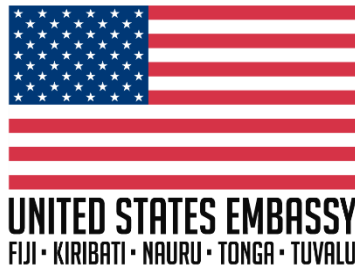




PACIFIC TOURISM
ORGANISATION



SPTO SME Recovery Toolkit

Chapter 6: Customer Service

Contents

What is good customer service?	4
Bookings and enquiries	5
A Warm Welcome	6
Transport and equipment.....	7
Activities and food	8
Good Guiding Practices	9
Training Needs for staff and guides	10
Building reputation and trust	10
Delivering quality service during the pandemic	12
Chapter 6: Key takeaways	13

Tools used for this chapter:

6.0	Checklist: Customer Service
-----	-----------------------------

Chapter 6: Customer service and communications



The last chapter of the handbook informed you on ways to bring your business onto the market to make it more easily accessible to customers and to reach a wider audience, and therefore more sales. This will aid in recovering from the impact of COVID-19 on your business.



In this chapter you will find a general guide to customer service and how to provide quality service to customers. At the end of the chapter, you will have gained **a clear understanding of the role played by staff**, particularly tour guides, in the delivery of quality service and **what practices to adopt to build reputation and trust** with your customers.

How to use this chapter of the handbook:

Read through each element of customer service and note the actions that you need to take to ensure that you can deliver high standards of customer service. Use the checklist at the end to help you to track progress.

What is good customer service?

Every interaction is a critical element of service delivery!

Nowadays there is increasing pressure on service providers to meet and exceed customer expectations. Customers don't just want a regular experience; they want a **great** experience! In this digital era customer feedback is instantly visible and available to anyone in the world. Just like with health and safety, customer service doesn't just happen; it requires you to think through the entire customer journey and put in place protocols and practices that will ensure they have an excellent experience. Remember that **ground agents and operators are customers as well** as tourists!

To ensure good customer service you need to:

Provide a **warm welcome** right through to a warm farewell.

Anticipate customer needs: what visitors need to be satisfied at all times.

Manage customer expectations, brief them on what they will see and do and timings of food service etc, plus reassure them and **respond to their needs** at all times.

Staff should be well presented, knowledgeable and friendly but remain professional.

Anticipating Customer Needs

It is important to be proactive and think ahead about what tourists may need to ensure that they are comfortable. Simple provisions and explanations can help them to adjust to their new surroundings.

Customer needs

Manage expectations:

Ensure that you fully explain what is involved / included; never assume that they know exactly what to expect.

Ask them if they have any questions or additional needs for example, dietary requirements, health conditions.

Welfare:

Help customers to stay hydrated and cope with the tropical climate as it may be new to them. Ensure access to water and shade (where possible)

Ensure that they have the right equipment / clothing for taking part in activities safely e.g., walking shoes for hiking, a change of clothes.



Bookings and enquiries



A Warm Welcome

A culturally appropriate greeting for both hosts and guests is really important for all parties to feel comfortable, understand and respect each other's culture. Ensure staff understand how to welcome customers and explain the cultural significance and meaning behind traditional greetings.



- Anticipate arrival times and ensure there is always a staff member ready and waiting to receive / meet and greet customers. Never leave them waiting!



- Ensure that staff are well presented as this creates the first impression of the business. The most important aspect is clean clothing and good personal hygiene. Avoid eating and drinking in front of tourists (unless part of the experience!)



- Always seek to understand how guests are feeling. For example, if they have had a stressful or long journey an extra smile or offer of a drink will go a long way.



- If you are running an accommodation business ensure that you make it clear when staff are available for assistance and how they can reach them.



Transport and equipment



•All transport and equipment must always be clean, in good working order and comply with regulations. All premises that customers interact with must be clean and tidy. Particular attention should be paid to the enhanced cleaning, physical spacing and sanitizing protocols relating to COVID-19.



•Visible evidence that the business is respectful of the environment is also important, for example reusable / natural packaging, refillable dispensers and waste bins.



•Drivers / boat operators must be trained to provide customer service as they are a critical part of the experience. Even if there are language barriers between drivers and tourists body language can make a great difference to how a customer feels.



•Signs and visual aids such as safety cards are internationally recognisable and will ensure that customers receive essential information on how to stay safe and comfortable.

Credit: David Kirkland & SPTO



Activities and food



Activities and services should be **exactly as described** and delivered to the same high standard **every time**! Carefully check that your activity matches the product description.



Ensure that any staff or other people involved in the delivery of an activity are trained or aware of how to deliver quality service and **never assume** that they know how to do this!



Serving food provides a great opportunity to showcase the Pacific culture and cuisine. Businesses should aim to create happy food memories. Aim to provide reusable utensils and crockery as tourists do not want to feel that they are creating a waste problem.

Credit: David Kirkland & SPTO



Good Guiding Practices

“Guides are so important and beneficial for your business. You really need to make them feel loved and important”

General Manager, Intrepid

Guides are incredibly important to your business as they are in front of the customers and can make or break the tourist experience. Guides should be knowledgeable and act as **‘engaging interpreters’** for customers and use storytelling to create interest. Good guiding is about connecting customers with what they are seeing and experiencing.

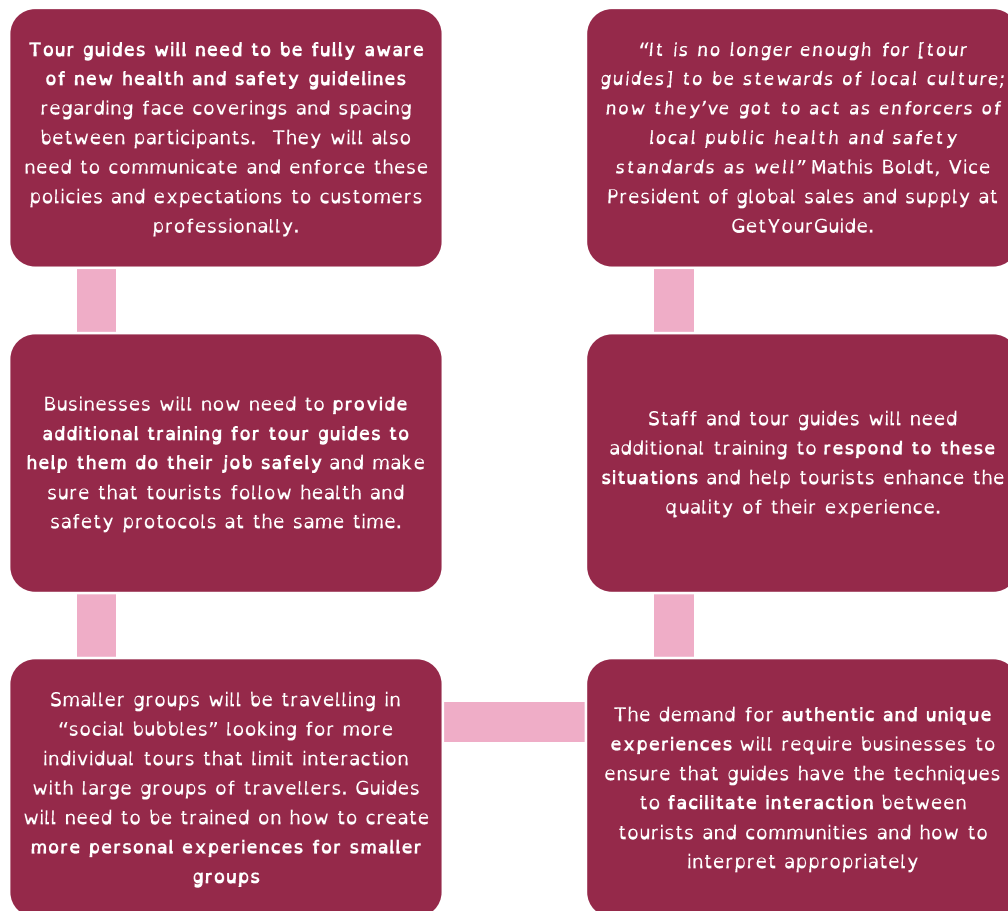
Guides must be alert to customer needs and interests and respond accordingly rather than sticking to a set speech every time. The diagram below illustrates quality aspects to guides and guiding techniques.



The quality of guiding and interpretation can make the difference between a good experience and an outstanding experience.

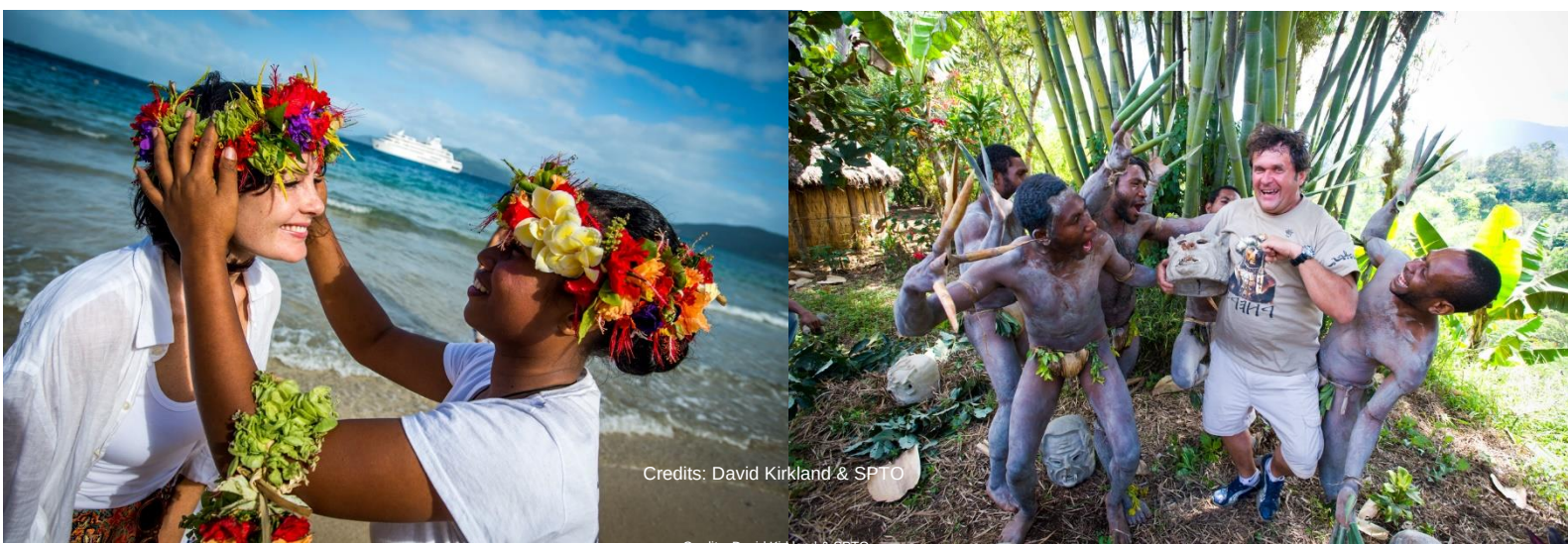
Training Needs for staff and guides

The pandemic has created a new set of challenges for tour guides and guiding; here are some key areas of training that will help to ensure that service quality remains high.



Surprise and delight with special touches

Throughout all aspects of the customer journey, every business has the opportunity to surprise and delight customers by adding special touches. This could include cultural or personal stories, offering special gifts or finding ways to create a sensory experience. The atmosphere can be greatly enhanced with small details such as music, aroma, lighting, displays and signage.

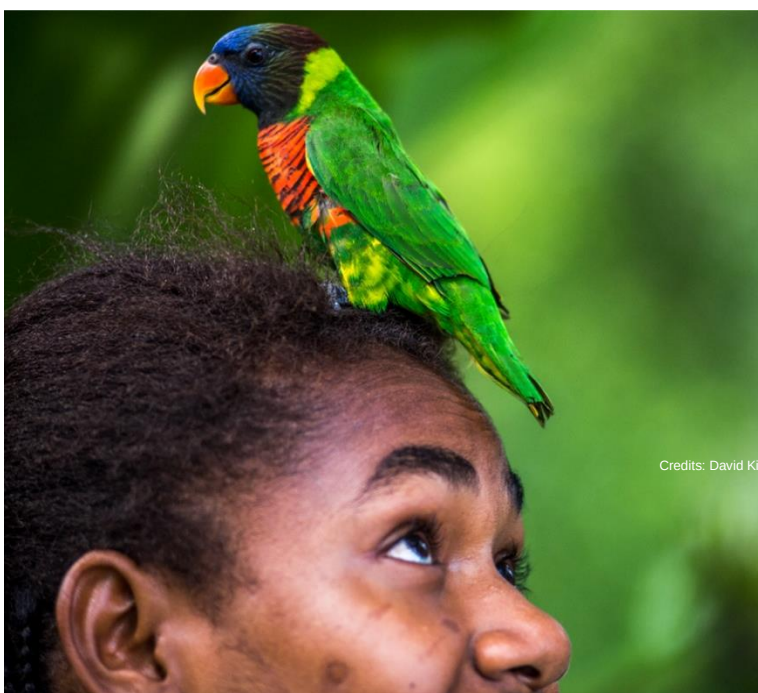


Building reputation and trust

Customer service has the potential to make or break a business. Providing excellent customer service will not only enhance the reputation for your business; it will also build trust with your customers. **Great customer service can improve customer retention and repeat business.**

Some of the ways to build trust are:

- **Staff who genuinely care:** Your staff must be empathetic and want to help. People may not remember when someone was kind, but they will **definitely** remember when someone is not.
- **Make it easy for customers to contact you:** Your phone number, email address and other contact details should be readily available to customers on all your marketing and promotional material (website, flyer, brochure, etc.).
- Having those channels in place is one thing, but you must be able to **support each channel with adequate staffing**. Customers will have different expectations for each channel, for phone contact and live chat online, they will expect instant responses. They may expect more reasonable delays with email responses, but you should aim to reply within 24 hours.
- **Provide an easy-to-use feedback system:** OTAs and other online channels, such as TripAdvisor allow customers to give reviews and provide feedback on your facility and service quality.
- **Provide a timely response to any feedback received:** Regardless of the channel, it is very important to always respond as quickly as possible, if not immediately, to every complaint. It is also a good idea to thank those customers who are complimentary about your business.
- **Always act on a complaint.** Ensure you understand what went wrong / what the customer didn't like and consider what you can do to prevent it from happening again. For example, this could be training staff, improving the quality, communicating more clearly and accurately about the service you offer.



Credits: David Kirkland & SPTO



Delivering quality service during the pandemic

The pandemic has required everyone to operate differently. The measures recommended by health authorities to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus, such as mask wearing and practicing social distancing may make it challenging to provide in-person service delivery while protecting your staff and customers.

While customers understand the need to adhere to the recommended COVID-19 protocols, they still expect excellent customer service. To ensure you continue to deliver excellent customer service during the pandemic you should:

- **Communicate clearly** with customers about how your business is responding to the pandemic. Let them know what steps you are taking to keep your staff and customers safe.

- **Educate customers** about how to interact with your business. Clearly describe what they should expect e.g. new opening hours, mandatory mask wearing, etc.

- **Review your delivery standards** and prepare your staff on how to respond to customer service needs at this time.

- **Adapt flexible policies** to make cancellations and refunds easy.



Use [Tool 6.0: Customer Service Checklist](#) to check that you have everything in place to deliver excellent customer service during the recovery phase and beyond.



Credit: David Kirkland & SPTO

Chapter 6: Key takeaways

Customer service has the potential to make or break a business.

Review all of your interactions with customers and business partners and ensure that you are responsive to requests and communications in general. First impressions count and set expectations for how you do business.

Work through the entire customer journey

Ensure that you anticipate customer needs, provide a warm welcome, manage customer expectations and ensure that staff remain well-presented, friendly and professional throughout.

Nurture guides and staff by training and supporting them to make each and every experience special and personal for customers.

Provide feedback mechanisms

Making it easy for customers to contact you will help to build trust. Always ensure that you respond to queries and complaints in a timely manner.

Let customers know how you are responding to the pandemic

Communicate with customers about what you are doing to keep customers and staff safe and what will be expected of them during their visit in order to comply with COVID-19 protocols.