MANAGING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Debbie Marie Dennick
B.A., California State University, Sacramento, 2004

PROJECT

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

at

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

FALL
2009
MANAGING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

A Project

by

Debbie Marie Dennick

Approved by:

__________________________, Committee Chair
Claudia Bridges, Ph.D.

__________________________
Date

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Student: Debbie Marie Dennick

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__________________________, Graduate Coordinator       ________________
Monica Lam                 Date

Department of Business Administration
Companies need to find ways to differentiate themselves in order to compete. The next level of competition will be based on creating and managing unique customer experiences. This paper will examine how customer experiences can be created, then managed by using models. It will also compare the Ritz-Carlton and Arden Dental Care to determine how well a customer experience model can be applied when used in two very different industries.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Professor Legorreta, whose excitement and interest kept me motivated and eager to continue.

To Professor Bridges, who put up with my sudden bursts of writing and impromptu office visits.

To my husband, an excellent sounding board and a very patient listener.

To my family, who have supported me in so many ways and in so many things.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Companies are constantly seeking out ways to differentiate themselves from their competitors. A former British Airways chairman, Sir Colin Marshall said that a company needs to “go beyond the function and compete on the basis of providing an experience.” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) Every company and product inherently provides customers an experience, the key is to managing that experience to create a competitive advantage. The question is whether customer experience management can be utilized for any company or product, or whether it is limited to specific industries that are focused on experiences already.

Every definition of customer experience has a focus on generating an emotional response and engaging with the customer. Pine and Gilmore state that customer experiences “engage customers, connecting with them in a personal, memorable way.” (1999) Pullman and Gross define it as “An experience occurs when a customer has any sensation or knowledge acquisition resulting from some level of interaction with different elements of a context created by a service provider.” (Voss, 2008)

Experiences that have proven most beneficial to companies are those that have created an emotional resonance with the customers. Companies like Disney, Ritz Carlton, Whole Foods, and the Mayo Clinic have all excelled at learning who their customer is and what emotional cues they need to elicit from them in order to help create the best experience that will not only keep them coming back, but also spread the news to their friends and family. (Berry & Carbone, 2007 Voss, 2008 Pine & Gilmore, 1999)
As stated previously, customer experience is inherently part of any company, as customer emotion is inherently part of customer experience. How to manage the customer experience, how to apply it, and how to measure it is more difficult. Pine and Gilmore (1999) provided a very comprehensive overall outline of steps that should be taken when developing specific customer experiences. For that reason their outline will be used as a comparison for the cases in this paper. However, other authors will also be cited to show a range of support for this outline, and to point out criticisms of the model.
Chapter 2

DEVELOPING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

1. List Impressions
2. Create a theme/storyline
3. Create Cues (Clues)
4. Determine the Effect of the Cue (Alignment)
5. Extend the Experience

List Impressions

In order to generate a good experience, it is imperative to know what that means, for the company and for the customer. As Pine and Gilmore state in *The Experience Economy*, “Impressions are the “take-aways” of the experience.” (1999, p. 52). This idea is further supported by Voss (2008), “if one of the desired outcomes of experiential services is to evoke emotionally engaging responses, then it is important that the connections between those responses and desired consumer behaviors be clearly articulated and well understood” Put more simply, by Berry and Carbone, “this involves defining a targeted customer perception and set of feelings” (2007)

Create a Theme / Storyline

Because themes can conjure images of the Wild West, Outer Space, or the Tropics it is important to note that while a theme is extremely important it does not require companies to start buying costumes and fake laser guns. That is, unless they are trying to create an Outer Space theme of course.

Having an overall storyline or theme is imperative. It not only helps customers know what to expect but is also a guideline for employees. At the Mayo Clinic, they strive to create a
storyline that stresses the importance of patients and their families. By putting an emphasis on this, the Mayo Clinic promotes their theme of personal touch-points. Not only does this help employees make decisions in how to respond or work with patients, but it also helps facilitates decisions on building architecture, design, and even flooring, all based around how to make patients feel personally cared for.

Create Cues (Clues)

It is not enough to know how you want the customer to respond, or feel, or to tell employees how to act to generate specific responses from the customers. Once companies understand the journey or story they want their customers to have they can “orchestrate an integrated series of “clues” that collectively meet or exceed people’s emotional needs and expectations.” (Berry, Carbone, Haeckel, 2002) This is important because, as the article goes on to say, “the internalized meaning and value the clues take on can create a deep-seated preference for a particular experience – and thus for one company’s product or service over another’s.” (Berry et al., 2002) Every time a customer interacts with a company in any form; websites, ads, products, or employees, this can be considered a “touchpoint”. Any customer touchpoint gives the company an opportunity to create an impression or reveal cues to which the customer can react.

Clues do not necessarily begin with the first interaction of customer and employee, or even the first time a customer enters your door. It can start when they go to the website, or look through the store window.

There are two types of clues commonly agreed on in the literature, Mechanic and Humanic. While the verbiage may be different, the definitions are essentially the same across all of the
articles. Berry and Carbone (2007) define these as, “Mechanic clues come from inanimate objects and offer a physical representation of the intangible service.” At East Jefferson General Hospital in Louisiana, they use different types of flooring (carpet, slate, terrazzo) throughout the hospital to show the path to different types of areas. (Pine & Gilmore 1999) Barnes & Noble intentionally set out to design their stores to be spacious, with comfortable seating and coffee shops in order to encourage people to come and stay longer. (Berry & Carbone 2007)

Humanic clues are defined as those coming “from the behavior and appearance of service providers – choice words, tone of voice, level of enthusiasm, body language, neatness and appropriate dress.” (Berry & Carbone, 2007) Humanic clues can be much harder to control and measure. This is one reason why there needs to be some level employee empowerment and independence in judgment and decision-making. Of course, guidelines through orientation and company culture should be employed as well. This level of independence from employees also shows why having an understanding of the impressions you want customers to have, integrated with an overall theme and an understanding of the power of cues is so important. If the company and the employee understand all of these pieces and act accordingly, they should be able to achieve the results they want. Having a storyline you want guests to follow and teaching employees how to tell that story helps guide the desired customer experience.

For example, employees at the Mayo Clinic know that patients should always come first and they have some autonomy to follow through on that storyline. Repeating true customer experience stories is a part of the regular training. One true account follows a critically ill patient that was admitted shortly before her daughter’s wedding. She realized that she probably would not make it to the wedding day. The critical care manager heard the daughter saying how much
she wanted her mother to be part of the ceremony and transformed the atrium at the hospital with decorations, flowers, and balloons. Staff provided a cake and nurses did the hair and make-up for the patient and a volunteer played the piano. The hospital chaplain conducted the service while other patients and staff ringed the balconies around the atrium like, “angels from above,” as the bride described. This story, repeated through the years at the hospital, helps to reinforce the theme that the Mayo Clinic follows and offers a clue, to customers and employees, about the care and experience they can expect. (Berry & Bedapudi, 2003)

Berry and Carbone (2007) also add their own third clue into the mix, Functional Clues. These are clues that “concern the technical quality of the offering. These clues are the “what” of the experience, reflecting the reliability and functionality of the good or service.” (2007) This may include having the latest technology. For example, having the most innovative diagnostic equipment may reinforce an experience designed to put patients at ease regarding their class of care. This type of clue does not yet seem widely adopted or discussed in other literature. (Berry & Carbone, 2007)

Companies should look at the cues that they are giving their customers and start “accentuating the positive and eliminating the negative.” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) How to conduct an experience audit will be discussed in further detail later.

Determine the Effect of the Cue (Alignment)

Pine and Gilmore argue that, “the more effectively an experience engages the sense, the more memorable it will be.” (1999) Pine and Gilmore also state that “cues trigger impressions that fulfill the theme in the customer’s mind.” (1999) Essentially, all of the steps must follow the
same storyline. Deciding you want customers to feel comfortable coming to your store and creating a theme of psychological and physical comfort followed by poor lighting and hard chairs with friendly and hospitable employees is a misconnect. Each step must be part of a cohesive whole.

*Extending the Experience*

In the *Experience Economy*, Pine and Gilmore (1999) discuss mixing in memorabilia to extend the experience. They title this step Mix in Memorabilia. After all, part of their definition includes being memorable. They argue that memorabilia usually has a much higher price point because the value attached to it is not from the actual goods but the memory of the experience. However, they also noted that memorabilia could be given away as well. While no other literature reviewed discussed memorabilia, it can be a useful tool in extending the experience. Extending the experience should be the ultimate goal of this step, which is why re-titled it to that broader term.
Chapter 3

AUDITING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Some of the steps in conducting an audit are the same or similar as those in creating an experience. However, this approach does focus more strongly on evaluation and redesigning a current experience plan. This approach also offers some additional insight and practical advice on management tools that can be used.

The first step is similar to the one Pine & Gilmore provided, List Impressions. However, it is different in that it is looking specifically for emotions that evoke customer commitment and it advises the use of technology, specifically, the use of a video camera to document the conscious and subconscious reactions of the customers. These recordings can be used to help identify customer’s needs and desires, both met and unmet with tools like the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET), which “… reveal mental models that shape customer thought and behavior.” (Berry & Carbone, 2007)

The second step of establishing an experience motif is meant to serve as “the unifying element for every clue”. (Berry et al., 2002) All clues in the new redesigned customer experience plan should fit into the experience motif.
The third step, Inventory and Evaluate Experience Clues says that “The existing experience should be viewed from the customer’s perspective and deconstructed into experience clues” (Berry & Carbone, 2007) These clues should be evaluated for consistency and execution, categorized, analyzed and evaluated to determine their benefit or negative impact.

The fourth step is to determine the experience gap. This is the gap between what customers want to feel or get out of an experience and what they actually get. The results provide the basis for changes to the current customer experience plan or for overhauling and creating an entirely new one.

The fifth step is to close the experience gaps that were observed and monitor the execution. Further audits on ideas generated from this step should also be taken. This is the implementation stage for all previous findings. (Berry & Carbone, 2007)

The use of an experience audit is extremely important because customer needs and wants are constantly changing. It is also difficult to get the same amount of satisfaction from the same experience time after time if nothing ever changes. The next section will discuss more suggestions on how to combat this.
Chapter 4

THE FOUR-S MODEL

This model, discussed by Pine and Gilmore is a key ingredient in how to keep the experience from getting too stale. Its emphasis is on determining what customers want versus what they get. The first two “S”s are the commonly known.

Customer Satisfaction = What customer expects to get – What customer perceives he gets

The typical measurement factors for Customer Satisfaction are focused primarily on “managing customer expectations of what companies already do, rather than truly ascertaining what customers really want.” (Pine & Gilmore, 2000)

Customer Sacrifice = What customer wants exactly – What customer settles for

Customer Sacrifice gets less attention in the general populous, but is as important as customer satisfaction. Customer sacrifice looks at what the customer really needs versus what he gets. Oddly enough, customer sacrifice can lead to faux customer satisfaction measures. A perfect example is a frequent flyer. The first time he flies and the attendant asks if he would like a drink, he might say Pepsi, only to be told they only have Coke. He might try on a second or third flight to get Pepsi, but ultimately learns to only ask for Coke. Coke is what he learns to expect, so rather than marking “unsatisfied” on a questionnaire and asking for Pepsi, he will mark “satisfied”
because he got a drink in a timely fashion and he got to his location safely. However, he is still experiencing customer sacrifice. (Pine & Gilmore, 2000)

Customer sacrifice is not necessarily just about not getting what you want, sometimes it means getting more than you want. Ever been to a fast food restaurant and not wanted a full meal, but it is cheaper than just getting a burger and coke? Or purchased a camera that came with some features you did not want or need? That is also considered customer sacrifice and it can also result in wasted time or money on part of the company as well. By selling a camera with many features there are greater chances of introducing an element that ultimately “disqualifies the offering with a particular buyer (either because he does not want the element or does not want to incur the perceived higher price for a marginal element).” (Pine & Gilmore, 2000) In order to eliminate customer sacrifice the company needs to learn more about individual customer needs and behavior. This can lead to mass customization, which can actually help cut costs due to eliminating wasted time and products. Gaining greater awareness of customer satisfaction and sacrifice and what customer’s needs and wants are lends itself well to realizing how you can create experiences for customers.

Customer Surprise = What customer gets to perceive – What customer expects to get

With customer surprise the company gets to transcend what the customer expects. Not by meeting expectations (customer satisfaction) or setting new expectations (eliminating sacrifice) but by creating the unexpected. The goal is to create an experience that customers will remember. This practice was adopted earlier this year with Hyatt hotels. They created a “Random Acts of Generosity” program, which randomly awards its customers with free gifts. The purpose behind this program was to try to create a feeling of reciprocity between the company and the customer.
However, it will also create a memorable experience for those customers that win – whether it is a free drink, spa treatment, or room for a night. (Walker, 2009)

Hyatt also has a frequent buyer program, but these programs have a serious flaw. Customers have “earned” their free product, so they do not feel gratitude or consider it an experience when they get something free. They consider it their due. Pine and Gilmore make an excellent suggestion that an employee’s register can transparently inform them that a specific customer is highly valued and randomly award those customers a purchase on the house. The random awards would still go out to everyone, but could give a slight advantage or even have an entirely separate awards ratio, for premium customers.

Surprises are good to shake things up, and to give customers an experience and get them excited. However, just like any experience, it is important to continue to shake things up. This leads us to the last “S” in the model.

*Customer Suspense = What customer does not yet know – What customer remembers from the past*

Once customers start expecting surprises, the company should consider creating customer suspense. This is the difference between what customers remembers from past surprises and what he does not know about what is coming. It is the measure of anticipation. Let us say you receive a travel package on your birthday from an airline you are a frequently flyer with. The first year you would be pleasantly surprised. The second year you might still be surprised, but by the third year you know it is coming. Instead of a travel package, maybe you get a more customized gift, like a gift card to a restaurant in a city you frequently fly to. Suddenly you are surprised again, and
wondering what you might get next year. A little more effort may go into making sure you maintain your premium status to see what you get.

The ultimate goal of this model is that customers will no longer purchase goods just for their function, but “for the experiences created during purchase and use.” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999)
Chapter 5

HOW USEFUL IS IT?

Some companies are already inherently based on creating customer experiences. This is particularly true for the Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality fields. Voss, Roth, and Chase for example posit that customer experiences cannot be applied to all services and that there are experience-centric services. (Voss, 2008) Pine and Gilmore on the other hand are of the belief that this model can be applied to all services, and that companies that do not attempt to create customer experiences will face commoditization. They offer a wide range of services to prove this point, from experience-centric services like theme parks, hotels, and restaurants, to companies that may not seem as obvious; valve makers, airlines, and vitamin companies. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999)

It is my belief that it is certainly easier for certain industries to adopt the customer experience premise and that those industries are already experience-centric. However, this also means more competition to provide a better experience than your competitors. The Ritz-Carlton is an ideal example of a company whose industry is largely based on providing experiences for their customers – hospitality. Yet they far excel their competitors in the customer experience arena.

However, I also believe that other less experience-centric industries can also take this model and apply it. Being a first-mover in this field is a huge advantage, by generating experiences that touch customers will develop a customer loyalty base that late comers will not be able to match. In looking for a company that would match this description I not only wanted to find an industry that was not experience-centric, but that customers may even be hesitant about.
Dentistry was the perfect option, and Arden Dental Care in Sacramento, California was the perfect company for this type of study.

How useful is it to be a company that excels in experience when the industry is already there? And how useful is it to offer experiences when so few of the competitors are, and when the customers just want in and out as quickly, and painlessly, as possible?
Chapter 6
THE RITZ-CARLTON

The Ritz-Carlton is an internationally recognized hotel with a reputation for luxury, quality, and unmatched customer service. Ritz Carlton hotels have won dozens of industry awards from Conde Nast Traveler, Travel and Leisure, AAA Five & Four Diamond Star awards, and Mobil Five & Four Star awards. They are also the only hotel company to ever be awarded the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award twice, in 1992 and 1997. (Ritz-Carlton, Baldrige National Quality Program)

The Ritz-Carlton has innovation teams, specifically tasked with finding ways to create and improve customer services and experiences. (Timmerman, 2009) Hospitality and tourism are experience-centric industries that are more likely to have a focus on customer care and creating experiences for their customers. Particularly the leisure customer who is specifically looking for experiences to share with friends and family. They can do this through the shared experience of vacationing together or through word of mouth when they get home. For this reason, “innovative experience design and orchestration will become an increasingly critical component of any successful hotel-management company’s core capabilities.” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) Fortunately for Ritz-Carlton, they have been practicing the methods that help create customer experiences for years, longer than most of their competitors. This gives them an advantage since they have already developed strong customer relationships and loyalty. In order for a customer to attain that same level of quality care from another luxury chain, they would have to invest in educating the new hotel on all of their likes and dislikes. Now we will look at how the Ritz-Carlton may fit into Pine and Gilmore’s customer experience model.
The Impressions

Because the Ritz-Carlton has so many different locations, each hotel may have a specific type of impression they want to leave the customer with. After all, the Ritz-Carlton Boston Commons hotel would not work as well if it were transplanted from Boston to Jamaica. However, there are certain impressions that Ritz-Carlton would like to leave their customers with, no matter the locale. Some of the impressions that should be conveyed throughout the company are, genuine, personal, refinement, well-being, mystique, emotional engagement, and functional. These last three items are specifically noted on the Ritz-Carlton website as “The 6th Diamond”.

Ritz-Carlton Theme

As mentioned previously, a theme does not necessarily mean fantasy or fantastic props, costumes, or sets. A theme should be the dominant idea, the central principal that the experience organizes itself around. The theme can be subtle, loud, hidden from customers, or shared. The Ritz-Carlton theme is more subtle than say, Disneyland, but it is obvious to the customers and shared with the world via their website. Their theme is most aptly stated in the Ritz-Carlton Credo:

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel is a place where the genuine care and comfort of our guests is our highest mission. We pledge to provide the finest personal service and facilities for our guests who will always enjoy a warm, relaxed yet refined ambience. The Ritz-Carlton experience enlivens the senses, instills well-being, and fulfills even the unexpressed wishes and needs of our guests.

The Credo is part of the Ritz-Carlton Gold Standard, which is a series of rules that every employee is required to know and to follow. It is the script that employees follow whenever they interact with each other, or a guest. It is, in part, why the Ritz-Carlton is able to have such a legendary employee empowerment policy. (Application Summary, 1999)
In creating clues for the customers, Ritz-Carlton taps into their employees for ideas. They leverage these ideas to “create exceptional experiences for its customers.” (Timmerman, 2009) They also form an “innovation team” to help create these experiences. (Timmerman, 2009) Any implemented ideas are shared with the entire company via email, with results and improvements communicated through a daily newsletter. (Application, 1999)

By encouraging employees to come up with new ideas and empowering them, it helps Ritz-Carlton “unleash the talent of the work force to deliver memorable guest experiences.” (Application, 1999) It also helps Ritz-Carlton’s employee engagement levels to exceed the national average. Another company, who attends the Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center, Southwest Airlines, also encourages their employees to come up with their own ideas and unscripted methods of improving customer experiences. They have created a “coveted service culture” that differentiates them from their competition, with customer loyalty increasing with internal employee loyalty. (Solnet & Kandampully, 2008) The role of employees in offering clues to the customers is invaluable in the experience economy; this relationship will be explored further in the humanics section. First, the mechanics cues will be discussed.

Every hotel is designed to reflect the ladies and gentlemen that will be guests at the hotel; they are all refined, tasteful, and unique. When designing their hotels the Ritz-Carlton considers the locale. For example, the Bachelor Gulf at Vail is designed to resemble a ski resort. The Battery Park in New York City provides a telescope in every room, aimed towards the Statue of Liberty. The President and COO, Simon Cooper has expressed that, “Every Ritz-Carlton hotel is
a stage, and frequently the architect and furnishings should match the surroundings, rather than replicating a standard look.” (Lampton, 2003)

Part of the Ritz-Carlton Basics also addresses mechanic clues. Ritz-Carlton Basic number 18 requires that employees, “Take pride in and care of your personal appearance. Everyone is responsible for conveying a professional image by adhering to Ritz-Carlton clothing and grooming standards.” Another tenet, number eight, requires that “Each employee will continuously identify defects (M.R. B.I.V.) throughout the hotel.” This stands for: Mistakes, Rework, Breakdowns, Inefficiencies, Variation in work process. (Application, 1999) By watching for these tell-tale signs of a potential problem the employees can report the issue and get an immediate response, stopping problems before they happen or get too large.

The Ritz-Carlton does not just rely on well-designed interiors and well groomed employees to convey their mechanic clues. Attention to the smallest detail and how they impact the guests senses are also taken into consideration. For example, a manager at the Boston Commons hotel noticed the additional time guests spent in public areas during rainstorms, unable to sightsee due to the weather. The hotel decided to create a video podcast tour of all the art in the hotel. This leveraged the art already in the hotel to create a new and different experience for guests. Once that decision was made, they also decided to host a kick-off event to celebrate the new concept and introduce it to the guests. (Timmerman, 2009)
The first thing that they did was create theme “The Fine Art of Living” and a goal, “Stimulate unique, modern, and state-of-the-art experience for our guests while enlivening five senses and triggering the sixth sense through experience and knowledge.” (Timmerman, 2009) Then they researched and brainstormed ideas on how to make their theme come to life and reach their goal. In the process of creating “The Fine Art of Living” experience they generated a Six Sense Diagram, to show how all the clues would stimulate the senses of their guests. They focused not only on the art (See, Experience) but also on special coffee table books about art (See, Touch, Experience), a Signature Amenity (See, Smell, Taste, Touch, Experience), and even a Signature Scent for the event (Smell, Experience). It was vital that Experience be a part of every clue because it is part of the goal of the event, and ultimately the goal of the hotel as well – to create memorable experiences for guests. (Timmerman, 2009) In following these steps they also followed the overall view of how to create a customer experience by, “defining a targeted customer perception and set of feelings followed by designing and orchestrating clues that create the desired perception and feelings.” (Berry & Carbone, 2007)

The ultimate result was guests that had an excellent experience and requested to receive information about future events. A local modern gallery even invited their top clients to the event, exposing the Ritz-Carlton Boston Common to a larger audience. (Timmerman, 2009)
The Ritz-Carlton puts an even heavier emphasis on humanic clues, believing that while they may have “beautiful carpets and chandeliers from around the world” (Lampton, 2003) they are not the heart and soul of the company; the employees are, because they are the ones that can build relationships with the customers. As the President, van Grinsven states, “We are a company of relationships.” (Lampton, 2003)

Most of the work in how to generate clues is done behind the scenes at a Ritz-Carlton, they want to make the delivery of their clues as transparent as possible. A huge part of the Ritz-Carlton allure and experience is the Mystique, their ability to act in a prescient matter, giving the guests what they want before they can ask for it. In some cases the clues may not even be specifically noticed by a guest, the overall sense of well-being and being cared for does result from even the multitude of subtle clues offered. (Pine and Gilmore, 2002) This ability creates extraordinary opportunities for creating customer experiences. For example, employees are given an average of 120 hours of training each year – no matter how long they have been with the company. This training includes learning how to listen to guests and observe them, to learn their preferences, likes and dislikes, etc. (Lampton, 2003) Learning and entering observations about a guest is part of every employee’s job description, and contained in the Ritz-Carlton Basics. It is a major challenge to remember each of the 800,000+ customer’s preferences, which is why the Ritz-Carlton has a specific database to help in the matter. This automated memory system is called CLASS, or Guest Recognition and is shared throughout all of their hotels, so customers can expect the same level of personalized service at any location. (Application, 1999)
Figure 4 to the right shows the type of items that are stored in the system. The likes/dislikes section can cover a lot of areas, so here are some examples of things that may be stored: Allergies, room floor preference (i.e. do not want a room on the first floor), preferred dining locations (not just particular restaurants, but a particular location within the restaurant ie a corner, near the bar, etc.), favorite breakfast, and a favorite newspaper are just a few details that may be recorded. (Lampton, 2003, Hart, 1996)

The application of this information into clues begins even before your stay at a Ritz-Carlton. Each hotel employs a “guest historian” (Hart, 1996) that will go through all the files of guests that are checking in on a particular day. The guest historian will use that information to develop a suggested list of personal touches to surprise and delight the guest. That list will also go out to department heads, so they are aware of the guests potential wants and can make suggestions of their own as well. Each guest’s room is prepared, “in accordance with the specific needs of the guest who will stay in that room.” (Solnet & Kandampully, 2008)

Employees are not limited to merely entering information they have gleaned from observation into a database however. The Ritz-Carlton has a, “legendary empowerment policy – where any employee can spend up to $2,000 … to rectify a problem or exceed a customer’s expectations.” (Solnet & Kandampully, 2008) Therefore, if they see a potential problem they can
react immediately to rectify it. However, they can also react to new knowledge to create a special surprise or experience for a customer as well. For example, a housekeeper overheard family talking about their child’s birthday. While they were out she arranged for balloons and cookies to be brought to the room to surprise the child. (Solnet & Kandampully, 2008)

There is also a daily line-up for each shift for approximately 15 minutes, where important arrivals are discussed, ideas for improvement are shared, and a particular item from the Ritz-Carlton Basics is discussed and ideas on application are shared. These meetings depart clues to the employees, keeping the tenets of Ritz-Carlton current in their mind and reinforcing the Credo.

This shows how Ritz-Carlton is able to leverage their technology to create personal touch for each customer and develop an experience that is unique to them. However, there are some more fundamental clues that are also employed. First, every customer is greeted warmly and sincerely, and by name whenever possible. When asking for directions customers are always led to their destination, never pointed the way and left alone. One of the important tenets of the Ritz-Carlton Basics is number thirteen, “Never lose a guest. Instant guest pacification is the responsibility of each employee. Whoever receives a complaint will own it, resolve it to the guest’s satisfaction, and record it.” (Application, 1999) Ritz-Carlton guests will never hear “That’s not my job.” or “I’ll have to check with my manager” when faced with a problem. On the Service Quality Indicators that Ritz-Carlton uses to measure seriousness of defects “Unresolved Difficulties” and “Missing/Damaged Guest Property/Accidents” are the top two, with scores of 50. The next-worst defect is worth 10 points. (Application, 1999)
Employees go to extraordinary lengths to keep the customers happy, including one instance of a guest accidently leaving a bottle of prescription drugs in his room when he checked out. Two employees drove four hours, one way, in the middle of the night to get it back to him. Another guest accidently left a pen in his room after check-out. He asked the hotel to hold onto it for him until he returned in a few weeks. An employee put it in their locker for safe keeping, and when the guest did not return he continued to hold onto it. Three years later the guest returned to the hotel and to his astonishment, was presented with his pen.

*The Effects of the Cues*

The Ritz-Carlton continually talks with front-line employees regarding suggestions for improvements and potential problems. Because of this they get regular feedback on what is and is not working. If there is a variation in service it is addressed quickly to either realign it with the image and theme that the Ritz-Carlton wants, or if it is a variation that can add value to the customer it is researched and possibly investigated by an innovation team.

Special events or new experiences are researched and put in place, like the earlier example of Fine Art of Living. New experiences are followed up on to determine if everything went as planned or if there are areas for improvement. After the Fine Art of Living event for example, it was determined that they needed to educate the concierge more about the event and the particular artist to better assist in educating any guests with questions. (Timmerman, 2009)

Another special event, planned at the Naples Ritz-Carlton was designed to create a special “Beach Club” experience. Once implemented they found that, “guestroom features were second to the beach experience for the leisure customers.” (Timmerman, 3) This example will be
discussed more in the Audit section, but it shows that their method of creating experiences and delivering clues is highly effective.

The fact that 51% of all Ritz-Carlton guests are repeat guests also speaks volumes about the reception of their clues by guests. (Lampton, 2003) As is the fact that since designing and implementing the Guest Recognition program the Ritz-Carlton has increased guest retention by 23%. (Hart, 1996)

*Extending the Experience*

In terms of memorabilia, the Ritz-Carlton offers an abundance of tasteful souvenirs. From jackets and robes, to candles and soaps, to passport holders to teddy bear’s with his own little suitcase the Ritz-Carlton has a gift for everyone. If you enjoyed the mattress or bedding their hotels use, you can purchase your own off their website.

Not all of their memorabilia is sold at their gift shops or websites however. The Ritz-Carlton in Naples, Florida changed to computerized keycards in the hotel, they decided to give the old doorknobs away. They were cleaned, buffed, and engraved with the classic Ritz-Carlton lion and crown logo, converting them into a distinct and unique paperweight. Ritz-Carlton let all their previous guests know they were available, at no charge. While this may seem like a strange concept, over 6,000 guests responded requesting a doorknob paperweight. Only 463 of these paperweights were available. This is solid evidence that the guests enjoyed their experience at the Ritz-Carlton enough, that they wanted a physical memento to remind them of their stays. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999)
Auditing the Customer Experience

While the Ritz-Carlton has many matrices developed to track their target markets, sales, performance, and service and product quality it is difficult to directly track it back to experience. So we will look at a case study done specifically on the creation and audit of a new experience generated at the Naples, Florida Ritz-Carlton hotel specifically for the President’s Day weekend.

The function of this experience was to provide an alternative lunch and breakfast venue for Club guests during a high traffic time. The impressions they wanted guests to come away with included unique, hassle-free, and engaging. These were in addition to the impressions the Ritz-Carlton always strives for - welcoming, genuine, personal, and well-being.

In establishing an experience motif they wanted to make sure it matched what they wanted from the first step. They looked at using Caribbean Resorts and All Inclusive resorts as one of the benchmarks to establish a motif.

They planned the concept around what they wanted the customers to see, feel, and experience. New mechanics clues were generated, including a welcome station, welcome mimosas, and lounge chairs. Grouped couches and chairs were set-up to offer a more private beach experience as well. Guests were also offered the use of ipods, dvds, slippers and newspapers to help generate that all-inclusive resort feel. After their initial test run, they surveyed some of the participants and trained employees on the types of questions to ask to get genuine feedback on the experience.
From the feedback they were able to determine what guests enjoyed and what they wanted to see more of. Some observations were also made by the staff on ways to make improvements. Positive comments included, “Made a big difference in our stay – absolutely fantastic”, “Fun and convenient”, “Anticipated all needs”, and “Hallmark of The Ritz-Carlton”. These comments showed that they did in-fact meet many of their original goals. (Timmerman, 2009)

There were some experience gaps observed however. These included the need to make it more private and exclusive. They also fielded suggestions of providing a burger pit, a full bar, and a large screen tv during lunch. In response to the popularity of the program and the desire to have it be more private they currently offer it only for purchase by the Club Level guests – there by closing an experience gap. (Timmerman, 2009)

The Four-S Model

So far we have discussed ways that Ritz-Carlton creates new experiences for guests. But let us start at the bottom of the Four S Model – Customer Satisfaction and Sacrifice. The Ritz-Carlton has received many rewards regarding customer satisfaction and Figure 5 shows that on a National survey, they have a lead over their competitors in every section. In fact, they have an average 15.95% lead over their foremost competitor. (Application, 1999)
Earlier two forms of Customer Sacrifice were discussed. The first is a customer having to give up something they want because it is not offered. The second was a customer getting more than what they wanted (i.e. an ironing board in every hotel room). The Ritz-Carlton combats each of these forms of sacrifice through the training of their staff to observe the guests preferences, and through the application of the Guest Recognition database.

This moves us onto Customer Surprise. It is certainly surprising when on a second visit the bellman opens the door for you, and is able to greet you by name. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) On that same visit you might find a copy of your favorite newspaper waiting in your room, the same one you had asked for on your first visit. And right next to it, a bowl of strawberries and a Sprite – the same guest room amenities you had requested on your first visit but forgot to mention for the second. Again, the Ritz-Carlton is leveraging the knowledge they learned from your previous visit to surprise you on the second. But what happens after your third and fourth visit? Suddenly it is expected that people will know your name and that there will be a newspaper, strawberries, and sprite in your room. However, each time you visit more observations are made and the Ritz-

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### Frequent Leisure Traveler 1999 Key Comparisons

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Top 2 Boxes RCHC</th>
<th>Top 2 Boxes Foremost Competitor</th>
<th>Top Box RCHC</th>
<th>Top Box Foremost Competitor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Satisfaction</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleanliness of Room &amp; Facilities</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>48%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adequate Security</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Value for the Money</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Knowledgeable &amp; Helpful</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>20%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Frequent Business Traveler 1999 Key Comparisons

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Top 2 Boxes RCHC</th>
<th>Top 2 Boxes Foremost Competitor</th>
<th>Top Box RCHC</th>
<th>Top Box Foremost Competitor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Satisfaction</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Facilities from Location to Location</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Services</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Alert &amp; Helpful Staff Responsive to my Needs</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides Excellent Business Class Floors</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has Very Clean &amp; Well Maintained Facilities</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides Full Range of Business Services</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 – Traveler Key Comparisons
Carlton learns more and more about you, and is able to personalize their service to a greater extent. Each hotel is also constantly working on new ideas and experiences that they can generate within the hotel – like the Fine Art of Living experience and the Beach Club experience.

By constantly learning and adapting the Ritz-Carlton is able to create new surprises and develop new personalized experiences. Because of this a sense of Customer Suspense can be reached. If you attended the Fine Art of Living event and loved the experience you could look forward to a new artist exhibition on your next trip. If you received an old doorknob paperweight, you might look forward to the next email offering a special limited edition keepsake. You might be looking for that email with even greater suspense if you did not receive the doorknob the first time around!

There is very little argument one can put forth that creating relationships through customer experience does not breed loyalty or a competitive edge for the Ritz-Carlton. They have the lowest turn-over in the industry without paying any more than the average salary when compared to other luxury hotels. They outstrip their competitors in terms of customer satisfaction surveys, and they have more than 50% of their guests as return customers.
ARDEN DENTAL CARE

Arden Dental Care is owned and operated by Dr. Michael Boyce and Carol Boyce, his wife and business manager. Carol has helped guide the direction of their practice over their years and her experience in finance and her MBA degree have helped influence that direction. Dr. Boyce and Carol purchased the practice in 1994, when Dr. Boyce had already been practicing dentistry for over 5 years at that time. He worked in private practices and group practices but wanted less of a “clinic” feeling. Having his own practice would allow him to offer the care and high-end procedures he had wanted to do at previous clinics but could not.

Arden Dental Care had a good clientele when Dr. Boyce purchased it, and he was able to maintain many of the previous customers. Initially Dr. Boyce and Carol did not have a specific plan for what they wanted to do or how to guide their new business. Instead, they learned as they went and learned from experience, competitors, and utilized international consultants.

One of the first changes that was made to the practice was implementing a computerized system. This was done to stay more contemporary, and reduce intensive labor hours in tracking a fully paper system. Part of this computerized system is a patient database. Although it is not as extensive as the Ritz-Carlton system, they do have some similarities. The Arden Dental Care database is primarily made to track patient medical information, but they can also track patient details regarding basic likes and dislikes, and any other special considerations.

Unlike the Ritz-Carlton, Arden Dental Care does not have an experience management plan. They did not sit down and go over the steps that have been discussed so far in this paper. Rather,
their development of customer experience was organically developed over the years by listening to patients and patient surveys, reading trade magazines, learning from industry experts, and listening to employee suggestions like aroma therapy, having pillows and blankets available, and purchasing movie goggles. Despite not having studied or been familiar with experience management Arden Dental Care has still used considered many of the same principles used in Pine & Gilmore’s experience plan.

The Impressions

In my discussion with Carol it was clear that a lot of thought went into the impressions that they want customers to experience. Because so many people get anxious or nervous over visiting the dentist one of the most important impressions is a sense of calm and soothing. Another top impression to make is one of cleanliness, because there are so many tools (and fingers!) that will be entering a patients’ mouth. Other types of impressions mentioned were comfort, using the latest technology, professionalism, and friendliness.

Arden Dental Care Theme

Arden Dental Care does not appear to have a formalized theme that is stated or vocalized. However, there is clearly a consistency in the focus of their décor and treatment of patients. From this and phrases repeated on the website and in my discussions with Carol I believe it would be fair to say the theme is to create a place of calm, comfort, ease, and advanced care. Or, a spa that happens to offer top-notch dental care with the latest technology.

Cues & Clues

This step is where Arden Dental Care really sets its primary focus. Much attention is given to the physical space of the office and to the hiring, training, and treatment of employees. The
physical office of Arden Dental Care is broken up into a lot of small areas, each with a specific purpose and use. There is the waiting room, the check-out counter, the consultation rooms, and the patient rooms where procedures are done.

Arden Dental Care offers consistent mechanics clues throughout their office. Many are discreet or designed to work on a sub-conscious level, including the décor. While the Ritz-Carlton has décor that invites their guests to take video podcast tours, Arden Dental Care’s décor is chosen with sole purpose of putting their patience at ease. The main impression they want to impart is one of comfort and calm. In order to main that impression they choose a color scheme for the entire office to reflect this. All of the walls, carpet, counters and even chairs are shades of blues and greens, with some cream. These colors are all specifically chosen because these are more soothing colors. Every room also either has a plant or plants, or in the case of the patient rooms, a garden view.

Another important set of clues regard the cleanliness of the practice, because people will relate that to the cleanliness of the instruments. Arden Dental Care does more than just merely clean regularly however. They also make every room throughout the office clutter free, including counters and walls. In fact, there is a policy that nothing can be put on a wall without specific permission. This is not limited to pictures, but also includes notes and papers.

The waiting room is kept uncluttered, even of magazines. Instead of magazines piled up on tables around the room like most offices, there are only three or four on the coffee table at Arden Dental Care. The room is painted green, with paintings and pictures of calming outdoor garden and forest scenes. Along one wall is a framed collage of pictures of staff, letters from patients, and appreciation letters from school districts for community service. The receptionist’s desk,
while mostly hidden from view of the patients behind a counter, is also kept extremely organized with no piles of papers or files scattered around. It is hard to imagine any paperwork getting lost or misplaced in this office.

Like the waiting room all of the counters in the patient rooms are completely clutter free and empty. A thick shelf hanging on the wall has pamphlets on the latest technology available to you sitting on top of it. On the bottom side of the shelf are small cut outs where you can pull out paper towels, Kleenex, or small drinking cups. On the side of the shelf is a small spigot to dispense soap. In the *Experience Economy* Pine and Gilmore discuss the opening of a brand new baseball stadium. On the opening day an employee walked through the lines with a small sweep and dustpan, sweeping at the ground. The stadium was brand new, it had never been used and there was nothing to clean. But having someone out there sweeping up nothing showed just how clean the stadium was being kept! (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) This anecdote reminds me of Arden Dental Care’s counters. They are kept so clean and clutter free, it seems like they are never used! They even have a hook on the wall specifically for your purse or coat, so you do not need to put anything on the counter. They do have a small table under the hook, for larger purses or other items that you might bring with you. This is obviously designated as patient space, not for use by the office.

In the patient room there are several diversions offered to distract patients from the fact they are now sitting in the dentist chair. Each of the patient rooms has a large floor to ceiling window that takes up approximately half of the wall. Outside the window a textured rock wall runs the length of the building, with trees growing on the other side. In front of the wall outside each window there is a small zen-like garden with a gravel path, plants and rocks. A bird feeder
also sits outside each window, no two exactly alike. So as you wait for the doctor or assistant you can relax and enjoy the view, watching squirrels chase each other through the trees.

As is the case with most dental offices, each patient room has a small tv set near the ceiling where you can watch a cycle of “before” and “after” patients who have had cosmetic work done. However, at Arden Dental Care they also make iPods available for patients to listen to music, or even watch a movie! For the past year Arden Dental Care has been experimenting with glasses that plug into an iPod for easy movie watching. The movie plays on the inside of the glasses, so you can watch the movie easily, no matter how wide you have to open your mouth or tilt your head.

Aside from the obvious distractions there are other, “negative” cues. By this I mean, when you sit in the dental chair in a patient room there is no evidence that you are actually at a dental office. All of the normal clues and evidence of a dentist practice are removed. The typical dental office exam lamp and the dental tools are set behind the chair, so you do not have to wonder which of the sharp implements will be used on you first. The computer that displays your x-rays and the work that will be done is set directly behind the patient chair, so you do not have to stare at your teeth and worry about how large that particular cavity looks. Every patient room has large x-ray machine with a large arm apparatus that allows pictures to be taken from any angles, but it is entirely hidden from view when folded into the wall between patient rooms, accessible on each side from what looks like an innocuous cabinet. All of the reminders of the procedure about to take place are removed, allowing patients to relax while they wait, instead of get increasingly anxious.
Before the procedure is started the dental assistant comes in to check and see how the patient is doing. They will also offer a pillow or two, one for behind the neck or under the knees to make patients more comfortable. During the actual procedure patients can continue to can listen to music or watch a movie on the supplied iPod. All of this is designed to soothe the patient and distract them from the procedure being done.

The use of humanics cues are also extremely important to Arden Dental Care. Because Dr. Boyce is focused on providing the best treatment available it is important that other staff have a strong orientation on taking care of the customer. Because of this Arden Dental Care uses the DISC (Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientious) method of personality testing for hiring purposes. Companies use this method in hiring and to help integrate teams new team members greater ease. (Wikipedia) Arden Dental Care also has working interviews to see how potential employees interact with the customers, in addition to evaluating their skills.

The majority of work that goes into creating humanic cues for Arden Dental Care goes on behind the scenes, so all patients experience is a well run office designed to relax and assure them. An unseen, but vital clue for Arden Dental Care is the special training that all employees receive on greeting a patient and communicating with patients. Consistency in communication and specific techniques are taught by an international dental consulting company that Arden Dental Care consults with twice a year. By working with consultants twice a year all employees can stay current in their training. Because the consulting company also advices Arden Dental Care on the latest technology, trends, and customer service tools, they are able to stay on the leading edge of trends in the industry.
Although patients may not be aware of the special training that employees receive, it does manifest itself in a number of humanics cues. First, whenever a patient comes in for a visit the receptionist stands up to greet them. The receptionist makes eye contact and always uses the patient’s first name to welcome them, just like the Ritz-Carlton. Arden Dental Care has a leg-up on the Ritz-Carlton in this department. Every new patient is photographed in order to obtain a “before” picture. These pictures are filed electronically with the patient file. This makes it easy for staff to recognize their patients on sight. As a side-benefit, it also provides an extra level of security in regards to laws about medical privacy.

In addition to greetings, employees are also trained in how to communicate with patients regarding procedures. They call this, “eye to eye, knee to knee” training. When explaining a procedure or a diagnosis Dr. Boyce or his dental assistant will always sit down, in order to face the patient directly and demonstrate that their focus is on the patient, not a chart or paperwork. It also allows employees to better gauge how receptive the customer is, and if they understand what is being said. Another part of the training is consistency; the message that is being told is the same from the waiting room, to the dental chair, to the check-out desk.

Other behind the scenes work includes daily morning meetings to discuss the patients that will be coming in for the day, very similar to the Ritz-Carlton. The patient procedures are discussed, and so are stories and memories about the patients. So while Arden Dental Care’s database may not track details like a patient getting married, among the staff someone frequently remembers and shares the information with the entire staff. I have experienced this myself while getting prepared for my wedding. I had a visit in January where the staff learned I was engaged
and at my next visit in June they asked me about the wedding plans. When I visited the staff again in December, they asked how everything went with the wedding and how the honeymoon went.

Also similar to the Ritz-Carlton, a part of each Arden Dental Care meeting is dedicated to staff. Each one starts out with a motivating quote and the first ten minutes are dedicated to positivity, talking about what staff are doing really well, what customers have particularly enjoyed, and a compliment basket. The compliment basket is where employees can write a note praising someone for a particular deed or good day.

For new patients there is specific behind the scenes work to be done. Prior to their first visit every patient is mailed a questionnaire with questions regarding goals for their smile, teeth and gums. They are also asked to call into the office with their insurance information, or even fax a copy of their insurance card in. This preparation makes the first visit simple and easy. It is Arden Dental Care’s goal to have all of the insurance paperwork and past medical history in their office before the patient arrives. This creates a strong impression when a patient makes their first visit. There is no “Arrive 15 minutes early to fill out paperwork” rule. You walk in and can immediately relax in the waiting room and will soon see the dentist. This information is also used at the end of the first visit for a consultation to discuss long term dental care goals (work that needs to be done, cosmetic work, etc.) and to show how the plan will work with insurance.

Insurance is another behind the scenes item that helps provide cues to customers. Primarily this knowledge is used to prevent bad customer experiences. If your next procedure or scheduled appointment will not be covered by insurance (due to reaching maximum limits or any other reason) they will let you know in advance, typically when you make the appointment. That way a
patient is never be surprised by a large bill they were not expecting, which can lead to a very bad customer experience. However, this can also provide positive cues to patients, showing them that Arden Dental Care is not out to make a quick buck. Patients can privately discuss the immediacy of procedures, costs, and when coverage begins again with employees in the sectioned check-out area, or in the consultation room.

While a lot of attention has been directed towards behind the scene work, there are also humanic cues that happen immediately with patients. This is primarily just before and during a procedure. As mentioned previously, after a patient is seated they are offered pillows, an iPod and asked if they need anything.

During a procedure the dental assistant not only helps Dr. Boyce but also watches the patient to gauge if their anxiety level is rising, to check and see if they need a break. Noticing the goose bumps on my arm in the middle of a procedure I have even had the assistant stop to ask if I wanted them to get me a blanket.

Once the procedure is over you will be offered a hot towel to calm or soothe you. As someone who has been in the dental chair for more than an hour and a half at a time, I can vouch that having a hot towel to set on your jaw is extremely soothing! After letting the patient relax, they are escorted to the check-out counter. This is not a totally unique experience to me, as Thank You letters in their waiting room can attest. One letter in particular encompasses all of these aspects:

I really enjoyed my last visit, with the movie goggles, pillows under my knees, and the hot moist towel to clean my face. Felt almost like having a spa experience. The movie really works to distract you from what's going on. Thank you!
Arden Dental Care does not have a specific measurement of determining how each cue effects their patients. Many of their cues, particularly the mechanic ones, work on a more subconscious level, so it would be extremely hard to measure. Instead, they use a model similar to the Ritz-Carlton. They observe their patients and they listen for reactions from patients to changes that have been made. At weekly meetings these observations are discussed, so all employee observations can be heard to get a consensus on varying reactions. Arden Dental Care also uses their referral numbers active patient numbers to gauge how they trend over time. Since 2004 their patient referrals have increased by more than 30% and the number of active patients has increased by more than 80%.

Memorabilia takes on a new meaning when looking at a dental office versus a hotel chain. After the first visit Arden Dental Care will provide a special binder that includes future dental plan. On future visits to get your teeth cleaned you leave with a small Arden Dental Care bag holding a small tube of toothpaste and a toothbrush, with Arden Dental Care’s contact information on the handle. However, you can also get other items like special prescription toothpaste for sensitive teeth.

Extending the Experience

There are non-memorabilia ways to have your dental experience extended. Some may not be so pleasant, like a sore jaw (but do not forget that hot washcloth!) but others are more pleasant. For several hours after getting your teeth cleaned, who can not help but run their tongue over their new ultra smooth teeth? Or for those that get cosmetic work the experience is truly lasting, every time they look in the mirror! Arden Dental Care has created a new way to extend the experience.
though. With their new movie capabilities, they have actually had customers asking to stay in order to finish watching the movie! They actually have people asking to stay in the dental chair longer!

**Auditing the Customer Experience**

Because Arden Dental Care does not have an official Customer Experience Plan, they also have not officially conducted a full experience audit. While they do have an informal system of observing clients and meeting to discuss reactions I believe they could benefit from conducting an audit and formalizing some of the habits they currently practice. This is an area the consultants that they currently use could also be of help.

The first step is to identify what patient emotions can be evoked to help retain patients, or increase referrals from that patient. Responses can continue to be measured by employee observation, but a discussion about observing patient reaction to “X” and how to record or remember that reaction should be done at a prior meeting. Prompting questions or surveys could also be used to gauge customer reaction and emotion as well.

Arden Dental Care has a reoccurring theme in the language they use to describe their company, “oasis”, “comfort” and “advanced care”. They could benefit from formalizing or more clearly vocalizing their theme to employees, or even customers. By formally adopting the, “Spa that happens to offer top-notch dental care with the latest technology” theme or “Retreat to a spa oasis – that offers excellence in dental care”, it could guide future decisions in managing customer experiences. While “oasis” is recurring, by incorporating “spa” into their theme they are giving employees a clear benchmark of the type of experience customers should have. Whatever
theme they establish, they need to insure that the key points align with the emotions and impression they want to impart to their patients. If they do not, will need to make adjustments until there is a complete alignment.

In the next step, Inventory and Evaluate Experience Clues, Arden Dental Care should consider the perspective of their patients through their entire visit. By following a patients path they can track all of the clues, then deconstruct and evaluate them. The clues should be evaluated for consistency and execution to see if they have the desired benefit or a negative impact.

Once that is done they can determine the experience gap, what the customer wants or expects versus what they get. While Arden Dental Care does an excellent job in anticipating the type of experience a patient may want, they are not always consistent in their delivery. Not all patients are offered the pillows or hot towel, or they may not always be offered at every visit. Some of this may be due to the type or length of procedure, but it does create an inconsistency that can confuse patients or leave them wondering what happened to the pillows.

Once the experience gaps are determined, the next step is to close those gaps and then monitor the newly implemented practices or experiences to determine if the execution is good or needs more refining. In my interview with Carol we discussed their newest customer experience, the movie glasses. This is an area where they are especially focusing on the experience gaps and taking measures to correct them. They have already done this a few times, trying out different types of glasses until finding the one that delivered the best experience. Through observation they have also seen that movies are too long for certain procedures so they are looking into getting tv shows as well, for the shorter visits.
The Four-S Model

Without Customer Satisfaction surveys, it is hard to determine the exact level of customer satisfaction for Arden Dental Care’s patients. However, a general idea can be determined based on the 30% increase of referrals numbers from friends and family over the years. After all, no one would suggest a dentist that they are not satisfied with.

As mentioned previously, there are two forms of customer satisfaction, a customer giving up something they want because it is not offered and a customer getting more than what they wanted. In terms of dental care, Arden Dental Care is a very comprehensive company. They offer all of the standard procedures and some more advanced ones. So in terms of products offered there is very little customer sacrifice involved. As mentioned in the previous section there are times when customers are not offered certain amenities. This may cause some customer sacrifice for those patients that are not offered amenities and do not want to ask for them. New customers are asked to fill out a medical survey and a questionnaire regarding their cosmetic dentistry goals. Arden Dental Care may want to consider a likes/dislikes section as well to determine if a customer likes music playing or watching a movie while getting a procedure done – and what type of music or movies. This will help eliminate sacrifice and may surprise patients. This type of customization also helps develop an experience and relationship that would be hard to duplicate at another dental office.

In creating Customer Surprise I believe that Arden Dental Care does have an advantage over their competitors. Not many dental office employees can recognize and greet every patient on site, or offer patients a room with a garden view. Arden Dental Care is also frequently offering
and updating new amenities. Two years ago they had a tv for distraction, then a year ago it was an iPod, and now it is movie glasses. These changes provide a big enhancement in the dental experience. And, because most patients only go to the dentist a few times a year, Arden Dental Care can get a lot of “surprise” from one change.

Customer Suspense is the most difficult step to achieve, particularly for a dental office where suspense is most strongly felt while waiting for your x-rays to come back to find out if you have any cavities and how many! So creating a positive feeling of suspense can be difficult. Currently they may be generating a lot of suspense as patients return, looking forward to some time to sit back with a pillow and new movie. Or maybe they will be surprised with a selection of tv shows to choose from.
Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to determine if current thoughts and ideas regarding customer experience management could be used in an inherently experience-centric industry like hospitality and an industry that most people like to avoid thinking about like dentistry. It is clear that both the Ritz-Carlton and Arden Dental Care follow some of the same business practices and that they both utilize key tools in managing customer experiences.

It is clear that the Ritz-Carlton goes more in-depth in regards to customer experience management, utilizing their tools and employees to a greater extent than Arden Dental Care. However, the goal was not to hold these companies to the same standard, but to see if they could each use this model. Arden Dental Care plainly fulfills the Pine & Gilmore model in regards to managing their patient’s experiences to create a differentiation between themselves and their competitors. The Ritz-Carlton also fulfills the model and does so to a degree that they are able to stay at the top of their game in a competitive field that is constantly managing and engineering customer experiences. It is clear that this model can be used across a wide range of industries to help manage customer experiences.
APPENDIX

**THREE STEPS OF SERVICE**

1. A warm and sincere greeting. Use the guest name, if and when possible.

2. Anticipation and compliance with guest needs.

3. Fond farewell. Give them a warm good-bye and use their names, if and when possible.

**“We Are Ladies and Gentlemen Serving Ladies and Gentlemen”**

**THE EMPLOYEE PROMISE**

*At The Ritz-Carlton, our Ladies and Gentlemen are the most important resource in our service commitment to our guests.*

By applying the principles of trust, honesty, respect, integrity and commitment, we nurture and maximize talent to the benefit of each individual and the company.

*The Ritz-Carlton fosters a work environment where diversity is valued, quality of life is enhanced, individual aspirations are fulfilled, and The Ritz-Carlton mystique is strengthened.*

**CREDO**

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel is a place where the genuine care and comfort of our guests is our highest mission.

We pledge to provide the finest personal service and facilities for our guests who will always enjoy a warm, relaxed yet refined ambience.

The Ritz-Carlton experience enlivens the senses, instills well-being, and fulfills even the unexpressed wishes and needs of our guests.

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