



Awards

for Customer Excellence

By Don Hales, Customer Service Presenter & Author and Awards Guru

Customer service is frequently quoted as being the most important factor in today's economic climate in the battle to win, retain and grow customers. The importance of customer service cannot be underestimated but Awards International, a company that specialises in award programmes, believes that what really counts for customers in deciding where to spend their money is what it feels like to be a customer rather than what the company has done to provide a service.

The UK Customer Experience Awards

Increasingly commentators and practitioners are thinking in terms of "customer experience" rather than service and the UK Customer Experience Awards, first launched in 2010 reflect this trend. The awards are endorsed by a number of leading professional and membership bodies, including the Institute of Customer Service, the Society of Consumer Affairs

International, the International Customer Service Institute and the Customer Experience Foundation. Morris Pentel, principal at the Customer Experience Foundation says that the entries for the 2010 programme played a major role in assisting the Foundation in establishing some best practice case studies and has contributed to the Customer Experience White Paper sent to all 2010 participants and available to all those who take part in 2011.

2010 customer experience awards winners

The sector winners in 2010 were:

- Telecoms & Digital Retail – Fizzback/T-mobile
- Financial Services – Wonga.com
- B2B – LeasePlan UK
- Travel, Leisure & Tourism – Butlins
- Retail – Shop Direct





2011 customer experience awards categories

In 2011 there are more categories covering all sectors of industry and commerce plus a range of individual categories. Full details can be found at www.uk-ce-awards.co.uk, but in brief, this year's categories are divided into two classes:

- UK Customer Experience of the Year (for organisations)
- UK Customer Experience Professional of the Year (for individuals).

UK Customer Experience of the Year

Mainly divided into sectors, the categories in this class are:

- Retail, Travel & Utilities
- Contact Centres
- Financial Services
- Public Sector
- IT, Telecommunications & General
- Healthcare & Pharmaceutical
- Professional Services and Research Agencies
- International

In addition there is an overall winner, "The Customer Experience of the Year Award", which is chosen from the winners of the categories above.

2011 Customer Experience Professional of the Year Categories

These awards are for outstanding performance by individuals, and will be awarded in the following categories:

- Contact Centres & Financial Services
- Public Sector & Not for Profit
- IT & Telecommunications & General
- Retail, Healthcare & Pharmaceutical
- International
- Professional Services and Researchers
- Rookie of the Year (less than two years in role)

There is again an overall winner, "The Customer Experience Professional of the Year Award", chosen from the winners above, plus a "Lifetime Achievement Award".

The Customer Service Training Awards

Running simultaneously with the UK Customer Experience Awards are the Customer Service Training Awards, in association with the Customer Service Training Network, established in 2007. Full details can be found on the website (www.customerservicetrainingawards.com), and like the customer experience awards, the training awards are also divided into two classes as follows.

Customer Service Training Team of the Year

The sectors for this award are:

- Leisure, Travel & Utilities
- Contact Centres
- Financial Services
- Commercial Training
- Public Sector
- IT, Telephony & General
- Retail, Healthcare & Pharmaceutical
- International

As before, there is an overall winner awarded to the best entry from all the above categories and called "The Customer Service Training Team of the Year Award".

Customer Service Trainer of the Year

This is divided into a shorter list of sectors plus rookie and lifetime awards as before.

- Contact Centres & Financial Services
- Public Sector & Not for Profit
- IT, Telephony & General
- Retail, Healthcare & Pharmaceutical
- Rookie of the Year
- Lifetime Achievement Award

From the above, the overall winner will be given "The Customer Service Training Professional of the Year Award".

Why enter?

The question remains however, why enter these awards or any awards in the first place? Neil Skehel, Managing Director of Awards International points to three reasons:

1. External recognition of individuals and teams

"The power of recognition, the fantastic team bonding and the ultimate pride in reaching the final of a national award cannot be underestimated. Compared to money spent on other forms of team building and motivation, the payback on the outlay involved with participation in awards produces the best ROI and in an activity directly focused on the business".

2. Spreading best practice and benchmarking

"By definition virtually all award entries are pretty good – why else would anyone enter? That being so, it stands to reason that those progressing to the finals will be exceptional, whilst the winner will often be simply amazing. These awards - perhaps more than any other – through individual feedback and network opportunities to share ideas and success, provide the environment for encouraging all participants to improve still further. In sixteen years of running award programmes, in all sorts of business activities, it never ceases to amaze me how willing award winners are to share their ideas with others".





3. Customers like to do business with organisations that have won meaningful awards

“A recent survey (by Fly Research) of financial service consumers, found that 70% were influenced by awards when trying to decide between similarly priced providers. This reinforced the notion that awards are an asset that is invaluable when customers are grappling for a reason to choose between similar suppliers. How often do you hear people say “I chose this one because it won an award” or “it must be good, it won an award”. To make this happen, the award needs to be relevant in its subject matter and of sound provenance – i.e. backed by the right kind of professional bodies”.

On the last point Chris Robinson of Boost Marketing, an awards consultancy company says *“Nowadays the dramatic increase in the interest in winning awards is driven by three strategic imperatives - boosting morale, boosting sales and driving a hunger for excellence and continuous improvement”.*

Do awards drive sales?

A survey of 400 buyers conducted by Shape the Future for Boost Marketing produced the following conclusions for individuals:

- 85.3% are influenced by awards when buying as a consumer for themselves*
- 82.4% are influenced by awards in general when buying products/services for their organisation*

In addition, on B2B sourcing, the survey found that:

- ▶ 72.1% are influenced by awards when choosing financial services

- ▶ 74.7% are influenced by awards when choosing call centre related services
- ▶ 81.0% are influenced by awards when choosing HR/Training services”

Costs

Both the UK Customer Experience Awards and the Customer Service Training Awards are open for nominations until 31 March 2011 and the finals and awards presentation day takes place at Heathrow on Friday 8th July. On this day the finalists in each category make presentations to the judges in the morning and the announcement of winners takes place a few hours later at the awards lunch. Making it a combined judging and presentation day and holding the awards ceremony over lunch rather than dinner reduces the ancillary costs associated with entry such as time off work and overnight accommodation. The fee for entering either the UK Customer Experience Awards or the Customer Service Training Awards, in any of the categories is £245 plus VAT. This includes one ticket for the lunch ceremony. Additional tickets for the lunch can be purchased for £160 plus VAT.



Don Hales

After heading Sun Life Unit Services, which he and four colleagues launched and later sold to the Sun Life Group, Don launched the National Customer Service Awards in 1999 and remains involved today as founder and chair of judges. He founded the Customer Service Training Association in 2007 and now also heads Awards International, a company that recognises excellence in many activities, including sales, service, marketing and training.

One big fan
of the awards is Ray Harrison, Head of Operational Training & Service Quality, Barclaycard, one of last year's winners, who commented:

“The content of the report has sent a real buzz through the team. Comments like; “didn't expect this”, “very professional”, “really helps us for next year” and “tells us where we need to do better” have all formed apart of conversations I have overheard.”

Full details of this year's awards and how to enter can be found for the customer experience awards at:

www.uk-ce-awards.co.uk

and for the customer service training awards at

www.customerservicetrainingawards.com

