

Service at the Write Road

by Roger Henson, Southwest Training and Consulting

When do you think the last page will be written about the importance of service or about service excellence? As I read differing perspectives on service and how better service leads to higher profits, if your company really wants to stand out from the crowd, service is the differentiator. I wonder does service beyond the expected level really matter? After a major storm, like Hurricane Irene, basic services like “rescue me” are expected. Getting the power restored is expected. Getting the planes back in the air is expected. No real thanks for a job well done, we just expect service people to do their job. Quite often it is almost impossible to exceed expectations when we expect equipment and service providers to always meet our ever-higher expectations.

I was looking over my bookshelf at some of the different titles from a few years ago. There is *Raving Fans* and *Gung Ho!* by Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles, *Keeping Customers for Life* by Joan Koob Cannie, *After the Sale* by Joe Patton and William Bleuel, *Competitive Advantage* by Michael Porter, *Love 'em or Lose 'em* by Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans, *180 Ways to Walk the Customer Service Talk* by Eric Harvey, *Discovering the Soul of Service* by Leonard Berry, *Positively Outrageous Service* by T. Scott Gross, *Aligned Thinking* by Jim Steffen, *The Knowledge-Based Organization* by James Alexander and Michael Lyons, and one of my favorite titles, *A Complaint Is a Gift* by Janelle Barlow and Claus Möller. There are many more on management, motivation, leadership and how to become successful.

It seemed like a new book was coming out every week, with each author sharing new insights and revelations on how to become a success in the world of services. Like some of you, I belonged to AFSMI, the Association For Services Management International, which published a monthly magazine full of how-to and success-based articles about the world of “after sale”

service and services. For many years I attended monthly local chapter meetings and we had a local monthly newsletter. Today, we want to get to the answer in “two clicks” of the mouse. No time to wait for a newsletter or magazine in the competitive world of today. One of my commitments to myself when I first became a service manager was that I would be the Editor of a regular newsletter for the organization I was to lead. I was able to keep that commitment through many different organizations and job changes having names like *The Link*, *The Loop* and *The Lariat*, depending on where I was. *The Lariat* was the newsletter name in Texas. The idea of taking time to reflect and then put thoughts and ideas into a newsletter format vs. a memo created a different feel to the written word. The memo was usually facts and figures, get to the point and make it easy to understand. The newsletter was more personal, the effects of actions to be taken or recognizing those who had gone the extra mile to make a bad situation turn out OK. Pictures were also a part of the story, not just a posting on Facebook, but a way to enhance the story or further recognize the achievements of others. Of course, there are those who write blogs on a regular basis, but not always with a target audience. Within the NASM community we have the opportunity to share and promote the successes of our organizations with the rest of our service community through the NASM Newsletter. It then becomes a permanent record to reflect on as we move down the road and up the corporate ladder.

What about you and your organization? Are there persons or processes that you could recognize or promote through an article in the newsletter? Benchmarking and Best Practices sharing are still vital in our highly competitive world and perhaps your success story could be just what another member needs to solve a problem in their organization.

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The JobTarget website offers employers and job seekers an opportunity to find each other.

Interlog 2011 – Summer Session

A report to the NASM Membership by Ned White, Director-Sales and Marketing, Ken Cook Co.

The Interlog 2011 Summer session was held June 13th-15th at the Omni Los Angeles at California Plaza. This was a great conference facility and in an excellent and surprisingly walkable location of downtown LA (just across from the amazingly futuristic Frank Gehry–designed Walt Disney Concert Hall – home for the Los Angeles Philharmonic).

As I had been with the Ken Cook Co. for less than a month and completely new to the technical information and service manager support industry (and clutching my brand new ‘suitable for framing’ NASM Membership Certificate), I really wasn’t sure what to expect from my first Interlog Conference.

I had my first “I’m not in Kansas anymore” moment when, in my initial session, the moderator asked, “Who here is from a *small company*? And by that I mean under \$500 million in sales.” I was one of the very few to sheepishly raise my hand...

Clearly this was an event with the major players in the large-scale Reverse Logistics industry. The casual conference setting offered the opportunity to interact both professionally and personally with Senior VPs from such organizations as Apple, EMC, HP, Sony Electronics, Oracle America, Hitachi Data Systems, LG Electronics, UPS, the US Army and a host of others.

There were numerous detailed formal presentations but what was most fascinating for me was that nearly all of the sessions featured break-out groups and interactive roundtables where we worked together in teams to tackle Harvard Business School Case Study–style problem exercises.

The most compelling was a hands-on workshop in “Six Sigma in the Aftermarket” led by Cable Best, Director of Quality Assurance for the Bose Corporation. We brainstormed and worked together to find new solutions to real-world problems. In my workgroup I strategized with SVPs for Apple, Cisco, Medtronics and Abbott Labs...pretty heady stuff for a ‘newbie.’

What was most fascinating was that, despite the vastly different industries, there was so much commonality in the challenges faced by all of the attendees. The only real differing factor was the scale and scope of their respective markets; their problems were all remarkably similar.

As a relief to the serious presentations and workshops, The Interlog Conference staff structured a number of interesting, more casual networking opportunities. Different vendors, such as ReSolve and Solutions Zone, sponsored end-of-day outdoor wine and cheese and cocktail receptions for mingling with our newfound colleagues.

The most fun (and actually fascinating) was a Speed Networking Session sponsored by UPS Logistics. Sort of like a business version of ‘speed dating.’ You’d be surprised at how hard and amusing it is to try to describe what your company does in a frenetic one minute burst (perhaps the open bar complicated things!).

A couple of the formal (i.e., PowerPoint-driven) presentations really jumped out at me.

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Interlog 2011 (cont'd.)

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The first was by the very folksy Georgian, Col. Joe Walden (Ret. US Army), who is now the Director of the Supply Chain Leadership Institute. He explored the concept of initial Supply and then Reverse Logistics from the historical experiences of the US Army. He quoted Gen. George S. Patton, who said, "In the heat of battle, troops often ask for things that they do not really need." Typically the Army will fulfill those requests so the Reverse Logistics issues often entail the accounting for and return or disposition of vast amounts of equipment.

In the run-up to Operation Iraqi Freedom, Col. Walden supervised, over a few short weeks, the transfer of the equivalent of 150 Walmart Supercenters' worth of gear that occupied an over 40 hectare (100 plus acres) expanse of desert. Once the operation commenced he was charged with evaluating what they had, resupplying what was needed the most (that had changed considerably) and redistributing what was no longer appropriate.

His key was to Know Your Process: Define It, Walk It (get out of your office; go and really see what is happening), Evaluate It (in real time to modify as needed) and conduct a thorough After Action Review.

Apparently, one of the returning 'rock stars' of this event is Rusty Walther, VP-Technology Services, HP Storage. His rollicking talk focused on the "Impact of Mergers and Acquisitions on Service Logistics." He survived (and apparently thrived) through eight M&As, all while maintaining and rebranding his Service Logistics Operations.

His lesson for continued support operations during an M&A is to: communicate compulsively, check your ego at the door; keep your focus on your job, your team and your customers. *Know when to fight* (when it impacts your customers) and *when to roll over* (when the impact is ambiguous or out of your control).

Like Col. Walden, Rusty Walther warned to "beware of the Fog of War." Whether in battle or in business, much will be unknowable...just focus on satisfying your customers!

An additional value of this session was the ability for Interlog to conduct a high-level Benchmarking Study on Supply Chain issues from among the executives and companies who attend these events. Within all participating industries (conducted at Interlog 2010), two distinct product support issues emerged: high cost/low volume returns and low cost/high volume returns. Each requires vastly different support cost structures, yet all customers still demand the same prompt resolution of their problems.

Senior management recognizes that a great service and repair operation can make or break a company's bottom line. The key is to systemize good service processes so that they are scalable, repeatable transactions. That will keep existing your customers and attract new customers to grow your business.

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Go to: www.nasm.com and click on "Service Management Certification" for more information on application procedures.

Don't delay, take that next step toward NASM Certification!

Service at the Write Road (cont'd.)

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But, is it even worth the time to write about service if service is no longer a competitive advantage? Walmart has a very successful business model that emphasizes price, and I know of small service-first businesses that have had to shut their doors. Does your company see a real competitive advantage in having front-line employees go the extra mile? Or do you take a situational approach? We would like to think our employees go the extra mile for our very important customers, but practically there isn't always the time to do so. Obviously you cannot give service above and beyond your price point and stay in business. However, in my interaction with small business owners, marketing

Outstanding Customer Service is often getting more attention than delivering Outstanding Customer Service.

Now back to the premise of this article. As someone once said, "If I knew I would die tomorrow, I would still plant a tree today." In our service businesses, do we still go the extra mile knowing that we still believe Service at its Very Best is a successful business model? Or, will the last chapter on Excellence in Service soon be written?

Roger Henson
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Osterhaus Replaces Aylesworth on NASM Board

President David Jones announced he had received a notice of resignation from Dwight Aylesworth: "We appreciate the dedicated service Dwight gave to NASM, especially his work on the Education Committee. We welcome Carl Osterhaus, Service Education Manager, The Toro Company. We are looking forward to Carl's leadership on the NASM Board."

Carl Osterhaus is the Service Education Manager for the Toro Company, Commercial Equipment Division. In this position, Carl works directly with Toro Distributor Service Managers, Service Directors and Service Technicians, organizing and providing a wide selection of training. This training ranges from basic system fundamentals and machine-specific training all the way to customer relations and shop operations. The Toro Company offers this training through a combination of traditional, in-house training activities, live online training events and self-paced online courses, which Carl develops and delivers.

Prior to coming to Toro in 1995, Carl held numerous service and service management positions including Service Manager at several Agricultural equipment dealerships, Area Service Manager at J.I. Case Company and Product Support Manager at J.I. Case Company.



Through current and previous positions, Carl has had extensive experience in all aspects of the service industry, from direct customer contact, dealer to manufacturer interactions, and manufacturer to dealer and customer interactions. Carl uses these experiences to increase the level of professionalism and knowledge for all service department members he works with on a regular basis.

NASM New Website with a Forum

The NASM website, www.nasm.com, has been redesigned with more features. Members now have a page on the website to network with other members on related issues and challenges. Here are several items which you may want to share and get fellow service executive input:

- An internal challenge you are having and need another opinion
- Pre-delivery
- Supplier warranty recovery

- Extended warranty pricing and ways of expanding sales
- Warranty practices and processes
- Measuring Key Performance Indicators (KPI)
- Using IBM Cognos for field tracking
- Using telematic systems
- Technical call center/knowledge base solutions
- Technical publications (parts catalogs, ops manuals, etc.)
- Women in service management

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Management Myths

by Jack L. Huffman

This issue we look at the myths “The Customer is Always Right” and “One Dose of Time Management Education is All You Will Ever Need.”

The Customer is Always Right

Here’s a highly misunderstood adage. We can think of many customers who were simply not right. Some were mistaken about the facts and some were trying to get something for nothing. Some customers make a decision concerning what should be done and not move from that decision. They feel that they are right and we must give.

Here is a case in point. A few years ago a national retailer decided that its return policy would be “The customer is always right.” This statement translated to their return goods policy. The customers did not need a receipt. All the customers had to do is say what was paid and the retailer would give them a credit slip for that amount. This policy did not last many months. Enough of the customers took advantage of the policy that it became a laughing matter to many of the employees.

One Dose of Time Management Education is All You Will Ever Need

If only this were true. Unfortunately, old habits die hard and poor time management habits tend to return as the manager deals with the multitude of problems and decisions associated with managing a function.

The best approach to improved time management is to improve one aspect of time management every month or quarter. For example, if not using a daily or weekly To Do list, begin doing it. When the list becomes habit, move on to the next time management approach. Perhaps you might want to deal with e-mails more efficiently. Let that become habit. Next, you might want to move to the “What’s the best use of my time right now” approach and let that become habit. Do not ever think that an hour or two of time management education will make you a much better time manager.

These myths were excerpted from *Aftermarket Management for Distributors and Dealers*, the NASM study manual for those preparing for the Certified Service Manager Examination.

Welcome New Members

Randall Arita, Hawthorne Pacific

Aldirico Carba, Hawthorne Pacific

David Dietz, Storr Tractor Company

Tim Franklin, EOS

John Garlets, Spartan Distributors, Inc.

Angela Hubbell, Kenney Machinery Corp.

Brian Kuhn, Storr Tractor Company

Doug Leischner, Midland Implement

Michael Mabe, Jerry Pate Turf & Irrigation

Michael Moyer, C.H. Reed, Inc.

Craig Neuhardt, Doosan Portable Power

Michael Skvorzov, Shuffle Master, Inc.

Travis Tilton, Hawthorne Pacific

Lloyd Tsue, Hawthorne Pacific

Ned White, Ken Cook Co.

Chad Zitur, Midland Implement

NASM New Website with a Forum (cont'd.)

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You most likely have challenges that would benefit from another opinion and that is why NASM is adding this unique feature to the website. What questions do you see posting to a forum like this? What do you want to see on this forum? This will help us with future communications including the NASM newsletter. Contact Richard Lessard with your thoughts.

If you want to participate in the administration and development of this site, contact Richard Lessard: NASMBLOG@comcast.net

In order to participate, you will need to register and obtain a password. This way your input can be identified and e-mailed to confirm. More information about the forum will be e-mailed to members in the coming weeks.

Begin Preparation Now for 2012 Software Initiatives

By Tony Petrucciani, CEO Single Source Systems, Inc.

It's not too early to start thinking about year-end planning and 2012 budgeting tasks, especially if you are considering business system upgrades or software purchases which will require some research and advance planning. Convincing the IT Department and CFO to support your request is going to take some fact-based persuasion. This article provides a step-by-step approach to help you translate your departmental needs into a budget-ready action plan you can take to the financial team.

Define Needs

Customer service and productivity issues need to be itemized and translated into financial terms. In order to persuade top decision-makers to invest in a solution, you will need to define your pains in terms of dollars, impact and profit margin. This allows you to estimate Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) and Return on Investment (ROI).

These terms may seem foreign and far removed from the vague "We need a better way to do this!" realization that got you started thinking about a software purchase. Don't worry; some advance planning and background research will help you move into the budget prep stage with confidence.

You've probably been operating with a subtle gnawing concern somewhere in the back of your mind that the inefficiencies you were battling were actually becoming dangerous. Perhaps the frustration over delays, errors and gaps in communications is starting to become overwhelming. Perhaps, you're still at that "wondering and worrying" stage.

It's not always crystal clear when a new solution is going to be cost-effective or offer an ROI that is acceptable to top decision-makers. Several hard-to-define factors, such as frustration level of employees and risk of losing valuable customers, make it difficult to plug non-disputable numbers into a projected profit return analysis. Some terms may need to be defined or added to the corporate vocabulary. What exactly constitutes on-time delivery? Just how much is each satisfied customer worth to the company?

For meaningful action to take place, it is important to move past anecdotal examples of errors and frustrations and time to take a serious look at the hard financial data.

Budget planning requires translating your headaches and potential solutions into accepted accounting principles. Not only will this help you cost-justify your ideas to

the managerial team, but it will also help you refine your strategies and prioritize which areas offer the most likelihood of early payback and momentum-building success.

Set Realistic Expectations

Several factors will influence the payback cycle. Your company's previous experience with implementation projects will certainly be a factor, as will your team's ability (and willingness!) to embrace new processes, commit time to training and firmly establish this as a company-wide priority. Understanding that there is likely going to be incremental improvements and gradual gains is important.

Once you have set expectations, you can move on to choosing the specific performance issues you want to study and build your ROI projections around those areas of improvement.

Identify Issues

Although it is likely that several trouble spots can be improved by a new software initiative, most analysts agree that narrowing the focus helps the company stay on task and keeps the implementation team from taking on more than it can effectively project-manage.

Start with the issues that are causing the most visible pains – the ones that are causing daily headaches and making important customers unhappy. Also, take advantage of existing data. If your company already collects extensive metrics around certain issues, it will be relatively easy to compare it to national industry benchmark data that will be helpful in calculating potential improvements.

Use Benchmark Data to Identify Opportunities

Comparing your data to industry benchmark standards will help you identify statistical gaps and focus on major opportunities for improvement. Areas where your performance falls far from Best-in-Class status can be your first targets of improvement. National averages will also help you estimate realistic goals for results, knowing that it is not likely to move from Laggard status to Best-in-Class overnight.

Define Cost of the Problem

In order to calculate the return on investment of your software purchase you need to understand the current costs associated with the tasks being affected.

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Begin Preparation Now (cont'd.)

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This is an incredibly important step in the process and, unfortunately, one that many companies bypass, leaving their entire evaluation process based on speculation and guesses.

Although the principles of activity-based accounting may seem daunting, the goal is actually simple: To determine the direct expense associated with a particular activity. For example, what does it cost the company to manage the contact center and take customer service requests? If four people are currently required to manage the call volume, the salary/benefits of those four people certainly would be factors, as would any costs associated with the phone system, equipment and outside services. The expense is usually calculated based on a time frame (such as the annual cost of running the contact center), but can also be stated in terms of volume (such as the cost of providing customer service for each account).

Even if availability of accurate detailed data is limited, you can still make generalized estimates of overhead costs that will help you determine a basic range of financial impact. If you are embarking on this planning project with limited accounting experience, at least start with some rough estimates of costs. You can paint a picture of ROI potential with very broad strokes until you obtain top management support and then fill in details as you get approval to commit more time and resources to conduct thorough research.

Define Cost of the Solution

As you head into your budget planning phase, you need to have at least a rough estimate of how much investment is going to be required to resolve the issues you identified during your needs analysis. This rough estimate is needed in order to calculate the estimated time it will take to achieve a return on your investment.

Beginning with a realistic estimated cost of the solution is critical to setting expectations of top management and establishing the scope of the project. Is this going to be a major initiative that requires a serious long-term commitment and top-level support or a modest undertaking that department heads can achieve within a fiscal year? Price ranges of solutions – and their implementation – vary drastically depending on how complex the functionality is and how specialized the applications are. Number of users, extent of customization required and complexity of the product or industry are other issues that can make a major impact on price range.

A few Google searches may be all that a hurried manager takes time to conduct in order to plug a rough estimate into his budget request. Although this is a common tactic, it is one that involves considerable risk. It's quite possible that taking a shortcut in research at the early stages of the project will cause a distorted, narrow-sighted perspective that totally derails the likelihood of a successful implementation. For example, forgetting to allow for necessary hardware updates may cause the implementation process to become stalled for months as the implementation team struggles to try to enhance old equipment.

Remember to allow for these considerations:

- Hardware
- Customization
- Implementation
- Training
- Maintenance/support

Will the gains pay for the solution in an acceptable amount of time?

How long will it take for you to recover your investment and begin achieving additional savings? For many companies, recovering their investment in the solution within three years is acceptable. Some companies take a more aggressive approach and aim to recover their investment within 18 months.

When calculating the potential return on investment, it is important to keep in mind that the savings potential continues past the break-even point. You will continue to see savings for the lifetime of the software. Gains can also be nonfinancial – such as improving the work environment to aid in employee retention. Of course, being able to meet customer expectations and build customer loyalty is always a goal. Well-planned software initiatives can certainly help with each of these goals.

By beginning your research and analysis steps now, you will have a sound foundation for successful 2012 projects.

About the author:

Tony is founder and CEO of Single Source Systems, Inc., a software developer that specializes in business solutions for service-intensive companies. For more information about Single Source or the productivity-enhancing tools, visit www.singlesrc.com.

NASM Meeting and July Golf Outing

We had a special treat this July 13, 2011, as Walt Gasparovic, The Gasparovic Group, hosted the NASM Board meeting at the Racine Harbor, followed by a cruise on his yacht. Thank you Walt! The NASM Golf Outing was held the following day at Bristol Oaks Country Club.

Team winners:

Walt Gasparovic – The Gasparovic Group
Brian McGowan – Ken Cook Co.
Tim Gilboy – Ken Cook Co.
John Jost – Ken Cook Co.

Individual Winners

Longest Drives: Brian McGowan – Ken Cook Co.
Tim Gilboy – Ken Cook Co.

Weather was terrific and members and guests enjoyed the event, followed by dinner and prizes.

Special thanks to the sponsors:

- Eaton Corporation
- Ken Cook Co.
- P&H Mining

Watch for information for the 2012 Meeting and Golf Outing! We are planning an on-site meeting at a member company followed by a business session. This will be informative and a wonderful networking opportunity. You don't have to golf to participate; some came for lunch and dinner and used the day to catch up and network with fellow service executives. We hope you and guests can join us in 2012.

Photographs for this year's meeting, cruise and golf were taken by Vince Lightfoot. Thank you, Vince.



Luncheon at Bristol Oaks



Brian McGowan Addressing the Ball



Board Meeting at Racine Harbor



Walt Gasparovic at the Helm

2011 Events

Note: Dates and locations are subject to change.

Association of Equipment Manufacturers Customer Support Council Seminar

September 26 – 28, 2011
InterContinental Hotel – Milwaukee, WI
“Tapping Into Our Potential”
[www.aem.org/Education/Conferences/
CustomerSupportCouncil](http://www.aem.org/Education/Conferences/CustomerSupportCouncil)

Society for Service Executives 2011 Fall Conference

October 11 – 12, 2011
Northern Illinois University Conference Center
Hoffman Estates, IL
www.servicexecutives.com

Field Service Interactive

October 18 – 20, 2011
Omni Mandalay Hotel at Las Colinas
Dallas, TX
www.fieldserviceinteractive.com

Field Service Interactive 2011 focuses on developing an innovative, flexible and efficient service organization that excels in both quality and operational excellence. Service and support executives will have the opportunity to benchmark against best-in-class examples and results provided by leading manufacturers across a number of industries.

NASM 2011 Business / Board Meeting Schedule*:

Business/Board meetings are monthly teleconferences (**1-800-630-9030, pass code 4616060#**), unless otherwise noted. Typical meeting dates are scheduled for the 4th Tuesday of each month, starting at 10:00 am central.

September 27, 2011 10:00 am (cdt)

October 25, 2011 10:00 am (cdt)

November 22, 2011 10:00 am (cst)

* **January 25 – 26, 2012:** NASM On-site Meeting 2012 at **AGCO Corp.**, Duluth, GA

* With some exceptions, there will be face-to-face meetings that coincide with other NASM events. The face-to-face meetings will have available phone-in to the teleconference for those unable to attend.

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