

IRFU Welcoming Clubs Programme



Info sheet #5: Retaining all of the Club's Customers

Every club has a range of “customers” that it provides with a product or service. The customers include sponsors, parents, members, players, supporters, business partners and coaches. They will all have been influenced to become involved with one specific club because they believe that the club will offer them with “what they want”. In the case of parents it may be that the club offers them coaches who have child development qualifications as well as their coaching qualification, a sponsor may be able to find new customers through the club and a social member may be provided with fun, a well-run bar and a range of social events.

The club needs to recognise that the customer has a choice and that they have chosen their club against the “competition”. Each and every customer has a huge potential value because if the club manages to retain the customer for several years they will spend money with the club every year. A family may spend money on memberships, retail, social events and summer schools. A sponsor may visit the club and spend money on items over and above their basic sponsorship and a player may spend money on memberships, beer, retail, events for his family and even hire of the club house for his business meeting.

If the club loses a customer then not only do they lose the spending potential of that particular customer, it will cost them time/money and effort to find a new customer. The club therefore needs to recognise the role that basic customer service can play in a) making the club sustainable and b) optimising its limited resources.

What is customer service?

Customer service is said to be the provision of a service before, during and after a purchase. It is also defined as supplying the customer with their wants and needs. If we were to analyse the elements of customer service they would be:

- Understand the customers wants and needs
- Fulfil their expectations
- Make service personal
- Establish an excellent customer experience
- Develop staff understanding of the importance of customer service and commitment to customer service
- Strengthen the bond with your customer - communication
- Evaluate your service through questionnaires

With limited resources what would the relevant aspects of these points be and what would be achievable in a club?

Understanding the customers wants and needs

This has already been covered in the sales section where the importance to understanding what the customer wants was emphasised. For example the sponsor wants to achieve one or more of the following; find more customers, retain customers, build its brand, build its reputation or motivate its workforce. If the club understands this then it can offer sponsorships that reflect this (offer the business what it wants or needs)

Fulfilling their expectations

If the club offers the customer one thing then delivers another it will lose the customer to the competition. If you offer a player high quality training and the coach arrives late and isn't very good they will move on.

Make service personal

When the new family arrives at the club they need to be welcomed, it needs to be recognised that they are new and any follow up needs to be personalised, not just a general letter to “Dear New Parent”

Establish an excellent customer experience

If the “customer experience” is good then not only will they stay with the club, they will tell others about it. However, as an example, if the club runs an event which starts late, is badly organised and isn't what the player/family/supporter expected they will not return to the next one.

Develop staff understanding of the importance of customer service and commitment to customer service

The volunteers aren't expected to be customer service experts but if they understand a) how important the service is and b) make sure that the areas in which they are involved embrace customer service, then it will make a massive difference. The point made above emphasises this; if a player or family is new to the club, welcome them and spend time understanding what it is they want from the club.

Strengthen the bond with your customer – communication

Resources will dictate how often you will be able to communicate with your customers and through which channels. However the basics are 1) collect data whenever you can from your “customers” and build up some basic profile information (what do they come to events, did they book the room for a birthday party etc.) 2) use the relevant channels – Social Media is the relevant channel for young adults whereas e mail is probably more relevant for older people. 3) keep your customers informed generally but if you have some basic profile information about them, target them with specific messages e.g. If you know who were the Social members last year contact them with a specific “what's in it for you this year” to become a social member again!

Evaluate your service through questionnaires

Listen to your customers and if you have the resources send out a basic questionnaire to find out what they do and what they don't like about the club!

Conclusion

With a basic understanding and acceptance of the value of “customer service” the club will run more efficiently, retain more customers and generate more income.

IRFU Welcoming Clubs Programme; An IRFU initiative which provides clubs with a road map and training for the “team off the field” to assist them in running their sports club as efficiently as possible.