

The Abandoned Consumer

There has been a steady and intentional abandonment of the consumer in recent year and it threatens to endanger the very character of business in the United States. The decline of service, quality assurances and satisfaction guarantees are driven by misguided marketing executives pressed to curb marketing related costs by even more misguided upper management. The pursuit of profit has led to the displacement of the consumer as the corporate priority, enabling the mass desertion of every core business value.

The discarding of customer service is evident in almost every encounter between company and customer. A simple telephone call is now turned into a navigational nightmare as the customer is forced to endure a long and often incomplete list of options before even being offered the opportunity to speak to a human being. Although we are assured that our “call is important” to them, the treatment being offered does has no correlating relation to any indication of concern or interest in providing service.

Another manifestation is the cessation of corporate empathy is the relatively new practice of offering extremely limited product warranties. Once upon a time, when America was a better place, companies proudly stood behind their products and spent millions of dollars convincing consumers that their products would last just about forever. Then some marketing whiz-kid realized that retailers were leaving dollars in customer wallets by accepting refunds when products break. Why not, thought the marketing genius, charge our customers for an “extended warranty”? All the retailers jumped on the idea and now consumers have little or no recourse if they don't ante up and take home a lemon that conks out a few days after the limited warranty ends.

The decline in customer care has reached epidemic proportions. Almost no company now gives more than standard lip service to the idea that the customer is king. Businesses need to re-evaluate what they stand for, and consumers need to demand more. As consumers we have been conditioned to want the products being sold under less than favorable terms so badly that we have ceased to insist that we be treated as king. By allowing companies to treat is poorly we are, in a way, getting what we deserve. The risk companies are taking is that we won't wake up and realize we've been suckers. Is that really a risk worth taking?