

Briefly Noted

by Nelson Scott



VOLUME 7 • NUMBER 1

JANUARY 2010

Service Stars ★★★★★

Magazines frustrate me. I like them. I buy them. But I just wish that they were better at delivering on what they promise.

Why don't editors look at their covers through the eyes of their customers (a.k.a. readers)? If they did, more would follow the lead of *Canadian Living*, one of a few magazines with editors that seem to understand what readers need.

While we are understandably skeptical about claims that people buy *Playboy* "for the articles," the truth is that most people actually do buy magazines for the articles.

Magazine covers are designed to attract the attention of the newsstand browsers and convert them into buyers. This is done with hints about the topics that the articles explore within the magazine.

Eager to learn more about something that appears on the cover, the browser becomes a buyer. But buyer-remorse can soon set in, with the discovery that what appeared to be business or travel magazines are actually mystery periodicals.

Somewhere between the cover and the table of contents, the topic that had interested the potential reader has disappeared or has been transformed into something else.

Recently, I picked up a travel magazine that listed several countries on its cover, including Brazil, a country I will be visiting when you read this article. What a disappointment when I finally found that the country was only briefly mentioned in an article entitled, *The Dream List! Who—besides the editors—would have known?*

Another example of the confusion created by what appears on covers saw *Good Night Insomnia: 6 Sleep Problems Solved* become either *Sleep: What makes night owls so smart* or, *The Nightmare Files: From insomnia to criminal sleepwalking sprees*.

Canadian Living does things differently. Appearing to understand that readers want to learn more about what was promised on the cover, those responsible for the magazine's layout reproduce the cover on the page opposite the contents. Lines radiate outwards from the headlines on the cover to page numbers indicating where the story appears.

Within minutes of purchasing Canadian Living, the reader has found and begun to read the articles that motivated her to buy the magazine. Unlike others who are frustrated with their magazine purchase, this satisfied customer will buy future issues of Canadian Living, or become a subscriber.

Nelson's Point of View

\$1.07 lesson in dealing with customer complaints

A pleasant Saturday morning that began with a discount coupon and a walk to a fast-food restaurant ended with a fight over \$1.07 and a lesson in how not to deal with customer complaints. Within two minutes, the assistant manager would make three mistakes in dealing with a dissatisfied customer.

The coupon promised, "2 can dine for \$5.98" (plus tax): two breakfast sandwiches, two hash browns and two *small* coffees. The conditions on the coupon's reverse side included an instruction to, "Please advise crew member of coupon prior to ordering." To make things as simple as possible, I laid the coupon on the counter as I placed my order. This is what we wanted, I explained, but we wanted to substitute a tea for one of the coffees.

"What size would you like?" the server asked. Knowing that this company charges the same price for all sizes of tea, I replied, "Large."

"That will be \$7.35."

I paid, but the price didn't seem right. As I waited for the order to be filled, I examined the bill. It appeared I had been overcharged. In my mind, I quickly calculated the GST on \$5.98. Thirty cents. A total of \$6.28. Should I say something or not? After all, I had only been overcharged \$1.07.

I decided to point out the price discrepancy. I doubted that I would have been allowed to leave the counter with a tray of food had I decided to pay only \$5.21.

The server looked at the coupon and turned to the assistant manager. "I made a mistake."

Adam glanced at the receipt. "We owe you 46 cents."

"No, I think it should be more like a dollar," I said.

"No, you ordered a medium coffee." Mistake Number One: blaming the customer for the problem.

"I didn't. When I gave her the coupon, I said that it was what I wanted, except that I wanted to exchange tea for one of the coffees. I don't drink coffee."

"I am not going to argue with you," he said.

"But that is what you have been doing and I have been arguing with you." Mistake Number Two: trying to prove that the customer is wrong.

By this point, Adam had become aware of something that I hadn't observed. The previously empty restaurant had suddenly filled with customers. A line stretched to the entrance.

"I'm not going to argue with you anymore," he said. "There are other customers who need to be served." Mistake Number Three: suggesting that serving the needs of other customers is more important than satisfying the one standing in front of you.

"Maybe you should just keep the money," I said.

"Well what do you want? Do you want the money or not?"

"I'll take it."

Adam punched several keys, the cash drawer opened and he reached in. Withdrawing some coins, he thrust his hand in my direction. A loonie and a quarter dropped onto my tray. I picked it up, turned and walked to my table.

Once there, I realized that I had received a larger refund than I was entitled to. Eighteen cents too much. Should I return to the counter and explain this to Adam?

Best not to, I concluded. I would donate the 18 cents to a charity. In fact, I decided to donate the full \$1.25 to charity. But the charity won't be the one named after this restaurant's clown-like mascot.

You and your staff can learn several techniques to respond quickly and effectively to complaints and build customer loyalty during Nelson Scott's Customer Service Magic: Changing Complainers into Loyal Customers. To read additional articles on customer service, visit www.seaconsultingonline.com/Articles/Service/index.htm. To schedule customer service training, contact Nelson at (780) 433-1443 or email nmscott@telus.net.

This Newsletter is prepared by Nelson Scott of SEA Consulting to maintain contact with clients and other readers. Information presented here relates to Nelson's presentations and other services provided by SEA Consulting. Reprint permission is granted when the following credit appears: "© Nelson Scott, 2010. Reprinted with permission from Briefly Noted by Nelson Scott, a monthly Internet newsletter. For your own subscription, go to www.seaconsultingonline.com."

Quote of the Month

"Our greatest glory is not in never failing, but in rising every time we fail."

— Confucius

Recognition Calendar

A few special days to remind us to recognize others for the contributions and achievements

JANUARY 2010

- January is **National Mentoring Month** (www.mentoring.org). Recognize staff members who mentor others.
- Monday, January 18: National Thesaurus Day** – On the anniversary of the birthday of Peter Roget, who published the first thesaurus, list all the words you can say, "thank you." Then, use as many of them as you can.
- Tuesday, January 19: Peer Recognition Day** – Encourage everyone to recognize their co-workers for their help.
- Thursday, January 21: Thank Your Mentor Day** – Take time to honour someone who was your mentor.
- Sunday, January 24: National Compliment Day** (www.complimentday.com)

FEBRUARY 2010

- Sunday, February 14: Valentine's Day** – "How do I love my staff? Let me count the ways."
- Monday, February 15: Family Day** (celebrated in several Canadian provinces) – Let the families of your staff members know that you appreciate them sharing their mother/father/spouse/son/daughter with you. Thank them for the support they provide to their family members who are also your staff members.
- February 15 – 21: Random Acts of Kindness Week** (www.actsofkindness.org).
- Tuesday, February 16: Peer Recognition Day**
- Wednesday, February 17: Random Acts of Kindness Day**

High-Value, Low-Cost Staff Recognition

- Ask staff members about their New Year's resolutions. Keep this information in mind as you plan to recognize staff. Is there some way you can align your recognition with their resolutions?
- If you need to ask employees to work late, provide them with a meal before the extra work begins.
- A balloon bouquet is a fitting way to thank someone who has gone "above and beyond."
- When a team completes a project, tell the members they have one more decision to make—how are they going to celebrate their success?

Reader demonstrates effective staff recognition is not about spending money

No budget for staff recognition? No problem. At least, it hasn't proven to be a problem for *Briefly Noted* reader Gina Fowler, a supervisor in the office of Alberta's Auditor General.

She wrote that because she works in a government office, "we are not allowed to use taxpayers' monies for staff recognition."

Having to use her own funds, Gina has had to be creative in how she recognizes staff. "Last year I purchased (on sale) funny file folders from Grand & Toy and stuffed them with free stuff: 'Alphabet for Life' book markers; 'Know how you feel' magnets (they have a picture frame that you can place over faces depicting how you might feel: happy, goofy, confident, chatty, confused, etc.); 'wacky' paperclips shaped like fish, stars and moons; and some funny Post-it note pads. My staff really seemed to like and appreciate the gesture."

Another time, she made "a bunch of 'bendy' people with really fuzzy hairdos (made from pipe cleaners, beads and yarn). Each was made using a favourite colour of each one of my staff and I attached a little card that said, 'Although we are each different, together we make a great team!'"

"As I walk around the office, I can see each one of those silly little bendy people proudly displayed in each person's area, as if it was an Olympic medal!"

Last month, Gina let her staff know they were appreciated in a unique way. She gave them something more valuable than money—the gift of time. She used some of her banked overtime to "give each of my staff two

hours to go Christmas shopping during office hours."

She says that at first the human resources department had difficulty with her plan, but in the end, agreed to the request to exchange some of her overtime for shopping time for Gina's staff.

"Since it was just a matter of exchanging bodies (mine, for each of my staff) and not an adjustment of funds (that may have impacted taxes, etc.), they understood and agreed to my request."

Gina believes that what she has done to recognize staff has made a difference.

"One staff member, who I inherited as a problem, has turned a complete 180 on her work performance and attitude. She recently received great positive feedback from the same staff member who just last year gave quite negative feedback."

"Another staff member came back from her overseas vacation this past October and brought me a little leprechaun holding a Guinness mug (my favorite beer). She said 'You're always recognizing us and giving us stuff. I wanted you to know I recognize you, too.'"

"Well, that almost did me in!" Gina concluded.

Do you have a staff recognition story to share? Maybe it's about a time when you recognized someone or a time when you were the recipient of well-delivered recognition. Others will benefit from reading your story of recognition success in a future issue of Briefly Noted. Like you, they want to learn new ways to let staff know they are appreciated.

Learn how to write and publish your book

Self-publishing guru Dan Poynter doesn't want you to die with a book still in you.

He will bring that message to Edmonton on Saturday afternoon, January 23, when he speaks to the Edmonton chapter of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers.

If you have been thinking about writing a book, but aren't sure how to begin or how to get it published, you should plan to attend. Non-members are welcome to attend CAPS events.

Dan is recognized as the leading authority on book marketing, promotion and distribution. He has presented his New Book Model to audiences around the world. During his presentation, Dan will explain how to use new techniques and the latest technology to produce your printed or e-book for less, and how to promote your book more effectively.

During Dan's presentation, you will discover how to:

- Ensure there is a market for your project
- Find time to write
- Find material to fill your manuscript
- Break your project down into easy-to-attack chunks
- Get illustrations—practically free

- Find relevant quotations and stories
- Get the project ready for the printer
- Make the choice between looking for an agent or publisher, and publishing yourself

Dan's own best-selling books include *Writing Non-fiction: Turning Thoughts into Books* and *The Self-Publishing Manual: How to Write, Print and Sell Your Own Book*. Dan's website (www.parapublishing.com) is a rich source of information on writing, publishing and promoting books. While there, you can also sign up for Dan's free monthly newsletter.

Your investment to attend Dan's afternoon session is only \$75. It will begin at 12:00 p.m. at the Royal Mayfair Golf and Country Club, 9450 Groat Road (Note: The MGCC has a no-denim, no-cell-phones rule).

Dan will also be speaking on Saturday morning at CAPS Edmonton's regular professional development session (8:30 a.m. to noon) about his experiences speaking to audiences around the world. Non-members are welcome to attend this session as well.

To learn more and to pre-register for the morning, afternoon or both, visit www.capsedmonton.com/events.htm.



Nelson Scott
Tel: (780) 433-1443 • E-mail: nmscott@telus.net
www.seaconsultingonline.com

