



# Customer service within the tennis industry.

Mark Tennant & Abbie Probert.

Inspire2coach, GBR.

## ABSTRACT

In the leisure industry customer service is a vital part of generating new business and retaining existing customers. Tennis organisations and teaching professionals are key components in delivering and promoting quality customer service within the tennis industry. Customer service can be achieved in several ways both on court and off court and is fundamental to the growth and success of an organization.

**Key words:** Customer retention, Customer service, Relationships, Tennis industry.

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**Corresponding author:** Mark Tennant, Inspire2coach, GBR.

**Email:** [mark@inspire2coach.co.uk](mailto:mark@inspire2coach.co.uk)

## INTRODUCTION

Interestingly, it was not until the late 1980s that service quality became recognised as a major area of research in the sport industry (Crompton, MacKay, & Fesenmaier, 1991). Since this recognition, service quality has become an underpinning factor for the success of the tennis industry. Nowadays, many sport organisations are competing for customers and attempting to satisfy them through a high level of customer service (Yong & Pastore, 2005). Within sport organisations, teaching professionals are fundamental to the high level of customer service.

### Why is customer service important in the tennis industry?

Customer service can be defined as the provision of service to customers before, during and after a purchase (Tennant, 2014). Customer service quality and customer satisfaction are central concepts that generate new business and retain existing customers.

Most companies acknowledge that they can only survive when they have customers and can only grow when they manage to retain existing customers and recruit new ones (Schmitt, 2003). The tennis industry is no exception, customers are a company's most valuable asset, therefore the tennis programme should be structured and managed around them (Schmitt, 2003). Tennis professionals continue to succeed when they focus on the customers' experience and key requirements are taken on board to satisfy the customer's needs. Teaching professionals are key ingredients that impact the customers' experience and have tremendous impact on the customers' perception of the quality of the service and subsequent profitability (Fulford & Enz, 1995).

## HOW TO UNDERSTAND CUSTOMERS

Communication is vital between teaching professionals and customers in the tennis industry. Teaching professionals should aim to create an environment that is safe, fun and positive for the customer. There has been evidence that suggests that when a customer is satisfied with the quality of service that they are receiving their behavioural intentions are positive, strengthening the relationship between themselves and the organisation (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). A teaching professional will achieve this success through their attitude and reputation both on court and off court. Building a positive professional relationship will increase the likelihood of customer satisfaction. A positive relationship can be achieved through managing expectations, goal setting and creating an engaging environment in which customers can learn or play the game. Teaching professionals within the tennis industry must identify their audience and adapt accordingly. For example, interacting with a junior tennis player and their parents will be different to an adult tennis player and their reasons for playing must be taken into consideration. The motivation to participate in tennis, in an ever increasing segmented leisure market, can vary between genders and age groups and identifying these reasons will enable the service to be personalised. The personalisation and adaptability that the teaching professional demonstrates leads to a feeling of uniqueness and value for the customer.

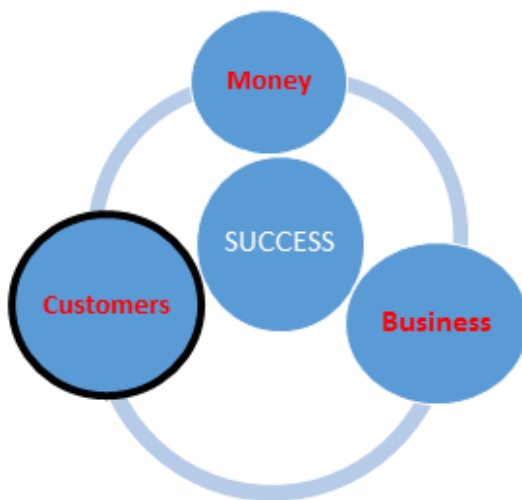


Figure 1. The important relationship between success and customers.

A negative experience can be detrimental to the organisation or teaching professional. It must be remembered that customers are not short on alternatives. If a customer is not satisfied other options can be sought or even a new activity could be taken up in their highly prized leisure time. Quality customer service can be the deciding factor of the success of a sport organisation (Yong & Pastore, 2005) and longevity of a partnership so an organisation should never take their customers for granted.

It would be unrealistic to think that customers are satisfied at all times. Despite a best effort, things might not work out. The criticism and complaints from customers are extremely useful feedback if used productively. Complaints can highlight areas that were previously over looked or deemed as less significant but which the customers think are important. Complaints and criticism that are used in a constructive way can be used to give organisations and teaching professionals a second chance to improve services and products. It is often an indicator of how a teaching professional or organisation can differentiate themselves from their competitors and the feedback is knowledge about what can be done to better themselves (Martin, 2010).



GIVING A GOOD SERVICE

Table 1. below shows six recommendations for teaching professionals to ensure good customer service in provided.

Six ways to ensure quality customer service	
Personal equipment	A teaching professional should ensure that all personal equipment and teaching aids are in excellent condition. It is imperative to make sure all balls are in good condition ahead of lesson time and if the lesson requires the use of technology, this should be charged appropriately and in a working order that meets safety requirements. Lessons run smoothly and safely when equipment standards are high.
Personal presentation	A teaching professional should be neat, clean and have a well groomed appearance. An outsider should be able to clearly identify the teaching professional by their appearance. Effort should be made in order to ensure clean teeth, hair and skin.
Politeness	At the end of each lesson, thank them and establish your next meeting date and time. Your lesson should be the best hour of the week for your students. Take time to watch people play and be willing to offer a quick tip, a word of encouragement or an acknowledgment of their progress between their lessons with you.
Punctuality	A teaching professional should always be on time for lessons or appointments and be respectful of everyone's time by starting and ending promptly.
Preparation	Ideally, the teaching professional should aim to arrive at least fifteen minutes prior to the lesson to prepare for the arrival of the customer, set up the court, review notes or ensure that the facilities are open and ready for play.
Personalisation	It is key to initiate the relationship with friendly introduction. A teaching professional should greet every customer with a smile and welcome them to the lesson, whether they are a returning customer or new. When working with new customers it is important that a teaching professional learns their name and uses it frequently. Personalisation allows customers to feel at ease and it is recommended that teaching professionals learn things that are important to them such as family, career or hobbies.

Table 1. Six recommendations to increase customer service standard and customer satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

Teaching professionals have a constant and daily impact on the lives of customers, imparting knowledge, instruction and feedback both on and off court. Customer service is an essential part of the tennis industry helping to generate new business and retain existing customers. A teaching professional can create a positive environment that fosters growth and satisfies the customers by ensuring that they make the customer feel welcome, unique and special. It is important to remember that within the tennis industry customers have a choice, whether that be to change organisations or to take up a new activity in their leisure time.

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