflict over costs and rewards, difficulty controlling quality and consistency and tension between empowerment and control.

o Gap 4: When promises do not match delivery

Gap four indicates that there is a discrepancy between what the company promises to deliver and what is actually delivered. Advertising campaigns and other methods of communication with customers such as promotions affects their expectations. As was indicated expectations play a major role in customer perceptions and experience of service quality.

This gap is caused by the following factors:

- Lack of integrated marketing communications due to viewing each external communication as independent; no inclusive interactive marketing communication plan; and absence of a strong internal marketing program.
- Ineffective management of customer expectations.
- Overpromising in advertising and selling.
- Inadequate horizontal communication between business units in the company.

o Gap 5: Service and quality of customer experience

The key to ensuring delivery of high quality services and customer experiences lies in meeting or exceeding customer expectations. Parasuraman et al (1985) state that judgements of high and low quality of service depended on how customers perceive the actual service performance in context of what they expected. The foundation of the gap analysis model lies in the set of gaps discussed. Service quality and customer experience from the perception of the customer depends on the nature and direction of gaps one, two, three and four. Customers have expectations and perceptions based on experiences on each of the dimensions of service quality i.e. tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (see Table 1).

Table 1:
Dimensions of service quality

Dimensions	Descriptions
1. Tangibles	Appearance of physical facilities, equipment and personnel.
2. Reliability	Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
3. Responsiveness	Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
4. Assurance	Knowledge/courtesy of staff and ability to inspire trust and confidence.
5. Empathy	Caring, individualised attention the organisation provides to its clients.

It is by measuring the gap between what customers expect and what they experience that provides you with a measurement of quality of the experience. When customer expectations meet experience, customers are satisfied (there is equilibrium). When expectations for example on Responsiveness and on Trust are higher than the experience, these dimensions are negative and vice versa, if expectations are lower than experience, Trust and Responsiveness in this example will be positive.

3. Conclusion

Customer experience of IPM services delivered is globally increasing in importance and it is expected that customers will become more and more demanding in an information and technologically advanced world. To adapt to this changing world where customer centricity in business is becoming the key differentiator to achieve competitiveness a pre-requisite to ensure competitiveness, growth and survival is the deliberate and skilful management and measurement of customer experience. This paper provides an introduction to establishing a customer satisfaction and experience framework for measuring and managing IPM in pest control companies.

Sources:

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