

# **CUSTOMER CARE FOR ARCHIVISTS AND RECORDS MANAGERS: THE CHALLENGE FOR ESARBICA ARCHIVISTS AND RECORDS MANAGERS**

Nathan Mnjama

Associate Professor

Department of Library and Information Studies

University of Botswana

E-mail: [mnjamanm@mopipi.ub.bw](mailto:mnjamanm@mopipi.ub.bw)

# Introduction

- For a long time archivists and records managers have paid little attention or no attention at all to providing quality service to their users.
- Stories of dissatisfied users in Registries and Public repositories are common and well documented.

# Customer Care

- 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.” Ward (n.d)

# Importance of Customer Care

- “no customers, no work, no income no jobs.” Cartwright (2000:1)
- “in the public sector, comprising more monopolistic situations, it might be thought that customer service is less important. However customers are also voters and thus the customer is able to express an opinion (albeit only every few years) on the standard of public service received from the public sector” (Cartwright 2000:6).

# Importance of Customer Care

- “if most of us were forced to justify our existence through the numbers of scholars we served, we would be out of business. There are other groups that would benefit from using archival materials, but we must first educate them as to how and why.” Harris (1993:12)

# Importance of Customer Care

- Mason (2007:1) argues that “if they (archivists) can hope to increase the use of their facilities, archives must develop programs and services which inform the public about their holdings and reference procedures.”

# Other reasons for developing customer care programmes

- Archive repositories can be intimidating places for those unfamiliar with them and that there is need to ensure that users get the most value out of their visits. This is best use of the archives resources, as well as preventing unnecessary wear and tear on the records, and of the customers' time.
- Archival Institutions keep records and archives so they can be used and consulted: professionalism as well as best practice dictates that archivists and records managers make good provision for their customers.

# Other reasons for developing customer care programmes

- In many cases customers have a civic right or business need to consult the records and archives in the custody of archival institutions.
- Being helpful to customers can make a repetitive and possibly tedious job more rewarding (The Archive-Skills Consultancy Info-byte 2001:2)

## Other reasons for developing customer care programmes

- “there is also a need to change the culture of archival institutions so that they can embrace new concepts and new ways of doing things.”  
Mazikana (2007:12)

# Who are our Customers

- Internal Users within Government Ministries and Departments: Action officers
- Ministries and Departments that have deposited records with the Records Centre  
√Archives Repository
- Academic Researchers
- The Media – Journalists, free lance reporters

# Who are our Customers

- The general public(for leisure, genealogy, land rights and other entitlements)
- Civil Rights groups

# Factors contributing to customer care satisfaction

- how well your product or service matches customer needs
- the value for money you offer
- your efficiency and reliability in fulfilling orders  
the professionalism, friendliness and expertise of your employees
- how well you keep your customers informed
- the after-sales service you provide

# RSA Principles of Public Service delivery

- 1 Consultation. Users and consumers of public services should be consulted about the level and quality of the services they receive and, wherever possible, to be given a choice about the services that are offered. Have archival institutions in the EARBICA region done this? The answer is everyone guess.

# RSA Principles of Public Service delivery

2 Service standards. Users and consumers of public services should be told what level and quality of service they will receive so that they are aware of what to expect. Do our archival institutions indicate the levels of service they provide? In most cases I would say No.

# RSA Principles of Public Service delivery

3 Courtesy. Users and consumers of public services should be treated with courtesy and consideration. Does this happen in the ESARBICA region? To a large extent I would say YES.

# RSA Principles of Public Service delivery

4 Information. Users and consumers of public services should expect full, accurate information about the services they are entitled to receive. Do archival institutions provide sufficient information to users to enable them make informed decisions concerning the services they provide? I would say Yes within the limited resources available to them.

# RSA Principles of Public Service delivery

5 Openness and transparency. The public should expect to be told how national departments and provincial administrations are run, how much they cost, and who is in charge. Is happening in ESARBICA archival institutions. I would say No.

# RSA Principles of Public Service delivery

6 Responsiveness. Users and consumers of public services should expect that, when the promised standard of service is not delivered, they will be offered an apology, a full explanation and a speedy and effective remedy, and that any complaint will produce a sympathetic, positive response. Does this happen in our archival centres and records centres? I would say No.

# RSA Principles of Public Service delivery

7 Value for money. The public should expect that public services will be provided as economically and efficiently as possible. In the ESARBICA region, I would say this is partially met.

# Factors that may impact on customer care

- (a) availability of information, organized information
- (b) adequate search room facilities
- (c) suitable archival legislation and supporting regulations
- (d) Easy accessibility of the archives office and
- (e) cooperation between the archives office and other information centres.

# Basic Details to be provided

- introduction to the service
- contact details and opening hours
- location, including map, transport and parking facilities
- outline of archival and secondary material available
- search room facilities, accommodation, film, fiche, Internet Access,

# Basic details to be provided

- planning a visit: readers tickets, whether an appointment is necessary, items to bring (pencils, identification), refreshment facilities,
- services for those unable to visit
- services for schools, colleges and other groups,
- reprographics and other research services
- how to get more information on the holdings and other services

# The Way Forward

Morrow (2000) suggests 8 Ways

- Management must make the measurement of service quality and feedback from the customer a basic part of everyone's work experience
- Be very clear about specifying the behavior that employees are expected to deliver, both with external customers and their coworker
- Explain why giving excellent customer service is important -- not only for the company, but for the world

# The Way Forward

- Create ways to communicate excellent examples of customer service both within and outside the company.
- Indoctrinate and train everyone in the culture as soon as they are hired.
- Encourage a sense of responsibility for group performance.
- Establish policies that are "customer friendly" and that show concern for your customers.
- Remove any employees who do not show the behavior necessary to please customers.

# Other Practical Suggestions

## 1 Make the Customer No. 1

- Positive initial contact
- Establish Rapport
- Do not keep customers waiting
- Thank Customers
- Encourage customers to return
- Make customers feel special

# Other Practical Suggestions

## 2 Appropriate Attitude

- Respect the Customer
- Keep Communication positive
- Professionalism

# Other Practical Suggestions

## 3 Determine Customer Needs

- Ask Questions until you understand the Customers needs
- Used positively phrased direct questions
- Use Active listening o convey respect and verify understanding
- Ask how better you can serve the customer's needs

# Other Practical Suggestions

## 4 Build Relationships

- Be fair
- Keep your word
- Provide peace of mind
- Seek service opportunities
- Know your products and services
- Admit errors and lack of knowledge

# Other Practical Suggestions

## 5 Effective Problem Resolution

- Empathize with customer
- Apologize
- Take ownership
- Respond to the problem in a timely manner
- Negotiated/formulate a win-win solution
- Do not take complaints/complaints personally
- Recognise problems as a learning opportunity

# Other Practical Suggestions

6 Develop an Access Standard.

Example:

- UK Standard for Access to Archives 2000
- Customer Charters

Thank You