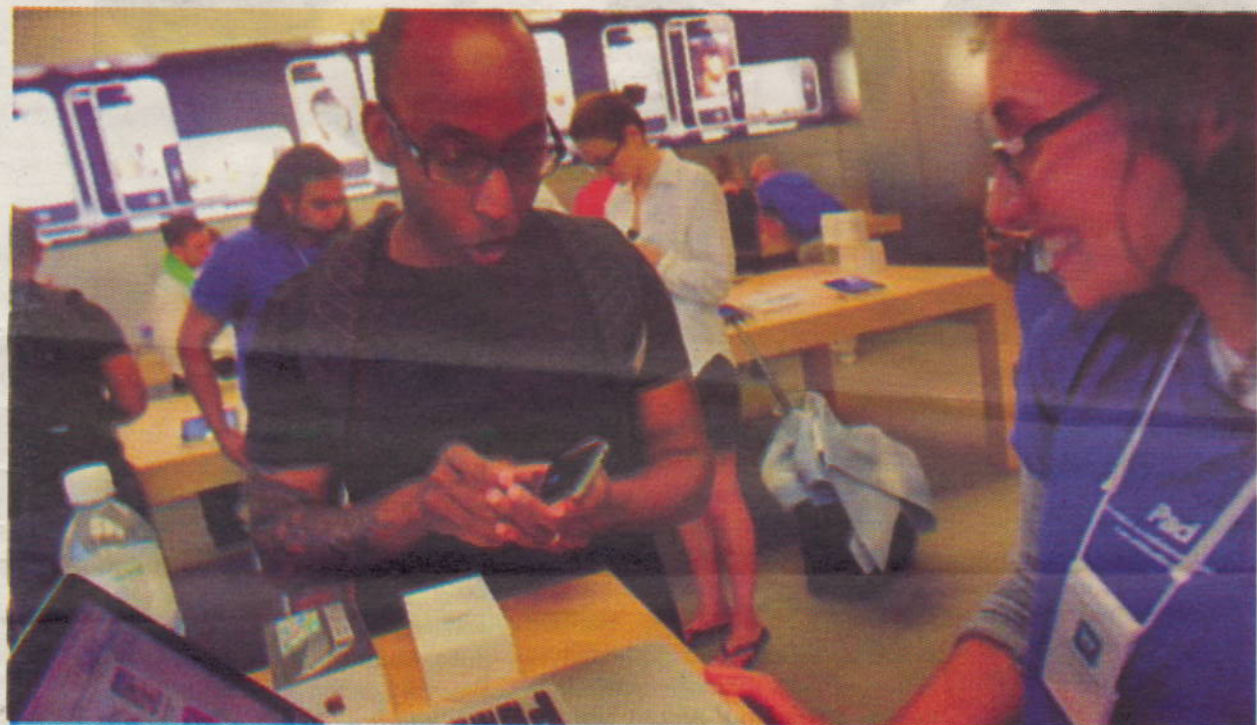


Business School

Customer Care Services as Management Strategy



African Business Schools Plan Curriculum for MBA Students

By Chris Uba

Teachers in the African business schools gathered in Lagos, last week, to brainstorm on how best they can train future leaders of businesses in Africa. Specifically, the meeting, which held at Pan-African University, Aja, an outskirt of Lagos, was to draw up curriculum for African business schools.

The management teachers working under the aegis of Association of African Business School (AABS) believe that in training current and future leaders in their home markets, business schools in Africa should play a critical role in laying the groundwork for economic development. The key to producing effective leaders is through education and improving business management training, as leadership skills have to be nurtured through the concerted efforts of institutions at all levels of society.

Participants stated that most of the classical business schools' models taught in African business schools are designed for stable economies where everything is foreseeable. Executives operating in complex emerging markets with high uncertainty and inequality, however, need unique qualities to succeed. Emerging market thinking goes beyond the geographical emerging markets. It is all about thinking how a leader is able to take responsibility in an economy that is changing every day. That is something one would rather learn in an emerging market business school, than in a stable (western) business school.

"I believe that the development of good leaders in nation building begins with the development of institutions that can produce leaders capable of meeting the needs of the region," said Dr. Enase Okenodo, the dean of Lagos Business School (LBS), who is also the chairperson of the South African-based AABS.

She noted that most good African business schools training future managers, offer similar curriculum to their counterparts in developed nations without regard to the peculiar needs of the African operating environment. "The African context is plagued by the ills of poor governance, corruption and poor management practices," she said.

She added that it was necessary for business schools responsible for developing the next generation of African business leaders to emphasise in their curriculum, a strong value system, business ethics, corporate social responsibility and a genuine desire to serve.

Making a case for cooperation towards regional integration, Okonedo stated that the next generation of African business leaders needs to think beyond self-interest and national interests to consider what is beneficial for the whole region.

AABS is an association of leading business schools throughout the African continent. It promotes excellence in business and management education through capacity building, collaboration and quality improvement. Business schools that do not meet the requirements for membership can join AABS as Pipeline Schools with the full benefits of membership while aiming to meet all the requirements within three years.

AABS equips faculty members through an annual teaching course titled "Teaching the Practice of Management" (TPM) and an annual programme for new researchers titled "Research and the Practice of Management" (RPM). AABS also provides strategic support and advice to deans and directors through inter-national study visits, peer reviews, workshops and conferences as well as consultant visits to schools.

AABS runs an annual case study competition in collaboration with Emerald. The association is governed by an elected board of members from around the continent and a secretariat based in Johannesburg. AABS provides member schools with an endorsement of quality, an opportunity to learn from peers, and access to a worldwide network.

By Chris Uba

The marketing concept is one of the simplest ideas in marketing management.

It is also one of the most important marketing philosophies. At its very core are the customer and his satisfaction. It states that an organisation should strive to satisfy its customers' wants and needs while meeting the organisation's goals. What this translates to, in simple terms, is that "the customer is king".

The premise for this mantra is that any product's design, production, distribution and marketing should have one central focus at the core of all decision-making: the customer. This means that products or brands by themselves do not automatically usher in customer loyalty or strengthen customer relations. In today's world, customers are looking for products that suit their purpose best in terms of price, features, quality and appearance. They expect to be treated as "kings" and to receive sales and service support, along with definite solutions problems from retailers, dealers or channel partners.

The customer is king, influencing the actions of even the largest business organisations when it comes to customer service, which marketing experts say is the lifeblood of any business. Good customer service is the lifeblood of any business. You can offer promotions and slash prices to bring in as many new customers as you want, but unless you can get some of those customers to come back, your business will not be profitable for long.

Good customer service is all about bringing customers back. And about sending them away happy - happy enough to pass positive feedback about your business along to others, who may then try the product or service you offer for themselves and in their turn become repeat customers.

If you are a good salesperson, you can sell anything to anyone once. But it will be your approach to customer service that determines whether or not you will ever be able to sell that person anything else. The essence of good customer service is forming a

relationship with customers a relationship that individual customer feels that he would like to pursue.

Customer service is the provision of service to customers before, during and after a purchase. According to Turban et al, it is "is a series of activities designed to enhance the level of customer satisfaction that is, the feeling that a product or service has met the customer expectation."

Telecoms companies in Nigeria for instance value customers a lot. Because of this, they have integrated customers into their core businesses. It is for this reason that they spend huge sum of money on advertisements and promotional exercises. But unfortunately, while they spend money on advertisement, they have not taken time to train their customer care personnel on the natty-gritty of customer care functions. Perhaps, this explains the shabby treatment they give to customers.

A firsttime visitor to the customer care sections of MTN, Glo, Etisalat, Airtel, and Starcomms would wonder whether he is dealing with traders in Dugbe Market in Ibadan or

one of the markets in Isale Eko, on the Lagos Island. They are rude and careless about customers, which is the main reason they are employed. Their attitude reflect oga ta oga ota o, owo alaru a pe (sales or no sales, my salary will be paid).

What is customer care?

Customer care involves putting systems in place to maximise your customers' satisfaction with your business. It should be a prime consideration for every business - your sales and profitability depends on keeping your customers happy.

Customer care is more directly important in some roles than others. For receptionists, sales staff and other employees in customer-facing roles, customer care should be a core element of their job description and training, and a core criterion when you are recruiting. Do not neglect the importance of customer care in other areas of your business. For instance, your warehousing and dispatch departments may have minimal contact with your customers - but their performance when fulfilling orders has a major impact on customers' satisfaction with your business.

(To be continued)