

Guest Service / Customer Experience Mgmt

You Have Three to Five Seconds to Impress Your Guest

By Michael Barbera, CEO, Barbera Solutions



Mr. Barbera

The attention span of a goldfish is eight seconds. The attention span of the average American is seven seconds. It's not surprising that we are easily distracted. There is marketing content everywhere we look. Many businesses are competing with one another to gain the attention of the consumer in order to fight for their dollar. Furthermore, the same applies to the lodging industry. It doesn't matter if you're a luxury resort, four star hotel, motel or renter on AirBnB, you're goal is to get the consumer to return; however, your consumers will make that decision within the first three to five seconds of walking through the front door.

We have two eyes, two ears and two nostrils. These are what businesses use to support their brand development, and increase sales via loyal consumers. The appearance of the environment and the fragrance in the air both has significant impacts on the consumer's perception of the brand. Are your colors neutral? Do they effect the emotions of customers in a positive or negative perspective, or do they intimidate the consumer upon entering the business? Emotions are the primary reason why consumers choose specific brands. Many of the products we purchase are available as generic and store brands with the same ingredients and at cheaper prices. Why do we decide to pay more for brand name products? Why would a consumer pay more for your hotel when the competitor has more amenities and lower prices? Since we have three to five seconds to target the emotions of our patrons, it's important to understand how they act. But that sounds difficult since each person is different. It's not. Let's break it down.



Check in and checkout times are universal throughout the industry. Most establishments enforce a checkout around 10am or 11am and a check-in time around 3pm or 4pm. The average American wakes up between 6am and 7am (Monday - Friday). This tells us a lot about the emotions of our customers. If a customer wakes up at 7am and has a check-in time of 3pm, that person has been awake for eight hours. Each person has a certain level of personal control they can use each day. The brain has a gauge for personal control that is similar to a fuel gauge in a car. Each time a person encounters a stressful situation or makes a difficult decision, that gauge gets lower. By the end of the day, people don't want to make decisions, their tempers are short and so are their abilities to actively analyze a situation, such as walking through the front door of an uninviting hotel.



Your establishment might cater to vacationing families, business travelers, or another demographic. Use that demographic data to help you develop your welcoming strategy. The environment you establish should be different from one that attracts tired mothers, children or business travelers who seek a drink after their arrival. Targeting the emotions of your consumers could give you a significant return on investment in the form of return business at a later date. Furthermore, in the digital age, that same impression in the first three to five seconds could affect your Internet ratings. This is especially true for millennials since 84 percent of millennials prefer ratings from stranger than those of their friends, family or associates. Customer segmentation can be immensely diverse. Take the time to confirm the demographics of the specific consumer you are targeting. Also, ensure the customer is one that is corresponding to your specific offering. Matching that consumer will warrant more profitability and less effort. The goal is to retain that customer.

Your entry should be inviting to your target segment. Trigger their feelings. Regarding customer emotions, feelings have a greater impact than wants and needs. The consumer can feel as if they have everything based upon their emotions. There are many variables that affect this decision-making process. There are colors, fonts, furniture, and greetings, even the reaction of children. Think about a mother and child walking down the cereal aisle of a grocery store. Who is the primary decision-maker in this scenario? Studies prove that parents will give into their child's demand for a specific cereal in order to avoid looking like a bad parent. If you haven't noticed, this comes back to perception, which is the foundation of the three to five second rule.

The human brain isn't designed to work in seclusion. Our brains and bodies synchronize with others when we develop rapport and trust, which are the catalysts to sales. Many of us enjoy singing together at concerts and cheering in unison for our favorite teams. And we also like to share our passion for our favorite brands. For example:

- Apple versus Samsung
- Harley-Davidson versus Victory Motorcycles
- Cocoa-Cola versus Pepsi

We've all been involved in a conversation that involved the choice of one of these competing brands. Cocoa-Cola is the second most recognized word in the world, after "okay". That's brand loyalty. More people have Harley-Davidson tattoos than any other brand name. Now that's out-of-this world brand loyalty. Are you prepared to build customer loyalty within three to five seconds?

The greeting is one of the most important aspects of the three to five second rule. This is where human capital plays a significant role in your brand. If your employees don't care about their duties and responsibilities, it will show in their interactions with customers. When we enter a hotel, the first place we go is to the front desk. A bad greeting, no greeting, or no people at the front desk all possess the same value of damage to your brand.

Lastly, your parent organization may have a strict policy about the environment; layout of furniture, fragrances, temperature and other aspects of the hotel's lobby, but the branch manager could always do more to improve the situation. If you're not continuously improving, you shouldn't be managing property. Methods you could use are the implementation of scents, fragrances, lighting, but most importantly: the greeting. Furthermore, when identifying a strategy to create the perfect three to five second experiences, it's important to think outside the box. You landed that management position for a reason...use those innovative and creative thinking skills.

In 2015, the four largest operators in the industry (Hilton Worldwide, Marriott International, InterContinental Hotels Group and Starwood Hotels and Resorts) account for an estimated 42.8 percent of industry revenue, providing this industry with a medium level of concentration. Although industry concentration is moderate, it is increasing, as hotel buyouts and mergers become more frequent, and operators join franchise and chain operators. The market share of the top four players has increased over the past five years. Major companies in the hotel sector are also increasingly seeking to operate on a global scale. Operators with major international hotel companies are expected to continue merging.

Although the biggest players account for an increasing industry share, their expansion has been achieved through franchising. The franchise business model of the large hotel groups means they can grow with limited capital outlays and lower risk.

About 45.0 percent of establishments have nine or fewer employees, while 90.0 percent have fewer than 50 employees. There are, however, a significant number of larger establishments. Given the diversity of accommodation styles and standards, the industry has a large number of small and midsize operators, but only a small number of larger franchised or managed chain operators. Some hotel franchises have more resources than others, but never underestimate the strengths of your human capital.

How will you compete for that consumer to return to your establishment?

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