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Logistics customer service on the example of courier companies

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Abstract. Logistics customer service is nowadays one of the basic tools of competition among companies. Keeping it in accordance with the preferences of customers may result in a group of loyal and satisfied customers. Services of courier companies are nowadays ubiquitous to the individual customer, however, with different availability. Based on the websites of the three courier companies, the author made a comparison of service offerings for individual customers based on the basic elements of logistics support. Finally, a group of elements that are necessary in the process of ordering courier service by an individual customer was created.

Introduction

Customer service is a very broad term in the literature, and in the area of marketing and logistics, one can find multiple approaches to the topic. This article aims to isolate elements of logistics, customer service in the process of ordering courier service through the websites of selected courier companies, and then to formulate a list of properly shaped elements.

Logistics customer service – theoretical background

Customer service in the aspect of logistics which focuses primarily on the areas of physical distribution of goods, realized according to the rule 7W (the right product, the right amount, the right condition, the right place, the right time, the right price, the right customer) (Matwiejczuk, 2006, p. 30). The most common is the understanding of the logistics, and customer service as:

- activities carried out regularly in order cycle (e.g. the preparation of documentation, physical implementation and settlement of deliveries, communicating with customers, repairing damage and errors in deliveries),
- offered service standards, which are measured and evaluated on each of the stages,
- management philosophy, which consists of the activities of enterprises to their customers, i.e. subordination of all the activities and products demands and the needs of the users (Kisperska-Moroń, Krzyżaniak, 2009, p. 74).

The whole process of customer service can be divided into three phases: pre-trade, trading, and post-trade. This division corresponds to the process approach to customer service. In this approach, firstly – the manager should prepare the strategy for customer service, the appropriate procedures, infrastructure, and employees; secondly – treatment operation as a part of the customer services; thirdly – all the activities that take place after the completion of the primary process (Cichosz, 2010, p. 80).

Detailed elements included in each phase are shown in Figure 1.

Customers generally attach importance to certain elements of logistics support. According to Kisperska-Moroń and Krzyżaniak (2009, pp. 77–86), the most important are:

1. Delivery time – the time counted from the date of order to the receipt of the shipment/goods by the person making the order. On-time delivery is influenced by various “concepts of time,” such as:
 - time for the receipt / transfer of orders (influenced by the way of communication with the customer and the forms of submitting an order – letter, e-mail, telephone, etc.),
 - the time for preparing the information contained in the order (depending on the document workflow, which consists of checking the creditworthiness of customer, registration of orders, preparation of documentation, e.g. the order of release, invoice, bill of lading),
 - the time for preparing the ordered products for shipment (it consists of handling work – searching, moving, completing, packing, and loading the means of transport),

- the time for the transport of the ordered products to the customer (time from loading the means of transport to delivery to the destination and unloading),
- the time of delivery of the ordered products to the customer (the time from the discharge of the goods to delivery to the customer, it is a part of the transport time).

Shorter delivery times and greater convenience of ordering goods can be caused by the following: a quick response to the order/customer inquiry, a competent employee of the company in contact with the customer, efficient preparation of calculations, terms of the order, the simplicity of the order form, etc.

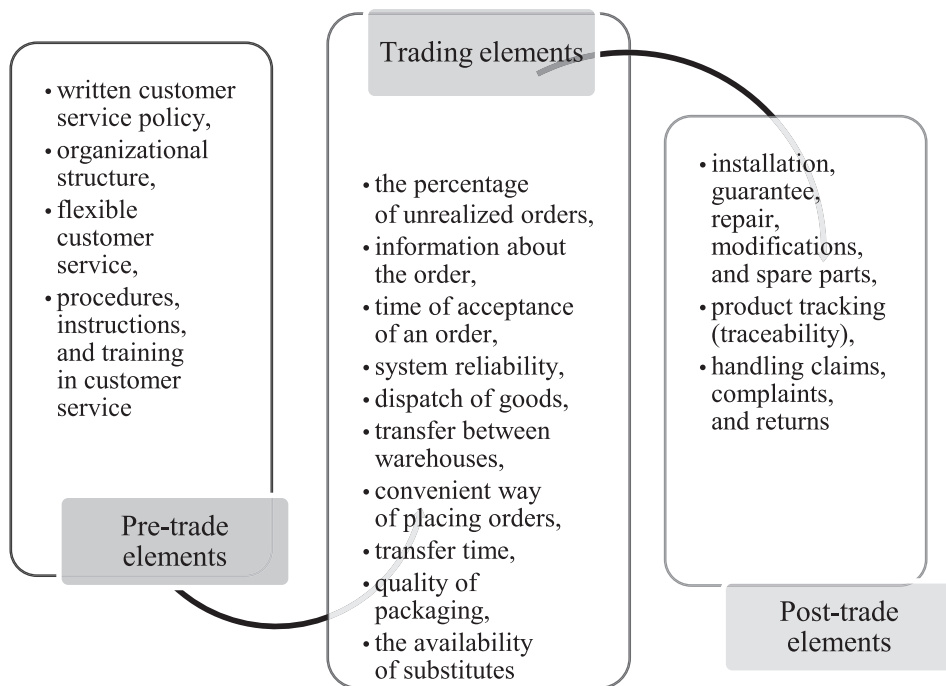


Figure 1. Phases of the logistics customer service

Source: Own elaboration based on: LaLonde, Zinszer, 1976, pp. 272–282.

2. Availability of products from the warehouse, which means that the products are in the store when the customer needs them. The size of the stock is determined on the basis of demand forecasts and various methods of stock replenishment.

3. Setting standards for product availability – estimating that the offered level of availability of the product is sufficient for the customers. It examines how many units the client needs and how many is available in the store.
4. Flexibility of supply – the ability to meet special requirements or operate in unexpected and emergency situations. It is to adjust the time of day, the size range of the product, and the method of delivery to the customer's needs. High flexibility in customer service proves its excellence. The examples of situations requiring high flexibility include:
 - one-time or occasional adjust to work service to the emergency needs of selected customers, e.g. emergency service orders, backlog, expressways,
 - providing service to an individual customer's needs, e.g. price labeling, packaging,
 - sudden, emergency supplies of spare parts,
 - support of dangerous materials and waste that threaten the environment.Regularly informing the customer about any delays in the implementation of the order is a sign that the company depends on the client.
5. Frequency of the supply – the number of deliveries in a given period of time (a day, month, or week). The frequency of deliveries are affected by the type of the product and delivery system adopted between suppliers and customers. The number of on-time deliveries is considered to be one measure of the level of customer service.
6. Timeliness – the compliance with previously agreed delivery time. Numerous delays can have an impact on the growth of inventories at customers and create a negative image of the company at customers.
7. Delivery accuracy – this is delivering goods to a client without any mistakes.
8. Completeness of the supply – delivery of exactly what was ordered by a customer in a particular state and quantity. The lack of even one thing in an order is regarded as unrealized in terms of completeness.
9. Reliability of supply – contains the elements described above: delivery accuracy, completeness delivery, and timeliness. Reliability means that the supply will not have any damage, and the invoice will be issued properly at the right place, product, and quantity. Not all aspects of reliability can be specified and measured. The term 'reliability' is meant as the ability and willingness to provide customers with accurate information about the status of the contract, the commitment of suppliers or vendors to keep delivery schedule, and the obligation to notify a customer of any problems with delivery.

10. Irregularities in the delivery of products are related to errors perpetrated during delivery, such as damage to the product or the wrong choice of the product made by the customer. Emerging errors can be divided into:
 - in the office – e.g. in the accounts,
 - procedural – e.g. products shipped, but not shown in the records or products sent to the wrong recipient,
 - in the store – in the statement of the order in shipments,
 - reception of the delivery – wrong customer, product, quantity.
11. Order OTIF (on-time, in-full, error-free) – order executed perfectly, where all of these elements come together. Each of them must satisfy the customer exactly as agreed with him.
12. Elements and standards of after-sales services of the product – the company should continue logistics service after the sale of the product e.g. the customer receives spare parts, installation, and repairs, handling returns and rapid withdrawal of products from the market, the use of which proves to be dangerous (medicines, toys, etc.).

Marketing is the process of exploring the customer's needs, satisfying them, and creating. Logistics is here a tool to meet customer's needs in terms of the place, time, and quality of service. The reason for such a large interdependence of marketing and logistics is the customer orientation. (Ławicki, 2005, p. 152).

Logistics customer service in logistics companies

A comparative analysis of courier companies was conducted from the point of view of an individual customer who wants to send a domestic packet. All the elements available on the websites of the surveyed companies were taken into account. The analyzed companies include DHL, UPS, and DPD, as shown in Table 1. Due to the fact that in the assessment of the courier service not all of the elements listed above can be evaluated, only selected elements of logistics support are subject to the analysis.

Table 1

Comparison of courier companies in terms of selected elements of the logistic customer service

Assessed element	DHL	UPS	DPD
1	2	3	4
Easy to find on the Internet shipping information for individual customers	difficult; one must find a bookmark called 'parcel,' with the information for individual customers and business clients; on the home page, there is a link which can be used to make international shipping	easy; on the main page there is a link to prepare the shipment and open menu; can be sent by a customer registered in UPS or an unregistered customer	easy; mainly due to the design of the website; there is a reference to the subpages – to order a courier to individual customers, where it is step by step presented what the process of sending a package looks like
A convenient way to place orders	comfortable; the customer has the opportunity to benefit from individual packages, depending on the size or weight of the broadcast package; when customer selects a specific package, he/she can add a variety of services, choose a place of delivery or order receiving parcel from a courier from any place; the prices of services are visible	comfortable, but long; a customer must enter a lot of data and also needs to choose the type of services, e.g. UPS today express or UPS express SVER today; the lack of explanation of the differences between the services. Price is compared and selected individually by the customer; time consuming	comfortable; a customer must first enter the code of the town where he/she wants to post the parcel, give its weight, and enter the code from the image. Then a window with a price is visible and a customer can carefully select further options for shipping and payment
Forms of ordering	Using the online form or a call center, a courier can be ordered to home; on the website, in the section for individual customers, there is no information whether a parcel can be posted at stationary points	form online; no information about other opportunities of shipping	form online; a map of stationary points for receiving and sending a parcel is also indicated, it can be easily searched by the postal code of a village
The need to register a user account	no	no	no

1	2	3	4
The time of ordering	2 min	5 min	2 min
Declared delivery time	the lack of such information while ordering a specific package; only when the package is timely, there is opportunity to choose delivery hours	the lack of such information when ordering a specific package	the lack of such information when ordering a specific package
System reliability	worked properly	worked properly	worked properly
Tracking parcel	a standard service	a standard service	a standard service
The flexibility of deliveries	many choices	many choices	many choices
Communication with the courier company	customer service, on-line form, contact by e-mail, contact with management of DHL Parcel, frequently asked questions	customer service, e-mail, phone contacts to branches in Poland, UPS support options: frequently asked questions, an overview of the topics	call center, contact form on the website
Handling claims and complaints	a downloadable complaint form	no special contact in the matters of complaint	a complaint form as a separate icon on the website

Source: own elaboration based on: *DHL; UPS; DPD* (2.03.2016).

Each of the analyzed courier companies has its own system of customer service, however, many of the analyzed elements are shaped similarly.

Conclusions

The comparative analysis of the offers of the largest Polish courier companies has identified the most important elements which should be included in every web page that the customer can easily use to send a parcel. These list should contain:

1. The website should be readable. The fewer links on the main page the better. Building a website in “tiled” style (DPD) makes this website clearer for clients.
2. A reference for individual customers should be included on the home page.
3. A convenient way of ordering is part of the decision making to use the services of a particular company or not. If it appears to the client simple and intuitive, then the consumer will decide. If there is a long form to complete (UPS), this discourages the customer to enter all the data. A visualization method

of ordering is also important for the customer. The most convenient way of ordering a courier is offered by DHL company, because it requires filling only a few form fields. Package weights and sizes are shown graphically, along with a brief description, and a customer only has to choose the proper options. Next, some additional services can be selected, their price is shown, and a client can print the confirmation of sending the parcels.

4. The more opportunities, forms of ordering a courier and shipping, the better for a client. Most opportunities and facilities are offered on DHL's website (an online form, ordering a courier to home, and a call center). An interesting solution, offered on DPD's website, is a map with stationary points for receiving and sending packages. The combination of all the described facilities and amenities would offer numerous options and benefits for the customer.
5. No need to register a user account in order to post a package is a huge simplification and convenience for a customer.
6. None of the websites gives information on delivery time when placing an order. Perhaps, the courier companies assume that the average delivery time is 24–48 hours, nevertheless, the customer should see this information when ordering.
7. Reliability and the promptness of operation influence customer's satisfaction.
8. In order to build a competitive edge over others, the company must adjust to customer needs and to provide as much choice as possible in terms of the services offered. Therefore, it is important for companies to offer a wide range of facilities of this type, and, even by means of regular market research, to check whether there are new customers' needs.
9. The way of communicating with a company presented by DHL or UPS is sufficient. The purchaser has many opportunities to contact with the company.
10. Whether the client will return to the company in the future, depends on conducting an efficient complaint process. Therefore, the company's website should have a separate bookmark for the issues of complaint, so that the customer does not have to search for other bookmarks, frequently asked questions, etc., to settle the matter.

The elements described above are part of logistics and customer service, and their shape has a direct impact on customers' decisions. By adapting the web pages to the needs of customers, the enterprise receives a tool in the fight for customers. Their proper conduct can win with the competition, and, as a result, help to build a group of loyal customers.

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Logistyczna obsługa klienta na przykładzie firm kurierskich

Słowa kluczowe: logistyczna obsługa klienta, klient, konkurencja, firmy kurierskie

Streszczenie. Logistyczna obsługa klienta (LOK) jest w obecnych czasach jednym z podstawowych narzędzi walki konkurencyjnej między firmami. Prowadzenie jej zgodnie z preferencjami klientów może skutkować grupą lojalnych i usatysfakcjonowanych klientów. Usługi firm kurierskich są dziś wszechobecne dla indywidualnego klienta, jednakże z różną dostępnością. Na podstawie stron internetowych trzech firm kurierskich dokonano porównania oferty usług dla indywidualnego klienta w odniesieniu do podstawowych elementów LOK-a. Ostatecznie stworzona została grupa elementów, które są niezbędne w procesie zamawiania usługi kurierskiej poprzez klienta indywidualnego.

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