

How Customer Service Helped One Shopping Center Stand Out Against The Competition



A BELDING GROUP CASE STUDY



Winner of the 2010 CSTD WOW! Award

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Produced by: The Belding Group of Companies Inc.

About This Case Study

Marketing a Shopping Center is a challenge at the best of times. to stand out. Traffic levels are traditionally dependent on the location of a center, and the selection of its retailers. It is hard to find a way to stand out in consumer's minds.

But when new, aggressive competition is on the brink of becoming a reality, it is critical that a center find a competitive difference that will keep their consumers coming back.

This Case Study examines how one Shopping Center leveraged enhanced Customer Service retain their share of market and their customers' loyalty.

Overview

Halifax Shopping Centre is one of the premier shopping destinations in Eastern Canada. Faced with new and aggressive competition, they created a joint retailer task force in 2009 to come up with an effective, competitive marketing strategy.

They knew that their vast selection of quality retailers was what defined their shopping centre, but what defined their customers' experience was the customer service the retailers provided. They determined that the ability of their retailers to deliver superior customer service would be the key driver which would give them the competitive edge.



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The *Together We're More* Program

The Belding Group of Companies was invited to collaborate with Halifax Shopping Centre in designing and executing an effective retail development strategy which was eventually named the *Together We're More* program. The program was created to transfer effective customer service practices through formal and informal learning and to drive direct and indirect participation from the retailers.



The year-long program helped build customer service levels, excitement in stores and throughout the shopping centre as retailers and individual employees were recognized and rewarded for providing WOW! experiences to customers.

The *Together We're More* program was designed to integrate enhanced customer service into the Halifax Shopping Centre's existing marketing theme of "More," with the mission of "Providing a fresh, new experience at the Halifax Shopping Centre" This statement outlined the commitment to ensure that customers *and* retailers have more positive experiences.



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Implementation Challenges

In order to develop and deliver an effective customer service development program, there were a few challenges that needed to be considered and overcome. Here is an outline of some of the more difficult challenges that Belding and Halifax Shopping Centre faced.



No Direct Control

Because the program participants were not direct employees of Halifax Shopping Centre, we could not mandate participation in the program. We were going to have to generate sufficient interest and enthusiasm to get people involved and engaged.

Varying Interest Levels

While some retailers were keen on improving their customer service, others did not share the same level of interest. We were going to have to design the program in such a way that all tenants were involved – either actively or passively.

Broad Participant Cross-Section

Halifax Shopping Centre retailers came from a wide cross section of industries including food, retail and service, among others. As a result, each retailer had a unique set of interest and customer service challenges. The program would need to be designed in such a way as to be relevant to all participants.

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Strategic Program Elements

To ensure optimal engagement of the retailers, a number of strategic elements were introduced:

Rewards And Incentives

Both a cumulative 'Points' approach and a situational reward approach were used to encourage participation in the program and to motivate employees to transfer their new customer service skills onto the sales floor. Throughout the course program, retailers were able to accumulate points towards their overall scores as well as to win instant prizes.

Motivational Launch Kick-Off Event

Halifax Shopping Centre hosted a centre-wide breakfast to launch the program. Each retailer was provided with an information package, and Belding CEO and customer service expert, Shaun Belding, delivered the motivational keynote speech.



Orientation For New Hires

Belding created a customized train-the-trainer workshop to prepare selected retail managers for delivering monthly orientation sessions offered to recently hired employees. These sessions provide new-hires up-to-date information on the Halifax Shopping Centre, the importance of customer service and details of the Together We're More! Program.



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Strategic Program Elements (Cont'd)

Eight Targeted Retailer Workshops

Belding created eight workshops, customized to address high-yield behaviours. Each workshop was 2 hours in length, targeted to address specific skills and customer service best practices. The workshops were delivered by Belding certified trainers. The topics included:

- World Class Customer Service
- Creative Ways for Building Sales
- How to Reward your Team and Retain the Best
- Coaching for Customer Service
- How to Hire Customer Focused Employees
- WOW! Customer Service
- World Class Customer Services
- Christmas Sales Building Tips



WOW! Cards

Recognition cards were provided to all store managers to reward employees of other stores who provided them with outstanding customer service. Each WOW! Card given away earned the manager points for their stores and extra points were rewarded if cards included a personalized message as to why the employee deserved the WOW! Card.

The employee receiving the WOW! Card was able to redeem the card at Guest Services for a \$10 Halifax Shopping Centre gift card and receive a point for their store as well. This program reinforced the use of core customer service skills in a positive and memorable manner.

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Reward And Recognition Measurements

The following were two methods used to measure and reward performance:

Customer Satisfaction Exit Surveys

Belding conducted customer satisfaction exit surveys once a week for the course of 4 weeks to help target and identify retailers that provided the highest customer service. Surveyors were stationed at the shopping centre's mall exits and approached customers about their shopping experience at Halifax Shopping Centre. Each store mentioned as providing excellent customer service received a point.

RetailTrack Mystery Shopping

Over the course of the program RetailTrack Mystery Shopping conducted two mystery shops of all of the stores in the shopping centre. Each retailer was visited to assess their performance based on customer service best practices and industry standards.

Retailers then received points based on their score and any stores achieving 100% received a certificate from RetailTrack.



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Engagement And Reinforcement

To ensure that retailers remained engaged and that the customer service initiative was sustained the following elements were also used:

Customer Service E-mail Tips

In order to maintain customer service as the top priority in all stores, employees were encouraged to sign up for regular e-mails which provided tips and facts on delivering great customer service. The 12 emails sent out throughout the year also provided reminders of skills that were introduced in training workshops and newsletters.

Retail Performance Newsletter

Monthly newsletters offering customer service news and tips were distributed to all stores. Each newsletter provided insightful and informative articles, updated information on the Together We're More! program and upcoming mall events.

Customer Service Quiz

At the midway point of the program an online customer service quiz based on the e-mail tips, newsletters and training workshops to date were made accessible to all employees. The online quiz which was available over a 3 week period could be taken at home or a computer was available for use at Guest Services. Each person who completed the quiz received a personalized response to their answers including updated scores and comments. Each employee who completed the quiz received a point for their store.



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Program Design

The program design was a true collaboration between Belding Skills Training & Development and Halifax Shopping Centre. Belding provided the strategic core, and Halifax developed the incredible look & feel. Together we worked on the executional elements, making adjustments based on the ongoing results and feedback. Here are just some of the key design elements:

Cost Efficiency

Halifax Shopping Centre allocated \$10,000 in prizes to stimulate participation and reward performance. Instead of using cash, however, the funds were all presented in the form of Halifax Shopping Centre Gift Cards. This meant that all prizes ultimately flowed back to the retailers.

Flexible Engagement Model

The model was structured for both active and passive participation. This allowed individual retailers to participate to the level they were interested, able and (in some cases of national retailers) permitted.

Synergies With Other Centre Initiatives

The *Together We're More!* theme leveraged and supported Halifax Shopping Centre's ongoing marketing efforts. The core message that the greatest success would come when all retailers work together helped build pride and community in the centre.



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Results/ Evaluation

The program was measured on the level of participant, level of participant satisfaction and performance change in the live environment.

Tenant Participation Numbers

Over half of the 148 tenants actively participated (workshops, WOW! Cards, web-based quizzes, etc) in the program. The remainder of tenants were kept involved through mystery shops, customer and peer feedback.

Level 1 Feedback

When asked the question, "Will this help you at work," 80.5% of participants said the workshops answered "absolutely." 87% of participants believed the topics were "very relevant." 98% rated the content as Excellent to Very Good.

Mystery Shop Results

RetailTrack Mystery Shopping keeps a benchmark of performance for shopping centres,, with the average overall performance being 63.8%. The initial sweep conducted within two weeks of the event launch showed a dramatic increase from the mean of overall scores to 80.4%. A subsequent sweep three months later showed a levelling off at 75.6%.



About The Belding Group of Companies Inc.

The Belding Group has been helping companies stand out with customer experience for 23 years. It has two divisions that provide consulting, training and measurement in customer service, workplace performance and leadership. It has two divisions:



Belding Training designs, develops and delivers customer service training, leadership training and workplace performance. Belding Training has earned accolades globally, and has won international awards for the innovation, effectiveness and results of its programs.



RetailTrack conducts mystery shopping and customer and employee satisfaction surveys throughout North America. RetailTrack's unique approach provides critical insights that help companies identify opportunities for Standing Out in Customer Experience.



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