

# White Paper

## Understanding the Customer Service Perspective

### A Primer for IT People

#### Overview

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**Introduction** This paper briefly describes typical end customer expectations for IT services. For many IT people, the complexities involved with running and managing an IT infrastructure sometimes clouds the vision of what the customer is expecting from the IT services they are delivering. Although the expectations presented here may seem obvious, it is surprising how often they get lost during day-to-day operational activities.

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**Why care about “service”?** IT people are ultimately in the service business. It is a major mistake to operate IT as if it is another support function within the business like the accounting or marketing department. The primary difference is this:

Company personnel consume what IT is delivering.

No other business department within a business organization has consumers, other than Payroll. In fact, most organizations do not provide services at all, rather, they create demands of each other. For example:

- The Sales department may create demands for Marketing to fill
- Marketing creates demands for the Advertising department
- Increased sales makes demands for the Factory line, etc.

IT, unlike the above, is not making demands of other organizations, but it is providing services to them. For this reason, an IT Service Management perspective with a solid business and customer focus needs to be undertaken.

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**Contents** Each of the following sections in this paper describes an aspect of end customer expectations for their IT services. Real life examples from the author’s experiences are presented with them.

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## Overview, Continued

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**Customer Expectation**

Customers prefer to get their own work done without stumbling over technology issues.

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**Description**

The complexities of running an IT infrastructure make it easy for IT people to communicate to customers in technical terms and issues. In reality, most customers would prefer to avoid these and have little interest in them.

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**Example Situation**

A very large global trading firm that provides technology, data and trading services holds regular service meetings with their largest banking customers to review service issues and discuss service IT service improvement initiatives. Service level requirements are very high at these banks. Even small outages create major financial impact.

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**IT View**

The customer was very cooperative at the meetings, even glad to see the efforts that IT was making on behalf of their services. Many discussions and presentations were held that showed detailed steps the IT organization was taking on their behalf to improve services. Outage communications were very detailed and explicit as what components were failing and actions being taken to avoid future outages.

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**Customer View**

It was a complete surprise to the IT service team when they were suddenly asked whether the customer actually preferred to sit through all the detail presented at these meetings. In later analysis, it was discovered that the customer was participating in these detailed discussions out of exasperation over the impact of the service outages – they had to do something. Yet, this had been going on so long that the IT group had taken it for granted that this is what the customer wanted.

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## Overview, Continued

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**Customer  
Expectation**

When things will fail, they expect quick recovery.

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**Description**

Customers actually understand that IT technologies are not always perfect and 100% available. Their expectations are that sometimes things will fail. When they do, they expect to see service restored as quickly as possible.

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**Example  
Situation**

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## Overview, Continued

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**Customer Expectation**

Don't say no – let the customer decide.

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**Description**

If faced with a customer demand that appears to be a challenge:

- tell the customer how much their idea will cost
- let them know what the consequences of doing it their way will be
- tell them what they may have to give up to have it their way

They can then decide for themselves whether that idea should be axed.

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**Example Situation**

A business unit in a large food manufacturing corporation had numerous demands of the IT group to obtain detailed production sales reports that would consume large amounts of data, network and IT processing time.

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**IT View**

IT had many concerns about production of the reports. They would consume a large number of IT resources to produce and might even impact their ability to deliver online services with reasonable response times while the reports were running. Since the requestor was a senior Vice President of the company, there were concerns about how to deal with this.

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**Customer View**

The customer had no concept or understanding of what the IT impacts were for the request they were making. Luckily, a smart manager within the IT department put together an impact analysis of the anticipated costs, labor and service impacts of the request.

The senior Vice President was actually surprised by this information. He had no idea of the impact of his request. When actually asked how this data would be used if he were to get it, the explanations did not justify the costs and impact, and he came to the conclusion on his own that the cost/benefit of the report was not justified.

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## Overview, Continued

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**Customer Expectation**

They dictate the service requirements, not IT.

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**Description**

A key mistake most IT organizations make is setting service levels and targets based on what they think they can deliver instead of asking what is needed directly from the customer. The fear is that they would somehow be committed to whatever the customer asks for.

Nothing is to be gained by having IT set its own targets. In fact, why would any respectable IT manager want to step out on the pier by themselves and set critical targets that may not be what the business needs?

Customer targets should be known by asking the customer directly and immediately. It is a waste of time and effort on everyone's part to "guess" what the correct service requirements are.

If it appears that targets cannot be made, then negotiation should occur to find a middle ground. If it is important enough, the business may even put up extra funds to get it achieved.

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**Example Situation**

The IT department of a large auto manufacturing company felt that service levels were needed and proceeded to implement IT Service levels on their own.

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**IT View**

The IT department set service targets based on what everyone in the IT department felt comfortable with. When asked why they were not directly going to their customers for these, the response was a fear that the customer would ask for things they could not deliver.

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**Customer View**

First reactions were doubt and confusion:

- "Why did you select these metrics?"
- "Why is IT doing this?"

Many of the service targets were not adequate to meet their business needs. Further exasperations occurred when IT kept coming back to the table with changing service targets.

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