

3rd Hong Kong Tourism Symposium 2004

Session 1: Service Quality in Tourism Room 301, HKCEC

Room 311-312, HKCEC

9:30 – 11:00 am, 18 March 2004

Summary

[Moderator: Mr Vincent Fang]

1. Panelists' Presentation

Hon Mr Howard Young

- Hon Mr Howard Young highlighted that tourism was one of the economic pillars in Hong Kong, contributing 8% to our GDP.
- After reviewing several pull factors, he opined that service was an important pull factor to attract tourists to visit Hong Kong. And service quality could differentiate us from other destinations and enhance our competitiveness.
- Mr Young said that service had a unique set of characteristics. It was intangible and difficult to be measured. The quality of service depended very much on the person who served. This was particularly true in the tourism industry, as the industry was labour-intensive.
- Mr Young then highlighted five improvement measures on service quality –
 - (a) Communication. He emphasized the importance of a tourist-friendly

environment. Tourists would appreciate if communication could be conducted in a language that was familiar to them. In this connection, he opined that Putonghua would become increasingly important because of the large number of tourists from the Mainland and Taiwan. Besides, there was a need to continue promoting the use of English. Use of other foreign language should also be encouraged to promote hospitable culture.

- (b) Training. He briefed the audience how the Tourism Orientation Programme (2002) for training young hosts and the Skills Enhancement Project (2003) (as a relieve measure after SARS) could enhance professionalism.
 - (c) Legislation. After the enactment of the Travel Agent (Amendment) Bill 2001, all inbound travel agents had to apply for a license. Government had also introduced a certification scheme for the tourist guides. Unethical practices should be outlawed by legislation.
 - (d) Community involvement. We needed to promote hospitality culture in the community, e.g. Hospitable HK Campaign (2001).
 - (e) Experience enrichment. Technology should be used for experience enrichment, e.g. electronic display boards and information accessibility.
- Finally, Mr Young underlined that the whole community should give recognition to quality service. The Quality Tourism Services Scheme and Hong Kong Award for Services Scheme were set up to give reward to quality service providers.
 - He concluded his presentation by asking the audience to consider whether

we should disclose the name of blacklisted shops.

Ms Quince Chong

- Ms Chong said that the airline industry was a very unique industry, as it worked 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The industry always faced a volatile external environment. Change was the only constant and service the key in the industry.
- She opined that the company's greatest asset was the staff. This factor could differentiate the company from its competitors. In Cathay Pacific, customer contact staff (inclusive of both cabin crew and customer service officers) represented 5% of the total tourism workforce. They were the ambassadors of Hong Kong.
- She then gave an overview of the attributes that a successful service industry worker should possess, e.g. outgoing, dynamic, resourceful, caring and people-oriented.
- Turning to the tourism industry, Ms Chong explained that Hong Kong should focus more on the intangible aspects to enhance our brand, e.g. the process of service delivery and enhancement of customers' experience.
- One key component of quality service was the frontline staff. There were several factors which could engage frontline staff to provide better services.
 - (a) A new corporate culture. Instead of relying on the management to make all decisions for staff to implement, staff should now act as a channel to transmit the needs of customers to the management. Cathay

had different communication channels to engage its staff, e.g. newsletters.

- (b) Frontline staff had to understand that their service would make a difference. Their action would influence whether a customer would return to the company in future. Frontline staff should feel proud of what they were doing. More importantly, staff should be encouraged to look beyond their present post and actively acquire new skills to enhance their employability.

- (c) It is important to have the right people (in terms of attitude and skill sets) for the right job. But motivation and engagement for staff could sustain their service quality. Ms Chong then gave a few examples of how CX implemented this policy within their own corporation, e.g. recognition (e.g. awards and incentive tours), special events, learning and development opportunities, positive and supportive work environment (e.g. mentors and coaching), results and remuneration (e.g. profit sharing scheme).

Mr Wong Wai-wing

- Mr Wong used the Quality Tourism Services Scheme to illustrate the importance of quality service in the tourism industry.

- He then pointed out that there would always be gaps between service provided and the expectation of customers. The wider the gap, the greater the dissatisfaction. However, better service quality could close the gap.

- He opined that people were an important component in the tourism industry

and training was the best way to enhance the quality of service offered by the tourism workers.

- Training could bring improvement to the following aspects –
 - (a) communication skills;
 - (b) service attitude;
 - (c) ability to identify customer needs; and
 - (d) sense of job ownership.

- Quality service could also bring about the following positive impacts –
 - (a) personal recognition for staff;
 - (b) good image for shops/brands; and
 - (c) good image for the tourism industry in Hong Kong as a whole.

- He concluded his presentation by drawing participants' attention to the business opportunity brought about by the rapidly growing tourism industry, especially after the implementation of the Individual Visit Scheme. To seize this unparalleled opportunity, those working in the tourism industry must understand the importance of quality service and take every training opportunity to enhance themselves and service quality.

Ms Jeny Yeung

- Ms Yeung gave a presentation on how MTR maintained its service quality to satisfy its customers.

- She first pointed out that provision of excellent service was one of the core

values of MTR. To achieve this objective, MTR had striven to up-keep high standards in safety, reliability and recovery and enhance journey experience of customers in terms of speed, accessibility and value-added service.

- There were several strategies employed by MTR to enhance service quality –
 - (a) MTR had put in place regular surveys to gauge the views of customers. Through this channel, MTR could learn how customers weigh different attributes of MTR's services and identify areas for further improvement.
 - (b) MTR also used benchmarking to compare its service with other railway operators around the world.
 - (c) There were also plenty of channels to receive customer feedback, e.g. hotlines, coffee evenings in MTR stations, radio phone-in programme, etc.
 - (d) A cross-departmental customer service steering committee was set up within MTR to help coordinate and drive improvement measures.
 - (e) MTR staff would receive adequate training to enhance their service quality. And training was not limited to frontline only.
- Ms Yeung then turned to how MTR had been implementing continuous improvement measures to enhance journey experience of customer, e.g.
 - (a) new station facilities including platform screen doors;
 - (b) value-added services including free magazine and internet access; and

(c) specific services were offered to target segment of customers e.g. information booths for individual travellers from the Mainland and Putonghua PA and information service at Airport Expressway stations for tourists.

- She concluded her presentation by outlining the challenges that service providers would face in the years to come which included pressure from increasingly demanding customers, the need to improve cost efficiency and the formidable task to address diversified needs of various customer segments.

2. Floor Discussion

- The main points covered in the Q&A session were as follows –
 - (a) There was a strong consensus that malpractices in the trade must be stemmed out. A member of the audience quoted different incidents to illustrate how shops and unscrupulous tourist guides employed tricky measures to rip off tourists.
 - (b) There was worry that if this kind of malpractice was not stopped, the tourism industry of Hong Kong and the reputation of Hong Kong would be seriously affected. A member of the audience said that there were actually some effective measures to follow up tourists' complaints and help them to obtain compensation.
 - (c) A member of the audience said that Mainland visitors were attracted to Hong Kong, partly because they were confident that what they brought was a genuine product. Given the opportunities brought about by the

Individual Visit Scheme, we should not let a few rotten apples to ruin the whole industry.

- (d) In this context, the panelists and audience also discussed different proposals to enhance service quality, e.g. disclosure of names of blacklisted shops, a marking scheme to record complaints by customers, encouraging tourists to shop at recognized companies, ways to enhance taxi service (such as cabin cleanliness and driver's language proficiency), the tourist guide certification scheme, etc. On the tourist guide certification scheme, a member of the audience said that he understood that many non-professionals had also managed to acquire a certificate after the SARS outbreak. He opined that obtaining the certificate alone might no longer be a good indicator of the professional qualification of a tourist guide. He urged employers to pay attention to other factors as well, e.g. knowledge of the industry, service attitude, etc. The panelists agreed that more monitoring would be required.

- (e) There were also calls for more government-coordinated initiatives to enhance the attractiveness of HK. It was generally agreed that the new project "A Symphony of Light" represented a good example of successful private-public cooperation in promoting HK tourism. But there was room for improvement, e.g. Government could consider whether building owners could enjoy financial/taxation incentives if they joined the light show.