



The Construction Industry – Is it all just Customer service?



Contrary to popular belief, the construction Industry is not all about the bricks and mortar, its all about the Customer Service.

Its a fact, and the sooner you come to terms with this, the better off you and your construction business will be.

In very simplistic terms your customers are the only reason that your Construction business exists.

Depending on the market sector you operate in, you may not have a finite number of Customers to partner with...If you are in partnership with Registered Providers or Commercial clients, you should be acutely aware that client satisfaction is key to this relationship.

Whether you are dealing with a new home-owner or a large public sector client, they expect the same level of Customer service that you promised them at the start of the contract or reservation of their new home.

Word of mouth has a new meaning in our new world too. Housebuilding companies reputations in particular can take a hammering , whether justified or not, as new home owners seek solutions to their own problems via their Social Network channels. Consumers are much more confident at complaining and using trending social networks to create campaigns to highlight poor service.

Handling customer care complaints is something that many Housebuilders and Commercial Contractors struggle with; however it costs much more time, money and effort to gain new customers than it does to retain existing ones.

I'm sure you would prefer your new home-owners and clients to talk to you and your business about their frustrations.

Below are 4 things every **Customer Centric construction company** should focus on

1) Just because you have always done it that way doesn't make it right.



The Customer Care files...

Most Construction Companies have one thing in common: they start off with fairly limited resources. When the time comes to create a Customer Care system or process, it makes sense that any business will choose the path of least resistance.

Enter the **generic Customer Care file**. A one size fits all tool that is used to store everything from: internal communications, lists of sub-contractors, appliance manuals to a master excel spreadsheet containing all reported Customer Care issues for every scheme or project. I'm guilty of employing it and so are many of you.

This '*Customer Care Bible*' as it is referred to in many cases can become a real source of pain for many Construction business owners. This does not inherently mean that it is wrong either. It simply means that you need to review and adjust your practices regularly.

Ensuring that your Customer Care team have the resources available and support from senior management is fundamental to the success or failure of the Customer Service experience your company delivers.

Your Customer care department shouldn't feel as if they are on an island detached from the rest of the team.

Traditionally a Customer Care telephone number and an e-mail address will be provided on handover, does your Customer Care team think that this is enough? Have you involved them in your companies after sales approach?

2) If you don't service your customers, someone else will.



Your competitors are watching your business...

I have a good deal of experience in the Sales and Marketing of new homes from various roles with regional house builders and a large PLC.

It always struck me that as a team we would focus our energy (and our marketing budget) on aspirational advertising campaigns that would convince the potential purchasers that this new home purchase would improve theirs and their families lifestyle.

Post completion Exit surveys carried out by Market Research specialists In-house Research, would provide verbatim responses which proved that this is where we stopped marketing to these purchasers.

All our good work would sadly start to unravel as we continued to under perform on our Customer Care responsibilities. Responses to questions such as 'did you feel special on moving-in day?' and 'would you recommend a friend to purchase a new home from X builder?' would provide damning evidence that something had gone wrong since the handover day.

In my experience the importance of Customer Care post-handover is massively undervalued. One or two members of your team will be tasked with 'managing' the process with in many cases archaic systems and tools in place like excel and outlook with little support from Senior Management.

Its extremely disappointing for a Sales Executive to have a conversation with a purchaser who they have had a very good rapport with throughout the sales process to leave the Sales centre in floods of tears due to frustrations with lack of action on after sales issues.

Most of us have many competitors and those competitors may have experiential or technological advantages over you. What those competitors cannot do is work harder than you to service your customers.

3) Ensure that your whole team has access to the single-truth.



One version of the truth on your Customer care...

Ensure all historic correspondence and milestones are stored on one platform, accessible to all of the team.

This enables all of your team to view each client or home-owners information in real-time.

No customer or client likes to explain their issues twice; view their data, provide an accurate status up-date and solve their problems quickly.

This clear audit trail provides all historical correspondence and enables other members of the team not involved in Customer Care to catch up on an escalated issues in seconds to provide an accurate up-date on the status of this defect or repair.

This eliminates your clients and home-owners getting different versions of the truth from other members of your team and taking to social networks to air their grievance...

4. Don't forget your Sub-contractors:



Empower your Sub-contractors and Maintenance teams.

Your company can't deliver your Customer care expectations to your clients if your sub-contractors who may be responding to after sales issues are not aware of your policy.

Your Sub-Contractors are pivotal to your Service levels.

They should be made aware of what is expected of them when they are representing your company on-site or in occupied homes.

Providing a collaborative platform to work together on defects and repairs, sharing documents, encouraging teamwork and creating efficiencies will ensure that your sub-contractors feel they are a valued and trusted part of your core business approach.