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A study of Relationship management with customers in hospitality sector

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ABSTRACT

Travelers of today are becoming more price sensitive, less brand loyal and more sophisticated unlike yester-years when they had less options to choose, brand loyalty was high and anything added value to the customer. Today, in order to enhance guest loyalty, hotels are focusing on developing Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategies that aim to seek, gather, store and share guest information throughout the entire organization for creating personalized, unique guests experiences.

The fault, it appears, is not that CRM reward programs have failed, but that such programs have not been fully developed. The solution involves enhancing the use of CRM tools, especially the capability to capture and manage the immense amount of available data to learn much more about customer behavior -- and then fashion marketing programs appropriately. Customer co creation is the need of the hour. Hoteliers must realize that the bargaining power of customers is growing rapidly and the businesses have least to do than to heed to the demands of customers. This paper highlights the study of the importance of maintaining relationship with customers of hospitality sector- with a backdrop of some leading hotels around Dharwad region

Keywords : CRM strategies, loyalty, customer co creation, hospitality sector, services

HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is the relationship between guest and host, or the act or practice of being hospitable.

For any organization or hotel who wanted to survive long term and stay competitive

within the industry, they must develop a bonding with some identified customer segments (Gronroos, 1994). The hospitality industry consists of broad category of fields within the service industry that includes lodging, restaurants, event planning, theme parks, transportation, cruise line, and additional fields within the tourism industry. The hospitality industry is a several billion dollar industry that mostly depends on the availability of leisure time and disposable income. A hospitality unit such as a restaurant, hotel, or even an amusement park consists of multiple groups such as facility maintenance, direct operations (servers, housekeepers, porters, kitchen workers, bartenders, etc.), management, marketing, and human resources.

Growth and Evaluation of CRM at Hospitality Sector

CRM has its roots in relationship marketing inaugurated by the influential work by Berry (1983) and Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne (1991). Relationship's marketing rationale is to enhance long term profitability by moving from transaction-based marketing and its prominence in attracting new customers, to customer retention by means of effective management of customer relationships (Christopher et al. 1991). Literature on CRM highlights the diffusion of relationship marketing practices for identifying, knowing and customizing services to individual customers into organization wide operations and customer touch points.

It is a good practice to evaluate not only guest satisfaction but also to evaluate the performance of employees who are providing the services. Results of surveys are used to further improve the quality of the services and products. It is recommended to enlist a third party to perform guest evaluation after the guest has checked out. Last but not least design a CRM dashboard. Make it simple and eye catching to provide a bird's eye view of where the organization stands in terms of

meeting the CRM goal.

STRATEGIES at HOSPITALITY SECTOR (Specifically HOTEL INDUSTRY) BUILT TO,

- Customer acquiring
- Customer retention
- Customer development

Customer acquiring:

- Location: A well located hotel can be easily identified by customer.
 - o Any customer can easily find a hotel convenient to choose located at places like near to, bus station, railway and Airport and other tourist attraction places.
- Awareness:
 - o Promotional activities like Visual displays, hoardings and display about the hotel in all the public places and in all tourist places can be done to create awareness about presence of the hotel.
 - o Print ads, radio jingles can play important role in creating some awareness about the hotel in customer minds.
- Word of mouth: Certain favorable word of mouth from public and existing customers may lead to develop some kind of customer base.
- Tie up with some big private/government organizations may create some sort of awareness among new customers and also lead to have increase in customer base.
- Proper segmentation:
 - o Segmenting to all types of customers by providing different classes in hotels like, economic class, AC class, and different sections for vegetarian and non-vegetarian can be provided.

Basis of the segmentation:

They segmented the customers as per the needs of the customers, their purpose and their profile.

- Family comes to the hotel to stay at hotel or to have lunch or dinner.
- The professionals are those who come for official purpose and the companies will be paying their bills. These are the customers who exclusively come for staying at the hotel and they may or may not have food at the hotel.

- Tourists are those who come to see the city and they are most of the times are travelers who stay for 1 night for the rest and check out.
- Foreigners may have come for the specific purpose or they also can be travelers.
- Companies are the customers who will book the hotel and banquet halls mainly to arrange the meeting and to train their employees.
- Event managers are the customers who book the banquet hall or open stage and organize parties, weddings and other events.

Customer retention:

- Pricing: A proper, economic and affordable prices on food and accommodation should be provided so that customers shall not shift to any other service provider.
- Availability: Providing consistent service to all customers when required. Food and accommodation shall be available to customer when he requires.
- Database of customers: Maintaining customer database and contacting them regularly based on their visits to that particular place. Also greeting the customers on their special days like birthday or anniversary through sms or call can make customer feel more special and can have a good image towards the hotel. This can also help to build a good relationship with the customer base and can lead to have a loyalty among customer towards the hotel.
- Value added services: Hotels can provide pick and drop facilities to customers where and when he requires. A help desk can be set to resolve all the queries of customers like, path finder, guide for local sight visit.
- Loyalty card: Hotels can come up with special cards to certain regular customers and provide various discounts on all the services provided to retain their loyalty towards hotel.

Customer development:

- Social Network: Building a network of all existing customers and make them all to communicate each other and develop some sort of awareness or brand in minds of new customers.
- Special offers/ discounts: Customers need to be treated in a special way. So hotels can come up with new kinds of offers.
 - o Avail regular customers to have party/bulk food in concessional fares.
 - o Provide free home delivery services.
 - o Customized product (food) services on special orders.
- Health care center: A health care center can be set in the hotels to make sure customers are having no problem with their health. A recreation center like gym and swimming pool can be set up in the hotel.

Technologies used by the companies:

Various technologies adopted by many hotels are:

- Maintaining customer database using CRM software.
 - Automatic messages are sent to the customers in the eve of New Year, Diwali and other occasions.
 - Safe Deposit Lockers
 - Tea & Coffee Maker
 - Refrigerator
 - Direct Dialing
 - Satellite T.V.
 - 24 Hours Hot & Cold Water
 - Laundry Service
 - Bar
 - Cyber Cafe
 - Childrens Park
 - Party Facility on Open Terrace & Air-Conditioned Hall
 - Doctors on call, taxi, courier and florist service also available on request.
 - Free Pickup/Drop from Railway Station, Airport & Bus Terminus on request at the time of reservation.
 - No extra charge for overstay upto 1 Hour.
- These are some of the technologies used to attract customers adopted by hotels.

Customers touch points for hotels:

Every part of a hotel including hotel's facilities, infrastructure,

technology gadget, operational processes and human touch points are all critical criteria to ensure an unforgettable stay experience for the guests.

Face to face touch points:

- Customers coming to the hotel itself and ordering for the food, here is where sales happens.
- Customers also get the food served, where in repeated service will happen which can be a touch point.
- Since some hotels have function halls too, any kind of private parties by customers and the attached service with that will also be a touch point with the customers.
- Some hotels arrange some entertainment programmes on some special occasions which can be on Christmas, diwali, new year..Etc, where in customers are invited and customer rapport building process happens.

Database driven touchpoints:

- Hotels maintain their own customer database, and maintain a good relationship with the customers by wishing them on special occasions.
- The hotels also receive home/door delivery orders through telephone, which is also a touch point with customers.
- The hotel gives the facility of credit card payment to the customers.

Mass media:

- It also advertises through news papers, roadside hoardings.....etc. These all workout as the touch points.

How to co-create value in hospitality industry

1. Customer portfolio management
2. Customer intimacy
3. Value proposition development
4. Managing customer life cycle
5. Evaluation and control

It is possible to co-create value in hospitality sector although all the hotels which we had visited don't have such system presently.

- Co-creation can be done in case of loyalty cards by taking insights from the customers regarding whether it is better to have redeemable points for every transaction? Or we should give some discounts instantly, which one will attract more customers, which one is better for a particular customer? Which kinds of value added service he expects, in which range he needs those offers etc. can be found out and we can create value for that particular customer and we can go for standardizing that value of for certain customers.
- We can even co-create value in case of some special offers also like special offers for New Year Party which pulls more customers. So we can get insights from our customers regarding which kinds of offers do they prefer during such vocations, which kinds of programs would be interesting etc.

Learning and conclusion:

The Customer relationship management is highly essential for service based company as the company deals with the intangible product or service. The customer relationship management has become the basic element required for the survival of the company as the competition is increasing among the companies.

The company having its customer relationship management in proper place can only last long and have growth in its industry as there is tough competition between the companies providing alike services to the customers.

Customer relationship management is not just the strategy, a process, software, philosophy, a programmer, network built by company but includes all of these above all it has to begin and end with the people, it has to start from service provider and end with the customer