

Karoliina Peltonummi

**AN INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE GUIDE FOR STARTUP-  
COMPANIES**

**AN INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE GUIDE FOR STARTUP-  
COMPANIES**

Karoliina Peltonummi  
An International Customer Service  
Guide for Startup-Companies  
Autumn 2014  
DIB2SN  
Oulu University of Applied Sciences

## ABSTRACT

Oulu University of Applied Sciences  
International Business

---

Author(s): Karoliina Peltonummi

Title of Bachelor's thesis: An International Customer Service Guide for Start-Up Companies

Supervisor(s): Ismo Koponen

Term and year of completion: Autumn 2014

Number of pages: 42

---

The thesis is provided to help small startup-companies to learn basic factors of international customer service. It does not have any specific commissioner but a company of any field of business is welcome to take advantage of it. The objective of the thesis was to make an international customer service guide with the most general perspective as possible and to include the most important matters according to international customer service into the same guide.

Source materials are used as references and these materials were the basis of the research. Books (i.e. Järvinen, R; Rosti, P; Ylikoski, T; 2002. Hyvä asiakaspalvelu-menestystekijä finanssialalla) and articles (e.g. Business and industry portal; Service and selling strategies at the time of sale) had a major role in the results of a research of this kind. The main findings of the thesis are that a functional customer service is a necessary part of any kind of business, qualitative customer service requires expertise and that cultural factors have an impact on international customer service.

This thesis can be continued by another author in the future. The next step for it would be to consider a specific culture and a startup-company and to find solutions for the company's main problems according to international customer service.

---

International customer service, startup, entrepreneurship, culture

---

Keywords

## CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION .....	5
2	THEORY PART .....	6
2.1	Entrepreneurship in Finland .....	6
2.2	Startup-companies .....	7
2.3	International customer service.....	15
2.4	Cultural factors .....	19
3	AN INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE GUIDE FOR STARTUP-COMPANIES .....	23
3.1	Adaption to the international market.....	23
3.2	Methods to improve the customer service .....	24
3.3	How to serve customers? .....	27
3.4	Compassionate resources of customer service .....	30
3.4.1	Personal factors .....	32
3.4.2	Professional factors .....	32
3.4.3	Customer servant – an intrapreneur and self-developer .....	34
3.5	A compaction of the basics of valuable customer service .....	35
4	CONCLUSIONS .....	37
5	DISCUSSION .....	39
6	REFERENCES .....	41

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis will consider the effectiveness of international customer service within small companies and provide an international guide for small businesses that are about to run foreign business as startup companies. The approach is the most general as possible but the basis for the theory part is entrepreneurship in Finland and Finnish startup-companies. There is also a part of international customer service in small startup-businesses and a small general consideration about basic cultural factors that have to be taken into account as the company reaches to provide international customer service. The actual product of this thesis is an international customer service guide for start-up companies. The guide includes basic considerations about the adaption of customer service to the international market and different methods suggestions to improve the customer service.

The key questions of the thesis are as follows:

Why is it important to have a workable customer service in the point of view of international business?

What factors regarding internationality should be considered?

What methods can be used to improve the customer service?

According to Holloman all the businesses can be seen as social businesses in a sense. It is said that the producing process of goods or services is simple since the basic main goal on producing them is to sell them in the future. To get profit from the products or services a company must know how to communicate with the possible customers and employees working in a specific business. This is a vital matter because any individual involved in the business is important for a company's reputation. (2012, 121-122.) This thesis will have a wide, general perspective towards better international customer service.

## 2 THEORY PART

The theory part of this thesis covers entrepreneurship in Finland, startup-companies in Finland, international customer service in small start-up businesses and cultural factors. The chapter 2.1 Entrepreneurship in Finland processes Finnish entrepreneurship in general and facts about small and medium sized businesses in Finland. The second chapter (2.2 Finnish start-up companies) describes and defines the term “start-up” as it is considered within this thesis. Since there are many possible descriptions for the word, the thesis will consider it in a certain matter that will be clarified later on. The chapter of International customer service in small start-up businesses (2.3) clarifies the basic features of international customer service and the last chapter (2.4) the basic features of cultures and their affections.

### 2.1 Entrepreneurship in Finland

In Finland there are 322 183 enterprises and 99,8% of these are small or medium sized companies. A definition to small and medium sized enterprises is that they usually employ less than 250 people. In Finland there are also a big number (93,3%) of organizations that do not have more than 10 employees. (Yrittäjät, 2014. Date of retrieval 20.06.2014.)

Small and medium sized businesses have a major role in Finland's economy. In the private-sector over 60% of employees work for enterprises that employ less than 250 employees. These types of companies create even 50% of the combined revenue of all businesses in Finland. Small and medium sized companies also have a significant role of making more than 13% of Finland's revenue of export. (ibid.)

Surprisingly, many surveys show that entrepreneurship in Finland is not that popular as a choice of career compared to i.e. other European Union countries on average. Still entrepreneurship according to other surveys is held in high respect in Finland. (ibid.)

## 2.2 Startup-companies

Paul Graham states that a startup-company is defined as an organization that is aimed to grow fast. The most vital thing according to startup-companies is growth; a lately founded company is not necessarily an actual startup. This is an obvious but many times forgotten fact. Yearly millions of companies are started but only a few of them are defined as actual startup-companies. Companies started often are businesses providing in the service sector, such as restaurants. These kinds of companies are not defined as startups, except in some uncommon situations. This is due to the fact that i.e. a restaurant is not aiming to grow fast whereas a real startup-company is. All the other possible things related to startups come after growth. (2012. Want to start a startup? Date of retrieval 02.06.2014.)

If a person plans to start up a company it is important to understand the essence of startups. Startup-companies are seen as a quite challenging company form so it is impossible to start one without knowing the basic structure. The success does not come without knowledge. It is necessary to know that growth is the aim of the business. After gaining growth a startup-company has possibilities to be successful in other areas as well. Growth can be taken advantage of afterwards when making almost any sort of decisions. (ibid.)

Startup-companies are considered as companies that aim to grow fast and they can be categorized by using a couple of ways. Firstly, there is always a risk of being unsuccessful related to startups. Secondly, startup-companies differ from other businesses by their nature. It means that the reason behind the actual word of "startup," is signified for companies that are expected to grow fast. If there were not so many differences between companies but only some of them had luck to grow fast it would be possible to use only one word describing all of these companies. The word would be "successful". Some of them could be called very successful and others then less successful. (ibid.)

In case a company is planned to enlarge, it has to fulfill its possible customers' wishes as much as possible. It also has to try to reach all those people and serve them the right way. Most of companies are strictly obligated in either another one of these requirements. A characteristic feature of a successful startup is that it is not. (ibid.)

## **Finnish startup-companies**

Startup-companies are considered to be “the rockets of the business world”. In Finland Finnish startup-companies are seen as possible international success and the entrepreneurs are expected to be innovative and creative. It is desirable that startups would employ a lot of possible workers and hereby create well-being for the entire country. According to Lajunen and Iloa, startups usually are young companies that are aiming to grow and internationalize fast. These types of companies are many times financed with risk financing. Mainly startups are seen as growth companies but the most of the official parties define also older companies as growth companies. (Dagmar, 2014. Date of retrieval 03.09.2014.)

In case the amount of startup-companies is tried to be investigated the criterions for the limiting have to be decided first. It is certain that the amount has increased in the previous years. According to Iloa, the motivator for the entrepreneurs is passion for a certain field of business and an aspiration to solve people’s problems with new products and services. For some people, entrepreneurship is mainly a way of life. To most it is also a way to express oneself and a possibility to do things that could not be done elsewhere. (ibid.)

The revenues of startup-entrepreneurs are usually small and irregular. Entrepreneurship is extremely risky and it is rare to be successful. Still it is important to be optimistic and strongly believe that it is possible to succeed. (ibid.)

Startup entrepreneurship is an attitude. An agile way of thinking is a matter that connects many entrepreneurs: in case a plan A does not work, they will switch straightly on the plan B. Entrepreneurship requires a strategic eye, anticipation ability and creative madness that many times makes entrepreneurs to choose an alternative that leads to growth out of all the alternatives that may seem chaotic at first. (ibid.)

In Finland entrepreneurship as a career is not popular at the moment and a will to become an entrepreneur is extremely low in the international perspective. In the previous years attitudes towards entrepreneurship have started to change. The change has been supported by i.e.



accelerators, such as Aalto Venture Garage, which is a place for entrepreneurs to meet each other and get advice. (Dagmar, 2014. Date of retrieval 03.09.2014.)

### **Everyday life of a startup-entrepreneur**

The tasks of a startup-entrepreneur are mainly based on three matters: defining the direction of the organization, procurement of finance and recruitment. The strategy is not defined at one time but it is iterated continuously along with different situations. (ibid.)

Startup-entrepreneurship is all-encompassing, difficult and stressful. Workdays are long and a way of life irregular. Also an entrepreneur's personal life may have affections that last for years. Many young entrepreneurs have told afterwards that they would have not started up a company if they had known what it requires. On the other hand, many entrepreneurs enjoy the challenges based on entrepreneurship. (ibid.)

Especially at the beginning there is no safety net available for entrepreneurs and therefore every situation has to be solved on their own – regardless from the experience or education. There are a lot of challenges; at the beginning a product does not usually succeed as it should so it has to be modified. Crises according to cashiers are frequent and competitive situation may vary unexpectedly that requires quick changes in the strategy. (ibid.)

The best entrepreneurs understand that not everything can be known beforehand and mistakes should not be scared of. The most important matter is to learn from mistakes, quick reaction to variable situations and persistence. Entrepreneurship requires durability; it is a long trip with its challenges and successes. (ibid.)

## **The success stories of Finnish startup-companies in the year of 2012 & 2013**

The atmosphere of entrepreneurship in Finland has dramatically changed as college graduates do not every time reach a stable work position in a large company anymore but rather have an own business idea to accomplish internationally (Talouselämä, 2012. Date of retrieval 03.09.2014).

Startup-companies have in a short time become a growing and visible phenomenon. The durability of the phenomenon still depends on the enterprises and their success and obviously the finance that is not always easy to achieve. According to a Finnish magazine Talouselämä and its group of professionals, the quality of Finnish startup-companies has improved considerably in the previous years. Nowadays startup-companies consider internationality from the beginning and there are many successful startup-companies which' entrepreneurs are so called "series entrepreneurs". (ibid.)

The criteria for the Talouselämä's list of successful startup-companies in 2012 were to have already published and interesting product, a possibility to fast internationalization and ambitious aim of growth. The finance, convincing team and the success in the competitions of startups effected on the results. (ibid.)

Promising startup-companies according to Talouselämä (in the alphabetical order):

<b>Enterprise</b>	<b>Founded</b>	<b>Business idea</b>
<b>Aava Mobile</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>Development of technology trestles for smart phones and tablet devices</b>
<b>Applifier</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>An advertisement net of game companies brings quality games together and helps to stand out</b>
<b>Blaast</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Cloud service based environment makes it possible to use applications in the phones of developing countries</b>
<b>DealDash</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>A virtual shopping center and cent auction is based on games and sociality</b>
<b>Digital Foodie</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>A social purchasing service for retail business and consumers</b>
<b>Flowdock</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>A tool of communication of teams combines group conversation to project management and development of software</b>
<b>Makia Clothing</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>A clothing provider and a wholesale- and retail business</b>
<b>Microtask</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>Helping technology to distribute large work tasks in the net</b>

<b>Multi Touch</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>Develops and provides large touchscreens</b>
<b>Oncos Therapeutics</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>A developer of cancer medicine of the new generation</b>
<b>Ovelin</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>A WildChords- music game teaches to play with a real guitar and Ipad</b>
<b>Rightware</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>Software tools for designing of 3D-user interfaces, i.e. in mobile devices and cars</b>
<b>Senseg</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>New touchscreen technology enables feeling pictures and buttons with a finger</b>
<b>SkySQL</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>“New MySQL”, which means an open source code database server’s provider</b>
<b>Supercell</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Develops social net games for smartphones, tablet devices and web-servers</b>
<b>Tinkercad</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>With a help of a server based model service it is possible to design and print 3D-printable products</b>
<b>Valkee</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>Develops and sells a bright light handset for curing depression and insomnia problems</b>
<b>Valon Lasers</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>Develops and provides a device for treatment of eye ground</b>

<b>WOT Services</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>A Web of trust-safety of community service conducts a safety use of internet</b>
<b>ZenRobotics</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>A recycle system that utilizes artificial intelligence and robotics</b>

The successful startup-companies in Finland in the year of 2013 are listed below. As a comparison to the year of 2012 it is different as there are only eight startup-companies listed and only a couple of them are in the list in the year of 2012 as well (Supercell OY, ZenRobotics Oy). (Talouselämä, 2013. Date of retrieval 03.09.2014.) The list is originally made by the British magazine Wired, which obviously has an impact on the results as well. Wired has listed its own criteria individually for each startup-company that is thought to be successful in Finland.

#### **1. Holvi Inc.**

A modern net bank that enables its users to share the access rights of their bank accounts. The users can also make their communities' usage of money public. The company aims to internationalize towards Britain. Holvi was chosen to be the most successful startup-company in Finland in the year of 2013. (Talouselämä, 2013. Date of retrieval 03.09.2014.)

#### **2. Jolla Inc.**

Jolla is a cellphone company that was founded by former employees of Nokia. Jolla was chosen to be the second most successful startup-company in Finland in the year of 2013. (ibid.)

### **3. Kippt**

Kippt was chosen as the third of the most successful startup-company in Finland in the year of 2013 as it was the first Finnish company that was accepted along with a respected enterprise accelerator called Y Combinator (ibid).

### **4. Grand Cru Inc.**

A game company that gained a huge amount of finance before providing any finished product (ibid).

### **5. Supercell Oy**

A game company that established its reputation with a game called Clash of Clans (ibid).

### **6. ProtoGeo Inc.**

A company that developed a sport application called Moves. The application identifies with the help of the sensors of a smart phone, if the user runs, walks or bicycles. The chief executive officer Sampo Karjalainen is already known as an entrepreneur in Finland. (ibid.)

### **7. Scarlet Motors Inc.**

Scarlet Motors Inc. is an organization that develops a Finnish electric sports car. The production process is based on a principle of an open code which means the company wishes to have new insights for the project from the outside. (ibid.)

### **8. Walkbase**

Walkbase is a provider of an application for retail business. The enterprise offers systems that help stores to follow the actions of consumers, e.g. how people move in a store. (ibid.)

## **9. ZenRobotics Inc.**

ZenRobotics Inc. is a company that has developed the first robots in the World that sort the rubbish (ibid).

## **10. IndoorAtlas Inc.**

IndoorAtlas Inc. is a startup-company that uses positioning technology indoors with a help of magnetic field (ibid).

It is not defined more particularly Wired's criterion why the companies were chosen as the most successful in Finland. In my opinion, customer service is probably one of the things that affected on the selection because without it is challenging, maybe even impossible to be successful. All these companies have a good business idea which they want to execute and in order to do it the customer service has to work.

### **2.3 International customer service**

International Customer Service Standard considers customer service as a result and a strategy for profit. Companies with a stable tactic to customer service win the prizes; whereas meager customer service conveyance outcomes make loss of income, have rising expenditures, weakened production and absence of efficiency. Various businesses have already started to deal with developments in customer service conveyance, and generally implement one or the other of the subsequent tactics: (2010, 6. Date of retrieval 02.09.2014.)

#### **Passion:**

Companies that use the Passion-tactic get on basically on positive campaigns, and look up to indicating all of the laxer issues related to customer service. The businesses' main values are that the "customer is always right", and that in all the business situations the customers are the priority number one. The disadvantage to this tactic is that several companies that have approved this viewpoint have on the other hand been excluding the company's main problems. Those

organizations have forgotten about the essential business constraints and, obviously, there are instances of customer service suppliers that have become impoverished. (ibid.)

**Process:**

The Process-tactic is used by companies that have established firm procedures and structures to improve customer service. Many times, they are considered by austere guiding principles and lines; unwell premeditated self-service selections, unworkable phone service structures with no capability to deal with a customer; and intransigence of transport. Even though this tactic concentrates on guaranteeing the constancy of delivery, it does not distinguish that every customer is an individual who have unlike desires and prospects. (ibid.)

Sooner or later, the customers probably make decision that the companies that use only one or another of these tactics are too challenging to cope with. To be able to preserve customer service quality, a company has to find an alliance between the two tactics; Passion and Process. Still the alliance will not always be divided completely equally since some companies have to concentrate more on Desire because of the type of their business process, and some again will have to concentrate more on Procedure. The significant matter still is the acknowledgment that a concentration on both tactics is compulsory for a company's continuous success. (ibid,7.)



It is not possible for functional customer service to operate as a separate part of a company: the customer service has to be a part of the total business aims, to be able to retain it with alliance. There are four main constituents obligatory to retain the position between a reason and outcome relationship and balance between Passion and Process: (ibid,7.)



- A Service outlook in customer relations
- An Economic outlook in customer relations
- A Functioning outlook in customer relations
- An Erudition and Development outlook in customer relations (ibid,7.)

Customer service superiority is an effect; an effect that truly trusts on people. Due to this fact, the main viewpoints concentrate both on the customer and the internal groundwork of the company – those matters that are vital to be able to carry exceptionally good customer service. (ibid,7.)

Nowadays customers tend to have more choices in markets than before. Therefore customer service has to be in focus in case a company plans to be able to compete with its competitors. Customers' expectations have to be clear for the employees and if it is possible to even exceed these expectations, the company should do so. (Leadership from the Trenches, 2010. Date of retrieval 20.06.2014 )

A business should use every tool and possibility to find out how satisfied or unsatisfied their customers are. Practices that make customers happy should constantly be improved and acknowledgements given to be able to retain the regular customers. A very good rule to remember is that a company should always “take care of their customers just to make sure they will get a chance to take care of them again in the future.” (ibid.)

### **Service Substances**

It is typical to run into customer service of a negative quality. Customers have become quite inured by meager customer service and negative attitudes and therefore it is many times noticed at once when customer service is even moderate. This is a wonderful motivation for companies to endeavor for brilliant customer service so that it will positively surprise the customers and make them come back another time as well. (ibid.)

Unique products and advantageous prices may differentiate a company from its competitors but these advantages can also vary as the markets vary and preserving them can be very expensive. Good customer service is also not free of charge but it is an influential matter that makes the company differ from its competitors. It also motivates and gratifies the personnel. (ibid.)

It is not possible for an entrepreneur to trust only their own experiences or coincidental facultative feedback when the entrepreneur tries to figure out how satisfied their customers are. Instead it is vital to regularly search for answers, for example by asking what the company could do better. Even the complaints should always be listened to because customers who often give negative feedback are a very valuable source of information. Customers' concerns should always be taken seriously and those problems the company gets negative feedback from should quickly be solved. (ibid.)

To certify that customers give honest and useful feedback it is recommended to implement an organized measuring practice. The practice can be done i.e. by getting feedback on the phone or via internet surveys. The company can also combine different groups of customers it wants to ask them about their expectations and brain-storm what the customers would like to be improved in the future. The key of success is to clarify the understanding between the company and its customers – how effective the customer service is and what else could be done to keep these customers. (ibid.)

Managers at every level have to consider customer service as a priority number one. Otherwise employees will also question the importance of good customer service. Achieving the excellence of customer service has to be an aim that the entire company is committed to. Expectations have to be clarified, preparation has to be inspected, and the outcomes proceeded. Also outstanding customer service actions have to be rewarded. (ibid.)

It is quite obvious that employees who regularly work in customer service will also learn what could be improved. Workers do know what distracts the process of offering the best possible customer service. The ideas of improvements can be taken advantage of so that managers hold meetings with the employees regularly and they can specify what is it like to do the customer service work in practice. (ibid.)

Every organization has employees whose skills in providing customer service are excellent. The organization must catch these employees and praise their effort. It should be considered what it is these employees are doing and use the same ways to enhance customer service elsewhere as well. (ibid.)

Both customers and employees are willing to see how the company's customer service is working. Customers want to know if the service is worth of their support whereas employees look to leaders to see how they handle customers. There are several things that are very important for a company's success. If managers ignore the importance of customer service, also their other efforts are in a danger of being unseen because the company will not have customers anymore. (ibid.)

## **2.4 Cultural factors**

Within certain cultures people tend to be loud or they tell straight out of things that are on their minds. In other cultures these types of habits are considered improper or impolite (InterNations, 2014. Date of retrieval 05.09.2014). There are lots of perspectives of culture that has to be considered in the aspect of customer service as well. This chapter processes basic points about cultural factors related to business and regards Hofstede's cultural findings which are the basis for culture issues of any kind.

### **Hofstede's findings**

Professor Geert Hofstede directed very inclusive studies in the 1970's of culture's effects on business and work life. Hofstede became in the 1980's one of the most respected representatives of cultural research as his studies achieved a huge success. The principles that were found throughout Hofstede's studies can be characterized to four different groups and they are Hofstede's magnitudes of national culture. (The Hofstede Centre, 2014. Date of retrieval 28.07.2014.)

### **Power Distance (PDI)**

This dimension explicates that in society there are more and less powerful members. It expresses how less powerful members accept that the distribution of power is unequal. The foundational problem according to this dimension is how the culture manages inequality issues among its members. Members of societies that reveal a huge degree of power distance approve that there is a certain hierarchical demand and think that all of the members have a place there. In societies

that have low power distance, the members attempt to have the most equal distribution of power. (ibid.)

### **Individualism versus Collectivism**

Individualism is defined as a social framework where its members take care for only themselves and their families. Collectivism is an opposite for individualism as it is a partiality for a social framework where its members may expect for example their relatives and friends to take care of them as well. Mutual loyalty is emphasized. The members of a society that follows the rule of collectivism prefer using term “we” to “I”. (ibid.)

### **Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS)**

A masculine society respects values like concrete achievements and heroism. These types of values are considered to be a key to success. Society is many times competitive as well. Masculinity’s opposite is femininity and in these kinds of societies values like co-operation and quality of life are in high respect. (ibid.)

### **Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)**

The uncertainty avoidance dimension measures how comfortable the affiliates of a group are with uncertainty. The main point with this dimension is how a society comes to terms with the uncertain future. Societies presenting forceful uncertainty avoidance usually have strict rules of belief and its members can often be defined as narrow-minded. Countries that have weaker uncertainty usually have a more easy-going atmosphere among inhabitants, such as not having very strict rules and regulations. (ibid.)

### **Long-Term Orientation (LTO)**

The dimension was founded by Michael Harris Bond and is based on a study (1991) which Hofstede supports as well. Hofstede added additional information into the dimension, concerning internationality among students. Long-term orientation is based on Confucian thinking and it was industrialized in cooperation with Chinese professors. (ibid.)

### **Indulgence versus restraint (IND)**

The sixth dimension was founded in 2010. Indulgence versus restraint is based on Michael Minkov's study of the World Values Survey data in more than 90 countries. According to Minkov's

findings, comparison determines culture. The results of countries are comparative since all human beings differ from each other. That is to say, comparison only makes culture meaningful. (ibid.)

The findings of Hofstede have exposed that variances among cultures can be mainly seen at the value level, which is the deepest level. On the other hand cultural differences between companies are mainly acknowledged at the practice level. Values are more intangible than practices. The definition of organizational culture is “the collective programming of the mind that distinguished the members of one organization from others”. (ibid.)

### **Communicational differences**

As people from different cultures meet, communicational differences may be experienced as well. In business situations the differences of communication are probable to come out. It is recommendable to try to set to the mode another party communicates, i.e. when greeting each other. First names should not be used unless it is certainly proper to do so. Also using titles is meaningful in many cultures. Hierarchies (i.e. Power Distance of Hofstede's) effect on communicational factors and therefore it is important to pay attention to them. For example seniors are highly respected in many cultures and their opinions matter in any kind of business situations. A company may give customers a negative impression in case a customer servant is not aware of these types of facts. (InterNations, 2014. Date of retrieval 05.09.2014).

### **Orientation to time**

Cultural factors are also revealed when orientation to time is considered. In some cultures time orientation is strict when in another cultures it is flexible (Uncertainty Avoidance). These sorts of matters are vital in the perspective of business because obviously a delay in some cultures is extremely impolite whereas in another cultures it is adequate to put i.e. matters according to family or friends in the first priority even though the matters require a late arrival. (ibid.)

Familiarizing with different kinds of orientations to time it usually is the best to arrive early rather than late at first and continuously implement a calm approach towards managing time. It is also useful to remember that not everyone concerns time as a serious matter and all types of habits should be respected. (ibid.)

## **Additional considerations of culture**

Additional guidelines according to cultural factors in business that should be taken into account are for example dressing and preparation. A proper dressing for different kinds of situations is important, i.e. a customer servant of a certain organization is expected to dress up in a certain way. A good preparation for a business meeting guarantees a success but the rule can be applied to customer service as well as obviously customer servants have to be well-prepared in different situations of customer service. (ibid.)

The best way to succeed in international business is to realize the significant role of culture. Cultural factors will directly influence a company's profitability, regardless the sector the company operates on. A company should try to improve its knowledge about international cultural differences according to business so that it would enable the company to reach a competitive advantage. At the same time it is vital to know the cultural matters of different countries but it is also difficult to understand all the details related to every country's structural culture. (Passport to trade, 2014. Date of retrieval 05.09.2014.)

Cultural aspects effect on customer service when internationality is considered. As a company starts its operations in a foreign country or has foreign customers in the home country it is vital for the employees to be familiar with the new cultures. For example gestures can have different meanings in cultures or some rules and regulations may effect on the customers' behavior. In my opinion, the most important thing to do is to get knowledge about the cultures a company deals with.

### **3 AN INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE GUIDE FOR START-UP COMPANIES**

The guide is provided for start-up companies in any field of business that are aiming to improve the customer service or/and try to expand their business internationally. International customer service in the point of view of this guide is provided when a company has or reaches to have foreign customers, whether the customer service is provided in the home country or in the target country. This guide considers the adaptation to international market, methods to improve the customer service and gives knowledge about the factors of customer service. The goal is to give start-up companies an impression of what is good customer service and how to serve customers in an international aspect.

#### **3.1 Adaption to the international market**

Internationalization starts with analyzing market opportunities, e.g. if there is or is not demand for a company of a certain field of business. Many times internationalization also insists both the development of knowledge and the adaptation of a specific service, materials, and production to fit the envisioned markets. (Enterprise Finland, 2014. Date of retrieval 05.06.2014.)

As soon as a company starts to deal with international operations, it has to be decided if the organization will operate from the home country, in the actual target country, or through collaboration with a partner firm. Searching for the right partners and links to be successful in the target markets is vital. Doing business internationally requires also financial funds from the company during a long-term period. Besides the company's own financing external funding is many time used. (ibid.)

The market observation, analyze about possibilities, and considerations about the future will progress the company's reputation in the foreign market area. There is a lot of analyzed information on several markets offered. (ibid.)

### **3.2 Methods to improve the customer service**

Functional customer service is thought to be one of the most important issues within all kinds of organizations. It is possible to use marketing promotions to get customers' attention but unless their experience with the company is not good, the business will most definitely suffer from lack of customers. According to Ward, the aim of good customer service is to create long-lasting customer relationships; reach right customers and serve them so that the relationship between the customer and the organization will last. Good customer service makes customers to give positive feedback about the company along to other possible customers as well. (8 Rules for Good Customer Service. 2014. Date of retrieval 26.05.2014.)

A good salesperson is able to sell anything to anyone at least one time. But the approach of the customer service will be what defines whether or not the salesperson will be able to sell that customer anything else afterwards. The essence of good customer service will construct a relationship with customers. To form a good relationship with customers it has to be taken into account that the company will be judged by its acts, not what has been said. (ibid.)

To provide well-working customer service is thought to be unchallenging. As Ward states, the only thing needed is to ensure that the business considers these following tips in a consistent manner: (ibid.)

#### **1) Functional phone service**

A company which aims to have a functional customer service should obtain an answering service and hire employees for this kind of purpose if possible. An organization should also ensure that there is an actual person answering the phone when a customer calls the business. The company must also consider how to answer the phone properly. (ibid.)



## **2) Loyalty**

For an organization it is vital not to plan to keep the promises but truly keep them. Reliability is one of the most important questions that are included in good customer service. An organization should not give any statements for customers, according to i.e. delivery or pricing in case they are not completely certain. The same tip can also be applied to other activities, for example appointments. (ibid.)

## **3) Truly listening to customers**

From the customers' perspective there is nothing more irritating than sharing a problem with a company representative and then noticing that that person has not been listening at all. If a customer has to explain their concerns again, it is quite obvious that customer service is unsuccessful. The right way is to let customers share their opinions and feelings and show them that they are respected by responding appropriately, for example offering a suggestion of how to solve the problem. (ibid.)

## **4) Reclamations**

No business can avoid reclamations and even though they are less desirable they should be accepted in appropriate manner. Not all the customers can be pleased but if the complaint is given attention, it can be possible to gratify this certain customer for one time. This incident can position the business to reach the advantages of good customer service. (ibid.)

## **5) Helpfulness**

A very good tip to remember is always to be ready to help even though there would not be straight profit from the help earned for the business. Still, even a little gesture of kindness can create a whole new, loyal customer relationship. Word-of-mouth marketing is also in a major role in these kinds of situations since a very good experience as a customer is certainly shared with friends and intimates. (ibid.)

## **6) The training of the employees**

An entrepreneur should either do it internally or hire someone to train new employees to be helpful and knowledgeable. The training should include knowledge about good customer service and how to execute it regularly. The most important thing is to give every member of the personnel enough information and power to make all the customer-friendly decisions, so they never have to say that they have not been informed about something. (ibid.)

## **7) Additional steps**

If a customer for instance walks into the store and asks a salesperson to help them find something, an employee should not only tell the customer the certain location of the item but to lead them to the product. Afterwards it is advisable to wait if the customer wants to ask questions about the product. Whatever the additional step is, if a company is aiming to offer good customer service, it should be taken. Customers also notice easily if the salesperson puts an extra effort on the customer service and will tell other people about the nice customer service experience. (ibid.)

## **8) A little extra**

Customers certainly like to have more than they thought to get. Whether it is possible to give a discount coupon or just a natural smile it will absolutely be effective. The gesture does not have to be large to delight the customer but sometimes smaller signs can be more effective. (ibid.)

If these simple rules are applied to business constantly, a company will soon become known for its good and workable customer service. The best part is that over time it will create more new customer relationships than for example promotions or price slashing. (ibid.)

On the other hand, Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority is defined a good customer service as a very essential part of a good or service a customer purchases. It is many times forgotten that the customer service continues also after the purchase process as the customer has to be able to contact the company easily and give feedback. In general a good customer service means that customers are treated properly and the feedback is handled within reasonable time. There are several rules and regulations stated according to customer service and

customers' rights which customer servants should always be familiar with. (2009, Date of retrieval 18.09.2014).

### **The usage of service strategies**

Contributing a workable customer service begins with saying thank you to the customers for their cooperation. The customers have to be appreciated. After the first step, a mutual understanding has to be created and the customer can be informed more about the company's business operations. (Business and industry portal, 2014. Date of retrieval 03.09.2014.)

### **Using the sale's point to gain information**

All the preparations according to selling or delivering a product should be clarified for the customer in words and i.e. suggest to call for the customer when the ordered products accede. A customer servant has to explicate return practices for the customer, particularly if the company's warranties or guarantees are wider than regulations oblige. It is advisable to have available product samples and be keen on about their advantages. It is useful to carry more information about a good or service than customers ask for. (ibid.)

### **Taking extra steps with serving customers**

A company should offer additional benefits for their customers, for example packaging the products for them. These types of efforts make customers think that buying from this company is simple. A customer servant may make an offer for a customer to put them on the company's contact or mail list. The customer should also have a business card of the company or the customer servant and they should be remembered that they are welcome to call or e-mail the company in case they have any problems. (ibid.)

## **3.3 How to serve customers?**

Customer service is often in a major role when a customer is trying to make a choice. It is obvious that they will choose the company that serves them the right way. Customers have high expectations – they expect to be served well and that their problems will be solved. Customers

are not always right but they are “kings” who have the right to assume a lot from the company. (Marckwort 2011,11.) Preparing oneself to challenging customer service situations is many times impossible since those situations are unpredictable. Still, with the expertise, right attitude, knowledge of human nature, mind control and good skills of interaction it is possible for the customer servant to meet the challenges of customer service. (ibid,13-19.)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, customer servants have to have the right attitude towards their work. Not all of employees are optimistic, social and happy people every day but also more pessimistic or neutral employees can be successful in the field of customer service. The attitude towards work and company’s customers is said to be a question of choice. The customer servant chooses whether they will have a negative or positive attitude and mindset. A customer servant with a positive mindset is defined as a person, who considers how he can help their customers, what exactly do the customers need and how they can solve customers’ problems. At the same time a customer servant with a negative mindset sees their work and customers as people who are not telling the truth and want only complain about something. (Järvinen, Rosti, Ylikoski,2002, 27.)

The best attitude for a customer servant is the one where both the customer and the employee are seen as equal. Interaction is not stressful but natural. An opposite for this kind of attitude is i.e. that the customer is seen as less significant as the customer servant. The attitude arises so that the employee despises customers and has prejudices. Also the customer can be seen as more significant than the customer servant. Neither of these situations is desirable since without the equality customer service will also not be able to be relaxed and comfortable. (ibid.)

Making contact with customers is relative to the relation between the customer servant and the customer. When meeting customers for the first time the customer servant needs first to make contact and get in the business only after making the contact. When serving a customer who the customer servant knows the contact has to be taken care of. A little small-talk makes interaction more natural, for example commenting the weather or asking something about the customer’s interests. On the other hand the customer servant has to be careful not to open conversation with a sensitive topic, such as politics. (ibid.)

## **The usage of language in customer service**

The language is an important tool in communication. When a customer servant can take advantage of it the company will reach the objective of having a good customer service. People who have linguistic abilities are able to have an influence on matters as well. The most vital thing is the understanding between communicators, not e.g. arguments that are said. (ibid,30.)

It is stated that the people with good language skills use also effects on the state of mind. For example, if a person continuously sees things in the negative perspective, it has negative effect on their feelings and personality as well. Also a positive state of mind has the same effect. A customer servant's state of mind effects on the language and linguistic expression and therefore it can be said that when it comes to challenging situations of customer service, a customer servant can also try to find solutions for problems by trying to change their own attitudes and way of thinking towards more positive mindset. (ibid,31.)

The usage of positive language has a major role in positive customer service. It means that customers should be informed about what the company does, not what it does not. All the customer service situations should be seen in the perspective of the customer. (IHD Service Desk, 2014. Date of retrieval 17.09.2014.) As an example, the benefits of a product or service should be told for the customer who wants to purchase it.

## **Managing challenging customer service situations**

It is useful to learn to notice and analyze customers' feelings. When the customer servant knows how their customers feel about different situations, it is easier to respond the way customers hope them to respond, i.e. by thanking or apologizing. It is the way to show that customer's opinion and wishes are respected. (Järvinen, Rosti, Ylikoski,2002, 71.)

Succeeding in challenging customer service situations strengthens customer relationship and customers' trust towards the company and its customer service. Instead of avoiding or being afraid of challenging customer service situations the customer servant should experience them as professional challenges and be prepared for them in different ways. As usual in situations of customer service, also every challenging customer service situation is different since there are no general solutions that work in every situation. It is very recommendable that employees working

in the sector of customer service document challenging situations and consider together possible ways to deal with the same kind of situations in the future. (ibid,107.)

Not all the customers will be satisfied with the goods or service they purchase. Therefore there may arise challenging customer service situations for customer servants. The diplomatic and efficient approach for challenging customer service situations is the feature of a good customer servant who knows how to deal with challenging situations. (eHow, 2014. Date of retrieval 17.09.2014.) In the challenging customer service situations it is even more important to listen to customers and try to make the situation at least a little more pleasant for them. For example an angry customer may calm down with a friendly attitude and understanding of the customer servant.

### **3.4 Compassionate resources of customer service**

Compassionate resources of customer service understand the entire human resources of a company. Customer servants are obviously in the key position but also other members of personnel serve customers indirectly. Therefore also these employees can be seen as a vital part of resources of customer service. (Järvinen, Rosti, Ylikoski, 2002, 130-131.)

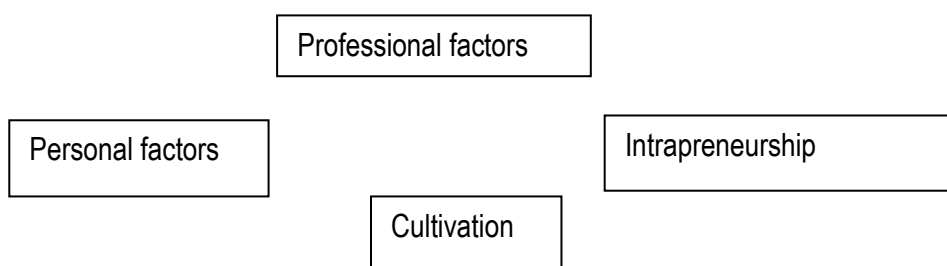
The meaning of personnel of customer service becomes essential when a company reaches competitive advantage. High quality customer service requires capable customer servants who besides intellectual knowledge have enthusiasm and ability to cooperate. It is also important to be passionate about entrepreneurship. Several researches (Korpelainen & Lampikoski, 1997; Halonen, 2001) emphasize the importance of customer service. Within these researches it is stated that the loyalty of personnel interrelates with the loyalty of customers. The more stable employment relationships are the more stable the customer relationships are as well. Consequently, it is recommendable for a company to create long-lasting relationships not only with customers but with the personnel as well because the commitment of personnel advances the commitment of customers. (ibid, 130-131.)

Still the personnel in customer service are vulnerable in a sense. Since the knowledge is within workforce, it is possible that replacement of personnel decreases knowledge within company. At this time also the loyalty of customers can become endangered, especially if customers are

habituated to use the service of a certain customer servant and they have a loyal customer relationship. An enormous challenge for a company is to recruit personnel who are suitable for customer service, train them and to uphold work motivation so that turnover of personnel remains low. At the moment of recruitment it is recommendable to pay attention to helpfulness of applicants. With training it is possible to give customer servants readiness to serve customers well. (ibid, 130-131.)

Understanding is also required from customer servants. The personnel have to know how customer service is connected to the company's business operations and how meaningful all the links in the service chain are. It is important for the company to communicate with the personnel who work in the field of customer service and inform them how important their work is for the entire success of the company. Especially important is to motivate the employees, open communication and actions that improve comfort at work (ibid, 130-131.)

Behavior of customer servants is affected by many factors. These factors can be divided into personal and professional factors. The knowledge of a customer servant arises from all of the factors. The knowledge is thought to consist i.e. the technical affection of sales and knowledge of company's services. The customer servants are also required to update their knowledge regularly. Also the management of interaction related to customer service is a field of continuous learning in which skills concerning feelings are important besides the management of information. It should also be remembered that besides these factors also in the individual level personal background effects on the customer servant. (ibid,131.)



Four horns of the knowledge of customer servant (Järvinen, Rosti, Ylikoski,2002, 131.)

### **3.4.1 Personal factors**

The most central personal factors of customer servants are features of an individual, social background, hobbies, education and both physical and mental well-being. Besides basic education, a customer servant is demanded to have the skills to sympathize that are a base for the interaction for customer service. Those skills guarantee the effective learning of special knowledge that is required in the field of customer service.

When singular situations of customer service are considered, the mood of the customer servant has a crucial meaning of creating service atmosphere. The creation of good service atmosphere is a sign of the customer servant's real commitment in service. (ibid,132.)

### **3.4.2 Professional factors**

Professional factors consist of the training the company offers, salary and internal culture of the company with its atmosphere and conventions, possibilities to evolve and proceed with career and possibilities to effect on developing operation and decision making.

The training of customer servants can be divided to basic education and continuous maintenance of expertise. The work of basic education is to give basic readiness for customer service that includes services the company offers, i.e. ADP-license or hygiene proficiency certificate. (ibid, 133.)

A natural part of well-being of customer servants is frequent, annual training events. The personnel of service industry's maintenance of expertise requires continuous education because it is compassionate to become rutted for certain customs to work and forget alternative procedures. (ibid, 133.)

The basic knowledge of a customer servant supplement experience and variability of work tasks. Especially in financial business learning at work is thought to be necessary. In the long run it is possible to learn to manage also challenging customer service situations. A customer servant with experience has a lot of so called "silent information" which means the company's mental capital that consists of the company's employees' knowledge and abilities. Transitions from a



work task to another either permanently or temporarily make customer servants multi experts who can manage different customer encounters and service needs that are related to those encounters. (ibid, 133.)

The lowest level of ability is considered to be securing the business' current level. To be able to execute growth targets, a company has to benefit from current knowledge better or to acquire new knowledge. The emphasis of knowledge means a lifetime learning and continuous training. Knowledge enables company's preservation in market since Hope&Hope's research (1998) shows that companies over 100 years old share a common feature of continuous ability to learn. (ibid, 133.)

A functional system of rewarding should take into account customers' benefits but also pay attention to company's objective attainments. Each part of the salary needs to be supportive and excellent results need to be rewarded. A competent customer servant earns more salary for successful moments of truth but those moments of truth affect also all the employees who work in the company since it enables to ensure the preservation of everyone's position. At the same time the customer servant improves the company's corporate image and creates both for themselves and their colleagues possibilities for new customer relationships and sales. Also customer centricism should be rewarded, not only financial results or effectivity. (Järvinen, Rosti, Ylikoski,2002, 133.)

Salary still is not the most important matter of motivation but more important seem to be challenging and interesting work tasks, a good working atmosphere, equitable system of leading and trust towards the entrepreneurship. However, work tasks should not be overscaled compared to work skills but they should not be underscaled either. The quantity of works also matters since a quantity of work too low frustrates the employee and an excessive quantity links eventually to oversteering. When each customer servant does a work that is challenging enough according to their skills and knows the meaning of the work in the totality of company, it is possible to reach excellent results. Meaningful work motivates. (ibid.)

### **3.4.3 Customer servant – an intrapreneur and self-developer**

Internal entrepreneurship fits in the customer service. Entrepreneurship usually concerns responsibility, necessary jurisdiction and a will to be successful. It requires decision making that is fast enough and exceeding oneself. Entrepreneurship necessitates mutual direction and goals – combining the company's and individual's aims and ambitions. The close work community's atmosphere affects a customer servant's mood, feelings and also his desire to learn, help the customers and colleagues and to improve the action.

Intrapreneurship pursues to develop the organization's vitality. The aim is also to increase the organization's productivity and innovation, which means the readiness to developing and adoption of issues. Intra-entrepreneurship is a way to strengthen the business and achieve better results but it is also a personal characteristic that requires motivation to execute. On the other hand, employees can also be encouraged and trained for intra-entrepreneurship: every customer servant can at least to some extent be an entrepreneur (ibid,133-134.)

The self-developing of a customer servant is crucial. The most certain and effective the developing is actualized so that people as individuals are willing to develop and they are given a possibility to do so. Self-developing is motivating at that point when the positive results show and reflect on the work community as well. Starting the self-developing may feel arduous instead since it requires mental efforts. Developing oneself can also be related to other abilities than those that are demanded in the employee's actual work tasks. (ibid, 134.)

Every customer servant is able to develop his own work. Every member of the organization should bravely pay attention to the development targets that they are responsible for. On the other hand it is important that the whole personnel participates to mutual responsibilities because the old argument that "the employee is the best organizer of his work" is actually true. The development work has to be a natural part of every customer servant's work, not depending on the work task. It is the way to ensure that within work processes and developing the customer service there is all the expertise included that the company has itself. Then the final result should also be the best possible for all the parties involved. (ibid, 134.)

As the world today changes continuously, it is vital to have a work atmosphere of constant training. Many success stories of companies are based on the continuous investments in

trainings. (Entrepreneur, 2014. Date of retrieval 17.09.2014.) It is recommendable to arrange trainings that consider customer service. Competition has a major role in today's global business and therefore it is important that customer servants are familiar with the expectations of customers. There are a lot of other benefits related to employee training, such as motivation of employees and decreased change of employees. (Free Management Library, 2014. Date of retrieval 17.09.2014.) Training is an expense for a company but it is an expense that is usually profitable as it is important to frequently improve the abilities to serve customers (Impact learning systems, 2014. Date of retrieval 17.09.2014).

It can be discussed, whether it is more important to have frequent trainings or to encourage employees to do self-development. In my opinion, these two matters do not exclude one another. Conversely, they support each other. As stated previously, it is important to make the self-development of employees as a natural part of their work. Still the trainings make it easier to motivate employees to develop themselves as customer servants. Also, the situation of the company and customer service may change and it is vital to inform the employees about the changes. I personally think that self-development makes trainings worthwhile. With mutual connection of self-development and trainings it is the most probable to guarantee a functional customer service.

### **3.5 A compaction of the basics of valuable customer service**

The fundamental to functional customer service is creating valuable relations with customers. Being grateful for the customer and maintaining an optimistic, caring and welcoming atmosphere will confirm the customers get an excessive impress of the company. A satisfied customer will certainly use a company's procedures frequently. (Business and industry portal.2014. Date of retrieval 03.09.2014.) Small, friendly gestures of the customer servant may have a positive effect even though the customer would not immediately show it. For example a little small-talk or a compliment can impress the customer. In my opinion, the continuously good customer service is one of the main reasons why customers want to purchase goods or services of a certain company.

**Tips to certify that the company offers the most qualified customer service:**

- Be aware of what are the customers' opinions about good customer service
- Arrange time to realize customers' expectations
- Listen to customer's opinions carefully
- Guarantee that all the characteristics of business are taken into account in customer service
- Constantly search for conventions that can advance the customer service of the company (Business and industry portal.2014. Date of retrieval 03.09.2014.)

**To create long-lasting customer relations it is necessary to:**

- Welcome customers and show them that they are considered as individuals
- Indicate customers that their wants and needs are understood
- Know and understand the fact that not all the people are the company's possible customers. Therefore it is important to focus on creating long-lasting customer relationships with the actual customers
- Be helpful – to let the customers know you are aware of their personal interests is an advantage
- Make sure the customers continuously know why is it worthwhile for them to be a part of the company's business (ibid.)

In case the company aims to offer the best kind of customer service, the whole personnel has to know how to communicate properly with customers and how to sell goods or services. The superiors also need to be personally aware of how to serve customers excellently. (ibid.)

The company has to know its products or services it sells. Locations, names of the brands, manufacture places and prices are things that the entire personnel should know. The more customer servants know, the more certainly customers are impressed by the knowledge. Also the characteristics of products should be familiar. These characteristics can be turned to advantages for the customers. Managers should guide the personnel to inform the customers about the characteristics and advantages of the product. (ibid.)

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

In Finland there are 322 183 enterprises and 99,8% of these enterprises are small or medium sized companies, which usually employ not more than 250 people. (Yrittäjät, 2014. Date of retrieval 20.06.2014.) In the private-sector over 60% of employees work for small or medium sized enterprises. The revenue from these types of companies is 50% of all businesses in Finland. Finnish start up-companies are seen as possible international success and the entrepreneurs are expected to be innovative and creative (Dagmar, 2014. Date of retrieval 03.09.2014).

Customer service is a result and a strategy for profit. Companies with a stable tactic to customer service succeed whereas companies with meager customer service have absence of efficiency. The two approaches to successful customer service are tactics called "Passion" and "Process". The Passion considers customer service with a perspective that customer is always right and the Process approach has strict guidelines of how to serve customers. All in all, it is not recommendable for companies to use only one of these tactics but both of them should be taken into account. (International Customer Service Standard. 2010, 6-7. Date of retrieval 02.09.2014.)

Nowadays customers have a lot of choices and therefore customer service has to be competitive. An organization should use every possible way to measure how satisfied or unsatisfied its customers are. For example asking customers what could be done better is advisable. Internet surveys are an excellent example of how to guarantee that the feedback is honest. Leaders should pay special attention to customer's satisfaction. (Leadership from the Trenches, 2010. Date of retrieval 20.06.2014 )

Also cultural factors are meaningful in the aspect of customer service. For example Hofstede's findings can be considered when a company plans to do international business. These findings should still be seen with a critical perspective as the research is already made in the late 1970's.

Internationalization is starts with analyzing market opportunities, e.g. if there is or is not demand for a company of a certain field of business. Many times internationalization also insists both the development of knowledge and the adaptation of a specific service, materials, and production to fit the envisioned markets. A company has to make a decision whether it will operate from the

home country or in the actual target country. Links in a foreign country are extremely important. Also observing the markets, analyzing possibilities, and considering the future will progress the company's reputation in the foreign market area. (Enterprise Finland, 2014. Date of retrieval 05.06.2014.)

The aim of good customer service is to create long-lasting customer relationships. Good customer service makes customers to give positive feedback about the company along to other possible customers as well. The essence of good customer service will construct a relationship with customers. To provide well-working customer service is thought to be unchallenging. A company has to certify that at least the customer servants truly listen to customers, are helpful and that the reclamations are dealt with the right way. (Ward, 8 Rules for Good Customer Service. 2014. Date of retrieval 26.05.2014.)

Succeeding in challenging customer service situations strengthens customer relationship and customers' trust towards the company and its customer service. Instead of avoiding or being afraid of challenging customer service situations the customer servant should experience them as professional challenges and be prepared for them in different ways. (Business and industry portal.2014, 107. Date of retrieval 03.09.2014.) The meaning of personnel of customer service is essential when a company reaches competitive advantage. Qualitative customer service requires capable customer servants who besides intellectual knowledge have enthusiasm and ability to cooperate. It is also important to be passionate about entrepreneurship. (Järvinen, Rosti, Ylikoski, 2002, 130-131.)

Customer servants' personal and professional factors have an impact on customer service. Employees working in the sector of customer service can also be seen as internal entrepreneurs (ibid, 134). The fundamental to workable customer service is creating worthy relations with customers. Being grateful for the customer and maintaining an optimistic, caring and welcoming atmosphere will confirm the customers get an excessive impress of the company. A satisfied customer will certainly use a company's procedures frequently. (Business and industry portal.2014. Date of retrieval 03.09.2014.)

## 5 DISCUSSION

An international customer service guide for start-up companies was a challenge as a bachelor's thesis topic since there are several things that could be considered within it. The approach had to be chosen and clear demarcations made. As the thesis writer I wanted to look at the topic in the most general aspect as possible – to let space for any other student in the future to continue the work. In this part I will share my ideas about the thesis and make suggestions of the way I would continue the guide if I was the person to continue it.

I find the topic very relevant and interesting, and I truly think that the guide can help many start-up companies to have a perspective on international customer service. International customer service as a term is difficult to define, as it can be considered in many perspectives, but in this thesis it is considered to mean new situations in doing business with multi-cultural customers. I did not choose one target country especially but wanted to make the guide as general as possible. The next step for it could be choosing a target country and culture and to deepen the knowledge about it in the aspect of customer service. A start-up company could be the next thesis' commissioner and suggest a target market that a thesis writer could concentrate on.

This guide is meant for all kinds of start-up companies but personally I find it the most useful for Finnish startup-companies as the basis for me as the author are Finnish companies. The most of the references consider startups in the most general perspective but for example my personal expectations about how to start a business are based on the Finnish companies. In my opinion it has an effect on the work even though it is possible for any kind of startup-company to take advantage of this guide. A start-up company in this thesis is defined as a company which is a start-up in the international aspect – therefore also companies with an established reputation can be seen as start-up companies in case the internationalization of the company is in the beginning. Still every organization in the need of improving the customer service can take advantage of this guide since the guidelines are extremely general. The guide is provided mainly in the general perspective.

The most vital thing according to internationalization of customer service is to be familiar with the markets a company wants to enter, study the new culture and do a wide research about it. In the perspective of customer service it is obviously important to know how to serve the customers in a

specific country – or is it even possible to find possible customers there. Besides the fact that the company has to be aware of these matters it is important to know the product or service the company provides and how to market it effectively in a foreign country.

A company should also pay special attention to cultural factors in the aspect of customer service, such as habits and customs, use of language, impressions and proper sayings. The language aspect has to be considered as well – does the company have abilities to serve customers in their national language? At least it is vital to ensure the customer servants' English skills are proper and that all the possible details are taken into account before starting to serve foreign customers. Still, a customer service only in English can be considered too limited compared to the customer service in an actual foreign language.

A good basis for cultural factors may be professor Hofstede's findings but in my opinion these findings have to be considered critically as the research is made already in the 1970's and the culture is changing all the time. Hofstede also researched only one particular case company and therefore the findings may not relate to every company. The critical point view is useful for small companies especially as Hofstede's research was made for a large company.

My personal opinion is that a right attitude and the ability to make circumspect decisions are the keys for good customer service. Whether it is international or not, compassionate mistakes are understandable. It is obvious that friendliness will be appreciated in every culture but it can be defined differently. Therefore a vital matter is to study the factors of a new target country as a company tries to expand its procedures internationally.



## 6 REFERENCES

- Business and industry portal; Principles of good customer service. 2014. Date of retrieval 03.09.2014, <http://www.business.qld.gov.au/business/running/customer-service/improving-customer-service/customer-service-principles>
- Business and industry portal; Service and selling strategies at the time of sale. 2014. Date of retrieval 03.09.2014, <http://www.business.qld.gov.au/business/running/customer-service/after-sales-service/service-selling-strategies>.
- Dagmar, Startupille Suomi on laukaisualusta.2014. Date of retrieval 03.09.2014, <http://www.dagmar.fi/uutiset/startupille-suomi-laukaisualusta>
- eHow, Examples of Difficult Customer Service Situations. 2014. Date of retrieval 17.09.2014, [http://www.ehow.com/list\\_7505257\\_examples-difficult-customer-service-situations.html](http://www.ehow.com/list_7505257_examples-difficult-customer-service-situations.html)
- Enterprise Finland, Internationalization – Team Finland. 2014. Date of retrieval 05.06.2014, <https://www.yrityssuomi.fi/en/kansainvalistyminen>.
- Enterprise Finland, Starting a business. 2014. Date of retrieval 11.06.2014, <https://www.yrityssuomi.fi/en/yrityksen-perustaminen>.
- Entrepreneur, What Successful Businesses Have in Common. 2014. Date of retrieval 17.09.2014, <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/83764>
- Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority, Hyvä asiakaspalvelu on kuluttajan perusoikeus. 2014. Date of retrieval 18.09.2014, <http://www2.kuluttajavirasto.fi/fi-FI/tiedotteet-09/09/hyva-asiakaspalvelu-on-kuluttajan-perusoikeus>
- Free Management Library, Employee Training and Development: Reasons and Benefits. 2014. Date of retrieval 17.09.2014, <http://managementhelp.org/training/basics/reasons-for-training.htm>
- Graham, P. 2012. Want to start a startup? Date of retrieval 02.06.2014, <http://www.paulgraham.com/growth.html>.
- Holloman, C. 2012. The Social Media MBA. United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Impact learning systems, Get to the heart of customer experience. 2014. Date of retrieval 17.09.2014, <http://www.impactlearning.com/solutions/customer-service-continuous-improvement/>
- International Customer Service Standard, ICSS: 2010–14; 6-7. 2010. Date of retrieval 02.09.2014, <http://www.csia.com.au/pdf/ICSS%202010-14.pdf>.

InterNations Connecting Global Minds; Cultural Differences in Business. 2014. Date of retrieval 05.09.2014, <http://www.internations.org/magazine/cultural-differences-in-business-15308>.

Järvinen, R; Rosti, P; Ylikoski, T; 2002. Hyvä asiakaspalvelu-menestystekijä finanssialalla. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.

Leadership from the Trenches, Serve Customers Well, or You Won't Serve Them Long. 2010. Date of retrieval 20.06.2014, <http://www.leadershipfromthetrenches.com/2010/06/serve-customers-well-or-you-wont-serve-them-long/>.

Marckwort, R & A. 2011, 11;13-19. Ole hyvä asiakaspalvelija vaativissa tilanteissa. Helsinki: Yrityskirjat Oy.

Passport to trade, Cultural differences in business – are you aware of them?. 2014. Date of retrieval 05.09.2014, <http://businessculture.org/business-culture/cultural-differences-in-business/>

Talouselämä, Talouselämä valitsi: Tässä on 20 Suomen kuuminta startup-yritystä.2012. Date of retrieval 03.09.2014, <http://www.talouselama.fi/uutiset/talouselama+valitsi+tassa+on+20+suomen+kuuminta+startu+pyritysta/a2073724>.

Talouselämä, Wired listasi: Tässä Suomen lupaavimmat start upit. 2013. Date of retrieval 03.09.2014, <http://www.taloussanomat.fi/yritykset/2013/10/04/wired-listasi-tassa-suomen-lupaavimmat-start-upit/201313851/12>.

The Hofstede Centre; Organizational Culture & Change Management. 2014. Date of retrieval 28.07.2014, <http://geert-hofstede.com/organisational-culture.html>.

Ward, S; 2014. 8 Rules for Good Customer Service. Date of retrieval 26.05.2014, <http://sbinfoCanada.about.com/od/customerservice/a/custservrules.htm>.

Yrittäjät, The Federation of Finnish Enterprises. The small and medium-sized enterprises. 2014. Date of retrieval 20.06.2014, [http://www.yrittajat.fi/en-GB/federation\\_of\\_finnish\\_enterprises/entrepreneurship\\_in\\_finland/](http://www.yrittajat.fi/en-GB/federation_of_finnish_enterprises/entrepreneurship_in_finland/).