

IVEN FRANGI

Rainbow Balls and the Corner Store



Do you remember shopping at the corner store? Why did you like it?

Recently, I asked a group this question and the answer was fascinating. They said it was convenient, the household essentials, odd useful things like light globes and potato peelers, the shopkeeper knew you and sometimes there were even little gifts—rewards for shopping there.

I remember my local shopkeeper rewarding me with rainbow balls (my favourites, some of you are too young to remember these delightful indulgences) when Mum told him I did well in a school test. I was seven years old.

The other reported feedback was that the corner store cost a little more, but we liked it, so that was fine.

So, what happened to the corner store? For the most part they are gone. Replaced by large supermarkets or shopping centres that are trying to recreate the easy relaxed atmosphere in a large complex that we miss by adding the, “*Joe and Tom Fruit & Veg section.*”

Mass personalisation

No, it's not an oxymoron. With all the talk today of value not price, building relationships and getting to know the customer, etc., aren't we going back to the corner store way of thinking?

I thought about this because a client was briefing me recently for a sales skills workshop and I was struck with the similarity of the outcomes that were required. The difference was the client's team is delivering the needed customer outcomes via e-mail, voice mail, a net site, conference calls, faxes, PowerPoint presentations, mobile phones, a telephone centre, “schedule plus” organised calling and of course, actually visiting the customer.

All this was designed to keep the

customer informed and creating a relationship that worked for both—and it does. The technology of today, intelligently used, supports and expands the customer experience and the delivery of the required services and products.

Are we forgetting something?

An experience I had recently, brought home the use and limitations of technology in selling our capabilities.

I checked into a five star, international resort for a three day stay. I checked in late, at 12.20 am. The doorman was welcoming and friendly. He commented I was the latest check in he had ever had. At the desk, another warm welcome and “Sorry, the computer is down but there is a room ready.”

I had booked a



room facing the ocean and the morning would bring a spectacular view. Arriving at the room, I was excited—until I opened the curtains and found a wonderful view of the car park! The porter responded quickly and rang the front desk, only to discover all the ocean view rooms were taken. This could wait until the morning, all I wanted to do right then was sleep!

In the morning, I went to the front desk and was greeted by a lady named Sissy. The response was “Yes, Mr Frangi, we know about you.” (Had there been a special staff meeting?) This was good they were prepared.

She apologised, the computer was still down (now 36 hours) and my room was not yet ready. I told her I was not really upset, the computer problem was not her fault and that it must be very difficult, if not impossible, to work without it. I told

Sissy that my business was sales training and customer contact skills and at times, mistakes happened. *It was how the business recovered that was the true measure of excellence.* I also told her that I would use this story in some of my future seminars. She seemed genuinely relieved at my reaction, it had obviously been a hard morning!

What a recovery...

Later, I was waiting in my room for the porter to arrive to go to my new room. Sissy rang to say all was organised and “there was a surprise”. I was led to the Plumeria suite (which is coincidentally Frangipanni) a magnificent room with an outside spa, lounge room and a stunning view. I was impressed, and curious.

I discovered that Sissy had told the Duty Manager about my comment. He had authorised the upgrade and made sure the room was cleaned and prepared (the house keeper told me).

Now that's what I call a recovery—and smart business. Because of Sissy and Vinnie spotting an opportunity, they turned a potential complaint into a promotional story for the Sheraton Kauai Resort. Thousands of people will get to hear this good news story. They created the best sales outcome possible—a *delighted customer!* Well done to them both and Sheraton Hawaii.

In selling and dealing with customers, the technology and equipment can support you enormously in looking after your customers. It is vital.

However, it won't and can't pacify upset customers, handle complaints, make decisions, smile, develop special relationships and most of all, spot opportunities. That's what people do.

Iven Frangi is a business builder. He builds your business with higher sales results. Presentations are researched, customised and use humour to weave in relevant day to day examples.

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