Chapter 4
MARKETING STRATEGY FOR SMALL BUSINESS:
SERVICE AND QUALITY

Quality and Service Pay
Quality in service and product counts. Take, for example, Creemore Springs Brewery, a small Ontario brewery. While the beer industry is flat, Creemore has kept on growing. Creemore was founded in 1987 by John Wiggins on the assumption that “the industry needed a better beer”. Creemore produces a high quality beer with no additives, no preservatives, and no pasteurization. The market agreed with John Wiggins, and he has expanded the brewery three times to keep up with the demand. Creemore is successful because of its quality product. Since Creemore is small and cannot afford large advertising expenditures, it needs a product that sells itself and generates a high degree of loyalty among consumers. Quality delivers this. As John Wiggins states, “You have to have something that’s worth the word of mouth”.

The growth of Ikor Integrated Facilities Inc., an office furniture dealer in Toronto, is attributed to high quality service. In a declining market, Ikor keeps on growing. The president of the company sees three types of service: “Yuck”, less than customer expectations; “Blah”, what customers expect; and “Wow”, which is more than the customers expect. Ikor’s strategy is clearly “Wow” as sales have grown from $2.5 million to $9.2 million. The President’s service strategy is exemplified by the philosophy “if we are supposed to install 100 work stations in a week, we do it in four days”, plus they provide innovative added value to customers such as moving the old furniture into the basement.

High quality in service and product provides one of the strongest and most sustainable competitive advantages for the smaller organization. While it improves sales, it also improves the profit level of the company and it insulates companies to some extent from debilitating price wars. The benefits of quality in product/service are:
- higher profits and returns
- higher customer loyalty
- higher prices possible
- lower cost to service the customers (transaction costs are lower)
- providing of customer value
- longer time to adapt to changes in the market place
- customers less likely to switch to lower priced suppliers
- communications costs are lower; happy customers become the voluntary salesforce

Service and product quality examples are all around us and are readily observed almost on a daily basis. We marvel at the service of a small retailer while being frustrated at the lack of service of the larger retailer. Wal-Mart’s entry into Canada has set the benchmark for service for both small and large retailers. McDonalds has set the benchmark for the fast food industry. It pays to study the service excellence of large firms and then step it down to the smaller firm. Mastermind stores in Toronto have built a reputation for innovative products and excellent service. The Madrigal, a small music store in North York, Ontario, competes with the large chains by specializing in classical and jazz, and by having highly knowledgeable sales people. Combining a focussed offering with high quality products and service is a powerful marketing approach.

The Cost of Dissatisfied Customers
The penalties for poor service and poor quality are severe. There are many ways of looking at the cost of losing a customer and there are numerous studies that have explored this area. The studies have treated the business universe as consisting of various sized companies. None have focussed exclusively on the smaller organization, but it is not an unreasonable assumption to generalize from these studies to the smaller organization. After all, dissatisfied customers, in all likelihood, will not adjust their degree of dissatisfaction to the size of the organization.

There are many ways of looking at lost customers. One way is to look at the cost of acquiring a new customer versus the cost of retaining a current customer.
customer. The rule of thumb is that it is four to five times more expensive to attract a new customer than it is to keep an old one. Another way to look at lost customers is to estimate what a customer is worth from a lifetime of revenue. For example, a small grocery store could look at the annual expenditure of a customer, say $7,000 per year, for an average of 10 years - this customer is now a $70,000 account. A small courier may evaluate its customer in a similar manner to find that the $250 a month customer is really $30,000 account. This type of evaluation places a different framework on the lost or dissatisfied customer.

The U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs estimates that 96% of customers never complain, 90% do not buy again, and each will inform nine other people about their poor experience. A study by Arthur D. Little showed that the penalties for poor service were:

- 8% Stopped purchasing
- 9% Refused new items
- 12% Refused promotion support
- 16% Discontinued items
- 29% Reduced volume of business

Service and quality have become cornerstones of marketing strategy. Customers, both consumers and businesses, are seeking better quality and higher service levels from their suppliers. Customers have discovered that higher quality and better service are possible without large increases in price, and companies have discovered that as quality goes up it is possible to obtain lower costs.

Japanese companies have demonstrated that quality sells, and the success of fast food outlets like McDonalds have demonstrated that service quality also sells.

The service and quality arena has become the competitive battleground of the nineties; customer satisfaction is built around service and quality, and these two factors have become key to the development of long term customer relationships. The pressure from competitors, globalization, and customer attitudes and perceptions demand that organizations constantly improve both service and quality.

Quality and service have been orphans in the marketing family. The focus has been on sales, advertising, pricing, distribution and product. It is time to integrate quality and service into the marketing strategy of the organization and to develop an organizational chart that reflects this change of priorities.

What is Quality?

Any discussion of quality has to start with the customer. How does the customer define and perceive quality?

In some organizations, quality is seen as conformance to a set of standards, for example, the tolerance levels of a fabricated part; this is fine, but only if the customer appreciates and wants such tolerances. Within many markets, there are undoubtedly different levels of quality needs and perceptions. Quality is a multidimensional concept, but must be seen and evaluated through the eyes of the customer. The first step in any analysis of product or service quality must start with a thorough understanding of the customer’s quality expectations.

A very clean and concise view of quality comes from the American Society for Quality Control:

- It is not those who offer the product but those whom it serves - the customer, users and those who influence or represent them - who have the final word on how well a product fulfills needs and expectations.
- Satisfaction is related to competitive offerings.
- Satisfaction, as related to competitive offerings, is formed over the product lifetime, not just at the time of purchase.
- A composite of attributes is needed to provide the most satisfaction to those whom the product serves.

Quality then, whether it be product or service, is a relative measure with no fixed standard. The standards are, in effect, set by the customer.

After ten years of studying and observing, Tom Peters came to the following conclusions:

1. "Customers - individual or industrial, high tech or low, science trained or untrained - will pay a lot for better and especially best quality.
2. Firms that provide that quality will thrive.
3. Workers in all parts of the organization will become energized by the opportunity to provide a top-quality product or service.
4. No product has a safe quality lead, since new entrants are constantly redefining, for the customer, what’s possible."
The Malcolm Baldridge National Quality Award

The Baldridge Award is an annual recognition of American companies that have developed and executed a high level of quality service and product, as well as management. One of the categories of the award is small business. The criteria for this award is an excellent checklist for an organization to judge how well it is doing and how effective the quality and service programs are. An audit could be carried out by the organization itself or by an independent consultant. The categories could also be modified to suit. The award is based on the assumptions that the following concepts are the cornerstones of an excellent service/quality program:

- Quality is defined by the customer.
- The senior leadership of businesses needs to create clear quality values and build the values into the way the company operates.
- Quality excellence derives from well-designed and well-executed systems and processes.
- Continuous improvement must be part of the management of all systems and processes.
- Companies need to develop goals, as well as strategic and operational plans to achieve quality leadership.
- Shortening the response time of all operations and processes of the company needs to be part of the quality improvement effort.
- Operations and decisions of the company need to be based upon facts and data.
- All employees must be suitably trained and developed and involved in quality activities.
- Design quality and defect and error prevention should be major elements of the quality system.
- Companies need to communicate quality requirements to suppliers and work to elevate supplier quality performance.7

The Baldridge categories are listed in Figure 4-1. The seven categories address all the components of a good service/quality system.

Figure 4-1

Baldridge Categories

Leadership
Senior Executive leadership
Quality values
Management for quality

Information and Analysis
Scope and management of quality data and information
Competitive comparisons and benchmarks
Analysis of quality data and information

Strategic Quality Planning
Strategic quality planning process
Quality goals and plans

Human Resource Utilization
Human resource management
Employee involvement
Quality education and training
Employee recognition and performance measurement
Employee well-being and morale

Quality Assurance of Products and Services
Design and introduction of quality products and services
Process quality control
Continuous improvement of process
Quality assessment
Documentation
Business process and support service quality

Quality Results
Product and service quality results
Business process, operational and support service quality results
Supplier quality results

Customer Satisfaction
Determining customer requirements and expectations
Customer relationship management
Customer service standards
Commitment to customers
Complaint resolution for quality improvement
Determining customer satisfaction
Customer satisfaction results
Customer satisfaction comparison

The First Step in the Service/Quality Quest: Measure

Measure! Measure! Measure! Measurement is an essential prerequisite for good service and quality. Two trivial but true aphorisms sum it up nicely: “What gets measured gets done”, and “If you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it”. Only proper measurement will allow an organization to understand customer expectations, and then to deliver a product or service that will exceed these expectations. Another aphorism sums this up: “Under
promise, over deliver”. Measurement also allows the all important comparison of what the competition delivers, relative to you and to customer expectations, based on the same performance dimensions.

Measurement is a call to arms, a rallying point for the organization. You need information for insight and understanding. Like an army that travels on its stomach, the successful breakthrough service organization feeds on constant information. The organization uses the information to develop a better and better fit with its market needs. Only with a proper information base can you hope to become a market driven organization. The First Bank of Chicago measures 650 variables on a daily or weekly basis. That in itself is commendable, but then they take the next necessary step and share the information with managers, front line personnel and customers at weekly meetings. Measurements have no economic value by themselves unless used as a springboard for meaningful action.

The measurement and understanding of customer satisfaction and value perception is essential. Research is the link to the customer, the stepping stone to higher quality and service.

The first step in measurement is to identify the customer’s evaluative criteria. This is best done by segment if customers are varied. For example, the sought after quality and service will differ radically from a small organization buying a personal computer to a large organization purchasing one hundred computers. Service may be a priority for the smaller organization, while price may be a priority for the large organization. Allan Magrath has listed six general performance areas:

**Overall product characteristics**
- performance, warranty, fit with needs

**Price**
- including terms

**Quality of sales force**

**Logistics**
- just in time, responsiveness

**Access to support personnel**
- service and technical support, geographic proximity

**Supplier reputation**
- innovativeness, leadership

Different industries and different segments within industries have different ways of identifying and ranking service and quality variables that lead to satisfaction. These variables are not stable over time and need to be updated periodically. Poor economic times or temporary shortages may change both the ranking and the type of variable that lead to customer satisfaction.

### The Gap

The idea of gap analysis has been around for a long time in various areas of business. It is an ideal method for service and quality analysis and measurement since service and quality are relative and subjective.

Once the dimensions of satisfaction are delineated, the customer’s expectations across these variables, as well as the organization’s performance, are measured. The two ratings are compared, and the size of the gap determines how well the organization is doing. The closing of service and quality gaps becomes part of the marketing plan. Not all gaps can be closed. For example, a location gap is difficult to close in the short run. Without an understanding of shortfalls on the dimensions that the customer considers important, it becomes impossible to set goals or standards for the organization to strive for.

### Other Measures

There are many ways other than surveys to encourage customer feedback on performance. Some of these are:

- 800 number on products
- comment cards with product or service
- telephone enquiry after product or service acquired
- customer focus group (A focus group is a non-random group that is moderated and discusses various issues.)
- mystery shoppers
- level of complaints
- video taping transactions

### A Specific Application: Service Quality

A full understanding of service quality requires information at several levels. The Service Quality Measurement Matrix demonstrates the various generic measures that can be taken in a service business. The value of each measurement will vary from service to service depending on the nature of the business.

The matrix reflects the nature of services and demonstrates the type of measurements possible.
Services are usually intangible, but some have a tangible side or component. The intangibility makes it very difficult for consumers to articulate their feelings towards services. Even after the service has been rendered or consumed, it is difficult to know the true results and consequently the level of satisfaction with the service. Services such as education demonstrate this dramatically.

There are two sides to services: The inside, what goes on inside the service organization; and the outside, what happens when the service is consumed. There is an obvious link between the service provider (inside) and the customer (outside). Happy employees lead to happy customers at the most basic level of the relationship. An attitude survey of the customer must be mirrored by an attitude survey of the service deliverer in order for a true understanding of the issues to occur. The rate of warranty claims must be analyzed in the light of morale on the shop floor.

The last dimension of the matrix is the components of a service:

**The Setting:** This is the environment in which the service is manufactured and delivered; for example, the decor and ambiance of a restaurant, the bank branch color scheme and appearance, etc. It has long been recognized that the setting is not only part of the product (bundle of services) delivered, but that it creates images, expectations, and influences the purchase moods of the consumer. The setting can be risk-reducing and can send messages of comfort to the service acquirer. How you rank on this crucial variable and how relevant it is for your customer becomes very important. The setting provides tangible clues for the consumer, which in turn influences behaviour within the setting.

**The Process:** The process is where measurement is a must, because this is where quality control should take place. Outcome measures are fine, but it is process measures that help you adjust and improve, and this is where changes take place. This is the manufacturing plant of the service sector. Since in many cases the customer is an integral part of the process, interaction at various levels and understanding and gauging of the process are necessary. This is where constant monitoring and feedback pay back.

**The Outcome:** This is what is traditionally measured, in most cases by a measure which leads to results that are difficult to operationalize. Asking the customers if they were satisfied on a scale of 1-5 tells you very little, and only results in a warm feeling if you score high. “Service quality = delivered service - expectations”. It is therefore essential to understand expectations in order to measure the service quality of consumer satisfaction. Without an index of expectations, outcome measures mean very little.

The service quality measurement matrix takes the service components and demonstrates at what levels the measurements can be taken.

The next major issue is what dimensions to measure in the cubes on the matrix. Leonard Berry 9 and his colleagues have provided us with a set of universal variables that provide a focus. In their landmark study, they have identified ten dimensions that customers use to evaluate service quality. The dimensions are generic and can be tailored to meet the specific needs of most service organizations. These dimensions are:

**Tangibility**
This is the setting or the cues provided by the service. For example: Is the Trust Company’s facility presentable and are the tellers dressed appropriately? Is the airplane cabin clean? or, as Max Ward used to say, “Gum in the ashtrays means that we do not have proper engine maintenance.” The marketing of services is the marketing of evidence.

**Reliability**
This is the organization’s ability to deliver on a consistent basis; the ability to deliver what has been promised; for example, a delivery promise, error-free statements. One of the biggest complaints of car owners is having to go back to have the car repaired again after it was repaired. Having it done right the first time is something the consumer appreciates.

**Responsiveness**
How you help customers: How does the cleaner deal with my complaint? How long does it take my credit card company to fix up an error?

**Competence**
Is the service provider competent to carry out what is promised? Can the person I talk to about a problem deal with it or do I get endlessly shifted around? Does my lawyer know what he/she is doing?
**Courtesy**
How friendly or polite is the service organization contact person? Does the service organization listen to my complaints?

**Credibility**
How trustworthy is the service provider? Is my real estate broker honest? Can I leave the painter alone in my apartment? The reputation of the service establishment do they honour their guarantees?

**Security**
The freedom from danger is an increasingly important consideration for consumers at automatic tellers, indoor garages and self-service gas stations.

**Access**
How easy is it to get the service? Does the service provide an 800 line for information and/or complaints? How convenient are the business hours?

**Communications**
How well does the service organization keep in touch? Does the organization keep you informed of changes in a manner which is easy to understand?

**Understanding the Customer**
Does the organization take the trouble to understand the needs of the customer? Does the service provider greet the customer by name? Do loyal customers get recognized as such?

Some of the dimensions overlap; some are easy to measure and some are very difficult to measure. The developers of the ten criteria feel that the variables are ‘exhaustive and appropriate for assessing quality in a broad variety of services’*. The specific criteria to be measured will vary from organization to organization, but the broad, underlying service quality dimensions remain the same.

**Benchmarking**
Benchmarking is looking at how others do things better than you. It is looking at what the best of the competition is doing. What you hope to achieve by understanding how the best are doing things is an improvement in your own performance. Industry leaders in service and quality use benchmarking as a technique. It is an ideal tool for the smaller organization. Study how the large, successful organization performs, learn from it, and do it better. Many companies borrow it shamelessly; “President’s Choice”, a highly successful unit of Loblaws, is strictly borrowed. The President literally roves the world in search of ideas that will sell in Canada. Benchmarking can also focus on non-competitive industries. For example, you may study an organization that has the best service delivery, but delivers different products from you.

Benchmarking involves the following steps:
1. Pick an area that you wish to improve - distribution, communication, inventory, product development.
2. Look at your own process and select an organization that you feel is the best in the area selected.
3. Send a person out to these “best” organizations to study the area.
4. Bring the results back and compare them with how you do things.

**Quality As Culture**
Quality is a cultural variable of the organization, a mindset needing a constant push and a high degree of leadership. Allan Magrath captures the essence of this in Figure 4-2. 10
APPENDIX A

A Service Strategy For RPI; The Research Base RPI is a distributor of industrial products with sales of under $5 million. The firm supplies its product to original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and to distributors, who in turn sell to the ultimate customer, usually for repair and maintenance needs. RPI has two competitive advantages, service and a high quality product. RPI has distribution points in Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto, and it has a total of 12 persons involved in marketing, selling, and service. There are three key competitors in this industry. RPI’s sales are 50/50 OEMs and distributors. Although the management of RPI considered themselves a high service quality organization, they wanted to test the current level of service quality in order to establish a more comprehensive service strategy.

A pilot study was undertaken with the following objectives:
1. To define the customer’s perception of high quality customer service.
2. To determine the customer’s perception of RPI’s service.
3. To define the employees’ and management’s perception of high quality service and to test how RPI scores on these criteria.

The overall objective was to lay the foundation for a service strategy. A gap model provided the conceptual foundation for the study. Figure A-1 shows the service quality model used in the study.

Methodology
Self-administered questionnaires were used. The customer surveys were pre-tested. Keeping in mind that this was a pilot survey, only one segment was tested. Upon receipt of the questionnaire a short telephone interview was conducted with the respondent in order to ensure that all issues were addressed.

The research is sophisticated in that it measures three separate audiences: the customer, the management, and the employee. The attitude of the person delivering the service influences the quality of service, so it makes sense to look at all the human variables in the equation. The service quality variables were developed from discussions and from the research on service quality. These variables were then tested for agreement among the three audiences. The key determinants were:

Reliability
• Supplier keeps accurate records.
• Keeps promises to do things on time/by a certain time.
• Supplier is dependable.

Responsiveness
• Service is prompt.
• Always willing to help customers.

Competence
• Provides technical assistance.

Access
• Easy to contact.

Security
• Employees can be trusted.

Credibility
• (Not expected to be an issue in this case)

Courtesy
• Employees are polite.

Communication
• Tells customers exactly when services will be performed.

Understanding/knowing the customer
• Customers get individual attention.
• Knows what customers’ needs are.

Tangibles
• Have up to date equipment/systems for customer service.
• Employees get adequate support to do their jobs well.

An alternative is to develop a separate questionnaire for determining the service quality variables. Figure A-2 shows part of the questionnaire used for the customer.

Results
The results were tabulated comparing management’s, employees’, and customers’ perceptions of customer service on the basis of the same service quality variables. In addition, a comparison was made of RPI’s service quality versus the competition’s service quality. Figure A-3 shows a typical set of results of the

**Endnotes**

Appendix A is taken from a study by S. Cornish, L. Marrow, and S. Stevens, MBA students, Faculty of Management, University of Toronto, 1991. The excerpts are reprinted with the permission of the President of RPI.
### RPI’s CUSTOMER SERVICE CAPABILITIES

For each of the following statements, we would like to know your opinion of RPI’s overall performance. For each statement, please show the extent to which you believe RPI has the feature described. Please circle 7 if you strongly agree, and 1 if you strongly disagree. Circle on the middle numbers if your opinions are not strong in either direction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RPI has up-to-date equipment.</td>
<td>7 6 5 4</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPI employees provide customers with technical assistance.</td>
<td>7 6 5 4</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPI does not tell its customers exactly when services will be performed.</td>
<td>7 6 5 4</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When RPI promises to do something on time, it does so.</td>
<td>7 6 5 4</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees of RPI are not always willing to help customers.</td>
<td>7 6 5 4</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is difficult for customers to contact people at RPI.</td>
<td>7 6 5 4</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPI is dependable.</td>
<td>7 6 5 4</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPI keeps its records accurately.</td>
<td>7 6 5 4</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers do not receive prompt service from RPI’s employees.</td>
<td>7 6 5 4</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers can trust employees at RPI.</td>
<td>7 6 5 4</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees of RPI are too busy to respond to customer requests promptly.</td>
<td>7 6 5 4</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees of RPI are polite.</td>
<td>7 6 5 4</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees get adequate support from RPI to do their jobs well.</td>
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<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPI does not give customers individual attention.</td>
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<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees of RPI do not know what customers’ needs are.</td>
<td>7 6 5 4</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
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Relative Importance to Customers of Determinants of Service Quality, and Comparison of Customer Expectations to Customer perception of RPI’s Service (Gap 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Customer Expectations re Suppliers</th>
<th>Customer Perception of RPI’s Service</th>
<th>(Gap 5) Difference</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avg</td>
<td>Avg</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Average</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplier is dependable</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keeps promises to do things on time/by a certain time</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplier keeps accurate records</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tangibles</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate support for employees to do Their jobs well</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
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<td>Up-to-date equipment/systems</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
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<td><strong>Responsiveness</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Always willing to help customers*</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
</tr>
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<td>Never too busy to respond to customer requests*</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service is prompt</td>
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<td>5.8</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employees can be trusted</td>
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<td>6.4</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to contact*</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>+0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides technical assistance</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
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<td><strong>Empathy</strong></td>
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<td>Employees are polite</td>
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<td>0.0</td>
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<td>Customers get individual attention*</td>
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<td>Tells customers exactly when services will be performed*</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows what customers’ needs are*</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>+0.2</td>
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