

CAUTION » GURU WARNS FIRMS AGAINST 'STUPID POLICIES' THAT CAN CHASE AWAY CLIENTS

Get customer care right if you want stable economy — expert

John Tschohl, an authority in the field of customer service, says companies ignore this aspect, yet it is a key ingredient to their success

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Customer service is undoubtedly one of the central pillars of a successful company. This is because without customers, you simply do not have a business to speak of.

What does customer care entail? This is the question that John Tschohl, a customer service guru, sought to answer last week during a workshop organised by Amadeus and the Kenya Association of Travel Agents. Customer care, Mr Tschohl said, is so crucial that it plays an important role in the stabilisation of the economy.

"Kenya needs an update of customer service strategies to stabilise its economy," he told *Smart Company*.

The Minnesota-born expert shared insights on customer care with more than 200 leaders of companies.

Mr Tschohl said Kenyan companies are increasingly focusing on growing revenue using a variety of ways, but are ignoring excellent customer care.

Mr Tschohl, 67, has gained popularity preaching about the tenets of customer care globally, earning himself the title of "Guru of Customer Service" by *USA Today*, *Time*, and *Entrepreneur* magazines.

Dominate market

An author of several best-selling titles, he is the president of Service Quality Institute, a global leader in customer service. His latest book, *Moving Up*, showcases a step-by-step guide to building successful firms.

For companies to own and dominate the market, he recommended that they embrace customer service fully and deeply understand how it works.

He warned firms against "stupid policies" like creating passwords on

FILE | NATION

Amadeus East Africa general manager Juan Torres (left) and Service Quality Institute president John Tschohl during a customer service seminar in Nairobi last week



WiFi: "Such policies infuriate customers and would chase away high potential ones. The company ends up losing a customer despite succeeding in chasing away intruders," he said.

Recover from mistakes

Firms could increase their revenue by over 25 per cent if they adhere to the principles he espouses. Companies, he said, must make customers feel empowered.

"Once we get the basics, then we will know how to handle irate customers, act quickly to recover company mistakes, and keep an eye on how trends transform the company."

Mr Tschohl has been instructing and motivating employees, managers, supervisors, and CEO's for over 40 years.

He is the author of the world's first customer service training programme, which he released in 1980.

Participants at the workshop, who

were mainly from the travel industry, agreed to implement his guidelines.

Kenya Travel Agents Association chairman S.G. Kaka said Kenya's travel industry has a long road to travel as far as customer service is concerned.

"Our industry is operating around seven out of 10. We hope that experience gained from this seminar will shoot it up to nine out of 10," he said.

Online support

Mr Deena Patel from Concord Car Hire and Services termed the seminar informative and beneficial. His sentiments were echoed by Mr Walter Orato of AIG Insurance Kenya.

The workshop focused on service delivery such as how to train leaders and staff as well how to tap online support to ensure business runs in line with global market trends.

Mr Tschohl's books, which are read in more than 40 countries, have been translated into 11 languages.

APPOINTMENTS

Law firm names new top partner



STEPHEN MALLOWAH joins MMC Africa Advocates as senior partner and head of commercial division. Mr Mallowah brings to the firm 22 years of experience in commercial, corporate, and international and regional trade law, among other disciplines. Until December 2013, he was the founder of the Kenya Anti-Counterfeit Agency, an outfit specialising in intellectual property law and enforcement. He has been directly involved in significant regulatory reforms of the Kenyan financial sector through the creation of watchdog agencies.

Senior partner joins law firm



GEORGE W. RUBAGUMYA has been appointed senior partner at MMC Africa Advocates with responsibility for Africa-wide legal network development. Mr Rubagumya joins MMC from Knutson Global Inc., a US-based firm. He boasts a career spanning over 25 years in international business experience and legal practice in America and Africa, where he advised government and private sector leaders. He was the co-founder of the Institute for Development Technologies, a public-private partnership initiative with the government of South Sudan.

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MANUFACTURING

Similar goods blamed for low trade among African countries

PRODUCTION of similar goods is one of the major challenges affecting trade among African countries. This came to light at the African Development Bank's conference in Kigali, Rwanda, last week.

Traders at the forum said most African firms produce similar goods. This, they said, reduces trading between the countries, forcing them to import from markets outside the continent.

Rwanda's minister of Trade and Commerce, Mr François Kanimba, said the structure of the production systems in Africa poses a challenge.

"There is a need to diversify our exports if we are to trade with each other," he said.

He added that the environment in Africa is

not conducive for diversified exports.

"There is a bad culture where you have permanent tendencies at African border points to discourage emerging traders who would like to take the opportunity to penetrate and embark on the regional market," said the minister.

Speaking at the same forum, East African Community secretary-general Richard Sezibera noted that although trade within the bloc has increased, its full potential is yet to be achieved.

Trade in the EAC has increased to 25 per cent from less than 10 per cent among Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi in the past 10 years.

"The volume is expected to increase as regional integration deepens. This has been due to the reduction of trade barriers which have cut the cost of doing business in the region," he said.

Previously, the official said, it cost Sh130,500 (\$1,500) to ship a container from Japan to the port of Mombasa and Sh391,500 (\$4,500) to move the same container to Kigali. "Much of the cost was due to administrative hurdles. The cost (from Mombasa to Kigali) has since gone down by Sh93,525 (\$1,075)," Mr Sezibera said and called for further removal of non-trade barriers.

The secretary-general said the EAC, in part-

nership with the African Development Bank, has put up a regional payment system that enables fast movement of finances.

Integrate regions

The deputy director of the World Trade Organisation, Mr Frederick Agah, said there is a need to integrate regions to foster cooperation, growth, and trust between countries.

The chief executive of the Walvis Bay Corridor Group, Mr Johnny Smith, said infrastructure should be developed to create and promote opportunities for trade with neighbouring countries.

— Yvonne Kawira