Putting on the Ritz

Randy C. Hice

Why customer service is the best marketing

Returning to Houston for the annual Microsoft World Wide Partners Conference this year brought back memories: some dim, some vivid.

I was posted in Houston around 1989 for 2.5 years. Though I was living in Atlanta, I stayed at the Ritz Carlton for one year. Yes folks, I would send whatever clothes I had used to the hotel laundry, and because I was such a steady customer, they would place them in my room over the weekend if I returned to Atlanta. They wouldn’t even charge me for harboring my threads in an otherwise unoccupied room.

For service, it’s hard to beat the Ritz Carlton.

Three examples…

Feathered friends

Out at a petrochemical company where I was performing a business analysis, in an otherwise sun-scorched parking lot, there was a single tree. Trumpeting my good fortune, I screeched my white rental car into the space, knowing that at the end of the day, it would only be red-hot as opposed to supernova hot after basking in the Texas sun. What I didn’t count on was the tree was also the sole refuge for any bird in the area wanting to rest its wings. It was also the restroom for birds-on-the-go, and apparently the berry-de-jour in them there parts was a large purple orb.

At the end of the day, my white car was now a mosaic of hundreds of well-targeted, purple, rectal ordinance. Ah, and that vaunted Houston sun had fire-sealed each and every purple globule to the finish of the car.

Despondent, I stopped by one of the ubiquitous ice houses — garage like structures meant to provide thirsty and hot end-of-work drivers with road beer. Of course, I drank mine while sitting at the ice house (wink, wink). Once back at the Ritz, the parking valets, after viewing the abstract avian artwork, struggled mightily to contain themselves, but as I handed them my keys, I just shrugged and started laughing causing them to also dissolve into convulsive fits.

But by the next morning, when they delivered my car to the door, it had been run through the car wash and returned to its original state. I tipped them heavily as I could now ride to work that morning without the humiliation of driving a mobile septic tank for our feathered friends.

Trophy finish

A few months later, by luck, the U.S. Open Squash Championships were being hosted in Houston. I stayed in Houston for the weekend rather than return to Atlanta. The Ritz upgraded me to a massive suite with a full living room, multiple TVs and a few dozen antiques to spruce things up. I ended up a finalist, but lost to a member of the Mexican national team. For my troubles, I won a small silver bowl that I have to this day. I left the bowl in my room at the Ritz as I went out to dinner to celebrate. I returned a few hours later to find the bowl missing — at a Ritz Carlton!

I told the manager and he was mortified. He said he’d look into it right away.

Despondent again, I went to the bar in the Ritz (do you see a pattern here?).

I ordered up a Greyhound and the bartender pushed a bowl of nuts in front of me. I absently stared at the TV for a few minutes before I focused on the nut bowl — a small, silver bowl very similar in size to my trophy. I bolted out to the lobby to find the manager.

“I think housekeeping may have thought my trophy was a room service item.”

He was mortified for the second time. He said he’d have an answer for me by the next morning and took my work number out in Baytown.

I received a call about 9 AM. It was the manager.

“Mr. Hice, I’m so sorry — housekeeping did take your bowl, and we’ll have it in your room when you return.”

I returned that night and walked into the foyer. Sitting on a nice little pot belly cabinet was a crushed velvet cloth. Sitting atop the cloth was a silver tray with fruit, cheese, and expensive bottle of red wine, my trophy (which for reasons that will

become clear, looked better than before), and a handwritten note from the manager.

Dear Mr. Hice. Please accept my sincere apologies for the incident involving your silver trophy. It was accidentally run through the dishwasher, so we sent it out to a local jeweler for polishing. As always, I am available 24 hours to answer any questions.

Birthday boy

A last Ritz tale. A few years after the Houston incident, my wife took me to the Ritz Carlton in Atlanta for dinner. At the time, the restaurant at the Ritz was probably the best in town. I chatted with the Maître d'hôtel as we checked in for our reservation.

“Special occasion?”

I said nothing but my wife said, “Birthday Boy”.

“Well then. I have a special table for you.”

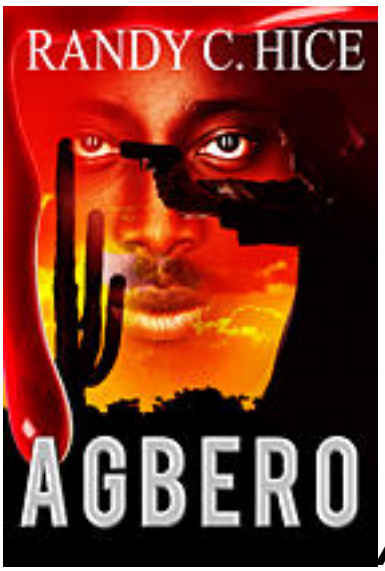
We were escorted to a small table next to another couple. I looked at a man having dinner with a beautiful lady. He knew I recognized him, and he smiled at me for a moment as I sat down.

When we sat down, my wife asked, “What’s so special about this table?”

I discretely pointed to the man six feet away. “That’s Ron Wood from the Rolling Stones.”

When you go the extra mile for customers, word-of-mouth advertising is priceless. I have told that story a dozen times, and now you’re reading it. You’ll not hear me complaining about customer service at a Ritz Carlton anytime soon.

Randy Hice is Director, Strategic Consulting at STARLIMS, and the author of the thriller novel Agbero. He may be reached at editor@ScientificComputing.com [1].



Agbero

Randy C. Hice | May 29, 2013 | Kindle Price: $4.99 | Available on Apple, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Smashwords and several other ebook outlets.

Summary: *Would the world be a better or worse place if the afterlife is discovered to be simply another dimension accessible by technology? Would religious zealots be forced to define blasphemy in entirely new terms? Would a juggernaut industry materialize to connect the dearly departed with their corporeal family members? Agbero challenges the reader to consider these questions and more; all while being swept into a breathtaking maelstrom of ingenious murder, startling psychics, and shocking duplicity.*

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