

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

Armstrong A. & Osman, R. (2012) The 100 Most Pointless Things in
the World, London, Coronet.

Nothing comes close to the enveloping sense of impotence
I feel on reading the words

We Value Your Opinion.

This is what's written on that shiny bit of paper that blows
off the desk in your hotel room when you finally give up
trying to sleep at a temperature that would pasteurise milk,
and fling open the window overlooking the bottling factory
on the other side of the street.

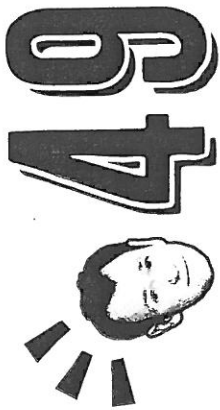
Customer feedback is right up there with weekly fire-alarm
tests (always Tuesdays, always 10.30 - your better class of
arsonist must surely be aware of this) in the league of box-
ticking gestures. Imagine for a moment that there exists in

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the world a pen that would actually write on that kind of
glossy paper (and that biro by your bed, incidentally hasn't
been the full shilling anyway since that Dutch salesman used
it to prize open the trouser-press three weeks ago) and you
dutifully fill it in (How was your welcome? Outstanding?
Average? Poor?) and then hand it in at the front desk. What
happens next? Either it goes to the hotel manager so he can
keep a stack of them by the loo for when the next Bowater
delivery's late or it goes to the company headquarters in
some part of Sweden where gimlet-eyed men in rimless
glasses check the quarterly profits to see if they need to care.

If I owned a hotel I'd care desperately. If I owned nine hotels
I'd care but in an altogether *richer* kind of a way. I would
guess the point after which I'd stop giving so much of a toss
would be around the owning-twenty-hotels mark. Then I'd
hand over 'Caring' to my low-paid individual hotel managers
and I'd hand over 'Making It Look Like I Care' to the people
who print up the 'We Value Your Opinion' papers.

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RESTAURANT LOYALTY SCHEMES

So, you've set up a restaurant/take-away business that is showing all the signs of becoming successful: you've got long queues at the tills every lunchtime, a lot of returning customers, and the *Sunday Times* Style section has featured you towards the bottom of its 'Going Up' fashion barometer (you're quite near their office and you serve food that goes down a storm with anorexic girls and gay men). Let's say you're a hummus restaurant. You've got a great name (GSOH – Good Sense of Hummus) and top-notch branding

Hummus (also Houmous) 'hum us

*n. 1. A thick paste or spread made from ground chick-peas and sesame seeds, olive oil, garlic and lemon. Orig. from Middle East**

What else do you need to do?

Well, apparently the next step is to start up a loyalty scheme. There's no logical reason behind this, unless

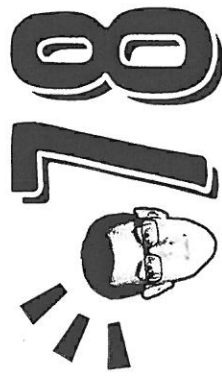
- (a) You are strangely and wrongly convinced that through having a person's contact details you will somehow own them.
- (b) Your shareholders will strangely and wrongly think that your business is doing better if it can show lots of names and addresses on its database.
- (c) You quite want to have the contact details of some of those hot fashion journalists who occasionally pop in to share a flatbread. I think they work round the corner.
Sunday Times or something.
- (d) Once you have amassed a decent volume of contact details, these can be sold on wholesale to other companies for muchos muchos houmous, or
- (e) A beguiling mixture of all the above.

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* You can have these. And given the name, Sense of Hummus, this is one of the few times that that wearisome dictionary definition thing *almost* works.

But what, at the end of the day, can you offer to people who become Friends of GSOH? Seriously. Other than hummus? Or a free drink with large orders of hummus? Or some more hummus if you order a spectacular quantity of hummus? Well, I'm afraid the answer is: nothing. Apart from a newsletter. GSOH being the kind of place it is, this will be a breezy, chummy piece of ho-hum marketing written as if by some slightly simple family friend who's under the impression that you think he's HILARIOUS. Engrossing tales of how Charlie's mum used to make hummus for him when he was a boy and how Ed (occasionally called 'Eduardo' or 'The Edster') drank a bit too much on his stag (this illustrated with woozy stick-drawings and a poem). And that's it.

You have all the ingredients for a restaurant. And you have customers who like your restaurant doing what it does. The minute you try to use those restaurant ingredients to magic up something that is more than a restaurant, you have over-stretched your capabilities.

Honestly. I tend to go to restaurants/take-aways because I want some lunch. I don't really want them as friends. Now, obviously if they're Nando's and are handing out VIP cards that will allow me and my family to eat there for gratis for the rest of time, then, yes, they can be my friends. But otherwise I like them more if they stick to what they're good at.



RESTAURANTS ADVERTISING THEMSELVES WHEN YOU ARE ALREADY EATING THERE

Dear Pizza Hut,

I'm in your restaurant in Cambridge. You know, the one by the cinema. A couple of things:

1. One of the Gents' toilets is blocked.
2. We ordered some garlic bread. Do you know if it's on its way?

But more to the point of this book, I would like to talk to you about how much advertising you have in your restaurant. I don't know how much

all these posters for Cheese-filled Stuffed Crusts, leaflets about Gourmet Italian Pastas and little laminated booklets about doughnuts in wooden stands are costing you, but I think I can save you some money.

You see, I'm actually already *in* your restaurant. You've got me! I have already made an intelligent, informed choice to visit Pizza Hut.*

I would argue that *inside your own restaurant* is the only place in Britain you *don't* need to advertise. Because, surely . . .

Inside your restaurant everyone is eating at Pizza Hut.

Outside your restaurant everyone is *not* eating at Pizza Hut.

So, why not take the money you're spending on trying to encourage people who are already eating your food to eat your food, and spend it instead on encouraging the people who aren't eating your food to eat your food?

* The queue at Nando's was too long.

I know it's not just you. McDonald's tell me to eat in McDonald's when I'm already in McDonald's. KFC like to tell me how much I might enjoy a KFC while I'm halfway through a KFC, and even Pizza Express politely ask whether I've ever considered trying Pizza Express even as they're handing me my dough balls.

If I'm enjoying my food, I'll come back. If I'm not enjoying it, I won't come back, no matter how many posters you put up encouraging me to. Unless, as ever, the queue at Nando's is too long.

And, if you decide that it might be too expensive to advertise to people you haven't already persuaded, then could I suggest you spend the savings on:

1. Fixing the Gents toilet
2. Bringing me my garlic bread

Yours hungrily,
Richard off *Pointless*

POINTLESS QUIZ QUESTION

In a genuinely impressive piece of marketing, what extraordinary place did Pizza Hut deliver a pizza to in 2001?