

# It's Hard to Be Easy

Customer friendliness is in the eye of the customer. Make sure your customers like what they see.

By Bryan Rader / *Bandwidth Consulting LLC*

**D**o you think your company is easy to do business with? When companies ponder this self-assessment question, they often answer, “Of course we are!” They may believe their sales teams’ 800 numbers, their online new-property forms or the well-thought-out FAQ buttons on their websites qualify them as “easy to do business with.”

That seems easy enough!

A few years ago, in a nationwide customer service study, two companies were ranked as the easiest to do business with. One was USAA, a large insurance and banking organization, and the other was Kohl’s, an affordable retailer. What did customers like about them?

USAA customers cited service reps who were so well-trained, they could handle any inquiry on a single call without having to transfer callers to multiple departments. Kohl’s customers identified the no-hassle return policy and the in-store kiosks at which customers could efficiently order products to be shipped directly to their homes.

“Easy to do business with” is defined by customers, not by sellers. USAA and Kohl’s win because they excel at what their customers define as important.

Too many companies mistakenly call themselves “easy” because they design great customer-facing websites or they believe their sales teams are responsive to client needs. They fail to realize that “easy” may mean something else to their customers (property owners, in the case of multifamily service providers).

Some companies get it; others don’t. Uber is easy to do business with. Download the app, key in your address, order a driver when you need one and go. FedEx is easy, too. Print the label at home, drop off the package at a store or a box and track it until it is received.

Other companies seem lost. Ever try to redeem frequent-flyer points from one of the mega-airlines? They are eager for customers to build up points balances, and they make it easy to track balances and watch them grow. But they make redemption virtually impossible with blackout dates, multiple phone calls, and crazy, newly announced redemption fees and limitations.

Business practices that impact “ease of doing business” can be policies, internal procedures, pricing plans and sales or

operational strategies. Some companies have simply developed a culture of being easy (or hard) to work with.

My firm works with many service providers on new multiple-dwelling-unit communities. We are constantly amazed that some providers make working with them so difficult. Property owner clients notice, and they encourage us to steer away from these providers.

Why is this?

## EASY OR NOT?

Let’s start at the beginning of the relationship. An owner typically creates a request for proposals and sends it to multiple candidates. What happens next separates pretenders from contenders. Some providers ask for a six-month lead time. Others raise more questions than answers. And some can’t coordinate an engineering site survey for 30 days or even forget to respond. That’s “easy”?

Next is the selection process. Owners ask follow-up questions. How fast do providers respond? How do they handle these unique requests?

Then comes the dreaded draft service agreement phase. Some providers are great about submitting well-crafted, customized agreements and make their legal reps available for comments. Others send draft agreements and then spend the next two months begging owners not to request any changes, as it would slow down the deal process.

Finally, an agreement is signed – then comes the launch process. How well sales coordinates with operations is a good way to distinguish “easy to work with” providers from difficult ones.

These are just some key measures clients use to determine how easy a company is to work with. Look at your company to see how you stack up. Are you more like USAA and Kohl’s or more like the mega-airlines?

Yes, it’s difficult to be easy, but it’s so important for driving success. Don’t ask me. Ask your prospective customers. ❖

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