

Let's punish them for being loyal to us!

 By [Johan Botha](#)

15 Jan 2016

I recently read a post on social media about one unfortunate individual who had been treated very unfairly by a business.



© Full copyright as Brandlove.

As a customer experience design practitioner, this just did not make any sense to me at the time, but the more I analysed it, the more I realised, it is quite common for brands to punish "their" customers for being loyal to them.

I was really taken by the individual's status update as it was not one of those "see-if-they-will-send-me-a-voucher" customer complains, but rather a heartfelt and desperate cry by a human being who had experienced emotional distress as a result of dealing with a specific brand he has been loyal to for many years.

I ask you all to put yourself in the shoes of an average consumer and then carefully consider what transpired during this customer's journey.

In short, our customer has been driving a particular brand of expensive imported Japanese 4x4 SUV for more than 15 years. During this period he has purchased and owned various models and was planning on getting the new version in 2016.

The way a business treats a customer should, in my opinion, not be related to the amount of money that was spent, but we

need to acknowledge the fact that these vehicles trade for more than \$35,790.00.

Our customer made a booking well in advance with the agents for the vehicle's last service under a 60-month service plan. As the booking was for the 19th of the particular month and the plan, according to the Warranty agreement, would only expire on the 20th of that month, everything seemed in order. When he took in the SUV the agents declined to do the final service, claiming that the computer said the service plan had expired on the 18th already.

After escalating the issue, the brand's customer care agent stated that the dealership had entered the wrong date in the book. The long and the short of it was that they still refused to do the service. Then the brand in question indicated that the matter was out of their hands as the warranty was underwritten by a luxury German car manufacturer in South Africa and the final decision to refuse the service lay with them.

As our customer's wife owns a vehicle from the German manufacturer, two brands were now instantly involved. To quote from the post:

"So Mits... and Mer... lose 2 loyal customers over a service contract date error (NOT MINE) of 1 day (for a service costing ±R2,500). What a brilliant business decision made by Mits... and Mer...!"

I struggled to believe that two global brands so well established in South Africa could make such a terrible mistake. If they punish their loyal customers like this, how do they treat the unconverted ones?

An urban myth, some of you may argue... I know I did at first, but then I did some further research and found that brands love "spanking" their loyal customers as part of their legacies, processes and ignorance.

Let's count the ways:

Airlines

By far one of my favourite industries when one considers customer experience "journeys". Frequent-flyer miles or not, examples of punishing the customer abound.

- Obtaining refunds on booked flights are virtually impossible.
- You have to pay extra if you want to catch an earlier flight (they have to fly in any case, don't they?)
- You are punished when your bags are slightly overweight or are not the shape that fits in those ridiculous-looking "pipe thingies". *You should be punished for this because everybody has a scale that can weigh the most awkward-shaped luggage, and surely you checked the 3D shape of your baggage before leaving your point of departure?*
- It simply is your mistake when your luggage was not on the same flight as you were, and you should wait as long as possible to get it back. *Why do you need your luggage in any case? Surely everybody carries spare underwear and toothbrushes?*

Call centres (of any kind, take your pick)

You must be a loyal customer for this one as most call centres will only take your call if you enter your existing account number. And from the minute you punch in the hash key, you are being punished.

How dare you call a brand for the simple reason that they are taking money from you for a service or product!

Punish you we will, by:

- Letting you listen for minutes while a nearly inaudible voice on the IVR orders out options. *We will punish you more for not making the correct choice by letting you listen to the menu once again.*
- When you make your selection, *we will tell you exactly how much you are going to be punished by telling you how far back you are in the queue.*

- And if you have been really BAD, they will let you listen to some of the worst music ever recorded on the planet!

Payment and monthly instalments

No matter how loyal a customer you are or have been, most registered financial service providers have no time to enquire why you missed a payment, or how they can perhaps help you rectify the situation. No, they are too busy handing out punishment in the form of third-party debt collectors' letters informing you that they will take away your life as you know it if you do not pay!

Subscription services

I just love this form of business model.

You have some sort of subscription to some sort of service, let's say to Armed Response from a leading international security brand. The more loyal you are and the longer you maintain your subscription, the more you are being punished as it increases by a certain percentage every year. The odd thing, though, is the fact that the base subscription remains low for new customers. I know of a retired couple who have been loyal to a company and after 12 years were paying almost double the subscription for new clients.

I told them to give notice of cancellation and sign up again on the first day of the following month. They did just that and their subscription decreased by almost 46%!

Makes sense, doesn't it? I suppose the loyal customers have to pay for the free alarm installations of the new ones!

I will conclude with a very ironic last example before I start punishing my loyal readers by repetitive babblings.

Loyalty programmes

You have to love these!

'Let's spank our loyal customers by letting them pay subscriptions to our programme, which we use, to reward them for being so ignorant' (sorry, I mean loyal!)

Most loyalty programmes are run by independent administrative companies or units that are their own cost centres. These "businesses" exist purely to make a profit from their members. Sorry, now I am confused as well.

A brand starts a loyalty programme so that the loyal customers can pay more money to the brand for being loyal so that the brand can give the loyal customers a product or service on which the brand makes a buck, in order to show the loyal customers just how much the brand appreciate their loyal patronage...

What the heck?

Even I know a couple of people who don't mind a good "spanking" from time to time!

Note that Bizcommunity staff and management do not necessarily share the views of its contributors - the opinions and statements expressed herein are solely those of the author.

ABOUT JOHAN BOTHA

Johan is an Anthropologist by education, but his career took him on a journey of being a passionate educator and mentor to many students in Business Studies and Visual Arts. He is a certified digital marketer and social media storyteller. He has been actively practicing as business analyst and social community manager for Brandlove for the last two years. He has a track record of delivering to tight deadlines and being highly organised.

• ROI on customer experience as simple as replacing these 'apps' - 5 Oct 2016

• Customer experience with a 25-year guarantee? - 21 Jul 2016

- Why the CCO should be the Leatherman on your company's belt - 29 Jan 2016
- Let's punish them for being loyal to us! - 15 Jan 2016
- "Yes, baby, yes!" Faking customer experience almost always ends in separation - 14 Sep 2015

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>