



## CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT

Over the past five years, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on shifting organizational and operational structures and processes. All of the nation's leading property owners and service providers have and continue to measure customer satisfaction. Many firms have established customer service standards, retooled hiring practices to attract more customer-centric employees, and have added customer service statements to their key values. However, many real estate firms have discovered that “taking customer service to the next level” mandates an added focus on how the customer experience is managed.

The number of “touches” a customer has with their service provider can top 100 in a given week. From signage to lighting, phone etiquette, parking areas and common areas, every real estate customer interacts with a building individual or amenity that is owned, operated and/or serviced by professionals directly and/or indirectly associated with the primary service provider. From the moment a tenant or resident arrives at a property, to the moment they leave, the number of customer experiences and interactions shape the level of overall satisfaction that individual has with “their” property. How a real estate firm manages that customer experience can have a dramatic impact on the asset’s overall profitability.

While the process of Client Relationship Management (“CRM”) is fairly well known and highly valued by those real estate firms deploying the CRM process, the art of Customer Experience Management (“CEM”) is not well known and just beginning to find its way into the lexicon of real estate CEO's

priorities. CEM is increasingly becoming a component of the new client-centric business model within real estate organizations as the battle to attract and retain tenants and residents intensifies. Confronted with rising vacancy levels and/or a protracted leasing process, real estate CEOs have discovered that investing in CRM and CEM programs is far less costly than trying to secure a new tenant or resident.

While there are many facets of an effective CEM program, CEL & Associates, Inc. has identified the following seven essential elements which must be present in order to be successful.

### **Begin With Quantifiable Benchmarks:**

The foundation of all CEM programs begins with quantifiable measures on customer satisfaction and the customer experience. Knowing and understanding how one's current customer base perceives their “experience” provides a basis for prioritizing improvement initiatives. The real estate customer has opinions and levels of expectations about their entire property experience and/or interaction with their service provider. The “visible” attributes of good property management are increasingly becoming in balance with the “interactive” elements of property management. Quantifying the opinions and perceptions of one's customers is a “must do” first step in all CEM programs.

**Determine Service Standards:** It is literally an impossible task to anticipate and deploy service standards that will meet all current and future needs of one's customers. However, real estate firms have discovered that establishing service standards for all the key points of customer interaction and experience is essential. In



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addition to the obvious appearance and condition standards, performance “The number ‘touches’ customer can top hundred given week.” benchmarks should be set for all methods of communication, the leasing experience, the primary points of customer interaction and the internal support needed by on-site personnel, among others. Setting and implementing service standards will enhance the overall ability of one to manage the customer experience.

**Listen To Their Words... Observe Their Emotions:** Real estate firms are increasingly becoming adept at soliciting and obtaining feedback from their customers. Daily interactions are fairly routine for most real estate service providers. However, listening to and recording the question, complaint and/or service request is only half of the process. The level of emotion during a customer interaction is as, or perhaps more, important than listening to the words. An effective CEM program incorporates elements on how to interpret anger, confusion, frustration, bewilderment and hesitation. Perhaps if the emotions were better understood, many customers would be saved.

**Identify And Perfect Each Customer Touch:** The easiest way to identify the number of customer touches is to pretend you are a customer for a day. Record the number of touches you have with the facility and its service providers, from the striping in the parking lot to the security control system, billing system, phone system, hallways and air conditioning systems, etc. Once the touch point is identified, a grade or rating should be applied to determine the quality of that number of experience, and an action plan should be developed to enhance

or upgrade that customer touch point. There could be as many as 100 touch points in a typical customer experience.

**Fix Operational Problems And Systems Before They Occur:** Even the “perfect” operation can get better! An effective CEM program includes an operational assessment and a prioritized list of action items. Operational assessments are best done by independent consultants who are not encumbered with internal bias and personal agendas. Once an improvement opportunity is identified and a solution accepted, the process for enacting that improvement should be immediate.

**Develop An Effective Customer Access Strategy:** Real estate firms in today's uncertain and constantly changing marketplace must develop and adopt an effective customer access strategy. How, where and why a customer interacts is critical to managing the customer experience. CEL & Associates, Inc. has found that developing customer profiles, defining methods of communications, identifying customer access channels, capturing customer data, sharing customer knowledge and aligning the customer access expectations of top management are critical to an effective CEM program.

**Create And Deploy Customer-Friendly Employees:** Managing the customer experience ultimately comes down to the quality and motivations of the professionals assigned to interact with customers. Establishing customer-centric hiring practices, recognizing performance excellence, cultivating leadership, instilling a pride in serving customer needs, developing career and skill path opportunities for customer-friendly employees, etc., are some



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of the components of hiring and deploying CEM-based employees.

Conclusion: Customers are the key to every real estate event. Without customers, there would not be any leases, tenants, residents or sales. Developing and deploying an effective CRM and CEM

program is a must for every real estate firm that wants to be profitable and succeed over the next decade. In challenging economic and financial times, investing in the customer experience is one aspect of operations that cannot be overlooked or deferred.

*For more information on how CEL & Associates, Inc. can assist your organization in the development and deployment of a CRM and CEM program, please contact us by calling 310.571.3113 or via email at [chris@celassociates.com](mailto:chris@celassociates.com)*