

To hell in a handcart: Good news for smart businesses

Consumers who have never had it so bad are presenting service-led businesses with an unprecedented opportunity to stand out. Smart business simply has to offer respite from a perfect storm of rising prices, strikes, violence and failures of leadership.

 By [Aki Kalliatakis](#) 21 Nov 2012

The world is going to hell in a handcart. That's the impression of anyone reading the news - which means even small personal touches and little gestures 'wow' customers.

Even modest investment in better service has disproportionately large impact because the contrast with the norm is huge.

Developments in 2012 raise concerns rather than spirits. My list of depressing realities include:

- Political shambles with greedy politicians engaged in a cynical pursuit of power and constant waste of taxpayer's money.
- Sporting malaise with former heroes exposed as cheats... cheating on wives, cheating with drugs and cheating on the field.
- Environmental catastrophes in a world where 12 children die of starvation every minute while pollution piles up.
- Social turmoil, highlighted by strikes, protests, violence and death
- Rebellion by disillusioned taxpayers who occupy Wall Street, revolt against austerity and rail against morally bankrupt political and business leaders.
- Cynicism as consumers feel exploited by institutions, brands and businesses they once trusted, but now don't.
- Fear of want as household costs outstrip income, with medical aid savings depleted by mid-year and desperate recourse to personal loans.
- Anger in the face of market power, reflected in rows over short-term insurance claims that go unsettled
- Loss of faith as long-term investments don't even pay out accumulated monthly contributions because fees deplete build-up.
- Frustration with banks as rock-bottom savings and current accounts show just how expensive our banking charges are.
- Refusal by consumers to be suckered any longer, indicated by low customer loyalty and rising complaints.
- Escape from reality, reflected in celebrity fixation (Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber and Britney Spears have more Twitter followers than the combined population of Sweden, Israel, Chile, North Korea, Australia and Greece).

In a world gone wrong, smart businesses simply need to get a few things right to win big.

Suggestions

- Get the basics incredibly right. Make it easy for people to do business with the company by cutting delays, improving efficiency and removing clutter.
- Make it tough for competitors to lure customers away by creating high anti-switching barriers.

- Put relationships above processes and rules while giving customers proof every day that you care more about them than short-term profits.
- Continuously find creative ways to add value by presenting customers with personal, unforgettable experiences competitors will find hard to imitate.

When the average daily experience is mildly depressive at best, it's easy for true service leaders to stand out. The bar has been set low - let's see how many businesses still clear it.

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