



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Foreword

### A guide to customer care best practice

#### Creating an outstanding guest experience

As consumers travel more widely, their expectations rise. In the UK however, our levels of customer service don't always match our high standards of retail marketing expertise and innovative shopping centre design.



As this year's President of retail property organisation BCSC, I've focused on addressing this industry-wide issue. To this end, BCSC commissioned Industry Forum Services to analyse the wide range of issues affecting customer care and to produce a definitive, practical guide to best practice.

The result is [A guide to customer care best practice: creating an outstanding guest experience](#). The full report examines shopping centre environments, related staff implications, consumers' needs and experiences, and the roles of retailers and stakeholders – offering clear advice and practical suggestions. This is the latest in a series of BCSC customer-focused publications, which include [A training guide for customer relations/security staff in shopping centres \(2000\)](#).

We believe that this publication is a roadmap for best practice and a critical first step towards ensuring that UK customer care levels can be perceived as being the highest in the world.

**Bob De Barr**  
President BCSC

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## Creating an outstanding guest experience

### 1.0 Introduction

This guide to best practice was developed as the result of a six-month research programme. Its purpose was to develop, with examples, elements of best practice in customer care in shopping centres, which companies and employees could embrace in order to improve their performance. The research included 30 interviews with consumers, retailers, shopping centre management teams, property companies and town centre managers. Both in-depth qualitative interviews of consumers (200) and quantitative market research surveys (8,000) were used and were supported by a telephone interview programme. A cross section of 12 different sized shopping centres across the UK were surveyed to cover the breadth of the sector.

#### Framework

The underlying business model used as a framework for the guide is based on the four principles:

- Performance is delivered by people using sound processes. Both trained and motivated employees and outstanding processes (often very simple) are required to deliver exceptional performance. Investment in recruitment and training helps to develop people with potential and character to deliver outstanding service.
- Satisfaction is obtained by meeting customer expectations. Consistently exceeding customer expectations develops customer loyalty.
- Unmet expectations must be identified and recovered.
- Customer focus is critical in understanding and anticipating customer needs and expectations.

#### Implementing best practice

Implementing best practice is about deciding which areas to compete in. 'To be the best' is often based on the notion that there is a single optimum way to compete. This is not always the most profitable strategy and appealing to a particular target group, using identified elements of best practice, often delivers the greatest long-term financial returns.

#### Summary of results

The research results are divided into five chapters and include:

- The organisation and management of customer care within a company.
- The understanding of consumer needs and behaviour.
- The customer shopping experience.
- The relationship with retailers.
- The relationship with other stakeholders.



### 2.0 Culture, people and management

In order to deliver outstanding customer care there needs to be a supportive environment in which customer service can flourish. Best practice organisations:

- Are led by visionary, inspiring leaders who promote change. These people communicate a clear vision and operate by a strong set of values that they share with their staff.
- Have values that appeal to customers and staff. They focus on meeting customer needs – operating in a way that lets staff take pride in their business and makes customers happy to buy from them.
- Unlock the potential of their people. The best businesses develop their employees, making them feel valued and encouraging them to contribute to the business.
- Promote new ideas and ways of working. They see that future success depends on constant improvement and innovation.
- Know their customers. They are always looking to learn from their customers and try to anticipate and respond to their changing demands.
- Try to exceed their customers' expectations. They place great emphasis on continually improving the quality of the products and services they provide.

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The one thing that best practice organisations have in common is that they focus on people – how they think, how they communicate and how they work together. The three main categories which underpin this philosophy are:

### Culture: leadership and mission statements

- Having a champion who sponsors continuous improvement in customer care.
- An organisational culture focused on the consumer.

### Performance measurement and reward

- Ensuring that performance is measured.
- Goals are written into the business plan.
- Achievement is rewarded.

### People development: recruitment, training and responsibility

- Recruiting people with the right attitude to respond to customer service training.
- Training in both customer care skills and product knowledge.
- Delegating responsibility to solve and look after customer enquiries.
- Empowering and motivating all employees.

#### KEY BEST PRACTICE

The key best practice issues are:

- There is an individual who is directly responsible to the board for customer care.
- Customer care objectives for consumers and retailers are communicated to all members of staff.
- Good customer service is regularly rewarded financially. Outstanding customer service is singled out for praise and is also rewarded.
- The selection of staff is based on their ability to relate to customers.
- All personnel, whether employed or subcontracted, go through an induction programme for the centre which includes both centre knowledge and customer care; this is updated annually.
- Delegated authority and responsibility is given to all staff members to resolve customer issues immediately.



## 3.0 Understanding consumers

Consumer focus is critical. Both qualitative and quantitative data is required to be able to understand customer expectations. This section specifies the four areas of research data that are required in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the current and potential customer needs. These are:

### Market research

Used to identify the customer profile, shopping centre usage and consumer needs. Although companies traditionally invest significantly in this area, they often overlook two important areas of research: customers should be interviewed about their behaviour both at the time of arrival (when they become customers), and at the time of departure (when they stop using the centre). Whilst difficult to carry out in the shopping centre environment, successful market research should be designed to overcome this. An understanding of how and why customers are gained as well as lost is crucial, both in attracting new customers and in retaining the existing customer base.

### Customer satisfaction indices

Surveying customers about their level of satisfaction and plotting the results, helps managers to understand just how satisfied or dissatisfied customers are with shopping centre services and facilities.

### Qualitative in-depth consumer research

To understand consumer reactions to the customer services offered, we recommend using the following categories to measure it by:

- Basic attributes: Their non-availability/delivery leads to immediate dissatisfaction because their presence is expected. An example would be the provision of an adequate number of well located and clean WCs.



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- Linear attributes: This type of provision leads to an incremental improvement in satisfaction. An example would be the presence of vending machines within the washrooms.
- Attributes which surprise and please: Their non-availability/delivery leads to no dissatisfaction but their presence leads to greatly improved satisfaction. An example would be the provision of hand care lotion in the WCs.

### Feedback mechanisms with front line personnel

Best practice companies ensure that customers' comments, complaints and questions are collated, analysed and acted upon. A shopping centre cannot implement a recovery strategy – a plan for making amends when something has gone wrong – if it does not know who has had a problem. Therefore having a dynamic process to capture consumer feedback is critical.

Employees who have direct contact with the customer provide an important listening point. However, to take full advantage of front line employees' interactions with customers, a company must train them to listen effectively and to make the first attempts at amends when customers have had bad experiences. They must also have processes in place to capture the information and pass it along to the rest of the company.

#### KEY BEST PRACTICE

The key best practice issues are:

- Market research is carried out regularly to measure customer satisfaction and customer preferences. This quantitative data is analysed and disseminated both to all shopping centre personnel and to retailers.
- In order to deliver satisfaction, customer needs must be analysed.
- There is a process in place to encourage consumer feedback.
- Customer comment is listened to and fed back throughout the organisation on a regular basis.

## 4.0 The consumer shopping experience – the journey

This section traces the delivery of best practice to the consumer throughout the shopping experience. First the journey to the centre, then transfer to and arrival at the centre, then the shopping centre and retail experience itself and, finally, the onward journey.

A detailed analysis of this journey identified ten key stages within which 20-30 customer contact points are made. These stages are illustrated in the graphics below. At each of these points opinions are formed and satisfaction levels are generated.

The delivery of the customer care experience is supported by the culture, management and people processes highlighted in the first section. The experience can only be improved if the processes to measure consumer perceptions and satisfaction levels are in place as described in section two.

The audit process of the physical elements of the shopping centre environment is straightforward. However, consumers' emotional reactions are more difficult to analyse. How they respond emotionally to elements of the experience will be specific to the consumer group and the shopping centre. The inclusion of service elements which delight the customer in the journey is important in the development of customer loyalty.

The elements which were classified as basic, i.e. those which developed strong elements of dissatisfaction, were as follows:

- Poor signage to/from the centre.
- Queues.
- Poor quality car park lighting and environment.
- Poor signage in the car park to enable location of the car, on returning to it.
- Poor ambience (light, heat, sound, smell).
- Lack of centre information and advice.
- Inattentive service.
- Inaccurate information.
- Confusing signage within the centre.



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- Inadequate toilet facilities.
- Poor food offer and poor retail offer.
- Inadequate special needs facilities (from baby facilities, crèche to mobility, etc).

### KEY BEST PRACTICE

The key best practice issues are:

- The customer journey starts on the way to the shopping centre and includes the approach to the centre and the departure, by all forms of transport.
- The provision of service outside the centre is equally important in driving customer satisfaction.
- The flawless delivery of basic services is imperative as poor performance leads to high levels of dissatisfaction.
- Increased provision of services may lead to relatively little increase in customer satisfaction. However, an impressive availability of services or the provision of unexpected services which create delight, lead to great satisfaction and loyalty.
- The provision of service includes the need to satisfy all members of the shopping party and their non-shopping needs.
- The customer journey includes environment, ambience, entertainment, food and drink.
- Staff in best practice organisations interact with customers, understanding how to greet, exchange information, deliver a service efficiently and effectively and, at the end, give an appropriate farewell salutation.

## 5.0 Retailers

This section takes a look at the relationship between retailers and the shopping centre. It recommends best practice in terms of working together to meet the needs of the ultimate customer, the consumer.

The shopping environment is changing, with consumers demanding more and spending less. In order to compete, the shopping centres need to deliver an improved customer experience; one which includes the total 'customer journey'.

### KEY BEST PRACTICE

The key best practice issues are:

- Pro-active regular communication with the retailer in a manner which is responsive to their needs.
- Shopping centre management needs to demonstrate an understanding of retail business models and key performance indicators (KPIs). Retail liaison should be the specific responsibility of one person.
- The shopping centre provides centralised consumer data which is helpful to the retailer.
- There is a cost effective spend of the marketing budget based on this consumer data.
- The shopping centre is measured by retailers' perceptions of their performance, both in terms of the physical delivery (e.g. the billing process) and their management (openness, responsiveness, etc).
- There are pro-active programmes to encourage the wider adoption of customer care with the other stakeholders and joint initiatives with retailers.
- There are induction programmes for retailer staff.

## 6.0 Relationship with other stakeholders

This chapter highlights key elements of best practice for completeness; although this was not a major focus of the research. Community and town centre involvement is an important element of footfall generation and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Having a strong CSR function has been demonstrated to provide long-term beneficial results to those companies who embrace it. Proactive, well managed involvement in the community and finding ways to compliment town centres has been shown to have both immediate and long term benefits.

### KEY BEST PRACTICE

The key best practice issue is:

- Best practice organisations have a proactive involvement with their extended communities, actively participating in community and town centre issues.



**Report funded by:**  
BCSC Educational Trust

**Researched and written by:**  
Ken Watson



### **Steering Group – Customer Care Committee**

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The full report is available from BCSC in print, on CD and online at <http://www.bpsc.org.uk>.

Audit sheets to examine performance and checklists for action are also available on the CD and as free downloads to members.

Price: £25.00 (members £10)  
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ISBN 1 897958 28 5

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Designed by Robert Barkshire. Printed by DJ Press.

# **BCSC**

**REPRESENTING THE RETAIL  
PROPERTY INDUSTRY**

1 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9BT  
T: 020 7222 1122 F: 020 7222 4440  
E: [info@bpsc.org.uk](mailto:info@bpsc.org.uk) W: [www.bpsc.org.uk](http://www.bpsc.org.uk)