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The Thunderbird Learning Consulting Network's Global Business and Competitive Intelligence practice features Professor Paul Kinsinger, a 30-year intelligence professional who has taught more than 2,000 T-bird MBA's about the value of competitive intelligence, done over 150 CI projects with companies ranging from Fortune 50's to small start-ups, and provided workshops for companies seeking to arm their employees to be intelligence collectors and for working CI professionals seeking to upgrade their skills sets.

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Are you a technology provider? Here's nine steps to improve your all-important "customer experience."

The all-important "customer experience." Before the holidays, I had two encounters that reinforced how critical it is. First, a catalogue sales person was unable to help me place an order without a specific clothes size...not too helpful, considering most men are unfamiliar with women's sizing but can offer up height and weight. The result? A lost sale. Second, I got an unnecessary call from my car leasing company asking about lease-end turn-in two weeks after I had already traded the car into the same dealer and leased a new one. Why weren't they aware of that?

Companies with award-winning and cutting edge technologies and products have too often been tripped up in the marketplace by complacent or even mediocre customer service practices. Thunderbird recently completed a project aimed at identifying best practices for managing "the customer experience" among several companies with very high customer service expectations, and nine key attributes emerged:

- 1) Move call centers for high end customers—enterprise or key corporate accounts—back to the US or drop your plans to move them to India now. Those customers expect to have their support needs easily and clearly understood and acted upon.
- 2) Don't enforce time limits for customer calls. Move instead toward learning to fix things right the first time.
- 3) Make your web-based support information as easy to understand and use as possible, as is done by a major online travel planning provider.
- 4) Have product specialists no more than one call away from the first agent for the customer.
- 5) Consider offering customers a fixed price yearly rate that would include face-to-face time with a customer service representative, as is done by a company with one of the fiercest brand loyalties out there.
- 6) Move to brand the customer experience, if you can. Think "Geek Squad."
- 7) Provide demonstration videos on your website for the most common problems your customers encounter, as is done by a major online travel planning provider
- 8) Consider implementing the use of a Myers-Briggs type testing for customer service representatives so you can assign more appropriate personnel
- 9) Provide a place or a way for CSR's to "play" with the products they must service, as they do at a major provider of satellite television services

To learn more, contact us at the Thunderbird Learning Consulting Network.

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