

# Vision

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## Crystal balls or focused VISION? What method of foretelling future service needs do you adopt?

You may be meeting your current customers' needs, however, if you want to deliver excellent customer service in the future you will need a service vision.

Don't get me wrong, I read my horoscope every day and have been to more clairvoyants than I care to admit. Sometimes the soothsayers have even been spookily close to foretelling the future with their premonitions of health, wealth and happiness. Other times though they seem to have grabbed words at random offered with a ghostly glare. It all seems a bit of a lottery, and too risky a method to plan my future around the ramblings of Mystic Meg! In your organisation, predicting what your customers' need today, let alone what they may need tomorrow may force you into the arms of a fortune teller but beware, it is easier to plan for your future with a service vision!

It used to be so easy to see into the future, as in the past customers and organisations knew their place and stayed there. If you used to visit your G.P or dentist you were conditioned to accept an uncomfortable seat in the waiting room with only the frosty glare of the receptionist and a pile of

outdated well thumbed magazines for company. When shopping for clothes you were grateful if the garments were off the floor by the middle of a Saturday afternoon and that the cashier gave you the right change. You kept quiet even though you were losing the will to live in queues in banks and Post Offices and were pitifully grateful if the mechanic servicing your car returned it only a week late and unquestioningly paid the unfeasibly large and intricate bill.

So what has changed to make us all expert customers with very clear and increasingly demanding expectations from the organisations we choose to patronise?

Let's start with the younger generation; advances in technology mean that they are only a text-ing finger or thumb away from a wide network of friends, all of whom are shopping experts by the age of 16. Many have grown up aspiring to own global branded products and these needs have often been pampered to by their parents concerned that their offspring should fit in with the rest of the gang. These young people wrestle with the images of being beautiful and the simplicity

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Got a question about your Service VISION?  
E-mail [steven@withav.net](mailto:steven@withav.net)

Want to talk through a service issue  
then call Steven on 07940 329704.



**Steven Cartwright**  
**Mobile: 00 44 (0) 7940 329704**  
**Office: 00 44 (0) 1422 327258**  
**E-mail: [steven@withav.net](mailto:steven@withav.net)**

and speed of fast food. In general girls take to shopping, like a duck takes to water, they may eventually be found to have a shopping gene, however, in the youthful generation the boys are catching up. Guys are surfing the net for the goods to meet their needs and cruising the shopping malls and High Streets even without a mission purchase in mind.

As for their parents and grandparents, long gone are the days when the U.K. High Street chains or independent stores were the only shops they had frequent access to. They have so much freedom and choice for example in the amount of shopping channels, on the High Street, out of town centres, mail order and the internet. There has been a blurring of who sells what, with one stop huge supermarkets offering white goods and insurance and petrol stations selling food and newspapers. The U.K. High Streets have been populated by chains from all over the world, Zara and Mango have come from the South, H&M from the north and The Gap from the U.S.A. With each new entrant to the market new standards of service and choice were offered. As this generation travelled more, they also exposed themselves to cultures where different levels of service are offered. This growing confidence and ability to shop around and the influence of the compensation culture mean it is now not considered rude to complain about poor or inadequate service, it's almost obligatory!

If customers have been so easy to morph their behaviour so effortlessly over the last decade then what will they do in the coming decade? This is where you choose either option a) Open a Chinese lucky cracker and see what it says. or b) Create a service vision. The former has some disadvantages: "Good fortune will come from afar" is hardly going to be easy passionately communicate, inspire all your employees to deliver their part of the vision, unite your organisation in a common cause, and retain your high fliers who feel energised to work for an organisation with clear and measurable goals.

So where do you start with your vision? You already have, by reading this so far! Gather everything you know about your current customers, monitor trends in their spending patterns and track changes in their shopping

behaviour, scan your industry for emerging themes and benchmark your organisation against the competition for service delivery. Once you have all the relevant data you will need to gather together key decision makers from all parts of your business not just those in customer facing roles. You may even consider calling upon some industry experts and even some of your valued customers to attend part or all of the sessions. Everyone will need to be familiar with the data collected and ready for some creative thinking. You will need to create an environment where ideas of what your customers will look, sound and need in the future, can be captured without criticism (some visioning techniques or guided fantasy techniques will help you here.) After ideas have been generated, time should be given to debate each idea thoroughly to complete your end up with a picture of the future (this can be represented pictorially to great effect)

Congratulations you should now be the proud owner of a vision for service, making the vision a reality is the hard part. If all the stakeholders in the company have been consulted you should have input from them that will help you understand their perspective and enable you to accommodate any conflicting priorities. You will need to break down the vision into manageable chunks (quarterly or annual should do) and make sure everyone is clear on their accountabilities and responsibilities for delivering the vision. It is critical that everyone in your business understands the journey that is being embarked upon so they can feel a part of the process and provide their perspective on how to implement the dream to maximum effect. You will need to make sure progress is tracked and star performers rewarded for delivery to keep the momentum up and a full overhaul will be necessary at least every 5 years to make sure your customers have not transformed again out of your grasp.

A quick delve into the dictionary reveals the word vision to mean the foresight or the ability to see or know before. Even with a service vision you will never be guaranteed to know everything about your service requirements in the future, and anticipate every future nuance of the needs of your customers, but it sure beats a gaze into a crystal ball

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