

Small businesses are fixing customer service

 By [Aki Kalliatakis](#)

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Anecdotal evidence suggests customer service has been 'broken' by the big business players. The good news is that small businesses are showing them how to fix it. Here is my sweet and sour view on the state of customer service at the end of 2012...

When compiling my 2012 report card, I spotted a pattern - the number of times small businesses, owner-managers and franchise operators score highly for good service versus the rare occasions when major groups delight their customers.

Some stellar customer care interventions ...

- The independent car repair workshop operator who pestered a major car manufacturer to clear up a mismatch between published specifications in an owner's manual and actual specifications on the vehicle - without being asked; simply to put a customer's mind at rest
- The manager of a tyre franchise who became a consumer champion to ensure a customer received a replacement tyre after a puncture only two weeks after fitting new tyres
- The franchise boss of a grocery store who bought an impoverished old lady a new walking stick because she broke her old one in his store
- The confectionary shop owner who drove to a customer's home to re-ice a birthday cake for free because the customer spelled her husband's name wrong on the order form

I log feedback like this all the time, but examples of superior customer care tend to come from small business owners, owner-managers and franchisees.

It is rare for customers to inform me of superior service from the staff of the really large companies or from parastatals or big airlines. This is sad. Bigger should mean better.

Cutting back

To restore profitability in recessionary business conditions, many companies have cut back on staff and little extras. But business can't cut back forever. At some stage you have to drive up sales and grow.

One of the most cost-effective interventions any management team can make is a sudden injection of superior service. Investment in training and staff motivation is modest; the gains immense.

However, some larger businesses are starting to learn from nimble, customer-focused small businesses. Some larger businesses are trying to build a small business culture that's more responsive and less bureaucratic. It's been a long time coming after three years of cut-backs, but it's a start.

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