



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

*Creating a Strategy to Achieve
and Maintain a Service Culture
“Improving the Performance
of our Service Industry”*

**CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY
CONFERENCE**

.....
FEATURE ADDRESS

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MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY**

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A pleasant good morning to you all!

I would first like to thank the Trinidad and Tobago Etiquette and Protocol Specialists Limited for inviting me to speak today on such an important topic, as, for almost every business, regardless of its size or sector (whether goods or services), excellent customer service is critical.

Customer Service deals in part with the interaction between consumers and service providers, but also encompasses a whole range of activities including after care services which are relevant to creating a strong and vibrant Services Industry.

The Services Industry is growing in importance in global trade and commerce and plays a major role in the national economy, to the extent that the projected figure for non-energy services sector in 2015 is TT\$52.7 billion – which represents over 55% of Trinidad and Tobago's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and contributes more than 65% to national employment.

The Service Industry encompasses a wide range of creative and professional areas which include Financial Services, Construction, Distribution, Communication, Medical, Educational, Tourism and Personal Services, among others.

Quality customer service is more important now than ever before due to its impact on economic growth not only because of the corporate spending it demands, and its effect on recruitment and selection, but also because it is all about making and keeping customers happy about the money they spend, thereby developing loyalty to your products and services.

As consumers prepare to spend again, they will look for quality services and products offered with a superior customer service experience to give them the trust and confidence to stick with a particular brand. Satisfied customers will refer their friends and families to companies that provide excellent customer service, and that in turn will lead to enhanced sales for our businesses which will in turn spur our economic growth. On the other hand, negative word of mouth can quickly spiral out of control and irrevocably damage the trust built between a company and its customers and jeopardise its future prospects.

Let's be honest: while the Manufacturing and Services sectors are extremely important to Trinidad and Tobago, we have a reputation for poor customer service and poor work ethic. But while many may attribute this to culture, we cannot allow it to continue because it is eroding our efficiency and as a result our international competitiveness).

Trinidad and Tobago, for example, is ranked 89th out of 140 countries according to the World Economic Forum's 2015-2016 Global Competitiveness Report, with "poor work ethic" in the national labour force as the most problematic factor for doing business here. With energy prices at a new low and millions being invested in education from primary to tertiary levels including developing technical and vocational skills, the Services Industry is a path through which we can successfully diversify and grow the economy. This will encourage entrepreneurship and new and better quality domestic and foreign investment, while ensuring meaningful self-employment and other employment opportunities, high productivity and a more competitive society. Quality customer service should therefore become a way of life.

OBSTACLES TO DEVELOPING SERVICES

There are, however, many obstacles to developing services in Trinidad and Tobago. Relevant, timely data is largely absent. This prevents us from truly understanding the Services Sector, its extent and its potential, which has resulted in labour market inefficiencies and ineffective policies. Of particular concern to me is the area of export of services, in which the Services Industry has generally underperformed.

In addition to poor data, another issue is the underutilization of technology by service providers and consumers which can, not only, increase efficiency, but also, ensure that businesses are more accessible to and interact more effectively with their customers. In fact, this is an international problem. Some of the ways that the Government is working to increase awareness and productivity of our Services Industry is by:

- i. providing the overall legislative and policy structures,
- ii. creating synergies to acquire and analyse data, and
- iii. providing opportunities and incentives for training to improve customer service.

1. STRUCTURE

While we may know the overall size of the Services Sector relative to other sectors, say manufacturing, that broad cursory knowledge is not enough to understand what exactly is happening on the ground in Trinidad and Tobago. There are numerous individuals and firms that trade services both locally and internationally that are not captured in national datasets, which is in part due to the absence of an overall data-management system and lack of policy that formalizes the acquisition and analysis of data on Services.

In order to understand the Service industry in Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry of Trade and Industry is currently working to develop a National Services Policy and Plan that would provide the overall structure and framework to measure, grow and improve competitiveness of the domestic Service Industry.

In developing the National Services Policy, the Ministry has already begun consultation with stakeholders to better understand services in Trinidad and Tobago and key sectors that can be targeted for development and export promotion. These sectors include:

1. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
2. Energy Services
3. Maritime Services (Shipping, Yachting, Dry-docking, Ship Repair)
4. Cultural and Creative Industries
5. Financial Services (Banking, Insurance and Pension)
6. Tourism and Travel Related Services
7. Construction Services
8. Professional Services (Management Consulting, Architects, Accountants, Engineers, Other Business, Medical Practitioners)
9. Education Services (Academics, Offshore Medical Education, Technical Vocation Qualification)
10. Health and Wellness Services (Medical Tourism)
11. Aviation Services (Aircraft Maintenance and Repair)

The other major step will be data collection for informed decision-making and monitoring the performance of the sector.

2. DATA

As Peter Drucker, the founder of modern management, famously wrote: “What gets measured gets managed”.

In light of the current economic circumstances and the need to diversify, we need more than ever to manage our Service Industry - to maximize the benefits from it and elevate it to become globally recognized. In this respect, an important consideration of the Services Policy is the creation of a data-management superstructure involving the combined efforts and resources of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Central Statistical Office (CSO), the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, the Trinidad and Tobago Coalition of Services Industries (TTCSI), other relevant Ministries and Agencies, as well as representative private sector organizations and individual firms. Data in services is a challenge for all economies, but it is necessary if we are to fully understand and measure the value of the Services Industry.

3. CUSTOMER SERVICE

Trinidad and Tobago’s customer service reputation straddles both public and private institutions, with negative repercussions at the firm and national levels. It is possible that poor customer service was ignored and allowed to flourish because our economy was strong with more than adequate revenues from the energy sector, but the environment in which we operate today has changed drastically and requires us to think differently and act accordingly, taking into consideration the value-added that can be realized as a result of quality customer service and care. In fact, in a highly competitive environment, quality customer service may very well make the difference between the success or failure of a business.

But do we understand as a country just how harmful poor customer service is to our economy? A workforce management software company estimated that US businesses lose as much as US\$83 billion each year due to defections and abandoned purchases brought on by poor customer service. We don’t know the figure for Trinidad and Tobago, however, the existence of a bad reputation, though invisible, can prove to be an insurmountable problem if not effectively addressed.

Zendesk, a software company that specializes in customer service products, in its latest report which measures 6,000 companies and 125 countries ranked the following countries the top 12 for customer service:

1. Canada
2. Australia
3. Russia
4. Norway
5. Denmark
6. United Kingdom
7. Israel
8. Poland
9. Chile
10. Sweden
11. United States
12. Brazil

While the large majority of the firms surveyed operate in developed countries, **it is obvious that there is a strong, positive relationship between customer service and a country’s economic strength and competitiveness.**

Many reject the belief that customer care can be taught, but it can. Culture does not develop in a vacuum and though it takes time to become internalized over generations, it must begin somewhere and the time is now. Therefore, training is critical to develop a culture of customer awareness and customer service, and this **MUST** be viewed as an investment, and not simply a cost to the business.

Improved customer service in the Public Sector is of paramount importance and a critical element of public sector reform and enhanced service delivery. One of the most impressive accomplishments of the Ministry of Trade and Industry in the area of customer service is the achievement of Diamond Standard Certification, which is administered by the Ministry of Public Administration and Communication.

DIAMOND STANDARD CERTIFICATION

The Diamond Standard Programme is a Citizen Service Certification Programme based on, and aligned to, achieving excellence in service delivery. It seeks to encourage, recognize and reward improvements in the quality of public service delivery.

The Certification is subject to satisfactorily and continuously meeting eight clearly identified assessment criteria. This includes:

- Customer Involvement and Understanding;
- Communications;
- Promoting a Customer Service Culture;
- Responsiveness and Service Standards;
- Service Environment;
- Innovation and Creativity;
- Technology; and
- Partnership

I am pleased to say that on January 22, 2015, the TTBizLink Unit and the Trade License Unit (TLU) of the Ministry of Trade and Industry were both awarded the Diamond Standard Certification by the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications in this pilot programme.

Very often the public sector is seen as slow to modernize, become efficient and effectively meet customers' needs. The Diamond Standard Certification is just one way that Government is leading the way and doing its part in implementing the systems and mechanisms that allow public services to become more customer oriented and provide better service to our customers.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FROM CUSTOMER SERVICE

In respect of the economic opportunities from Customer Service, not only is customer service an important facilitator in existing industries, it is also an industry in its own right that promises strong growth (for example in areas such as Call Centers and Business Process Outsourcing (BPOs)). Globally, it is estimated that one of the top 10 occupations likely to provide the most job growth over the next decade are Customer Service Representatives. This is not surprising given the economic axiom that jobs are made where money is spent.

A tangible example of how Trinidad and Tobago can capitalize on these opportunities, is the existence of Scotiabank's Operations and Shared Services Company Limited (OSSCL) in Trinidad. The purpose of this operation is to provide back-office and operational support to Trinidad and Tobago and fourteen

(14) other countries across the Northern and Southern Caribbean in which the bank operates. OSSCL currently employs approximately 500 full time employees and provides services like transaction verification and processing and accounting control. This Government is currently working with Scotiabank to have the operations of OSSCL expanded in the short-term.

CONCLUSION

As I close, I wish to point out that customers don't just want great customer service – they **expect** it and **demand** it.

If Trinidad and Tobago is to diversify into new areas and make existing goods and services export-ready by raising standards, then we must act **now**. The Government will work to create opportunities through which the private sector can invest in new and improved workforces; however, we must be willing to make that change at an individual level. We all appreciate good service, but many of us are unwilling to make the change in ourselves.

Chip Bell, customer service expert once said: “Loyal customers, they don't just come back, they don't simply recommend you, they insist that their friends do business with you.”

In this increasingly competitive global environment, Trinidad and Tobago needs to create a reputation of good customer service.

It is not only good for business. It is **necessary** for our future.

I thank you.