

Experiences, Expectations, and Exploits

Taking Advantage of Customer Experiences Before They Take Advantage Of You



The amusement industry is built on providing customers and guests with memorable experiences. At every park, entertainment center, museum, and zoo, staff members and employees make it part of their job to ensure that each guest gets the most out of their visit. But how do they know that they are giving their customers what they want? And how should they deal with customers who ask for more than what is normally expected?

To answer those questions, InPark turned to Scot Carson, President and General Manager of Amusement Advantage. For nearly ten years, Scot and his wife Christine Carson have been “shopping” amusement industry facilities, learning what is most important from guests’ perspectives, and helping industry insiders recognize the ideal levels of service for their essential customers.

Can you provide a brief background on Amusement Advantage? How did your organization get started?

Created in 1997, Amusement Advantage, Inc. is a company born of many years of amusement park management, customer service, and mystery shopping experience. As a result of our interest and enthusiasm for amusement facilities, we put our experience and talents together to create a company dedicated to providing a critical look at guest service through custom-tailored mystery shopping programs. Amusement Advantage is the only company exclusively serving the amusement industry and works with over 100 facilities nationwide including amusement parks, water parks, family entertainment centers, zoos, aquariums, science centers, ski resorts and other attractions.

In a nutshell, what types of services do you provide for amusement industry clients?

Amusement Advantage provides mystery-shopping programs to monitor guest satisfaction, cleanliness, safety and loss prevention. Amusement Advantage creates a custom-tailored program for each client using industry standard and facility specific criteria. The detailed feedback comes in the form of a comprehensive report (often exceeding ten pages per visit to the facility) which is provided to the client within 48 hours of the mystery shopper visiting their facility. Clients then use the results to make changes in their facility and enhance their training and staff development initiatives. Many clients incorporate the mystery shopper’s results with employee incentive programs to identify and reward those employees who make a difference. Additional services such as on-the-spot employee recognition, digital photos, targeted group sales, full birthday party evaluations, recorded phone calls, and custom online

summary and comparison reporting are utilized by some clients.

What are some of the most prevalent customer service concerns present in the amusement industry today?

- Guest Education / Information:
 - Good, clear signage, verbal reminders and instructions, particularly when indicating less than perfect conditions (wait times, closed rides, inclement weather policies, etc.) are important. Whenever possible, make conditions abundantly clear prior to a guest’s entrance into the park, so that guests are less inclined to be disappointed or dissatisfied if they choose to enter. Don’t over promise and under deliver.
 - Make a visit easy for a guest. Make sure procedures are clearly indicated so that a guest doesn’t feel uncomfortable or on the spot in any situation (height or weight requirements, inner-tubes being required, etc).
- Perception is Reality:
 - This is especially true regarding cleanliness. Guests love a clean park, and ironically, if the park is not clean but there are a lot of employees visibly working on the problem, guests are very forgiving. They really want to know that the park is working on it. When they see park employees cleaning the park, our shoppers often comment that other guests are responsible for the conditions, but if they see no one sweeping, emptying trash or checking restrooms they comment that the park is to blame for the messy conditions.
- Individualize the Guest:
 - Coach employees to individualize guest interactions as much as possible. In our experience, park guests are

happiest with employees who make them feel like they're not just one of thousands of guests visiting that day. For many guests, because of the cost, a day at an amusement park is a very special, signature day each summer. The happiest guests report that the employees made them feel special. Employees who do something proactive to enhance the fun of their experience are the employees who receive the highest marks, and guests who experience this kind of service report a higher total value for the money spent.

Is the customer always right?

The customer for the most part needs to feel that they are right, but the customer isn't always right. The customer is always right in wanting to enjoy a fun day at the park with family and friends. The customer is right in expecting the park to take reasonable steps to meet that expectation for each guest. The customer is NOT right in demanding that unreasonable steps be taken by the park.

Many employees of parks and amusement companies know that there are times when customers and guests try to take advantage of a customer service situation. Can you give a few examples of what parks and amusement companies can do in advance to keep such situations from occurring?

- Knowledge:

-Knowledge is crucial. Facilities need to know what is happening with individual guests. Awareness of customer service strengths and weaknesses arms the facility with the ability to make small and immediate changes that have a big impact. Poor conditions can be identified and altered. Individual employees can be coached on performance, so that the thousands of customers the employee interacts with for the rest of the season will walk away with a more positive impression of not only the employee, but of the park itself.

- Empathy and Understanding:

-The first person to hear a guest's concern should be

empathetic and proactive. Employees can be empowered to provide some degree of restitution to a guest immediately. This will help to diffuse the situation early with the least amount of loss for the facility. If a guest has to walk across the park in 95-degree heat to find guest relations, he/she is going to become increasingly agitated with each step. This will lead to a higher level of restitution sought by the guest.

- Creative Problem Solving:

-Think outside the box as to how guest concerns can be addressed without overstepping reasonable boundaries. Give front-line team members the ability to suggest proactive changes to procedures and policies to help better serve the guest while meeting department and organizational goals. Get front-line team members involved in solutions and accommodations for guests' problems instead of escalating issues so rapidly.

What are some signs or situations that employees should be aware of that a customer service situation has gone beyond normal expectations?

Some signs may be the guest immediately asking to speak with a supervisor or manager, asking where guest relations or information is located, asking about getting return tickets, or asking for another location where they can address their needs or requests. In many cases, when a guest is immediately looking to escalate a problem that the front-line team member hasn't even been informed of or was just recently informed of, the situation has probably exceeded normal expectations.

What should employees do if they think a guest is trying to take advantage of the establishment's hospitality?

A key element is to remove the guest from a public area at the facility. If guests have less of an audience, their tone and demeanor may become deflated and more open to reasonable accommodations. Additionally, getting another team member involved often helps to diffuse the situation, as someone who is new to the problem has a fresh perspective on the situation and may be able to offer a quick resolution.

inpark

To find out more from Scot Carson and Amusement Advantage, please visit www.amusementadvantage.com.

What Are Your Guests Experiencing?

Start a mystery shopping program today and find out!

Amusement Advantage's programs for monitoring guest satisfaction provide the **detailed feedback** you need to enhance your training & staff development initiatives.

- * Comprehensive evaluations of your entire operation
- * Custom-tailored programs for each customer
- * Guest service, safety, loss-prevention, cleanliness & more
- * Proven results with over 100 facilities nationwide

IAAPA
Attractions
EXPO
See us at
booth#5114

Amusement Advantage
Mystery Shopping Services

Call 800-362-9946 or visit www.amusementadvantage.com

