

Setting the Standard: A Study of the Walt Disney Resort Service Model

A Senior Project

presented to

the Faculty of the Recreation, Parks, & Tourism Administration Department

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Science

by

Kelsey Freeman

March, 2015

© 2015 Kelsey Freeman

ABSTRACT

SETTING THE STANDARD: A STUDY OF THE WALT

DISNEY RESORT SERVICE MODEL

KELSEY FREEMAN

MARCH 2015

Companies are constantly seeking new ways to keep up with the changing expectations of customers. In the hospitality industry customizing guest service to each individual guest is a step that can be taken to create lasting relationships. The Walt Disney Resorts are worth examining for their high rate of return. The purpose of this study was to analyze the best practices and success of personalizing guest experience at the Walt Disney Resorts. The researcher used a case study checklist to gather information about the efforts Disney makes to customize guest experiences. The study found that allowing guests to customize their vacation, using customer relationship management technology, and placing emphasis on training programs can positively affect guest loyalty. To continue to be an industry leader, the Disney Resorts should expand the resort options offered to guests and encourage employee empowerment to continually satisfy the needs of each unique guest.

Keywords: Disney, service, guest satisfaction, Disney Resorts, guest experience, customer relationship management.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	1
Background of Study	1
Review of Literature	2
Purpose of the Study.....	8
Research Questions.....	8
Chapter 2 METHODS.....	9
Description of Context.....	9
Description of Instrument	9
Description of Procedure	10
Chapter 3 PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS	12
Company Overview	12
Training Programs	14
Customer Relationship Management Technology.....	16
Guest Loyalty.....	18
Chapter 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	20
Summary	20
Discussion.....	21
Conclusions.....	24
Recommendations.....	24

REFERENCES	26
APPENDIXES	30

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of Study

Quality customer service plays a significant role in a company's success. The customer is the key motivation to constantly improving the type of customer service the company provides. Just over fifty years ago Regan (1963) referred to the "service revolution." This is when businesses started to shift from product-based service to relationship-based service. Prior to this movement, customer needs were not sought after as a form of company improvement or growth. By providing a product and seeking a relationship with a customer, companies will find that customers will increasingly value their services and products. This ultimately creates a customer for life. A company will be sustainable and impact generations if they create meaningful relationships with loyal customers.

In the hospitality industry, sustaining a long-term relationship with guests will result in competitive advantages such as high rate of return (Woodruff, 1997). Having a high rate of return is desirable because it means that guests will choose you over and over again, and they will also recommend your hotel because of the service they received. One company that has set many service standards and has guests returning to visit year after year is the Walt Disney Company. Disney continues to innovate practices to keep guests of all ages engaged and delighted. Other hotels and resorts can look to and utilize the techniques that the Walt Disney Company uses to customize guest experiences. In this

study, the researcher analyzed the practices and success of personalizing the guest experience in the Walt Disney Resorts.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Hospitality and Tourism Complete, Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, Google Scholar and ABI/INFORM. The researcher used the literature to support the ideas of customer relationship management, training of employees, and customer loyalty.

Companies use marketing and service tactics to draw customers in and make them want more. Some of the most successful companies have recently realized that quality customer service is ultimately what makes or breaks their business. The availability of a product is not the only part of a transaction that a customer takes into consideration anymore (Wilder, Collier & Barnes, 2014). Businesses must continually adapt and get to know the needs of the customers in order to provide them with both a quality product and service worth coming back for. Consumer to company relationships have improved with the idea of customer relationship management (CRM). In 2012, CRM was rated one of the top five influential technologies in the world (Luftman, Zadeh, Derksen, Santana, Rigoni, & Huang, 2012). It is a technology that will continue to grow as customer needs become the core focus of companies. Fitzgibbon and White (2005) defined CRM as a “data driven approach that enables companies to assess each customer’s current needs and potential profitability and tailor sales offers and service accordingly” (p. 220). Many

companies utilize CRM techniques to customize the experience of a transaction by collecting and storing information from prior interactions. In the past few years companies have realized the worth of implementing CRM into their business models. In 2012 companies spent over \$13 billion on CRM technology (Gartner, 2012). The spending on this technology is only expected to increase as customers increasingly expect companies to tailor each service experience to their needs and desires.

As companies continue to integrate CRM technology, they will start to offer a more customized service experience. When a business personalizes the customer experience it makes the customer feel important and valued. With the development of CRM and the help of emerging technologies, the needs of customers are more easily anticipated by companies. With improved technology and increase in competition, customers have gained the upper-hand and expect more individualized service from their service providers (Wilder et al., 2014). It is simply not enough to only provide a service or product and receive a customer's loyalty and continued business.

Hospitality is an industry where the analysis of CRM can benefit several companies and is worth evaluating. Mohammed and Rashid (2012) noted that, "...CRM will be ideally suited to the hotel industry, especially when implementing it successfully and effectively, taking into our account that hotels receive a lot of data about customers" (p. 221). Hotels are able to collect a lot of customer data and are able to store this information to assist in improving their efforts to cater to the type of guests that stay with them. Current trends in the tourism industry suggest that guests are increasingly expecting a luxury experience at a relatively low cost and that brand loyalty is decreasing, which means that hotels are in need of a way to make their guests feel valued

and loyal to their specific brand (Mohammed & Rashid, 2012). Customer relationship management is designed to assist in achieving these goals. An example of CRM would be creating a database of repeat guests with their preferences and count of how many total room nights they have stayed at the hotel. With this information, the hotel can possibly implement a loyalty program or just make extra efforts to accommodate and acknowledge the preferences and requests of these guests.

Repeat guests want to be remembered, first time guests want to be welcomed, and all guests want to feel important and cared for. Hotels are constantly competing to win guests over and be the number one accommodation in their region. Successful implementation of CRM can help to achieve the hotel goal of creating guests for life. Customer relationship management is technique that should be used to personalize guest experience and is to be valued and used by hotels and businesses alike. Hotels are able to offer incentives to guests by getting to know them and understanding their needs and interests. By using CRM and making internal improvements, hotels are able to customize service and please their guests.

Training techniques and programs are an internal improvement that can significantly impact customer experience. A business can use state of the art technology and have the best service model, but it is up to the employees, specifically the front line employees, to carry out the service experience. Front line employees are sometimes “the first and only representation of a service firm” (Hartline, Maxham, & McKee, 2000, p. 35). This truth about front line employees makes it crucial to ensure the first interaction a guest has with the company is positive. Many companies institute intensive training programs to make sure their front line employees understand the desires and expectations

of the company. These training programs help to give the employees the tools and skills needed to create a wonderful service encounter. As companies provide access to training programs, employee motivation and satisfaction increase (Dhar, 2015). It has been found that when employee motivation increases, level of commitment to the company increases and thus the service quality level rises (Dhar). By having committed employees, companies build long-term relationships with customers (Boshoff & Allen, 2000).

Although companies are increasingly focusing on the training of their employees, it is important that the training programs focus on the areas that customers value the most (McColl-Kennedy & White, 1997). Customers and interactions with customers are dynamic and expectations can change rapidly. Companies that constantly work to improve the skills and knowledge of front line employees will increase the level of service quality that is exhibited (Sheriff & Layton, 2004). Training involves both technical and functional skills. Although technical skills are important to the operations of the service experience, functional skills serve as a vital part of positive service experiences (Sheriff & Layton). These functional skills are more than just training the correct greeting on the phone, they involve teaching skills that can be used to anticipate the needs of a customer or adapt to a customer's expectations (McColl-Kennedy & White). When a customer's needs are anticipated, the customer will feel valued and delighted.

Employees feed off of the customer service orientation displayed by the company and its management. Customer service orientation should start with manager support and trickle down to the front line employees (McColl-Kennedy & White, 1997). Managers and supervisors train front line employees. They must know how to effectively

communicate the values of the company and teach the skills necessary to achieving a customer orientated business. When front line employees know what is expected of them, the service gap between customer expectations and the service that is provided by employees is bridged (Min & Min, 2005). One way that managers can support their employees to provide quality customer service is empowering their employees. Wilder et al. (2014) pointed out that when employees are successfully taught how to empathize, anticipate, and be creative with the service experience, they will feel empowered to make their own decisions to adapt to the service needs of the customer. Empowerment is important because customers experience frustration when a front line employee has to get “manager approval” (Wilder et al., 2014, p. 448). Empowered employees help to avoid customer frustration, and the customers begin to trust the front line employees to provide the service they need without any interruptions. When customers feel like they can trust the employee, they feel like they can trust the company as a whole, and that is when the relationship begins to form.

When a service encounter goes right, a positive relationship between the customer and the company develops. Relationships are important in creating brand loyalty. Studies have shown that loyal customers spend more money with the company than non-loyal customers (Ganesh, Arnold, & Reynolds, 2000). Loyalty is valuable to companies, but it can also be valuable to the customer if the relationship is upheld on both sides. Customers will be able to find more worth in their transaction and find delight in their purchases. Both CRM and effective training techniques can be used as tools to increase customer loyalty to a company. But those tools are useless if you don't know what the customer wants from the service they receive. Customer relationship management can help a

company to know the customer and then train employees to know what the customer wants in their experience with the company.

In order to create a relationship and loyalty, it is important to know what a customer is looking for in a service experience. Torres, Fu, and Lehto (2014) did a study on what citizens of the United States value in a service experience at a hotel. Over half of the responses (54%) said that if service is “accommodating and flexible” that they feel a sense of delight. Second to that value, the friendliness of the front line employees played a big part in the satisfaction as well. The study also pointed out that Americans like to be recognized by complimentary items such as extra services and upgrades. This information generalizes the needs and desires of a typical American guest. With this understanding, hotels and companies in general can go a step further and personalize the friendly, accommodating, and flexible experience guests receive. By personalizing the service, guest satisfaction increases. Guest satisfaction is one of the main drivers of loyalty and company profitability (Ganesh et al., 2000).

The hospitality industry is one that constantly needs to improve to meet ever-changing guest expectations. The facilities can impress guests, but what will keep them coming back is the service they receive and the value they feel from that service. Customer relationship management and correct training can increase loyalty. If CRM techniques are implemented, the service quality increases and so does guest satisfaction. Employees also impact the guest experience and it is imperative that companies focus on employee orientation. Displaying effort to guests goes a long way and will be remembered. By putting effort in providing a high level of service quality, it is more likely that the guests feel appreciated and return in the future. In a time where brand

loyalty is scarce, companies need to put their energy into using different internal techniques to improve loyalty.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the success and best practices of personalizing guest experience in the Walt Disney Resorts.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. How does Disney create customer loyalty?
2. How do customer relationship management technologies affect guest experience?
3. What service techniques ultimately help to increase guest satisfaction?
4. What effect does employee training have on the guest experience?

Chapter 2

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to analyze the best practices and success of personalizing guest experience in the Walt Disney Resorts. This chapter includes the following sections: description of context, description of instrument, and description of procedure.

Description of Context

A case study was conducted of the Walt Disney Resorts in the United States. There are two Walt Disney Resorts in the country. The two resorts are located on the west and east coasts— one in California and the other in Florida. Within these two resorts there are a combined eight parks and 34 hotels and accommodations (Disney Parks, 2015). In 2013 the Walt Disney parks in the US had over 75 million visitors across the two resorts (Westfall, 2014). Walt Disney Resorts are the largest of the approximately nine resorts in the United States that include a theme park element. These resorts are part of the many popular vacation destinations in the United States that keep people coming back to experience them again and again.

Description of Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was a case study checklist developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). The checklist was developed after collecting information on important aspects of personalizing guest experience through the review of literature. The instrument was developed to allow the researcher to analyze the attributes of service that

customize a service experience. The instrument was designed to include quantitative and qualitative data. The researcher did a pilot study of the instrument on a different resort with a theme park element on February 10th, 2015. From the pilot study, the researcher altered the instrument to best analyze what successfully contributes to making an experience personal. This was done by adding additional questions to the instrument after the pilot study. Many of the points in the checklist addressed aspects of a company's service that result in customer loyalty. A notes section was added in the instrument for any information that did not specifically answer the questions, but would still be beneficial to the study.

Description of Procedure

A case study was conducted on the Walt Disney Resorts in the United States. The instrument utilized in this study was a case study checklist developed by the researcher. Research for the study occurred during a two week period in February 2015. The researcher utilized the information from the Walt Disney Resorts and accessed information about the Walt Disney and Disneyland Resorts under the Parks and Resorts tab. Information about the Disney College Program was collected by reading through the About the Disney College Program and Program Components tab. Similarly, information about the Disney Institute Program was gathered in the About Us and Our Approach tabs. The book *Be Our Guest* written by the Disney Institute was used by the researcher as an extensive resource for detailed insight into the Disney service model. The Archives of the Disney Parks Blog and the Releases tab on the Disney World News website were used to specifically gather information about emerging technology and innovations used to

improve the guest experience. The information gathered from the resources were used to assemble information on how Disney personalizes guest experiences at the resorts.

The instrument analyzed the information found in the review of the literature. The researcher used the instrument to determine the best practices of personalizing guest experience at the Walt Disney Resorts. The presentation of results follows in chapter three.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to analyze the success and best practices of personalizing guest experience in the Walt Disney Resorts. A case study was conducted of the Walt Disney Resorts in the United States. This chapter includes the following subsections: the company overview, training programs, customer relationship management technology, and guest loyalty.

Company Overview

The Walt Disney Company began as a media entertainment company and eventually opened its first theme park, Disneyland, in 1955. Since the opening of Disneyland the company has expanded immensely and now includes: five resorts across the world, a Disney Cruise Line, Adventures by Disney, a retail chain of over 350 stores, Disney interactive, and different training programs. The Walt Disney Company employs more than 150,000 people across the world. This study focused on the two resorts located in the United States: Disneyland Resort in Anaheim, California, and Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida.

The Disneyland Resort in California has two theme parks, a Downtown Disney District, transportation systems, over 90 dining options, and three hotels. The resort size is about 500 acres. Disneyland was the first theme park of all the Disney theme parks. Disney's California Adventure is the neighboring park to Disneyland and was opened in 2001. California Adventure is the newest of all the Disney parks and is themed by

California's diverse history and landscape. Downtown Disney is a shopping and dining element of the resort. Downtown Disney in California has 19 dining options and 24 shops. It features live entertainment as well. Admission to Downtown Disney is complimentary and is located just outside of either of the theme parks in close proximity to each of the Disney owned hotels.

The three Disney owned hotels located in Anaheim include: Paradise Pier, The Disneyland Hotel, and California's signature hotel The Grand Californian Resort and Spa. Each of these hotels offers something unique, but each of them has Disney as the main theme. Paradise Pier is considered the Value option for guests who want to stay at a Disney owned and operated hotel. The main theme is California sunshine and beaches. The Disneyland Hotel was the original hotel built for the Disneyland Resort. It essentially incorporates the themes of the Disneyland Park into a hotel. The Grand Californian Resort and Spa is the Deluxe accommodation option for Disney-goers which takes you into the mountainous region of Northern California.

The Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida is a community of theme parks, attractions, hotels, and restaurants that expands over 40 square miles of land. It is about the size of the city of San Francisco and includes: four theme parks, two water parks, 31 hotels, a Downtown Disney District, transportation systems, and over 300 dining options. The four theme parks consist of The Magic Kingdom which most resembles Disneyland in California, Epcot, Disney Hollywood Studios which is similar to Disney's California Adventure Park, and Animal Kingdom. Downtown Disney in Florida contains 39 dining options, 57 shops, and daily live entertainment.

The 31 hotel accommodations in the Walt Disney World Resort are separated into four tiers: Value, Moderate, Deluxe, and Deluxe Villas. Value offers affordable accommodations with a Disney touch, Moderate resorts are mid-priced hotels with themed properties, Deluxe offers a more luxurious experience, and Deluxe Villas offer larger and more spacious accommodations for bigger families and groups with the same luxury as the Deluxe option. Each of the hotel properties are located close to one of the parks or near the Downtown Disney District.

Disney Resorts have a rate of return just over 70%. A company that is continually expanding must attribute their success to a certain element of their business, and Disney credits theirs to one-of-a-kind service. From the beginning of Walt Disney's career in entertainment, he went to the customers and viewers for feedback. He knew that their opinion was the only one that mattered. When Walt Disney began to focus on the creation of Disneyland, his main concern was to create the ultimate guest experience. He used past personal experiences at other theme parks to ask himself how the experience could be drastically improved for visitors of all ages.

Training Programs

The employees of Disney are held to the highest standard and are trained to recognize that quality service is the key to guest satisfaction. The high demand to have a career with Disney and the curiosity of other companies have caused the Disney Company to create training programs. In 1955 Walt Disney created the first corporate university, Disney University. This university is used to make sure that new cast members (employees) understand and deliver the service that is expected of Disney.

Disney University is now known as the Disney College Program. The other training program offered by Disney is the Disney Institute. The Disney Institute is a program which invites other companies to learn the secret that goes into the magic and success of Disney service.

The Disney College Program is the gateway to a career at Disney. In the US there are two Disney College Program locations: Anaheim, California and Orlando, Florida. This program is unique and allows participants to network with leaders, take classes that teach personal and career development, and help to build transferrable skills. Participants are able to choose their own career pathway and the courses to support their chosen career in Disney. The different career paths include: operations, lodging, food and beverage, retail and sales, recreation, and entertainment. The program is considered a paid internship where “learn by doing” is a main component. With the “learn by doing” component, the program is made up of in-class time and working part time as well. This gives the participant the chance to demonstrate what they have learned in the classroom.

Trends in business fluctuate, but the need for innovation and passionate employees will always be relevant. The Disney Institute has worked with tens of thousands of people in almost every industry and country. The Institute has had the opportunity to train many Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, philanthropic, educational, and health-care organizations. The Disney Institute focuses on five core competencies in their training programs: leadership, culture, service, brand, and innovation.

Disney believes that a leader must be committed to making positive transformations for both the company and employees. They want each of their leaders to

leave behind their own legacy. Disney has a very distinct culture that is supported by the employees they hire. They hire based on how well a person's values and goals align with the company's mission, vision, and values, as opposed to hiring a person based on their skills and personality. Disney also believes that most companies do not fully realize the impact and importance of training new employees. Disney places significant emphasis on training newly hired employees and has an extensive orientation program. The company also tries to continuously educate their current employees because they believe that it helps to keep employees engaged and progressing with the company. Disney thinks that excellent service does not only come from a friendly employee or great technology, it is the result of the employee trying to understand the wants and needs of each unique customer. Having a strong brand is what keeps the customers coming back for more, especially because they won't get the unique experience anywhere else. And finally, innovation is being creative and constantly improving to adapt to the needs of the customer and industry.

Customer Relationship Management Technology

In recent years Disney has recognized the importance and success of implementing customer relationship management (CRM) technologies to assist in allowing guests to customize their experience based on their needs and interests. Disney truly wants to provide the best experience possible for their guests, so they think that the best way to do this is to allow guests to be involved in the planning of their own Disney vacation.

MyMagic+ is the Disney vacation planning program that lets guests customize their vacation all the way down to the smallest of details. Guests utilize this program during and after booking their Disney World vacation. To start, guests create an online profile that stores their basic information such as name, address, date of birth, and credit card information. After creating the profile guests are able to book their vacation conveniently and use the perks of MyMagic+. There are three main components to MyMagic+ that help guests to plan a unique Disney vacation. These components include: FastPass+, MagicBands, and My Disney Experience.

FastPass+ is essentially an online ride and attraction reservations system. It is a new spin on an old technology developed by Disney to reduce queue times for guests. This system can be used to plan what rides and attractions each guest would like to experience and at what time they would like to experience them. With FastPass+ guests feel confident that they will get to experience their favorite rides for sure and are relieved from waiting in the long lines that Disney Parks are known for.

In 2013 Disney launched their MagicBands at the Walt Disney World Resort. The MagicBands have a radio frequency identification (RFID) chip which can store information from each guest and improve convenience and efficiency for daily operations such as entering parks, paying for food, and even entering their hotel room. The MagicBands also store all of a guests FastPass+ information. They can simply check in to a ride or attraction by waving their band in front of a FastPass+ kiosk and skip the lines. MagicBands are designed to make a guests' Disney experience customized and as seamless as possible.

The last main component of MyMagic+ is a smartphone and internet application called My Disney Experience. This application gives guests control to plan their Disney vacation day by day before they even arrive to the resort. The application is a one stop shop to customize your Disney profile, view daily plans, hotel and restaurant reservations, park tickets, and FastPass+ selections. Once guests arrive they can continue to utilize the application as a reminder for when they planned their daily activities. Not only does this application assist in customizing each guests' visit, it also keeps them informed of all the happenings throughout the course of their days at the resort. My Disney Experience has a Disney itinerary of all the activities going on at the resort and has a global positioning system (GPS) which informs guests about activities taking place near them.

Disney has many other aspects of their operations that help guests to get the most out of their experience and most importantly, make the guests feel valued. A common example is the celebration buttons that are given as complimentary gifts upon request. They range from birthday to first visit buttons. When guests wear the buttons they are greeted by each cast member at the parks and resorts and are recognized for their special occasion.

Guest Loyalty

Disney is a strong believer that customer loyalty is the result of making and keeping credible and meaningful promises. Disney wants to create a positive emotional connection with its guests, even when they are deducting the cost of their Disney

purchase from their bank accounts. This means that Disney wants to have the benefits outweigh the cost of the vacation.

Disney's current purpose is "Creating happiness by providing the finest in entertainment for people of all ages, everywhere". Disney has found that their guests want a consistently amazing experience at all times during their vacation. Whether it is checking into a Disney hotel or waiting to get onto the next ride, each guest wants the interaction and experience to be delightful. The discussion and conclusions that stem from this section are analyzed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Over the years the Walt Disney Company has established themselves as a timeless icon in the world of hospitality. Disney has successfully set service standards that can benefit other companies within the hospitality industry. This concluding chapter will include the following: a summary of the study, discussion of the findings, limitations, conclusions based on research questions, and implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

Summary

Companies are continuously increasing awareness to the costs and benefits of quality customer service. Service quality has an important role in the success and sustainability of companies. Within the hospitality industry high quality and individualized guest service is expected. The success of delivering this type of service can be seen in the number of customers that return. The purpose of the study was to analyze the best practices and success of personalizing the guest experience at the Walt Disney Resorts. The researcher analyzed current trends in the hospitality industry that help to create an individualized experience for guests. Customer relationship management (CRM), training practices, and guest loyalty as a result of personalized service were examined.

The study was conducted between January and March of 2015. A case study checklist was utilized as an instrument to gather information about The Walt Disney

Resorts. The researcher used various resources published by Disney to research the information needed for the study.

The findings of the study detailed the history of service within the company, training programs offered by Disney, and the CRM techniques utilized to enhance guest experience. Disney has implemented extensive training programs to teach the foundations of service within the company. The company also continues to innovate and discover new technologies to enhance each guest experience. This enhancement of experience occurs by offering first-time guests, as well as guests who have loyally attended Disney Resorts for generations, the opportunity to customize their vacations.

Discussion

The vision of the Walt Disney Company is to cater to the individual expectations of each guest. The company has taken steps to allow its guests to customize their experience based on their budget, interests, and needs. By allowing guests the opportunity to customize their experience, their overall satisfaction increases. Ganesh, Arnold, and Reynolds (2000) noted that guest satisfaction is a key driver of guest loyalty. An example of this customization can be observed by taking a look at Disney's accommodations offerings at the Walt Disney World Resort. Guests are able to choose from Deluxe hotels or basic Value accommodations. Even though one guest may be paying less by staying at a Value hotel, they still get to experience the convenience and magic of staying in a Disney owned hotel.

Disney does a substantial amount of work behind the scenes to help create a memorable vacation for everyone. Ultimately the CRM techniques that Disney uses are

unique to the company and assist in personalizing each guest's vacation. In the past couple years they have stepped up their game by implementing the following CRM technologies: My Magic, MagicBands, and FastPass+. These examples enhance guest experience by providing a way for them to easily customize their vacation. The CRM techniques help to make guests feel valued and important. Customer relationship management implementation is important in establishing brand loyalty (Mohammed & Rashid, 2012) Since the CRM technologies are unique to Disney, brand loyalty also increases.

Brand loyalty can also increase when guests experience service that they cannot receive anywhere else. The unfailing service standards that Disney displays is a result of their extensive training programs. Guests that vacation at Disney Resorts expect to have a magical experience time after time, and employees can make or break that consistency. Significant focus on training employees can impact and improve guest experience immensely (Sheriff & Layton, 2004). A large part of the training programs is to help each employee understand and adopt the purpose and values of the company. Having a strong and powerful common purpose that is known and implemented company-wide is a key component to creating customer loyalty. Another main focus of the training programs should be on empowering front line employees. Wilder, Collier, and Barnes (2014) stated that when employees feel empowered that they can effectively adapt to the needs of each individual customer.

In addition to training programs for new employees, Disney offers continuing education to current employees. Employees are able to take courses to keep up with ever changing guest expectations. By receiving continuing education, employees are

motivated to improve their service delivery. Improved service delivery leads to increased customer satisfaction. Employee motivation also results in a higher level of commitment to the company. Boshoff and Allen (2000) found that companies with loyal employees are more likely to create long-term relationships with customers.

Although the research resulted in many useful recommendations, there were limitations to the study. A best practices approach was utilized which limited research to online sources. The success of Disney's efforts to customize guest experience was difficult to analyze because of the lack of quantitative data available to the public. The researcher accessed all information about the company through company owned websites which could be skewed in favor of Disney. In addition, the researcher may have influenced discussion through personal bias. Although the study was limited to a two week period, the quality and quantity of the information gathered was sufficient and relevant to the study.

Through this study the researcher found that the techniques used to personalize guest experience at the Walt Disney Resorts are successful. The service quality offered by Disney increases guest loyalty and satisfaction. Disney's dynamic and timeless approach to serving their guests serves as an ideal model for other companies to analyze and build upon.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The Walt Disney Resorts creates customer loyalty by customizing each guest experience through unique training programs and customer relationship management techniques.
2. Customer relationship management technologies enhance guest experience by simplifying the ability to plan customized vacations.
3. Allowing guests to customize their own vacations will increase guest satisfaction.
4. Standardized employee training and encouraging employee empowerment results in a company culture which is concerned with consistently creating memorable and unique guest experiences.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Expand the quantity of resort options to cater to various guest expectations and budgets.
2. Collect and analyze data from existing CRM technologies to continue to innovate new technology that is unique to the Disney brand.
3. Through training programs, encourage personal empowerment of employees in order to consistently satisfy the unique demands of each customer
4. Continuous learning must always be a top priority of the leaders in the Disney Company in order to have a versatile and motivated team of employees.

5. Future research should examine the customer loyalty programs that Disney has implemented over the years and the success of these programs.

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

- Boshoff, C., & Allen J. (2000). The influence of selected antecedents on frontline staff's perceptions of service recovery performance. *International Journal of Service Industry Management, 11*(1), 63-90. doi:10.1108/09564230010310295
- Dhar, R. L. (2015). Service quality and the training of employees: The mediating role of organizational commitment. *Tourism Management, 46*. 419-430. doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2013.09.007
- Disney Parks. (2015). Parks and destinations. Retrieved from <https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/destinations/>
- Fitzgibbon, C., & While, L. (2005). The role of attitudinal loyalty in the development of customer relationship management strategy within service firms. *Journal of Financial Services Marketing, 9*(3), 214-230. doi:10.1057/palgrave.fsm.4770155
- Ganesh, J., Arnold, M. J., & Reynolds, K. E. (2000). Understanding the customer base of service providers: An examination of the difference between switchers and stayers. *Journal of Marketing, 64*, 65-87. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3203488>
- Gartner, (2012, June 20). Gartner says worldwide spending on enterprise application software to increase 4.5 percent in 2012. *Gartner Inc.* Retrieved from <http://www.gartner.com/newsroom/id/2055215>
- Hartline, M. D., Maxham III, J. G., & McKee, D. O. (2000). Corridors of influence in the dissemination of customer-oriented strategy to customer contact service

- employees. *Journal of Marketing*, 64(2), 35-50. Retrieved from
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3203441>
- Luftman, J., Zadeh, H. S., Derksen, B., Santana, M., Rigoni, E. H., Huang, Z. D. (2012).
Key information technology and management issues 2011-2012: An international
study: *Journal of Information Technology*, 27(3), 198-212.
doi:10.1057/jit.2012.14
- McCull-Kennedy, J. R., & White, T. (1997). Service provider training at odds with
customer requirements in five-star hotels. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 11(4),
249-267. doi:10.1108/08876049710171713
- Min, H., & Min, H. (2005). The comparative evaluation of hotel service quality from a
managerial perspective. *Journal of Hospitality & Leisure Marketing*, 13(3/4), 33-
48. doi:10.1300/J150v13n03_04
- Mohammed, A. A. & Rashid, B. B. (2012). Customer relationship management (CRM) in
hotel industry: A framework proposal on the relationship among CRM
dimensions, marketing capabilities, and hotel performance. *International Review
of Management and Marketing*, 2(4), 220-230. Retrieved from
<http://econjournals.com/index.php/irmm>
- Regan, W. J., (1963). The Service Revolution. *Journal of Marketing*, 27(3). 57-62.
Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1249437>
- Sheriff, T. K. Luk & Layton, R. (2004). Service skills and service quality: An empirical
analysis. *Journal of Human Resources and Hospitality & Tourism*, 3(2), 33-60.
doi:10.1300/J171v03n02_02

- Torres, E. N., Fu, X., & Lehto, X. (2014). Examining key drivers of customer delight in a hotel experience: A cross-cultural perspective. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 36, 255-262. doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2013.09.007
- Westfall, Mike. (2014). Theme park attendance soared at Universal, dropped at Seaworld in 2013. My News 13: On the Town. Retrieved from http://www.mynews13.com/content/news/cfnews13/on-the-town/article.html/content/news/articles/cfn/2014/6/3/theme_park_attendance.html
- Wilder, K. M., Collier, J. E., & Barnes, D. C. (2014). Tailoring to customers' needs: Understanding how to promote an adaptive service experience with frontline employees. *Journal of Service Research*, 17, 446-459. doi:10.1177/1094670514530043
- Woodruff, R. (1997). Customer value: the next source for competitive advantage. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 25, 139–153. doi:10.1007/BF02894350

APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Instrument

INSTRUMENT

1. What is the history of the company in relation to customer orientation?
2. Is any type of customer relationship management (CRM) used to build customer relationships?
3. What types of CRM techniques are used to personalize service?
4. Is there a training program that each newly hired employee goes through?
5. What types of service training techniques are taught in the training programs?
6. Does the company attribute loyalty to service quality?
7. What other internal improvements are made when evaluating guest satisfaction?

Notes: