



Chasing a Moving Target

by Julie Finnegan and Hannah Thomas

I want what I want

As a lean professional, we are trained on the importance of the Voice of the Customer (VoC). We spend a significant amount of time and effort gathering what is important to the customer - what they like, what they don't like, what changes they want to see, etc. Has anyone noticed that the pandemic has created a new challenge around hearing the Voice of the Customer? Specifically, there is a constant change in what customers deem critical to quality, depending even more now on the emotional state of that customer which can change any minute, hour, or day. What was perfectly acceptable and critical to quality can rapidly change from minute to minute for a customer who demonstrates this new "pandemic personality". So the question is: how do you adapt/customize your services while staying true to your capacity?

As individuals we set specific goals for ourselves. We likely have expectations for the other people and businesses we interact with. Many times those expectations are formed from a belief or an experience, and we begin to establish our standards of what is critical to quality for the businesses we interact with and products we purchase. The reality of how those internal expectations and the actual experiences match up will determine if/how we engage with that business in the future.

Who am I?

As businesses and individuals are rapidly modifying their processes and products to meet the ever changing needs of their customers, they face a major risk: loss of identity. As we adapt and grow in this environment it is natural to want to continue to delight our customers, but doing so without proper scoping and creating boundaries is likely to jeopardize the integrity of the operation. Being all things to all people is a solid path to burn out, identity confusion, product variation, and defects.

So how do you delight the customer when their needs continuously change or are more diversified than usual during this pandemic without compromising your standards, productivity, and efficiency or jeopardizing your biggest resource of all, your employees?

You'll be delighted to wait a little longer

A curious headline caught my attention a few weeks ago – [Chick-fil-A has the slowest drive-through – and the most popular](#) [in Atlanta]. The article says despite data showing the fast food chain having some of the longest wait times for customers, they consistently receive the best ratings for drive-through speed of service of the brands being surveyed. They also receive very high scores in other areas surveyed. Interestingly, Chick-fil-A has a wait time nearly 3 minutes longer than other fast food restaurants – mostly due to a significantly higher customer count. However, in a world where one of the driving factors for a fast food chain's success is, in fact, providing food fast, Chick-fil-A seems to defy logic.

When I really began to think about it, however, I wasn't that surprised that while customers wait significantly longer at Chick-fil-A they were still extremely satisfied with their experience, removing consideration for the quality of food. I constantly read and hear about how Chick-fil-A provides

exceptional customer service; in fact this is a major theme in at least half of their commercials and promotional materials; come for the food - keep coming for the friendly service. When Hannah and I were discussing this topic, I brought up the Chick-fil-A example as a way to understand the VoC, understand what is critical to quality, and how setting up shop in that spot will ensure customer satisfaction, even if other areas might be seemingly less than desired.

What makes sense?

When we made the shift from the office to work-from-home we were faced with the dilemma of how to provide our training services – which we have developed and tweaked for years to be standardized, highly-functioning classes – to an entirely online audience without compromising value and quality. Essentially, we had to have some tough conversations where we talked through what our customers really want and need from us, what kind of gap there is between our current model and where we need to be to meet customer needs, and understand what is a realistic amount of flexibility and customization to provide without compromising efficiency. Ultimately, we were able to pull out key concepts that required some editing and adjustments, but also provided significant opportunity for customization that allows us to meet team-specific needs in our trainings; something we were not able to do previously. However, we made sure those customizations are collaborative and in targeted areas, maximizing impact while minimizing the need for extra work.

This approach also pushed us towards innovation and growth. We realized our customers not only needed our standard trainings in a new way, they also needed us to develop new trainings that address topics we either previously didn't offer, or ones that weren't even on our radar due to the changing nature of our jobs (I'm looking at you Virtual Facilitation). Ultimately, understanding what our customers need from us allowed LeanOhio to focus on what is critical to quality. Our other offerings are still around and will get better as we continue to adapt. As long as we listen to the Voice of the Customer we will surely continue to meet their needs, no matter how much the target may move.