

PROCESSES OF LOGISTIC CUSTOMER SERVICE: BEHAVIOUR OF SENDERS AND RECIPIENTS

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Abstract: This article presents the process as an instrument of marketing and the manner to execute a logistic process by those enterprises that provide logistic services. Owing to the relational marketing, TSL enterprises maintain long-lasting and close contacts with forwarders and are directly interested in knowing the opinions on services, procedures and customer service, which are described by a number of elements. The behaviour of consumers on the market of logistic services depends on those entities that provide logistic services, and the customer has a direct contact with the carrier. The present article covers the results of a survey concerning the level of the evaluation of the customer service provided by TSL enterprises.

Keywords: customer service, behaviour of customers, logistic process, TSL enterprise

1 Introduction

The processes of the creation and provision of the service constitutes an element of the marketing-mix. The process of service in the customer's opinion is the component of the service itself. A continuous improvement of the process of the customer service process is a success on the part of logistic operators. These processes involve procedures, work schedules, mechanisms and activities as a result of which the customer receives a commodity or a service.¹ The key role in the customer service is attributed to logistic processes for the purpose of fulfilling their continuously changing needs and expectations. The logistic service realized by TSL enterprises may constitute the basic instrument to gain and maintain customers, which is connected with ensuring the continuity, promptness and reliability of deliveries including an appropriate level of communication in the entire logistic chain. The purpose of the article is to present the processes of the logistic service of individual customers and to analyse the behaviours of the forwarders and recipients of parcels sent with logistic operators together with an assessment of their services. The research method applied for the purpose of this study is an indirect poll measurement method with the use of a questionnaire form technique. The application and improvement of the processes of logistic customer service may contribute to the achievement of an advantage on the competitive market and may involve changes to the management of an enterprise.

2 Logistics service process

An efficient logistic process allows an enterprise to acquire a competitive advantage in relation to other TSL enterprises. Provision of a logistic service can differ due to the elementary division of service products: parcels, packaged cargo and partial loads in the case of overland transportation on the territory of a country, in inter-modal transport, the shipment of loading units, i.e. containers. In the transport or logistic services according to the criterion of Ch. Lovelock², the service process is distinguished as one concerning the consumer's property; it does not require a lot of commitment on the part of customers in the process of the provision of a service. The participation of customers is limited to the ordering of a service and making a payment on the part of the sender or the recipient. Depending on the fact whether this is a transport from place A to B (a non-compound process) or whether this concerns consolidation, packaging, storing and then transport, we deal with a compound process. Services provided by logistic operators are characterized by a great diversity³. Operators try to adapt processes to the sector they provide their services to and the customer's needs. The development of information technologies

has increased the possibility to form the type of contacts with customers and the extent of their contribution to the service provided: on-line orders, shipment tracking or writing out of bills of lading. For the sender of a parcel, it is only the receipt of the shipment that is noticeable and the result of the shipping process: a confirmation of the consignment note or a transfer of the cash for the commodity. For the recipient, what is visible is the process of the transport of the shipment, and there exists a possibility to track the route. From the position of the customer, the service process is invisible in connection with the loading, transfer between terminals and the sorting office as well as the changes concerning the composition of the shipment itself. The customer does not require any knowledge concerning the course of the service or the role of the individual units or of the employees of a forwarding enterprise. Customers are not fully familiar with the procedures involving the supervision over the shipment, and the resources and abilities essential to the provision of a logistic service are assessed in the form of a subjective quality evaluation. The roles in the logistic service process are attributed both to customers and the employees of a logistic operator and to the carrier that acts as a subcontractor. The forwarder's duty is to prepare the parcel in such a way that it should not be damaged in the process of transport and handlings, to mark the bottom and the top of the parcel in a visible manner and, in the case of some commodities, to provide appropriate labelling, e.g. glass, ADR or a liquid. If a forwarding company has not been commissioned to write out a transport document in the form of a letter including the recipient's data, these details should be put in a visible place on the packaging (the coded address of the unloading terminal is also provided in the form of a barcode including the weight of the parcel). The recipient should sign legibly the bill of lading and, in the case of any damage to the packaging, they should mark this in the document. The bill of lading may include the delivery date including the hour and the details of those who are responsible for the unloading of the commodity from under the car loading ramp (e.g. carrying the commodity into the shop or onto the fifth floor in a block of flats). In the logistic service process, we divide the waiting time into the following periods:

1. Arrival of the carrier to collect the parcel;
2. Transport time;
3. Delivery of the shipment to the recipient (receipt confirmation).

Too long waiting time for the arrival of the carrier can complicate the work in the sending company due to the limitation of the company's working hours, e.g. till 4:00 p.m., or it may result in engaging warehouse workers in other work in the company in the time foreseen for other tasks. The customer expects reliability in the case of the receipt of the shipment, a short delivery time of 24 hours on the territory of Poland, a convenient delivery to the recipient: in the afternoon in the case of individual customers, and communication not only in the case of difficulties but also an entire system of on-line information in the process concerning the provision of a logistic service. The main task of a logistic operator in the management process is to reduce the time in the transport process: 48 hours is assumed, and in practice the time is frequently on the level 72 hours on the territory of the country. This can be changed from the real time into the time perceived: we accept the first day of sending as 0, the day of transport including the delivery time: day one, or in the case of an error, day two. In this event, there are no 72 hours for the delivery of the parcel in the logistic service process but only 24 or 48 hours. The executors of specialist services, such as the transport of dangerous, haematogenous or frozen goods enjoy a greater freedom in taking decisions, which allows a larger individualization of the service according to the customer's needs. The selection of a decision-making procedure can become the source of a competitive advantage of the logistic operator but also that of the customer who the service is dedicated to.

¹ A. Payne, *Marketing usług*. PWE, Warszawa 1997, p. 210.

² Ch. Lovelock, *Service Marketing*. Prentice Hall International, London 2010, p. 30.

³ A. Czubała, A. Jonas, T. Smoleń, J. Wiktor, *Marketing usług*. Wolters Kluwer, Kraków 2006, p. 153.

3 Customer service

In logistics, the customer service is in the focus of attention. It is perceived as a skill or ability to fulfil the requirements and expectations of customers according to the 7W rule, with the use of all and any available forms of logistic activities including transport, storing, management of supplies, information and packaging. These days, customer service is frequently referred to as customer logistics due to the activities dedicated to the customer and logistic processes that are specially designed according to the service system of a given company⁴. In the logistic perspective, the customer service focuses above all on the area of the physical distribution of goods, which is realized according to the abovementioned 7W rule⁵. The customer service can be understood very widely and its perception involves the following⁶:

- a defined conception concerning the formation of relations with customers,
- a system of direct and indirect contacts with customers,
- a set of specified functions in the company,
- a set of decisions that determine the usefulness of the place and time of the product,
- a system of the flow of the streams of goods, information and capital to the customer,
- a part of the distribution system,
- an integration of marketing and logistic processes.

The customer service is treated differently in the case of partner marketing, according to which the market success of a company depends on long-term and partner relations with the participants of the market⁷. The purpose of this conception is to provide customers with the logistic operators of value over a long period of time. For this purpose, long-term contracts are signed, where the logistic operator builds a storehouse for the needs of services provided a given company and has logistic services guaranteed for a period of 25 years. According to M. Christopher, A. Payne and D. Balantyne, customer service is in the centre of marketing-mix instruments⁸. A company that wishes to compete on the market frequently provides services to fragmented customers who buy small quantities in a dispersed area. In connection with this, delivery based on outsourcing is commissioned to those logistic operators whose representatives are often equated with those who sell given products (services). The customer service process should be carried out efficiently and in a way which ensures satisfaction to all the parties over a long period of time. Ch. Grönroos interprets the marketing of relations as a creation, maintaining and enriching the relations with the customer and other partners of the company in a way which ensures the achievement of the goals to both parties through the joint exchange and realization of the promises made⁹. Logistic operators aim at the creation of bonds with their environment. Websites include information on the social responsibility of such enterprises as DB Schenker and DP DHL; they focus on the integration of three elements: marketing, quality and customer service. Owing to the relation marketing, TSL enterprises maintain long-lasting contacts with those customers who send parcels, are interested in knowing directly opinions on the services, procedures and customer service. It is only through an identification of the customers' needs and preferences that they are able to prepare a well-tailored service which enables building a competitive advantage on the market.

The following are the most important elements of the logistic customer service¹⁰:

1. Delivery time: the time that passes from the moment of placing the order till the moment the customer receives the shipment; in accordance with the procedure, this includes: the time of order placing, the preparation time of the information included in the order accepted, the preparation time of the products ordered for shipment and the transport time of the products ordered.
2. The availability of the products in the stock: the availability of the supply which can be immediately realized from the stocks remaining in the sender's storehouse. Those enterprises that compete for the customer service guarantee and maintain the readiness to realize orders in accordance with the previously established procedure.
3. Flexibility of deliveries: the ability to adapt time, size, assortment and the method of delivery to the expectations of the customers (recipients). A high flexibility of deliveries is dependent on the cooperation with a logistic operator: deliveries at 8am or at 8pm. Handling of outstanding orders is a solution to problems in such a sphere as those orders which are not realized on time, shipments with a shortened delivery time, buffer shipments, material and product substitutions.
4. Frequency of deliveries: the number of deliveries over a given time period; this depends on the kind of products delivered and the organization system of deliveries. With a higher frequency of deliveries, the recipient keeps smaller product stocks. A correlation is taken into account between the costs of the maintenance of stocks, the ordering costs, storage and transport costs. The number of deliveries in time is considered to be one of the major measures of the customer service level achieved.
5. Reliability of deliveries: a correct realization and punctuality of the expected deliveries, that is the promptness of deliveries and the maintenance at a specified and relatively low level of losses, depletions and, in particular, human errors. An obligation to notify customers in the case when a delivery cannot be realized in the time specified on the part of a logistic operator.
6. Completeness of deliveries: an ability of deliveries to realize a complete specification of the products ordered. The consequence is an incomplete delivery: the forwarding company is fully responsible for this; it is only in the case of a loss of the parcel or damage that the logistic operator is held responsible.
7. Accuracy of deliveries: an assortment related compliance of the delivery with the order; in the case of the completion of the shipment by TSL enterprises, the operator is responsible for the realization of this element and for the punctuality of deliveries. This element of customer service indicates what the efficiency of the company's logistic system is, or what the efficiency of the chain of deliveries in the customer service is.
8. Convenience of order placing: in the case of logistic services, companies use an on-line system. When accessing the operator's server, they enter the direction and parameters of the shipment, which is to facilitate the further process of the completion of the transport by the booking the place in the line between the terminal and the sorting office.
9. Convenience of documentation: the sender writes out the bill of lading using the programme of the logistic operator. It is only the spaces connected with the parameters of the shipment and the recipient's address that are displayed. The standard document is adapted to the valid legal regulations.

The elements of customer service indicate the role of the logistic operator in the handling process of each order and customer. Service procedures are formulated in writing and are submitted to the customer in the form of a declaration of service, which protects a TSL enterprise from unreal expectations.

⁴ D. Kempny, *Logistyczna obsługa klienta*. PWE, Warszawa 2001, p. 15.

⁵ R. Matwiejczuk, *Zarządzanie marketingowo – logistyczne. Wartość i efektywność*. C.H. Beck, Warszawa 2006, p. 30.

⁶ I. Dembińska-Cyran, J. Holub-Iwan, J. Perenc, *Zarządzanie relacjami z klientem*. Difin, Warszawa 2004, p. 36.

⁷ R. Furtak, *Marketing partnerski na rynku usług*. PWE, Warszawa 2003, p. 44.

⁸ M. Christopher, A. Payne, D. Balantyne, *Relationship Marketing: Bringing Quality, Customer Service and Marketing Together*. Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford 1991, p. 20.

⁹ Ch. Grönroos, *Service Management and Marketing. Moments of Truth in Service Competition*. California State University, Wiley 2000, p. 138.

¹⁰ D. Kempny, *Logistyczna obsługa klienta*. PWE, Warszawa 2001, p. 19-24 and D. M. Lambert, J. R. Stock: *Strategic Logistics Management*, Cram101 Incorporated, Boston 2006, p. 113-116.

4 Behaviour of customers and satisfaction

The behaviours of customers on the market are defined as a total of reactions of the organism to stimuli from the environment taking a position in relation to this environment¹¹. The most frequently presented criteria which diversify those factors that form the customers' behaviour on the market include the following:¹²

1. Sources of the origin for factors divided into economic and non-economic factors;
2. Scope of the activity of factors: external and internal ones;
3. Dependence of factors from social and economic as well as cultural conditions in a given country divided into objective and subjective factors;
4. Force of the influence of factors on the diversification of consumer behaviours, divided into direct and indirect factors.

The behaviour of consumers on the market of logistic services depends on those entities which provide logistic services. The consumer has a direct contact with the carrier that represents the logistic operator. Competitive struggle is conducted not only in the scope of the price and promotion but in a widely understood customer service. Hence, there is a need for a better recognition of the behaviour of the senders and recipients of shipments; of those mechanisms that are decisive for the selection of a service and those factors that build their satisfaction and loyalty towards individual entities. It is the satisfaction from a given service that determines whether the customer will use it again. The model of their behaviour should be explained. Satisfaction can be interpreted as an emotional reaction to comparative processes that are initiated by the customer and which consist in a comparison of the customer's experiences and feelings in connection with the consumption of a product or service with expectations, individual norms or a specific model of evaluation¹³. The experiences and impressions in connection with the consumption of a given product or service constitute the function not only of the quality of the product itself or the technical quality of the service but also the quality of service as well as the contact and communication offered to the customer¹⁴. Satisfaction results not only from an evaluation of a service in accordance with a certain previously accepted or formed model, but it results from an evaluation of the course of the service provision process itself. Both these dimensions of satisfaction will be different in the perspective of the formation of a relation between the sender and the logistic operator as well as between the logistic operator and the recipient of the shipment. Satisfaction connected with the service may build loyalty towards the brand or a given logistic operator. On the other hand, its non-presence may provoke specific behaviours, such as complaints, a change of the contractor or an expression of negative opinions¹⁵. Behaviours in logistic services do not concern the registered office or the infrastructure; in the majority of cases, the customer has no contact with these. Satisfaction connected with the process of service may constitute a source of loyalty towards a given logistic operator. From the perspective of the contractor operating on the TSL market, the knowledge of expectations on the part of the sender and recipient in connection with the service process is especially important. Efforts at the fulfilment of these may constitute a significant way to build a competitive advantage on the TSL market and to create a positive relation in the whole chain of deliveries. In the concept of the marketing of relations, it is to be stated that one of the key objectives of a TSL enterprise is building long-term relations with the senders of parcels on the market to provide them with increasing benefits and satisfaction resulting from these. The

creation and maintaining of relations focuses on keeping customers, as logistic operators often adapt their line systems to the service of customer groups, e.g. food producers in deliveries supermarket chains. In this way, a food producer starts cooperation with a specific logistic operator who takes over cargo streams and wins their loyalty. The appreciation of senders so that they should think that they are in the centre of attention is the crucial element in the conception of relation marketing. The basis of the conception is the assumption of the possibility and necessity to maintain direct contacts between the contractor and the client. Logistic operators seek possibilities of competitive advantage and a market success. The consumer's behaviour is not only a decision-making process but also a widely understood pre-transaction, transaction and post-transaction behaviour. The decision-making process commences with the recognition of the problem of the sender, who initiates a search of those alternatives which can fulfil a specific need. Once the possible solutions have been listed, there follows an assessment of the carrier with the use of an appropriate decision-making rule, individual variants and the selection of one which corresponds best to the customer's expectations from the perspective of this customer. The customers of the TSL market present the following expectations in the decision-making process:

1. Duration of the process: on the territory of the country, the majority of logistic operators declare transport within 24 hours; due to the high value of the product transported, longer periods or product specifications (over-dimensional goods) are acceptable.
2. Information context of processes: customers do not know the logistic system of a TSL enterprise; communication over the Internet, on-line ordering of services, tracking the shipment over the Internet, contact with a logistic operator's employee.
3. Set of alternatives: a specific number of alternatives is expected, too small a number worsens the assessment of the process, the customer wishes to know the differences between the alternatives and the benefits offered.
4. Possibility to realize additional objectives, ones which are not directly connected with the functions realized by the service: packaging and customizing of products, labelling of products or testing of new channels of distribution.
5. Sense of certainty or risk connected with the process: a guaranteed timely delivery, a risk of the documents or goods not being delivered involves penalties or the loss of the recipient who perceives the delivery through the prism of the logistic operator.
6. Operational efficiency of the logistic operator: ensuring clear and transparent information on the service and the rules of its provision, availability of the service, reaction to customers' queries and expectations, also the competences of the personnel.

The process of taking decisions by companies in logistic services is usually very complex. It is realized on many planes. Customers themselves present a wide spectrum of behaviours connected with the selection of a logistic operator.

5 Results of a survey among the customers of TSL enterprises

From the perspective of the concept of logistics, logistic service is the key indicator of the orientation towards the customer. It constitutes the basic instrument to gain and maintain customers, which is connected with ensuring the determinants for the logistics of distribution to meet the recipients' expectations. Guaranteeing an adequate level of the service is possible through the provision of a service which is consistent with the customer's needs and by the provision of an added value in an integrated chain of deliveries¹⁶. The survey was carried out in the period from January to February 2013 with the method of indirect poll measurements among those customers who collect parcels delivered by TSL enterprises. 109 people who had been selected

¹¹ P. Gajewski, *Zachowanie się konsumenta a współczesny marketing*. Uniwersytet Łódzki, Łódź 1994, p. 7.

¹² J. Kramer, *Badanie rynkowe i marketingowe*. PWE, Warszawa 1994, p. 266.

¹³ K. Mazurek-Lopacińska, *Zachowanie nabywców i ich konsekwencje marketingowe*. PWE, Warszawa 2003, p. 305.

¹⁴ E. Rudawska, *Loyalność klientów*. PWE, Warszawa 2005, p. 91.

¹⁵ A. Jachnis, *Psychologia konsumenta. Psychologiczne i socjologiczne uwarunkowania zachowań konsumenckich*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Branta, Bydgoszcz-Warszawa 2007, p. 208.

¹⁶ R. Matwiejczuk, *Orientacja na klienta w logistyce a zmiany zarządzaniu przedsiębiorstwem*. „Logistyka” 1/2013, p. 21-22.

with the non-random sample selection method participated in the survey. Those people who do not use the services of TSL enterprises had been previously eliminated. The respondents were adult people who reside on the territory of Zachodniopomorskie Province. The research tool was a specially construed questionnaire form. The selection of the respondents was coincidental, but the sample did not meet the requirements of a representative sample due to the area limitations, yet the survey results show specific dependences. The participants were as follows: 53.21% women and 46.79% men, who are the residents: of towns with over 100 thousand residents: 31.25%, of localities from 50 to 100 thousand residents: 12.84%, of localities from 20 to 50 thousand residents: 15.6%, of localities from 5 to 20 thousand residents: 3.67%, of localities from 2 to 5 thousand residents: 7.34% and of villages: 29.36%. The age range was as follows: below 20 years: 1.83%, from 21 years to 30 years: 64.22%, from 31 years to 40 years: 33.03% and above 40 years 0.92%. In the case of the individual customers, the majority of them are the recipients of parcels: 91.74%, and the senders constitute 17.43%. A part of the respondents perform the role of senders and recipients. 2.75% are intensive users of the services of forwarding companies, those who use their services very frequently. Average customers constitute 37.61% (they send or receive parcels a minimum once a month). The majority of the respondents are occasional customers: 59.63% who rarely use services provided by forwarding companies. The weight of shipments is as follows: parcels up to 1 kg: 56.88%, parcels from 1 kg to 5 kg: 36.7% and above 4 kg: 6.42%. The respondents most frequently used the following TSL enterprises: DP DHL: 52.29%, Poczta Polska: 45.87%, Siódemka: 22.02%, UPS: 13.76%, DPD: 3.67%, OPEK: 2.75% and others: 0.92%.

With the selection of a TSL enterprise, the respondents would be guided by the following criteria:

- time of completion: 70.64%;
- price of service: 62.38%;
- no damages: 33.94%;
- quality of services provided: 33.03%;
- low percentage of complaints: 8.26%;
- comprehensiveness of the offer: 4.59%.

The respondents evaluated those companies that provide transport services in the scale ranging from 1: very low, 2: low, 3: average, 4: good, 5: very high, whereas 0 meant no opinion on this issue. Table 1 presents the distribution of marks and the result.

Table 1. Criteria of the evaluation of services provided by TSL enterprises and evaluation

Criterion of service	Average mark	0	1	2	3	4	5
Time of completion	4.16	0	0	5	13	61	30
Reliability of completion	4.01	1	0	2	25	51	30
Availability	3.94	0	1	7	21	48	32
Convenience	3.97	1	3	4	19	44	37
Hours of delivery	3.55	1	3	14	29	45	17
Communication with employee	3.67	5	2	13	24	43	22
Communication over the Internet	3.89	6	3	7	20	41	32
Quality of realization	4.06	2	0	5	19	47	36

Source: Author's own study on the grounds of the survey conducted in the period from January to February 2013

The time of deliveries, the quality of the completion of the service and reliability ranked the highest: above the good mark. The delivery hours and communication with an employee ranked the lowest. This also results from the fact that 31.19% of the

respondents collect the parcel at the courier's office and 68.81% receive the parcel via the courier. In the case of the evaluation of the level of customer service on the part of TSL enterprises, the average of marks is considerably lower. This is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Evaluation of the level of customer service by TSL enterprises

Level of customer service	Average evaluation	0	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge and competences, professionalism, knowledge of substantive issues	3.5	5	2	10	36	46	10
Ability to cooperate: friendly procedures, realization of unconventional orders, personal manners	3.71	2	4	68	28	48	21
General quality of service, openness, kindness, commitment	3.68	1	3	63	30	52	17
To what degree do you evaluate the transport of parcels in undamaged condition?	3.98	1	1	68	18	52	31
How you evaluate the quality of services by courier companies on the Polish market?	3.7	2	0	69	29	63	9
How you evaluate the use of the Internet by the forwarding company?	3.83	6	2	82	21	46	26

Source: Author's own study on the grounds of the survey conducted in the period from January to February 2013

The same grading scale was used as in the previous survey. The knowledge and competences as well as the professionalism of employees in the TSL enterprises ranked the lowest. The transport of parcels in an undamaged condition ranked the highest. The evaluation of the use of the Internet by the forwarding company is also above the average: 74.31% of the respondents declare that they track the route of the parcel over the Internet. Only 7.34% of the respondents had never submitted a complaint. The main causes include damage to the commodity: 54.13%, a delayed delivery: 35.78% and missing parcels: 28.44%. There are no complaints concerning the price of the freight and the quality of the service.

6 Conclusions

Those logistic companies which operate the market of parcels seek to guarantee the highest quality of their services. However, the survey results obtained indicate continuously increasing demands on the part of customers. When choosing a company, customers are above all guided by the time of completion, the price of the service, no damages in the process of transport and the quality of the services provided. Individual customers are little interested in the comprehensiveness of the offer in connection with the type of parcels sent. The respondents assessed the completion time of a specific service on the level of 4.16, the quality on the level of 4.06 and the reliability of the service on the level of 4.01. The respondents evaluated the lowest the hours of delivery (3.55), which are not adapted to the B2C market operated; hence, as many as 31.19% of the respondents collect parcels in the office of the shipping company. The communication with an employee (3.67) ranked the lowest, as well. Communication over the Internet comes out considerably better: on the level of 3.83. 74.31% of the recipients declare that they track the shipment on the websites of a logistic operator.

Unfortunately, there was a very low evaluation of the employees of TSL enterprises, such as their professionalism, ability to cooperate, and such features as openness, kindness and commitment. TSL enterprises are making efforts to improve the process of logistic customer service, yet the requirements are constantly increasing. As shown by the results, it is the recipients of parcels who in particular deserve an improvement of the quality of the service which is not adapted to their group. In spite of the fact that it is not them who pay for the service in the majority of cases, they can decide about the selection of a logistic operator. In connection with this, efforts need to be undertaken aiming at an improvement of the entire process in the chain of deliveries.

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