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BA Leadership and Management

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UNDERSTANDING AND ENGAGING IN THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

BY DAVID OJUGO

Introduction:

In today's ever increasing global competitive marketplace, customers have more options available to them than ever before. Modern day technology has played a big role in this new "Customer Economy" the phenomenon has engaged the customer to strengthen relationships with organisations to maximise customer satisfaction. This requires a Total Quality Approach from the organisation to ensure the performance has reached the expectations of the customer. Adding value to the customer's experience is essential as this is how relationships are formed. The primary objective of any organisation is to form a relationship, "in short a marriage" which can be long fruitful and everlasting. Or short and sour, the latter the organisation try to avoid. However, there is always a chance to rekindle the relationship by understanding the importance of engaging and maintaining the customer experience. According to Bergeron (2013), maintaining customer loyalty is a fundamental part of business. The author will also discuss customer service, complaints, centrality, and value. Exploring why it is important to manage expectations from the customers. Further discussion will touch on buying decisions, the process it takes as well as ethical considerations like fair trade and sustainable resources. Goodman (2009) believes that word of mouth is vital for buyer seller relationships, which in turn maximises the customer's appreciation. When managed well, this will help maintain a level of quality control over the customer. However, times have changed, technology is moving faster than a locomotive, so quality systems such as the customer relationship manager (CRM) add value and purpose for the customer's experience (Pauley, 2010). The impact of technology and its impact on CRM/Facebook issues will also be discussed. The author will evaluate various methods and theories and present a case study for further hypothesising.

The Case Study: Most organisations maintain a high level of customer service and maintain to be compliant and fair in trading. Any weakness they transform into an opportunity to improve and draw on their strengths to find solutions. Innovative improvements in technology have assisted in helping solve problems. Companies such as BT and Amazon maintain a high level of ethics, and as market leaders in reducing emissions they are making vast contributions to the Global Sustainability Development Programme.

Applying The Six Dimensions of Service Quality

6 Dimensions of Service Quality

- **Reliability** - Be accurate, efficient and effective enabling the customer to be able to depend on the knowledge that your able to perform.
- **Assurance** - By initiating a smart technique approach, the confidence employees give the customers assures them they are in good hands and they will be dealt with in a specific, measured, achievable, realistic, time frame.
- **Tangibles** - Being a market leader in the latest technology, proud to maintain the professional image throughout the company, think smart, dress smart.
- **Empathy** - Showing you actually care, putting yourself in the customer's shoes, paying attention to detail and giving that personalised touch.
- **Responsiveness** – Being (RWA) ready willing and able to attend to the customer's needs in a swift manner.
- **Standards** - Maintain high levels of values, competency and ethics throughout the organisation, meeting and exceeding the customer's expectations that the service is impeccable.

According to Kaufman (2012), a complaint is something no business wants but in reality they do as you have a second chance to right a wrong. Complaints happen all the time and is an essential part of any business relationship. However, how a complaint is dealt with will determine the outcome for the customer and the business. Complaints can have a positive or negative effect, for example, a negative outcome will result in the customer likely never to return for repeat business and slander the company in the process (Boden, 2015). On the other hand, if a complaint is dealt with in a positive way, and the customer feels satisfied that they have received a good level of customer service, they will return and also promote your business (Hill, 2012).

However, some customers may have received a bad level of service in the past, and during the process of the complaint have been appeased, by empathy showed from the business "I understand sir/madam" now the customer has managed to calm down and feels relieved. On reflection, the customer will feel that the business actually does put the customer first, and wish to carry on with repeat business. Even going as far as to inform others of the ordeal, subsequently, going on further to explain that if you have a problem, they will fix it, this is in short a win-win situation for both the customer and business. Hill (2012) showing the loyalty to the business the customer will receive some capacity of loyalty and benefits making the customers experience a pleasant one. This is vitally important when meeting the expectations and exceeding the expectations of the customer.

On reflection customer complaints if handled correctly can actually benefit your business/organisation. Kaufman (2012) goes further to explain that a complaint, or criticism the company endured, can become constructive as it can enable the business to identify vital areas for service improvements. For example, the company may realise that it products need improving, the systems being used are outdated and need upgrading. The complaints received and further investigations can trigger these things which sometimes may have been overlooked. Staff training is another factor complaints can initiate, allowing management to observe and look at ways of providing further training and supervision.

Identify Needed Improvement in Policies and Procedures

According to Karatepe (2006), customer complaints can help a company to identify where their current policies and procedures are inconvenient or not up to date. Complaints can also help improve customer communication for example the way in which information is shared, feedback from customers can also help tackle any issues encountered, thereby enabling a contingency plan to be put in place to help minimise problems for future proofing of the organisation Karatepe (2006).

Complaints can provide good education for the organisation as the information can be published enabling staff members to peruse and give comments as to how, improvements can be made, and outlining which action steps need to be taken to resolve the issues raised (Goodman, 2009). Companies who adopt this approach generally uplift the service culture, catapulting a positive change within the organisation as all staff will be better prepared if such complaints arise again (Karatepe, 2016). Several organisations become complacent when everything is going fine. The famous statement used “no complaints”, however, organisations who adopt a more non complacent attitude are always on their toes, when a problem arises it is dealt with efficiently and effectively showing that the organisation is very responsive to change, and can adapt to satisfy the needs; managing this level of consistency is a bonus for the organisation promoting assurance for the customer.

Using surveys and feedback forms are ways of communicating and companies know, the customer will always be the biggest asset to the business (Pearson, 2016). When looking at complaints from customers, one fundamental thing you learn is these customers like to be heard, and are willing to voice their opinion, such customers should be invited to participate in customer focus groups, panels, and research activities helping promote a sense of belonging to the customer and loyalty is generally formed with the business (Kaufmann, 2012).

Understanding the customer better can help promote new business opportunities and obtain a competitive edge in the market. Most customers are quick to say "well this company does things this way" this in truth is a smart way of gathering intelligence from the customer. Companies can use this to their advantage, helping to improve the business from the information gathered (Harrison, 2005). The things customers complain about may present new business opportunities for increasing revenue, reducing operational costs, solving problems and increasing value. Forsyth (1999) explains that by gaining information about the customer, companies can easily predict what sort of shopping habits and patterns they adopt. The main objective will be to be able to foresee what the customer wants and control it. This way of interacting and communicating is very useful.

Management often learn quickly about service issues that are important to the customer, and many thrive at tackling the problem as it gives the chance to showcase the critical problem solving skills learnt over the years, being able to use these tools for maximum effect for the organisation internally, externally, nationally and internationally, becoming a sustainable global partner in solving problems (Bryson, 2011).

Bergusson (2002) argues that using a CRM system can help the organisation to be better equipped in handling the customer's expectations. Most online businesses use a very innovative form of communicating with their customers, by using touch points which are points of contact between the customer and the business. Unlike retail the point of contact begins being face to face.

According to several studies Mohanraj,Sakthivel (2016) Gupta, Manish (2012) and Binder (2013) more and more people now prefer to do their shopping online than before. This can have its advantages and disadvantages, some of which are listed below.

Advantages:

The internet gives the customers the convenience and time to shop when they please. The variety of choice of products to choose from is vast, making it an invaluable way for saving money. Price-comparison websites make hunting for deals easier, thus guiding shoppers to the best stores online with the best reputations (Musso, 2014).

- The stores are always open.
- Convenience of shopping in pyjamas.
- Online shoppers save time and money on travel.
- No parking restrictions involved.
- Whilst shopping online it is rare you will find an aggressive salesperson.
- No crowds and long queues to contend with.

- Online retailers encourage shoppers to post reviews about the products that they purchased.
- There are more choices for purchasing refurbished products.
- Online sales representatives often receive more intensive product training than those at the local stores.
- Online sales representatives often have more flexibility when making decisions, generally are more competitive in prices, applying coupons, vouchers and dispatching shipping at no extra cost.

Disadvantages:

Communicating dissatisfaction online can become frustrating, being able to exercise patience is critical to achieve satisfaction. Problem solving is a lot faster and satisfying when you interact face to face Fjermestad, J. and Robertson, C.(2015).

- Contacting the next level of management is much easier at local stores than online.
- Online shoppers do not have the ability to physically inspect or try on the items being considered for purchase.
- Online shoppers sometimes lose the power to negotiate the price and payment terms that may exist in local stores.
- Items ordered online are sometimes back ordered, but shoppers may not find out until weeks later. This is particularly problematic when buying gifts.
- Online shoppers do not always know if a site is a legitimate retail store and if is safe to shop.
- Restocking and shipping costs are often charged on returns.
- Online shoppers often do not have a person (or the same person) to talk to when dealing with a problem.
- It is sometimes easier to get money refunded locally when the item purchased drops in price within the guaranteed price period.
- Online shoppers do not get to take advantage of seasonal statewide tax-free shopping events.
- Some online companies will sell the customers data.

Other Pros and Cons of Online Shopping:

Pros: Many online stores have the ability to sell goods at low prices due to reduced overheads. Discounts and vouchers for shopping online maintaining repeat business Levine, R.J and Young, L.M (2015).

Cons: Online stores advertising free products does not necessarily mean this, after adding up the cost implications of shipping, generally you will find this is not what was advertised, you will find that discounts apply only online so customers who go to a branch of the online store are told this voucher only applies online, which can be very annoying to the customer Levine, R.J and Young, L.M (2015).

The Bottom Line

It is imperative for Shoppers to take the time out and learn the policies of both online and local stores before making a purchase Levine, R.J and Young, L.M (2015).

Online shoppers have the advantage of not having to wait to buy what they want Levine, R.J and Young, L.M (2015). However, wanting to return an item, sometimes there are hidden charges like shipping, and restocking fees for some online and local stores. The restocking fee sometimes increases depending on how long it takes for the item to be returned Levine, R.J and Young, L.M (2015). The time it takes to ship a product back to an online store takes a lot longer as opposed to a return in a local store, faulty goods can be another deciding factor as returning the goods online can be long, frustrating and costly, on the other hand returning faulty goods to a local store can be found to be less stressful.

Reading the small print on return policies will outline whether the shoppers must pay to ship products back, despite the goods arriving faulty or with defects.

How do customers prefer to shop? Online or the local stores? When purchasing goods do they prefer to pay by credit, debit cards or Paypal. Customer are advised due to hacking online, faulty purchases that when purchasing online it is safer to use a credit card as opposed to a debit card Levine, R.J and Young, L.M (2015).

Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendation:

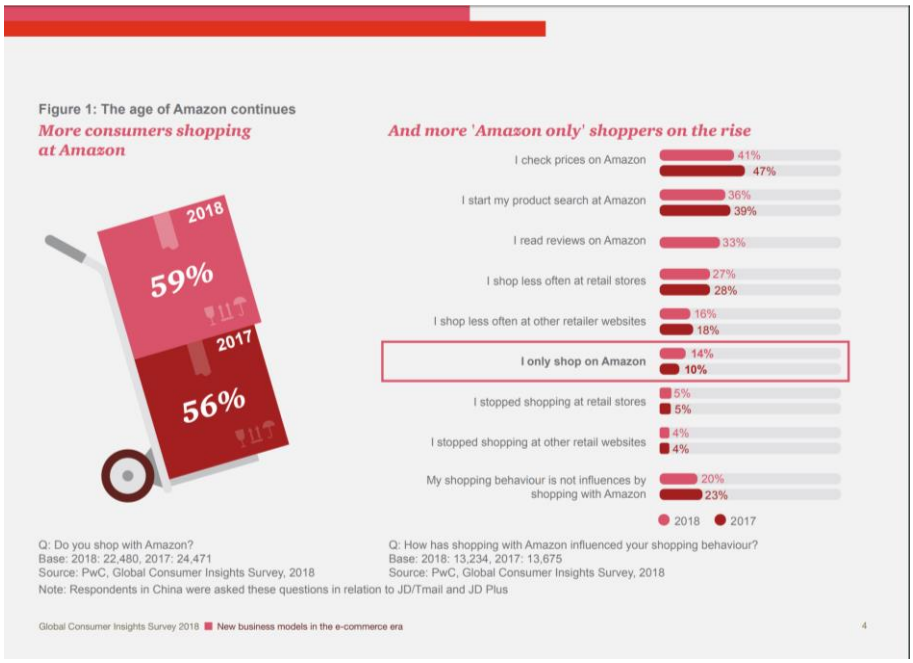
Current Trends:

Given the observed trends of customers, and there shopping habits, a recent Global consumer insights survey reached out to over 22,000 consumers in 27 territories around the globe. www.bt.com

Consumers expressed their optimism about their experiences, stating they have no real preference, 42% use mobile device online, nevertheless, going into a local store is still on the high. 73% of consumers say the economy will remain the same or improve. Another interesting finding was 88% of consumers are willing to pay extra for personalised services, such as next day delivery; and social media was important in making online purchases. However, consumers are ambivalent how they feel in regards to artificial intelligence and the use of modern technology, especially when it is used to track their footprints online. www.bt.com

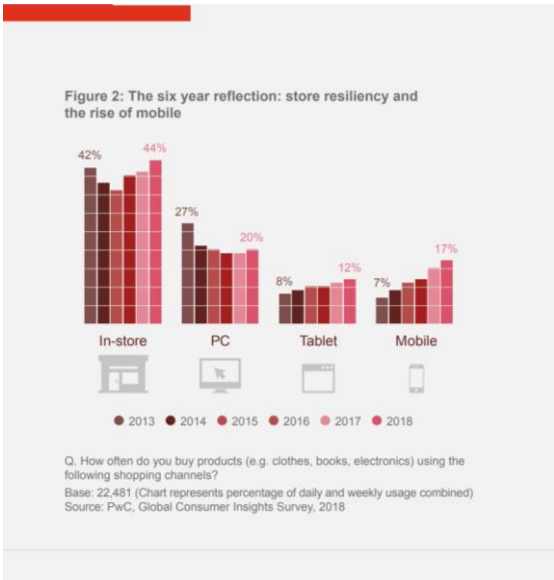
Amazon is, understandably, a world leading online platform and a recent survey found that 59% of respondents shopped at Amazon. But the fact remains that just 4% of total retail sales go through Amazon's platforms. Indeed, Amazon popularised online sales has bolstered the annual online sales growth of many traditional retailers. In addition, several other e-commerce giants, such as JD and TMALL, are just as dominant in their markets. Leaving plenty room for other business models, although the big names in e-commerce are cornering the market for efficiently sold, good-quality, commodity products, manufacturers and retailers have plenty of room to develop business models round differentiation, with personalisation, novelty, and a rich—not just convenient— buying experience. Cloud-computing, while not a retail business, is instructive. Amazon got a big head start here with Amazon Web Services (AWS), and it still has the largest market share. But Google, Microsoft, Salesforce, and Oracle have also grown substantially there with strong margins. That's because they've gone beyond the basic AWS service and are offering premium packages with lots of hand-holding. There's room for both approaches.4 Likewise, Boxed.com differentiates itself by offering bulksize consumer packaged goods specifically to customers who'd rather not drive to warehouse stores www.bt.com

The age of Amazon continues:



www.bt.com

In order for retailers to compete online, they must find new innovative ways to attract and sweeten the consumers whole experience Brogniez, Hall(2001) Keller (2016) and Calloway (2015). By reducing inventory, cutting shipping costs are just a few things to mention. Finding a spot between the physical and digital presences is key (Keller 2016). Despite, e-shopping is on the rise, the truth is that consumers still regularly visit retail outlets, the advantage is a human sales person. From the survey, half of the consumers were satisfied with sales associates knowledge of the product range. This shows that improvements can be made, engaging the salesforce, investing in training and product knowledge will help Levine, R.J and Young, L.M (2015). The shopping experience is vastly becoming enriched, turning into a social outing with friends. Lululemon, sells athletic equipment as well as yoga classes to attract new custom, Nordstrom is another company trying to attract new customers with wine bars in their stores. The survey found a pretty consistent trend for new business models. The percentage of shoppers who visit retail outlets fell from 42% in 2013 to 36% in 2015, however, the physical store has bounced back, all the way to 44% in this year's survey. The social experience has helped attract both old and new customers into buying from the store. Levine, R.J and Young, L.M (2015). Manufacturers can get in the act as well. A number of producers are partnering with direct-to consumer sites, such as Unilever with the Dollar Shave Club. Opportunities to experiment are on the high with new business models. By adjusting your offerings for the consumer, companies are prospering daily Close (2015).



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Increased use of Technology:

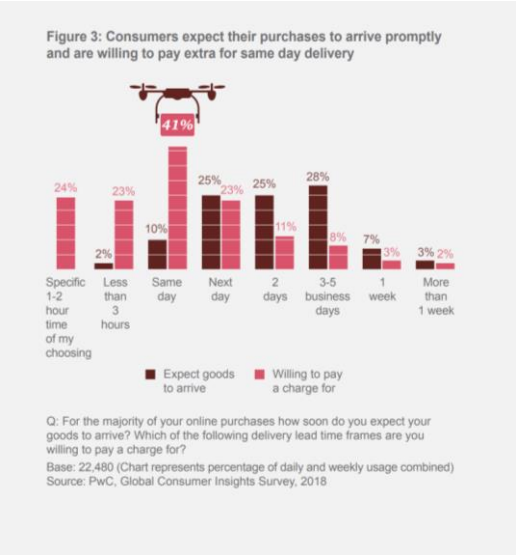
Behavioural researchers have found that people's habits are fundamental to their happiness, accomplishment and wellbeing Close (2012). Maintaining these habits, enables people to cope with the vast array of options available. Marketing firms, advertising organisations, manufacturers and retailers have benefitted from this information to tailor the customer needs Levine, R.J and Young, L.M (2015). Over thirty years ago, people tended to shop multiple times a week in their local stores in the high street. Home cooking formed part of the daily routine for most people and families. Eating in restaurants, shopping in retail parks was more of a treat.

However, with the growing global economy people's lives became busier, longer working hours, and people's habits changed to accommodate this new lifestyle Close (2012). Fast food, takeaways and drive in restaurants are now the norm. Weekly or monthly shopping in bulk in the large retail stores, have replaced the multiple weekly shop. Knowledge of this change in consumer habits, is also good for businesses, manufacturers and retailers, who have continued to respond to the customer's needs, by providing more "convenient ways" to shop and eat www.tesco.com

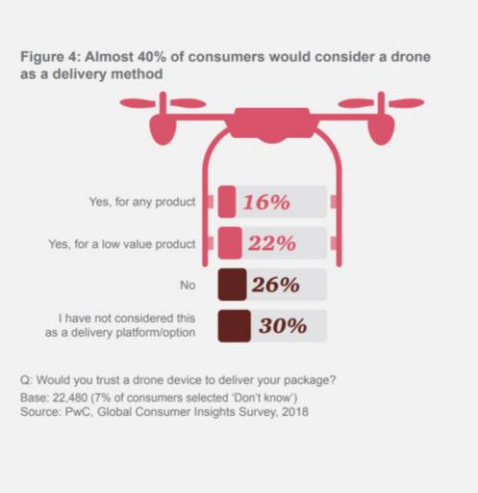
Consequently, retailers and to a lesser extent, manufacturers have adopted on-line platforms to the physical stores, plus there is an increase in new online businesses Woessner (2011).

Furthermore, online purchases have evolved from PC to mobile devices, such as tablets and smartphones. In fact, studies have shown that the purchasing items online using the smart phone and going into the store to collect the item is the most popular with consumers. This method allows the consumer to enjoy instant gratification and the face to face in store shopping experience.

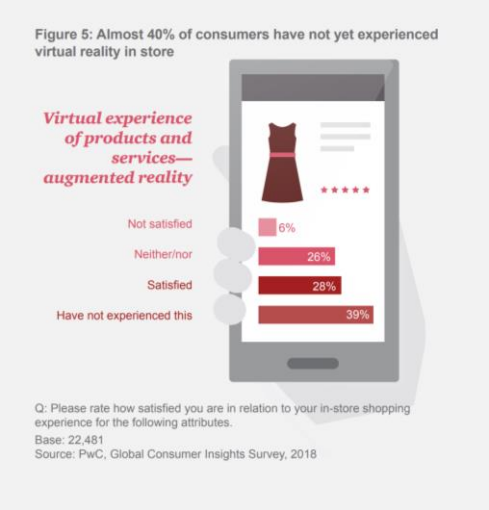
Shopping as experience, with delivery speed playing a key role Consumers are shifting their shopping to instant gratification: as soon as they want something, they can order it, rather than think about it until their next shopping excursion. They don't even need to open their device; they can simply tell their digital assistant, such as Amazon Echo or Google Home, to make the purchase. This innovative CRM is a fundamental way of doing business, as the CRM can predict what you want to buy Suphan, (2015)



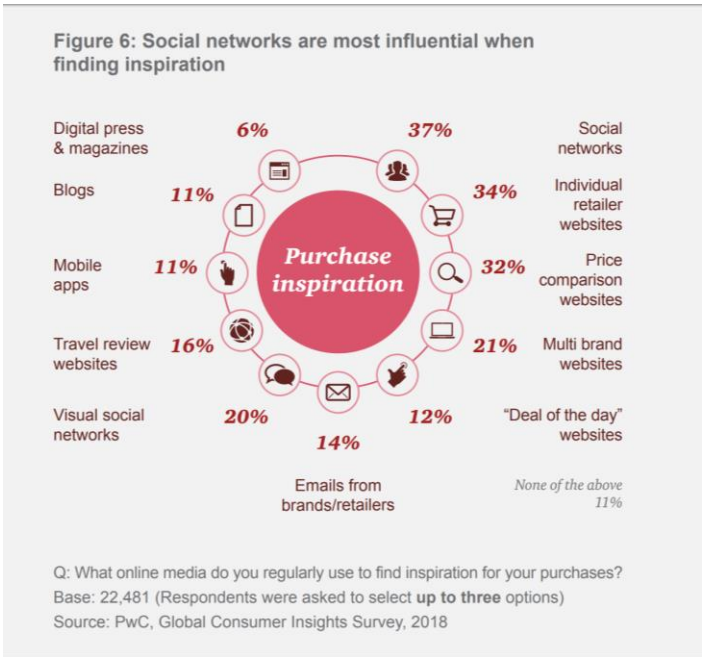
Manufacturers and retailers have found new innovative ways to satisfy the consumers growing need for instant gratification such as Drones, Artificial Intelligence (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR). In support of this, surveys have found that consumers will pay more for same day delivery.



Taken from www.bt.com



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Companies should respond to these new consumer habits by shifting their focus and investments accordingly. That means more attention to smartphone dynamics, as well as investments in AI and store experiences—especially in emerging markets. New business practices to support these investments can help companies go with the flow of new consumer behaviours Close (2015) and Lantos (2015).

It is well known retailers influence customer's behaviour, for example loose fruit and vegetables are cheaper than plastic packaged products, this goes in line with the government's latest campaign to reduce plastic waste. There was a huge public outcry following David Attenborough's Blue Planet II which featured ocean mammals being killed by plastic debris. Also Rip off Britain

www.bbc.iplayer.com broadcasted on 03-05-18) and HRH Queen Elizabeth also voiced her opinion on the issue. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/02/11/queen-declares-war-plastic-david-attenborough-documentary/

Recommendations:

How do customers prefer to shop? Online or the local stores? When purchasing goods do they prefer to pay by credit, debit cards or Paypal. Customers are advised due to hacking online and faulty purchases, that when paying for something online it is safer to use a credit card as opposed to a debit card Levine, R.J and Young, L.M (2015). Experts advise this is the safest way to shop www.moneysavingexpert.com

SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICES:

Global warming, climate change discourse following the G20 Summit 2018 The United Kingdom renewed its commitment to the agreed standards. Consequently, policy and guidance are geared to encourage, promote and support businesses in this area, such as renewable energies, recycling, reduced carbon emissions and sustainable products. Studies have shown more and more businesses in this area are growing Carlson et, al (2010) and Dodds et, al (2012).



Taken From www.un.org

The Sustainability Assessor is a simple British Telecom (BT) tool designed to help business suppliers measure just how sustainable they are compared with the best in the world. The Director of BT has said of this tool: "This is a very exciting and important development that moves us a step closer towards ensuring supply chains around the world are embracing the most sustainable business practices possible. The Sustainability Assessor means we can extend the benefit and learnings of the Better Future Supplier Forum even further into our supply chain. This simple tool helps suppliers measure just how sustainable they are compared with the best in the world." This design has also been used by charities and Non-profit organisations which helps them save money and work more efficiently and effectively, continuing their work in good causes Ramos et, al (2012).

BT offer a virtual conferencing service, so customers don't need to travel. Offering advice and tips on how to reduce energy at home. Future proofing developments are continuous, to help create low carbon, BT has twenty seven ways of reducing emissions. www.bt.com

Recycling Lives has been recognized as a world leader for supplier engagement on climate change. "Plastic's a hot issue now, so correx reels are a priority".

Climate change and sustainability are new areas for growing business. In a surge of climate leadership, 58 leading companies have earned a place on the second annual Supplier Engagement leader board, double the number featuring in the first year. Over three quarters (76%) of business suppliers are working on business strategies to reduce the risks to climate change. https://www.cdp.net/en/research/global-reports/global-supply-chain-report-2018

Several companies and organisation are involved in providing security and safety, particularly in this rapidly increasing online usage. UNICEF delivers its 300th internet safety workshop which they provide to schools and organisations, to equip teachers, children and parents with the skills needed to use the internet safely and to empower the users to become confident digital citizens www.bt.com

The programme aims to empower children to become confident digital citizens – enabling them to safely enjoy the benefits of the internet, in an online world that continues to rapidly evolve.

New Internet Matters 'Back to School' survey shows that parents of children aged between 8-11 year olds want an enforcement put in place for smartphone ownership. BT alongside Virgin Media, Sky and Talk Talk launched a website Internet Matters to assist parents and guardians keep their children safe online. www.internetmatters.org

The National Curriculum in England, made changes now making it compulsory for primary schools to teach e-safety www.computingatschool.org

Recommendations: Please Peruse These Four Steps Outlined

Step 1: Familiarise yourself with all parental controls on all devices

Step 2: Talk to them about what they watch and look at online

Step 3: Ensure children know the rules and should not share any information online

Step 4: Check your app store settings and set passwords for not age appropriated sites.

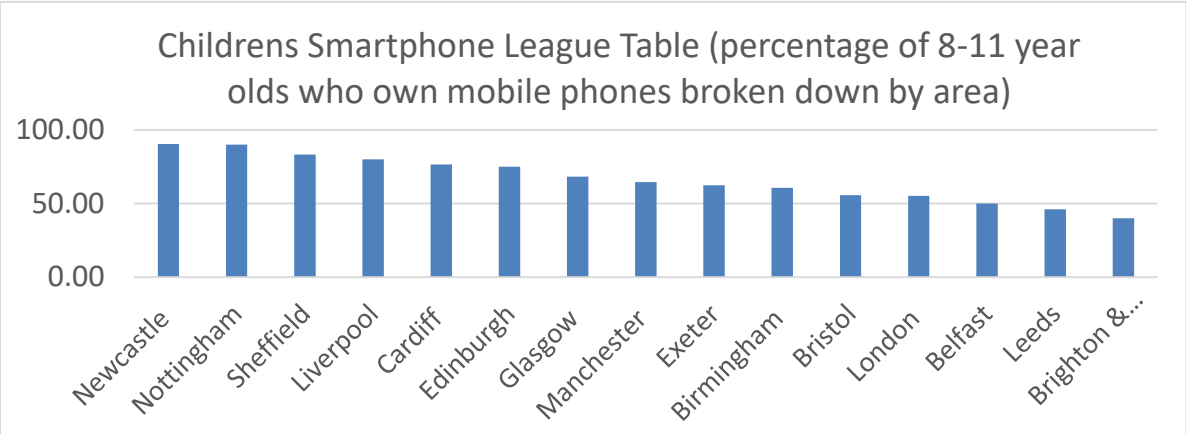
For further information visit www.internetmatters.org

Bunting, commented: "Every parent agonises over that all-important decision of when to give their children a mobile phone. Whether its peer pressure, a sign of maturity, or out of peace of mind, every child is different and parents know intuitively what the right age is for their child. Giving children this great tool comes with responsibilities both for parents and children. We would urge parents to ensure they have the conversation with their children about how to be responsible on their phones and ensure that the safety settings are in place across all their devices and search engines." At home, and out and about

Campaigns:

BT in partnership with the government, police and other major companies are working on monitoring the internet to keep it safe.

Kids Smartphone League Table:



Information from www.bt.com

Child internet safety:

Conclusion

Ensuring children's safety on the internet is a task not only for parents and teachers the responsibility lies with everyone. What is promoted and shared online should be a benefit for families, schools and businesses to use the internet. The online market has profited from the sports industry sending tweets for promotion, and advertising campaigns for marketing have helped increase business. Online courses are not just restricted to open university many higher institutions are online people can register and enrol as opposed to physically going in. Facebook a powerful social networking platform that has revolutionised the world with a staggering 2 Billion daily active users, the influence it has is phenomenal. By branding advertising on Facebook is a strategic way of cornering a particular market, the message you portray can persuade consumers to purchase from you. Political parties to the village Chief now use Facebook to keep up to date on current affairs. Nevertheless, many downsides to Facebook the way data is shared which is a growing concern. Stricter policies and procedures need to be outlined and implemented in order for a more compliant and fair trading society. Businesses must continue to find innovative ways to attract customers, Perhaps Argos will have a drive in store soon? Security, Safety, Data Protection, Privacy and Confidentiality – Governments, Global Super -powered Companies, Leaders, Entrepreneurs must all work together and synergise to create a better Sustainable future for, today and tomorrow.

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https://www.thebalanceeveryday.com **BY DONNA L. MONTALDO**

Updated January 22, 2018

International Council of Shopping Centers, "Post-Holiday Survey", 9 January 2018; "Retail Sales Grew 4.9 Percent this Holiday Season" news release, 26 December 2017, https://newsroom.mastercard.com/press-releases/mastercard-spendingpulse-retail-sales-grew-4-9-percent-this-holiday-season/