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## The Loyalty Leader

Customer Experience Management Solutions

### Consultant's Corner

#### **Service on a Shoestring: Delivering Memorable Service without Breaking the Bank**

By Shannon Pruce, Account Director, LRA Worldwide, Inc.



Growing up, birthdays and every other major milestone always had one dreaded downside – the thank you note. After the candles had been extinguished and the presents unwrapped, the tedious thank you note process began. With it came the inevitable internal debate – did the benefit of the new playthings outweigh the psychic and physical pain (writer's cramp is no joke!) inflicted by the stack of note cards? As we age, it (presumably) becomes easier to take on this necessary task, and at times I have even relished it...but that maturation hasn't kept me from occasionally buying a bottle of wine as

a "thank you" to escape the burden of the hand-written, personal note.

However, in the "new normal" that has accompanied the current precipitous economic conditions, perhaps it's time to reexamine this arguably lost art. How can it – along with several other fairly simple practices - leave a notable impression (pun intended) with your customers. I'm not talking about automated thank you notes and survey invitations, but a real-time, hard-copy thank you note delivered upon arrival – and not just to your "best" customers. Chances are you are already doting on your high-return and elite customers, but what about that first- or second- timer? All things being equal, if you and your competitor down the street are providing similar service, it is the personal, unexpected touches that make a difference.

Like all things, start simply and use your resources. For most enterprises, a list of customers is at your fingertips through sales records or incoming arrivals lists. With this material in hand, pick a handful of customers who are new to the venue, and hand-write (yes, the "h" word) a quick sentence or two thanking them for their business. In the sports arena this could equate to your first-time ticket holder with tickets waiting at "Will Call." Your message doesn't have to be Shakespearean, just authentic – welcome, we're glad you're here. Thanks for doing business with us. Add one business card, a quick seal of the envelope, and you're done.

Before you have flashbacks to threats of "no dinner until your notes are done," let me offer a simple alternative: the welcome call. Although the tangible benefits of a note-in-hand are removed, this small gesture still conveys that simple, personalized touch that can set you apart. A voicemail is both acceptable and appropriate, and again a simple script is all that's necessary. A word of caution, however – beware the forwarded message. During a recent stay at a very well-known resort, my husband and I received a "personal" call from the General Manager preceded by ten "forwarded message" announcements from the friendly automated operator. Memorable, yes. But not in a good way.

Thank you notes and phone calls aside, take stock of other ways your company can set itself apart without going far into the red. Most importantly, get your team involved. If you're a hotel in a highly competitive market, reward associates who perform exceedingly well with excursions to nearby restaurants, nightlife, and other attractions. The reward is two-fold: first, in this "do more with less" environment, your associates are rewarded for a job well done. And by extending their product knowledge of area attractions, you increase their ability to better serve your guests.

When a tired traveler asks for a nearby place to grab a late dinner, would you prefer your associate shrugs his shoulders and leafs through the yellow pages or raves about the place down the street where he had dinner last week, thanks to you? Put yourself in your guest's shoes – which seems more appealing? And of course, if they don't already, make sure every guest facing associate knows the "survival elements" of your area – the closest gas station, drug store, even nearby fast food - *and can tell your customer how to get there.* Knowledgeable, informed associates in any industry can make a difference in the perception of a company in the eyes of its customers.

Moreover, harness that knowledge to get an insiders look at your property. Ask your front-line associates,

entry-level managers, and seasoned veterans about what they think sets your property apart and what they are hearing from guests. Ownership in the guest experience at all levels will beget positive – and lasting – guest relationships. What are they hearing **right now** that you can take action on?

Of course all of the thank you notes and phone calls in the world won't make up for lackluster service and a poor product – the basics must be executed well. However, with an increasingly cost-conscious clientele demanding the best value for their money, simple, thoughtful extras may keep them from spending their dollars down the street.

*Feedback? Email Shannon Pruce at [shannon.pruce@lraworldwide.com](mailto:shannon.pruce@lraworldwide.com).*

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## About LRA Worldwide, Inc.

LRA Worldwide is a leading research and consulting company in the emerging discipline of Customer Experience Management (CEM). We work with our clients to help them design and deliver consistently exceptional customer experiences in order to drive customer satisfaction, loyalty and advocacy, and company growth and profitability.

In LRA's 25-year history, we have grown from a provider of customized quality assurance evaluation programs for the hospitality industry, to a leading CEM consulting company offering a variety of client solutions. The evolution has been driven by our clients asking us one question "How do we get better?" In response, we have built a range of performance measurement, research, training and consulting solutions to help them do so. Today, we are a growing company operating in more than 120 countries throughout the world, helping clients such as Starwood Hotels & Resorts, the National Basketball Association, the PGA TOUR and Ritz-Carlton Clubs deliver exceptional customer experiences. Every touch. Every time. For more information, visit us at [www.LRAworldwide.com](http://www.LRAworldwide.com).

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