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The Financial and Behavioral Impacts of Customer Service

'At Your Service' Spotlight: Andrew Dunn, Scott Dunn Travel



Andrew Dunn

A British luxury travel company has spent over 35 years wowing its customers. From its first ski season when the owner personally drove to France with huge supplies of bacon to perfect its English breakfasts, Scott Dunn has gone the extra mile for service and for quality. "From day one we wanted to be the best," says founder Andrew Dunn. The company was established in 1986 initially as a ski chalet business, operating out of two chalets in Verbier, Switzerland. Despite first year losses, 22-year-old Dunn ploughed on, opening up chalets in neighboring

resorts and differentiating on comforts such as down duvets and morning tea in bed. Launching his London office in 1988, he provided his own staff and British nannies for his Swiss and French properties, establishing a benchmark for Alpine chalet holidays with his emphasis on opulence and personal service. Up until then, most competitors had provided quaint but adequate accommodation, basic catering, and very low-budget wines.

When Giles Tonner joined the Scott Dunn team in the 1990s, worldwide tailor-made adventure holidays were added to the mix – this was soft adventure without compromising comfort. Seeing a bigger profit margin in high-end travel, Dunn also added long-haul luxury and Mediterranean villas with private chefs, hosts, nannies and exclusive children’s clubs. He was following the advice of his grandmother who told him when he started his business: “Andrew, you never want to be selling the cheapest – people will always pay for the best”.

A graduate in Psychology and Biology from Oxford Brookes University, Dunn has always been astute in consumer behavior. “I was acutely aware that a guest is not just a single purchase; they are a multiple purchase and there’s potentially a lifetime journey with them”. He looks to woo each customer early on and retain them through the different phases of their lives: marriage, parenthood and beyond. “It’s a massive responsibility because if you screw up it’s not just that booking you are going to lose; you’ve probably lost another six bookings over the next couple of years,” he says. His education helped out with recruitment and training, too. “I’ve always had a knack for finding the right people to work for me. It’s a question of whether I like an individual and a lot about chemistry. I need to know ‘do they care?’ and ‘do they want to give the guests the best experience possible?’ or do they just want to travel the globe,” says Dunn. Unlike many travel companies, he retains a strong base of year-round staff in order to ensure consistency and high standards with a permanent management team in the UK and seasonal workers in resort – around a third of whom return year round.

Dunn also employs consultants to scope out destinations in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, India, Arabia, Latin America, the Caribbean and South Pacific. They then write Travelogs for the company website about their experiences and also work as advisors to potential customers. “What makes us different is that nothing is too much trouble,” explains Dunn. “That mantra is just as important today as it was 25 years ago. If you worry and you care and you want your guests to have a good time, then they will.” The Scott Dunn website promises to craft something special for each customer. This type of one-on-one service has led to more than 70% repeat business through loyalty and referral. The Scott Dunn service philosophy includes unexpected acts of kindness (U.A.K.s) – a term Dunn coined – for guests, and there’s a behind-scenes budget for this. The price tag of such extras is never questioned. “We obviously try to mitigate costs as much as we can but nothing that would affect a guest. If you’re part of the DNA of the company, you understand the importance of the guest,” Dunn asserts.