

Publication: The Business Times, p 12

Date: 19 July 2016

Headline: DFS tops department store category for seventh straight year

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WHEN it comes to brick-and-mortar stores, customers continue to have clear expectations about their shopping experience. The elements that they consider to be important include store ambience, availability and assortment of products, brand image, and helpful and knowledgeable staff, says Wilcy Wong, managing director, Singapore and Indonesia, DFS Venture Singapore Pte Ltd, which again topped the Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore (CSISG) score in the department store category.

On the other hand, the tail end of the customer journey matters more for e-commerce consumers, such as timely product delivery, fair return/exchange policies and ease of check out. It is important for organisations to incorporate this feedback into both offline and online selling platforms to derive maximum engagement, conversion and loyalty among regular and returning customers.

"We're proud and delighted with our 2016 CSISG scores and for achieving our seventh consecutive year of top CSISG score in the departmental store sub-sector. We are strongly committed to driving a sustainable service-centric culture among all our teams and these results help to strengthen that commitment," says Ms Wong.

"The CSISG scores provide a useful and authoritative industry reference for retailers against which to benchmark our service performance," she adds. "Our year-on-year CSISG scores, coupled with added research insights from the ISES-SMU team and results from our internal service assessment programme, allow us to continually develop and facilitate initiatives to escalate our customers' experiences with our frontline teams."

Strong service values that help fuel a sense of empowerment and ownership not only enable powerful staff and customer engagement and lead to ongoing mutual relationship building, but more critically help to build a sense of purpose and culture among the frontline team, says Ms Wong. In turn, this helps to reinforce an organisation's ability to attract, recruit and retain the best talent, and boosts its competitiveness.

While the retail sector has been facing a labour shortage, Ms Wong feels that regardless of the fiscal or resource environment, organisations should continually invest in learning and development of talent to lift their service engagement with customers, driving a service-oriented focus and mindset that permeates all functions and levels.

"An environment that promotes continuous learning and growth allows the company to attract, train and retain a highly agile, performing and productive workforce. High internal employee engagement and retention are key to managing the manpower crunch within the service industry," she says.

It is important for companies to review their business models and redesign jobs to retain and develop talent on a regular basis. As customers become more technology-savvy and information is more readily available to them in real time, businesses need to be able to provide their staff with the tools and knowledge to keep up with the evolving expectations.



"Our people are our greatest competitive advantage, and we strongly believe that investing in our staff through our development programmes keeps our people engaged," says Ms Wong.

"The role of a sales associate, for example, has developed over time and so we have taken steps through our talent development efforts to ensure that they are equipped with superior product knowledge and service skills to deliver a personalised and memorable experience to our customers. Our people are our greatest competitive advantage, and we strongly believe that investing in our staff through our development programmes keeps our people engaged and therefore helps to retain and strengthen our workforce," says Ms Wong.

DFS focuses on its in-house leader-led learning and development programmes to develop talent and teams. For instance, it leverages on its globally-recognised Apprentice to Master frontline employee certification programme to provide exciting and targeted career development paths for its staff. The programme draws upon emotional intelligence concepts to build teamwork, and shows how a cohesive culture allows employees and DFS as a business to deliver the ultimate customer experience.

"Also, an optimal leader-to-staff ratio means we can continually engage in effective staff coaching with our frontline leaders. We are a people-based industry, and we encourage strong connections across all levels of the organisation to share knowledge and experiences," Ms Wong adds.

Looking ahead, she says that Singapore's reputation as a global destination for leisure and business travellers is only going to grow.

"As customers become more sophisticated in terms of their shopping behaviour and expectations, we need to be committed to inspiring and reinforcing the kind of service and engagement that sets us ahead of the rest of the world," says Ms Wong.

"At DFS, we will do this by continually striving to delight our customers, whether it is through our store environments, our product offering or through special experiences and services such as those we offer through our global LOYAL T customer rewards programme. Above all, however, the relationship we can create with our customer is the key to success."

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