

## **“MAIN SINS” IN THE CUSTOMER SERVICE IN THE CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATION**

**Wioletta WEREDA**

*Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities  
2 Konarskiego, 08-110 Siedlce, PL  
weredawioletta@tlen.pl*

**Monika GRZYBOWSKA**

*Warsaw School of Economics, Collegium of World Economy  
162 al. Niepodległości, 02-554 Warsaw, PL  
monika.grzybowska@tlen.pl*

**Abstract.** *The purpose of this article is to present the customer service process as yet imperfect part of the sales practice in contemporary international organizations. The pre and after sales process so-called the Sales Cycle is still underestimated. Consumers increasingly indicate what has the greatest impact on their satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Many international studies prove that consumers' satisfaction increases when companies meet their four key needs: the personnel professional competences, the ease of purchase, the initiative from the customer service employees in relation to the customer and the personalization of the offer. Consumers, in the majority, expect more initiative from the customer service side and the organization as a whole and this may cause some mistakes. The authors defined them as "main sins" in the customer service, based on the secondary and own researches. These sins can be viewed from the point of the sales process and from the overall organizational management. It has been discussed in various researches that the fewer mistakes made during the sales process the higher customers' retention and larger profit growth in the organization. Based on the limitations of this study, future research could expand by conducting a much larger survey across other Voivodships in Poland and a greater number of organizations in different activity areas.*

**Keywords:** *customer service; client dissatisfaction; failures in customer service; contemporary organization.*

### **Introduction**

International researches show that the essential element of sales in the contemporary organization is the customer service in the broad meaning (Schlesinger & Heskett, 1991, pp.35-38). The way to distinguish yourself from the competitors is to add extra value for the customer who will see excellence in the buying process (Griffiths, Elson, & Amos, 2005, p.59; Grönroos, 1994, p.8). It has been also noticed that mistakes made by the customer service and management can negatively affect the customers' experience (Tax, Brown & Chandrashekar, 1998,

p.60). In consequences, organizations may lose the buyers and thus their revenue can also decrease (Kim, 1997, p.77). The purpose of this article is to present knowledge, in both theoretical and practical terms, about the role of the customer service in the contemporary organization, analyze it and identify mistakes that can cause an undesirable impact on sales results. It has been argued in various researches that the higher standard of the customer service in the organization, the fewer mistakes made during the sales process and thus the higher customers' retention and profit growth. (Verhoef, 2003, p.33; Williams & Naumann, 2011, p.31; Kim, 1997, p.77).

### **Customer service – the real source of enterprises**

The role of the customer service is to satisfy clients' needs during the whole purchase process (Oloruntoba & Gray, 2009, p.487). The excellent customer service is the service that makes a positive and long-lasting impression and it is much more than a simple courtesy. It also means to go beyond their expectations in such a way that the organization is being recognized as the one which is worth doing business with. The excellent customer service means to look for unusual and unexpected ways of pleasing customers and surprising them, so they keep only a positive experience with the organization (Wereda & Grzybowska, 2014 p.192).

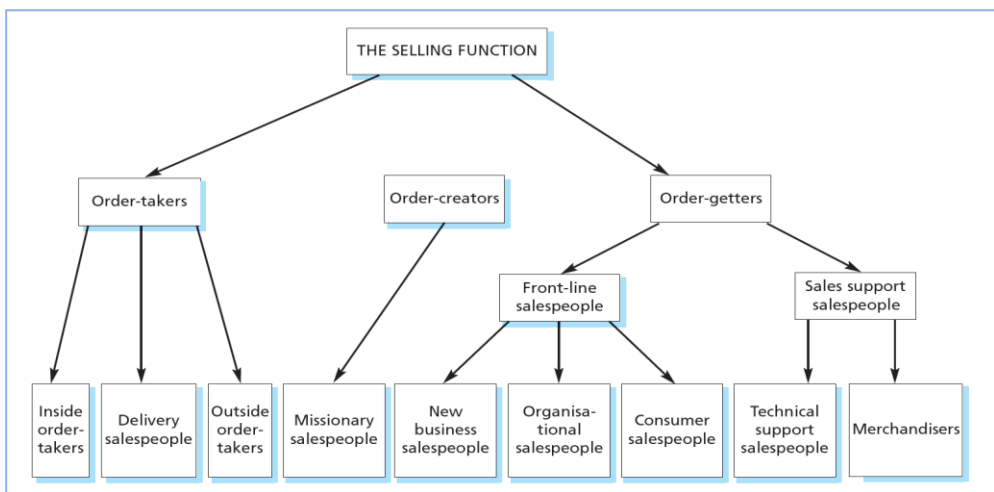
The customer service is a broad subject which is a part of the sales process. Particularly, it is important in relationship sales, because it allows to maintain existing customers and to establish new contacts with prospective buyers. This topic is too broad to be ignored (Sobczak-Matysiak, 1998, p.7).

The customer service from the customer's perspective should be something special and unforgettable for them. It's much more than a good impression or a nice attitude. The customer must feel honored (Zemke, 2005, p.9). The fulfilment of customers' needs has to be done in such a way that they feel that the seller is not only an ordinary trader but that he/ she wants all the best for them, even in the process of warranty or complaint.

In general terms, customer service covers all kinds of activities a seller takes to satisfy a customer. All these activities greatly influence the value of the customer relationship with the seller. Services provided by the seller to the customer in order to meet their expectations include, but are not limited to, credits, guarantees, invoices, packaging, product availability, delivery, claims, guarantees, etc. (Futrell, 2004, p.472). If the customer returns to the point of sale and still has confidence in the seller, then the organization can conclude that it approaches customers, professionally. Many companies note that today's customers have much less time than they used to, so if the seller does not get their trust quickly, potential buyers will go to the competition (Baird & Gonzalez-Wertz, 2011, p.20). Still, a large number of companies are interested in maximum current sales without thinking about what will happen next. Meanwhile, with more attention paid to its customers, the existing results would improve significantly (Williams & Naumann, 2011, p.25).

According to a study presented by Marshall, Goebel and Moncrief (2003) sales managers when asked to identify the skills and knowledge required to be successful in customer service and selling, indicated the following skills: follow-up skills, listening skills, ability to adapt sales style from situation to situation, tenacity – sticking to the task, organizational skills, verbal communication skills, proficiency in interacting with people at all levels within an organization, demonstrated ability to overcome objections. Closing skills. Personal planning and time management skills (Marshall, Goebel & Moncrief, 2003, pp.247-255).

Due to the process of selling there is a diverse nature of the buying situation. Representatives of the organization can perform many types of selling jobs. Figure 1 shows that there is a fundamental distinction between order-takers, order-creators, and order-getters.



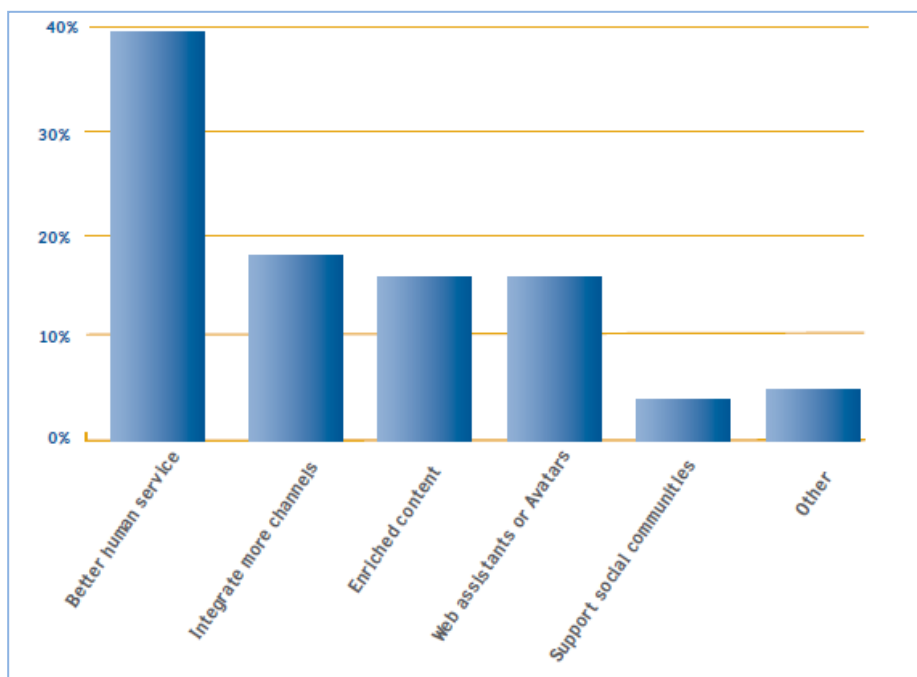
**Figure 1. Phases of customer service relations in the selling process**  
(Jobber & Lancaster, 2009, p.8)

Jobber and Lancaster (2009) describe that order-takers respond to already committed customers; order-creators do not directly receive orders since they talk to specifiers rather than buyers; while order-getters attempt to persuade customers to place an order directly. There are three types of order-takers: inside order-takers, delivery salespeople and outside order-takers. Order-creators are termed missionary salespeople. Finally, order-getters are either front-line salespeople consisting of new business, organizational or consumer salespeople, or sales support salespeople who can be either technical support salespeople or merchandisers (Jobber & Lancaster, 2009, pp.8-9).

Therefore, all of the representatives should cooperate with customers and provide professional customer service to create relationship and trust between clients and organization. Additionally, they all should be aware of the costs of losing customers if they make mistakes.

**“Main sins” in the customer service – general description**

Customers have become more aware of any organization's offer. They have an access to all sources of information thanks to the global net. Therefore, the market has become challenging for companies (Rundh, 2011, p.260). But, there is one thing that may decide on winning the customer – it is a professional customer service which enables avoiding mistakes (Walsh & Gordon, 2010, p.225). As per Report (2009) by Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories, international consumer surveys conducted in 16 industrialized countries shows that insufficient customer service has resulted in losses of up to \$338.5 billion annually. They are associated with the complete abandonment of the company's services or the passing of customers to the competition due to their bad experiences. In the surveyed countries, the most vulnerable sectors are financial services, cable and satellite TV providers, and telecommunications companies. According to the study, the average value of each lost customer is \$243 per year. Losses are defined as the transfer of transactions to competition (63% of consumers) and the abandonment of services (37% of consumers). Consumers were asked about their expectations and suggestions for changes needed to improve the quality of their customer service experience. The study was conducted in 16 countries: Australia, Brazil, China, Czech Republic, France, Netherlands, India, Canada, Mexico, Germany, New Zealand, Poland, Russia, USA, UK and Italy. The survey covered 8,800 consumers from 16 countries, representing each age and income group (minimum 500 people in each country surveyed). Based on the answers the report: “The Cost of Poor Customer Service: The Economic Impact of the Customer Experience and Engagement” was created. During the survey, consumers were asked about the frequency of business contacts via websites, Contact Centers or mobile devices. They were also asked to identify the impact of these contacts on their purchasing decisions and how important direct customer service is. Of course, all respondents pointed out that the biggest improvement they expect is customer service and this form is most suitable for them in the customer-seller relationship (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Most sought improvements**  
(Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories, 2009, p. 8)

Moreover, consumers are remarkably consistent in citing key reasons that they leave. Assisted service is well developed, with the overwhelming majority of consumers say their most satisfying experience occurred because of a capable and competent customer service representative. But self-service that is not intelligently integrated with assisted service is a key area of concern. Consumers feel the most significant root causes of poor service are: being trapped in automated self-service; being forced to wait too long for service; repeating themselves; representatives that lack the skills to answer their inquiry (Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories, 2009, p.9).

Poor service in customer care leads to making mistakes in this process. These mistakes become “main sins” of the organization that can result in customer outflow and profit loss. The “sins” in the customer service can be viewed from two aspects: the sales process, and the overall management of the organization.

#### ***“Sins” from the aspect of the sales process***

In order to have a good relationship between the customer and the seller, it is important to be aware what are “dos and don’ts” in these contacts. If the seller knows them, they can be easier avoided (Zemke, 2005, pp.23-24). These “sins” are as follows:

No product information. The worst of possible statements from the salesmen's mouth is the phrase "I do not know" (Peel, 1993, p.17). This leaves the customer unanswered and with the impression of lack of professionalism within the organization. Even if the seller does not know the, he/she should ensure that get from the other colleague and passes it on to the customer instantly.

No interest. Every customer would like to feel the focus of the seller. If the seller, when talking to customers, makes it clear to them that he/she is somewhere else or would prefer to be somewhere else, the customer automatically does not want to pay attention to the product. If the client is treated with attention, it confirms one's opinion that he/she make a good choice using services of this seller.

Lack of attention. Customers often want to draw attention to being in the spotlight, and if the seller is disdainful, this relationship leads to failure. Private phone conversations or conversations with co-workers are forbidden. If this is the case, the customer feels neglected and in this case is right.

Disregard and lack of friendly attitude. Clients more than we seem are to pay attention to the indirect and direct signals we send them (Anaza, 2012 p.619). The seller should put aside his/her subjective opinion about the client. Showing negative attitudes cannot take place in the customer-seller relationship. The customer will remember the seller's negative behavior rather than the positive, which may directly affect their subsequent relationship.

Failure and arrogance. The seller should not rush the sales process. Such seller can be considered intrusive and even arrogant.

Rude attitude. The seller must be polite and kind to the client at all times. If the seller expresses disapproval or anger with the clients, because clients cannot determine their needs, the client will definitely go to the competitor that will show more patience.

No equal treatment. Regardless of a degree of affluence client represent, at what age they are, or with what education, they want to be treated professionally. The seller should not treat people in smart suits better than people in a casual outfit. The same applies to the general appearance. It turns out that at the first glance the inconspicuous and poorly promising customer will buy from us more than a middle-aged, rich businessman.

No re-invitation. Every seller should behave in such a way that the customers know they can always return to the company. There should be no situation where the customers feel as unwanted visitors. They will not comeback.

Different opinions from the customer and the seller. The worst thing to do is to have a discussion between the seller and the customer when they are different. Although the customer is not always right, it is better not to persuade to change his or her mind because the client may feel offended.

No respect for the customer. Every person has only twenty-four hours per day, so every minute is precious. Respecting the time of another person, being not late for meetings, etc. will make customer reciprocate.

***"Sins" from the aspect of the overall management errors***

*From the aspect of the overall management errors*, it can be seen that customer service standards depend on many factors. It is not enough to hire a professional and pleasant staff. Excellent customer service is a result of creating a vision, strategy, and tactics for the organization as a whole (Mancini, 2010, pp.1-5). Although, companies understand what customer service is and the importance of its high standard, it is not always easy to achieve the main goals of the organization. Hyken (2016) lists several main reasons for the inability to reach the company's goal, due to overall management error. They become "major sins" in a contemporary organization and these include:

No vision and mission. Vision and mission should be clearly and briefly defined so that employees understand them, try to identify and direct themselves throughout the customer service process. The vision and mission that comes to their mind should help to make the right decision in critical situations. A customer service vision can be included in the company's mission. In the restaurant, the vision can be a picture of a customer who comes up with the opinion that he/ she has never eaten such a great dinner, before. The mission, therefore, will be to prepare an excellent quality meal combined with a high level of service throughout the customer's stay in the restaurant. In a medical company, the vision may be a better health for people, and the mission the thinking of "my behavior can influence the patient's health." Making the employee aware of the vision and mission of the company will have a positive impact on the decision making, and therefore the perception of the customer as an important link for the organization.

The company does not employ customer-oriented people. In the customer service department, where the most important element is building long-term relationships, it is important to attract people who have the personality traits necessary to work with clients (Lin, 2008, p.270). These qualities are called soft skills as they are elements of an employee's personality. They include communication and empathy and a value system that is positive and open to other people. They become more important than formal competencies such as education, certificates gained during training on the use of systems, projects or applications.

No training in the area of customer service standards. Companies usually implement hard skills training such as: using computer systems: e.g.: CRM, MS Excel, SAP, etc. They forget about training, which is aimed at providing clients with positive experiences and improving the standards and quality of their service. This training helps to develop behaviors that bring positive impressions to the customer. Proper client greetings in the workplace, combined with a nice smile, followed by a phone call and email communication, builds an image of the company.

This image will influence the buyer's decision whether he or she wants to continue working with the company or leave it for the competition.

Training only at the beginning of work. Companies that take a new employee for work, usually carry out initial training. However, they forget that this knowledge can vanish with time. "The sales department and sales representative are highly independent individuals, so their self-efficacy might only be motivated via continuous training and pressure of performance" (Lin, 2008, p.282). The business environment is constantly changing: its customers, competitors, market conditions, or stakeholders. Therefore, cyclical training should be provided to refresh this knowledge, remind of the vision and mission of the organization, and continuously improve the way of working with clients.

There is no leader who is a model and example. Many companies forget that in order to achieve excellent customer service, the managers responsible for quality should be an example to the group (Lin, 2008 p.270). They should be prepared for this role and, above all, have appropriate predispositions of personality. They should be able to answer difficult customer service questions, be supportive in problematic situations in which an employee is involved, and above all the customers themselves. The leader should have such characteristics as the ability to focus around and directing the group, knowledge of the merits, honesty, reliability, and certainty that builds the confidence within the group. A leader with such qualities can improve service standards to the highest levels because the customer will feel secure and trustworthy.

Companies forget the achievements of employees. Companies should not forget about celebrating the successes of their employees (House, 2003, p.24). Big and little accomplishments are equally important. Compliments from customers are very important achievements as well as from managers who set the path that workers should follow to contribute to the success of the entire organization.

The organization should remember that not only the dedicated customer service department is responsible for customer service. Every department and person in a company that directly or indirectly meets with the customer represents the customer service (Grzybowska, Radzko & Wereda, 2012, pp.169-170). The seller who goes to the customer with the offer and the way he/she looks and speaks builds the image of the company in the customer's head. The marketing department that compiles the trade offers must take into account not only the business interest but also the customers. The financial department that communicates with the customer about unpaid invoices or payment inaccuracies, must also deal with the issue without conflict. In general, every employee who encounters a customer in his/ her work is a customer service member, and this should be a standard adopted by the entire organization.

Companies treat employees inadequately and expect from them good customer treatment. Employees who work in a bad atmosphere and are not treated adequately will not be able to provide customers with a positive experience. This



means that within the company there must be very high standards of communication and a respectful organizational culture so that employees can translate the same pattern into customer treatment (Jeon & Choi, 2012, p.336). Companies should remember that the customers will feel the atmosphere inside the company and on this basis will decide whether they want to continue the cooperation with the organization, or not.

Companies feel they have good customer service standards, contrary to their customers' views (Bandy, 2003, p.323). Business well-being can be built when the company relies solely on its own guess without conducting any customer satisfaction surveys. Negative results are much better than none, as the first one shows a room for improvement. Losing contact with the reality can lead to customers' outflow. It is therefore important to conduct periodic surveys of customer satisfaction and even customer experience, analyze their results, and submit requests to all stakeholders. This will allow to maintain those processes that have been rated positively and to improve those that have had insufficient results. Only systematically conducted research and their analyses will keep up with the needs of customers and thus maintain a competitive advantage in the market.

Companies are focused on quick profit, not on building relationships with customers. If the purpose of a company is to exist in a long run, it should build long-term relationships with customers (Kim, 1997, p.78). Long-term relationships are based on building trust in the organization and its brand in the eyes of customers. The organization cannot think about doing so-called "fast money". Concentrating on short-term effects mean manipulating the customers in a way that only organization will benefit. This may involve rapid sales and contracts, which are difficult to withdraw for the customer. Such customers most probably will never come back to place another order. A company that works in line with its long-term customers' satisfaction strategy builds a good reputation in their eyes and thus strengthens trust and loyalty among customers. The customers become the best marketing and PR department that the business can afford at the low cost of promotion (Hyken, 2016).

### **Mistakes and failures in the sale and the customer service – a case study of the own research**

For the purpose of the article, the authors conducted interviews addressed to sales managers (top and middle level) of medium and large enterprises from the Mazovian Voivodship, Poland. The research was carried out between January and February 2017. To determine the role and the importance of errors made in the sales process in the study conducted, the following were diagnosed: whether the managers know the customer service code and whether it is implemented in their companies; whether the respondents are able to identify professional customer service; are managers aware of salespeople customer service errors?

As a result of conducted research, 20 interviews were used to analyze and draw conclusions. Table 1 shows the details of the study performed.

**Table 1. Description of the case study (own research)**

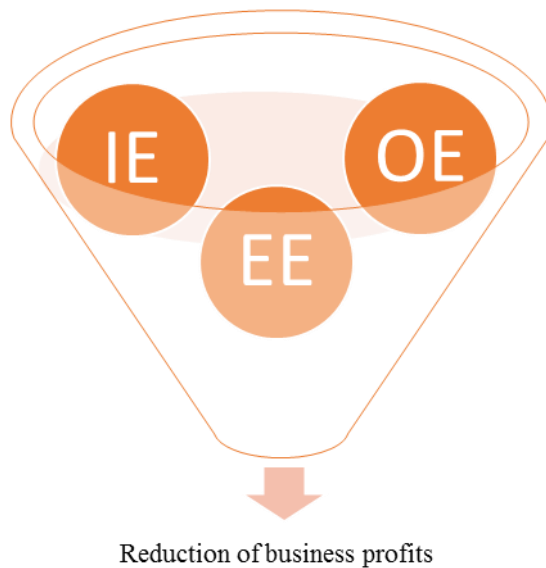
Area	Description
Scope of the presented study	Errors committed in the customer service process.
Research tool	Direct interview.
Period of the research	2 months (from 10.01.2017 to 21.02.2017).
Study population	Managers from the Polish enterprises of the highest and middle level from the Mazovian Voivodship, who make decisions in marketing and sales.
Criteria for selecting a trial sample	Availability of respondents.
Sample size	20 top and middle-level managers of production and service companies.
Types of enterprises managed by the surveyed managers	By criteria such as type of business (large 10 managers, middle enterprises 10 managers). All researched managers were sales and customer service managers or CEOs.
Methods of conducting research	Twenty interviews were conducted during fairs, scientific conferences and directly at the managers' workplaces. Respondents personally answered questions, meaning that the survey was appropriate.
Results of the study	Managers answered questions honestly, giving their own suggestions and examples from their own experience.

Some interviewees noted that they knew the customer service code, but in the context of the interviews, they were fluent in their work because they did not appear in the written format. In addition, when defining professionalism in the customer service, the following were the main elements enlisted:

General skills, including soft skills: impeccable external image neat appearance building trust; ability to build relationships and very good communicativeness; customer focus and listening; ability to deal with stress and conflict in the workplace; negotiating skills with each client (non-conflict, passive, aggressive, etc.); ability to manage their own time and punctuality; ability to actively listen to employees and customers; respond to customer feedback and promptly handle complaints; build trust in the team in which you work; auto-determination and discipline in sales; friendly and cultured approach to the client; honesty and respect towards the customer as a human being, not a profitmaking person; impatience in pursuit of the goal; sense of humor and attitude towards the client and not for his own benefit.

Additional skills: knowledge of the company and its marketing information; knowledge of the product offer on a regular basis; ability to gain knowledge of competition; obtaining information from the market and changing customer needs; knowledge of foreign languages; availability for participation in fairs, exhibitions; fast learning ability and willingness to improve their qualifications; and willingness to improve their qualifications.

An in the area of errors, mainly concerning sales and the customer service elements, respondents emphasized three types of them: organizational, interpersonal and economic. Figure 3 shows these errors:



**Figure 3. Errors committed in the sales process and the customer service (OE-organizational errors; IE - interpersonal errors; EE - economic errors)**

Organizational errors were mainly: conducting business conversations with the wrong customer; promising beyond the possibilities – e.g. offering deadlines for the execution of the order not in line with the actual time required to prepare the product (no contact with the production department in cases of very unusual orders); dealing with customers who have never had any orders or orders were only symbolic (e.g. too difficult to do for the current supplier); lack of working time organization and large arrears in the sales process; failure to meet the contract time from acceptance of the order to deliver the goods to the customer; hastening the customer to make a purchase decision; lack of knowledge of the offer; asking too many closed questions when researching customer needs.

Interpersonal errors according to the surveyed managers are: improper communication between the seller and the customer; arrogance and lack of

diplomacy in the communication process; lack of control of own behavior and reaction (often too much irritation and even frustration of the seller); lack of sensitivity and little patience in the sales process; lack of attention and chaotic behavior; too much "ego" of the seller and exuberant self-confidence; lies in sales promises.

Economic errors: focus on a quick one-off result rather than building loyalty; inadequate prices for product/service quality; focus on the performance of sales tasks and own commission; the sale of low-cost products (so-called "massive products") to which customers have claims and frequent complaints; accepting individual orders for products that require a significant amount of time and labor at a relatively low price level for the product.

## Conclusions

With the various ways of selling, attention should be paid on the quality of services. This quality is built on a number of factors, ranging from the high standards of materials that product is made its functionality and ease of use, the sense of security, and what follows – of an excellent and professional customer service (Burnett, 2006 pp.89-90).

The results of good customer service are the increase in sales and in numbers of customers. In a global, competitive market, a major focus should be placed on customers' needs and the quality of customer service. Meet their requirements, strive to achieve their satisfaction and, create an excellent experience are the most effective way to achieve the above mentioned.

To achieve such service, the organizations, have to provide constant training for modern sellers to reduce the number of mistakes made in customer service that can discourage clients from placing purchase orders, next causing the customers outflow and eventually profit decrease.

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