

The power of Humanness shown in The Ask Afrika Orange Index

The telecommunications industry has proved its worth in terms of service delivery and has shown a great improvement in the number of delighted customers since 2012 when only 37% were delighted, this increased to 50% being delighted in 2013 and, in addition, customer satisfaction levels have increased. It is important to note that Humanness is highly correlated with overall transactional service experience in the Telecommunications industry.



"Humanness is getting stronger every year. It is literally now the core through which all customer experiences are channelled, proven again this year statistically, but with even more weight supporting its dominance. It is pushing the more transactional /traditional drivers out of the way. We would not underplay this focus; it is going to cost brands dearly. This is not Humanness in a transactional context, but of heart and sharing the message of Humanness to customers and stakeholders, reaffirming affect," said Sarina de Beer, MD of Ask Afrika.

In the telecommunications industry, Humanness is a central contributor to loyalty; impacting on trust (fairness, relationship and empathy); transactional elements (reliability, assurance and responsiveness); individual investment (relationship) as well as service satisfaction.

Three telecommunications companies ranked in the top 20 in the 2013 Ask Afrika Orange Index service delivery awards. Overall out of over 100 brands, MTN came in seventh position, Vodacom ninth and Telkom Mobile 12th. Key loyalty contributors for telecommunications are Humanness, effort, reliability, empathy, responsiveness, relationship, corporate social responsibility and assurance. Key loyalty detractors for the telecommunications industry are first call resolution, fairness, tangibles and trust - these will not necessarily make customers more loyal, but not having these in place detracts from retention and will make customers leave telecommunications brands.

MTN tops telecomms

In the telecommunications category MTN came first, it has held top position from 2007 to 2009 and then from 2011 to 2013. Vodacom scooped the top spot in 2010.

MTN has been amazingly consistent in winning service delivery awards in the Ask Afrika Orange Index and Eddie Moyce, chief customer experience officer of MTN, responsible for customer relations across multiple touch points, explained how they achieved this in a challenging and very aggressive market place: "Probably the biggest differentiator over the past few years for MTN specifically has been the people. We've had a strong, consistent team of people, our attrition is in single digits and we tend to have people stay a lot longer. We have a very experienced workforce absolutely focussed on Humanness and empathy and I think that this is what makes a difference.

"Consumers have become less loyal and price has become a key issue in these trying economic times. We have lost a fair number of customers at the pricing level, but we are a learning organisation and as much as we focus on performance, we also focus on fixing things, so we have become fixated with cause, analysis and feedback. Because yes there are compliments, but complaints will always outstrip compliments and those are the ones we work on, to understand exactly what's gone wrong and go back and fix the process."

Tremendous growth

Telkom Mobile has had tremendous growth over the past few months, between April and November the Telkom Mobile share price has more than doubled. Farhad Essop, executive for customer services of Telkom Mobile, who has been with them since its inception, said: "Telkom Mobile, formerly known as 8ta was formed three years ago by Telkom, which was not known for customer service and we decided to make the customer the centre of our universe. We worked with a strategy first, Telkom is now, with the correct leadership in place, consumed with customer service.

"We had a multi-channel and are now moving to an omni-channel strategy. Customer perception was one of our KPIs; we ask if customers are satisfied and we want to find out more about the customer's experience journey. You can Google this and read books, but this is all academic and you need to translate this into practical terms, what does it mean for the customer.

"The next important part for us was the operating model, we have multiple layers of where customers can contact us, there is not a single point of contact, whether they come through social media, through a call centre or whether they come through a retailer, there is always a different story for the customer and it is about making this into one story. Today customers can contact you at multiple times through social media and this is our biggest focus, before it was a face-to-face transaction, today one comment made on social media which is immediate, can have a vast impact depending on the customers following and this can have a big impact on our brand.

"We also make sure we have the correct people, who are passionate and have the right attitude for customer service and this is in their KPIs and in our business measures. We have a lot of activation programmes in terms of customer service and we publically recognise people when they do well in terms of customer service delivery."

MTN was the winner in this category this year not necessarily because they are doing the best on service interaction tangibles, but because they are doing well on Humanness. Perhaps this may still be an after effect from the 2010 World Cup "Ayoba" campaign, which brings a Humanness element to the brand - Humanness remains a key loyalty promoter within this industry. It's all about creating meaningful engagement with consumers and building trust to ensure polygamous brand loyalty in the cellular industry.

Tired of the squandering of brand promise

"South Africans are very invested in their country and the results of the Ask Afrika Orange Index show that this same commitment to good for their country is what consumers are asking of brands, they are tired of the squandering of brand promise," said Ferial Haffajee, editor of City Press at the awards.

In the Internet Service Provider (ISP) industry service levels have dropped consistently across industries with the exception of the automotive industry. Vodacom Internet has come in first for two years running, in 2013 and 2012; MTN Internet in 2011 and Telkom Internet came first in 2010.

"Service dissatisfaction is increased by a number of factors," De Beer continued: "Lack of Humanness will increase service dissatisfaction by 48.5%. Poor relationships will increase service dissatisfaction by a further 13.4% and low assurances will increase service dissatisfaction by an additional 16.8%."

Service delivery in the Independent Cellular providers has remained constant. Glocell, Nashua Mobile and Altech Autopage have all been in the top three since 2012. This year, once again, Glocell won the first position, Nashua Mobile second and Altech Autopage third.

Established in 2001, the Ask Afrika Orange Index is presently the broadest and most referenced service measurement in South Africa; measuring service excellence within, and across industries. Through these measurements South African companies are enabled to compare their service delivery with that of their competitors 22 companies are measured and over 100 brands.

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