

STAGING MEMORABLE EVENTS AND FESTIVALS: AN INTEGRATED MODEL OF SERVICE AND EXPERIENCE FACTORS

Linda S. Ralston

University of Utah
USA

Gary D. Ellis

University of Utah
USA

David M. Compton

University of Utah
USA

Joongwon Lee

University of Utah
USA

ABSTRACT

Excellence in customer service has received considerable focus over the last two decades with primary scrutiny regarding the identification of customer's perceptions of service, the value of particular services, and the training of staff to provide consistent customer service. Pine and Gilmore (1999) explored how successful companies have moved beyond service delivery by designing memorable experiences. The purpose of this article is to explore the integration of service factors with experience factors to advance a model for delivery of unique experiences that will ensure that events are so memorable success is assured through guest's intention to return and recommend

KEYWORDS

Event staging, service factors, experience factors

INTRODUCTION

The embarrassing slip-of-the tongue occurred while the servant and guests ascended the winding, spiral staircase that hugged the granite walls of the medieval castle. The immaculately dressed servant of the royal master had greeted the guests with the greatest of formality and nobility, inviting them to follow him up the staircase. "Your breakfast awaits, m' lord," the servant had offered, with a slight bow and graceful sweep of his arm. As the

march up the staircase began, the guest turned to the beautiful young woman who he was following up the steps. "I am a lord. You, then, must be a lady." The servant, overhearing the comment, stopped suddenly in his steps and whirled to face the guest, aghast. "Oh no sir," corrected the servant politely but firmly, "she is a princess."



Perhaps the reader wonders when and where this incident occurred. Rather than being in “the old country,” ruled by kings and knights centuries ago, this incident occurred in 1999 in central Florida. The medieval castle was Cinderella’s “home” in the center of Disney World’s Magic Kingdom. The servant was a “cast member” (employee) of the Disney corporation, the guest was an author of this paper, and the “princess” was his five year old daughter. The incident is recounted here as a prime example of a memorable guest experience that was staged by an agent of an organization whose remarkable success is founded on the fundamental understanding that its business is not to deliver services, but rather to stage experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). As Pine and Gilmore point out in *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and every Business a Stage*, successful organizations in this experience economy embrace the position that their mission is to stage experiences rather than deliver services, their buyers are guests rather than clients or customers, and their factors of demand are sensations and memories rather than intangible benefits. Among the many businesses that have achieved enormous success from designing their offerings from this perspective are Starbucks Coffee (who would otherwise pay \$5.00 for a cup of coffee?), Build-a-Bear workshop (where guests give birth to plush animals), Planet Hollywood, Rain Forest Café, numerous successful hotels and resorts along the Las Vegas “strip” (e.g. Treasure Island; New York, New York; Caesar’s Palace; The Venetian) and, of course, the Disney Corporation.

On the surface, these businesses seem to be remarkably disparate. Their experience offerings occur in a great diversity of contexts, ranging from exclusive resorts and theme parks to coffee shops and restaurants. If one were to peer into the “tool box” of devices that these agencies use to stage experiences, however, it would be very evident that the agencies share a fully common set of techniques. The purpose of this paper is to lay open this toolbox for readers and explore possibilities for application of experience economy principles to the staging of experiences for guests to festivals and major events.

Service Factors

Service quality is a dynamic concept derived from understanding both how the guest believes that service should be rendered and how a manager attempts to provide a service. This interpersonal concept does not simply imply good or satisfying perceptions of a service

but rather a memorable experience that the guest is inspired to share with others (Rust, & Oliver, 1994; Oliver, 1993b).

Service Quality Defined: Service quality is related to the proposition that “customers entertain expectations of performance on the service dimensions, observe performance, and later form performance perceptions” (Rust & Oliver, 1994, p. 5). Kotler, et al. (1998) utilized the definition of quality from the American Society for Quality Control as “the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy customer needs” (p. 16). Oliver (1993b) differentiates the meaning of quality and satisfaction. Quality judgment may be derived from specific situational and experiential cues or attributes, whereas satisfaction is a super ordinate concept that may include some judgments regarding quality. The assessment of quality expectations is founded on an image of excellence whereas satisfaction judgments are determined by the fulfilment of needs and equity, or fairness.

According to Herbig (1998), there are three general definitions of quality. Quality may be defined as conforming to specifications, quality from the viewpoint of the consumer, and quality as “innate excellence.” Quality as “conforming to specification” is measured simply by an established standard. A McDonald’s restaurant may have an established standard that a customer’s order must be filled within 60 seconds of taking the order (p. 259). If a McDonald’s restaurant is visited by a corporate supervisor, they can calculate the average amount of time it takes to fill the orders. If the staff is able to fulfil the orders within the 60 seconds, then the quality standard has been achieved.

“Quality lies in the eyes of the beholder” reflects the tendency of different consumers possessing different needs and therefore, a different perception of quality (Herbig, 1998, p. 259). This idiosyncratic or personal view of quality challenges the provider to modify services and products based upon each user’s requests in order to achieve quality. An illustration of this concept might be achieved with a comparison of two very different types of international tourists. A college student planning to backpack through Europe may be looking for affordable airfare or discount train fares that may result in extended stays in secondary or intermediary destinations. This type of international tourist places greater emphasis on price as the most important criteria for a perception of quality. Conversely, business travellers may place greater emphasis on

time and comfort and therefore, prefer to purchase non-stop airline tickets to their final destination. This type of international tourist then would include time, convenience and comfort as the most important determinant factors resulting in a perception of quality.

“Quality is innate excellence” reflects the perception that quality results from diligence and hard labor (Herbig, 1998, p. 260). Therefore, one cannot deny that quality exists if the service or product was produced through common or acceptable practices or process. Not all customers may appreciate the taste of Chinese food, but the aesthetic presentation of the food, service ware, table decorations, and even the restaurant atmosphere may be perceived as being of high quality.

The Importance of Service Factors: Why is customer service important in tourism, hospitality, and event management? Research has demonstrated that good customer service generates the most significant influence on customer satisfaction which is directly related to the customer's intention to return or intention to recommend. There are several objectives of service from the perspective of service providers: improving guest convenience, enhancing service provider's image, ensuring customer security, generating traffic, establishing a competitive edge, and generating customer demand (Wuest, 2001). One of the key contributors achieving guest convenience is providing convenient access (such as the proximity of parking lots, restroom facilities, comfortable seating, and so on). The second objective of service is establishing or enhancing the brand image of their property or services. Among the grand hotels of the world, The Ritz-Carlton hotels and resorts are renowned for their indulgent luxury and their legendary service. The picture perfect image of Ritz-Carlton is enhanced by their credo “We pledge to provide the finest personal service and facilities for our guests who will always enjoy a warm, relaxed, yet refined ambience.” The credo is further supported by their Motto, the Service Values, and the Employee Promise. Their three Steps of Service exemplify their attention to each facet of the guest experience.

1. A warm and sincere greeting. Use the guest's name
2. Anticipation and fulfilment of each guest's needs.
3. Fond farewell. Give a warm good-bye and use the guest's name. (Kandampully, Mok & Sparks, 2001).

Service champions, such as Ritz-Carlton ensure that their guests are fully satisfied and loyal as this will generate a

greater intention to return and intention to recommend the service to their friends and relatives. It is commonly accepted that word of mouth is the most trusted form of marketing and the most efficient for any agency or event.

Dimensions of Service Quality: Service quality was initially designed based on the traditional product manufacturing model of quality of materials utilized in the manufacture of goods, the workmanship resulting in a quality product, and the sales personnel. Similarly, Sasser, Olsen, and Wychkoff (1978) identified three categories of service delivery dimensions: levels of material, facilities, and personnel. Grönroos (1984) proposed three essential points of service quality: technical quality (What), functional quality (How), and overall perception of service. Technical quality may result from an interaction with actual service that is received from the service providers. The function quality represents the expressive manner of service delivery that service guest has taken from the service provider. The overall perception of service is a customer's evaluation of service between perception and expectation of the service (Grönroos, 1984; Desarbo, Huff, Rolandelli, & Choi, 1994; O'Neil, 2001). Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982) proposed three dimensions of service quality: physical quality, corporate quality, and interactive quality. Physical quality indicates facilities, equipment, or buildings. The corporate quality represents service firm's image and reputation. The interactive quality means the interaction between guests and service providers (Zeithaml & Parasuraman, 2004).

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) developed 10 dimensions of service after conducting numerous focus group research studies with a wide variety of industries.

- Tangibles (appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials),
- Reliability (ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately),
- Responsiveness (willingness to help customers and provide prompt service),
- Competence (possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service),
- Courtesy (politeness, respect, consideration, and friendliness of the contact personnel),
- Credibility (trustworthiness, believability, and honesty),
- Security (freedom from danger, risk, or doubt),

- Access and welcome (approachability and ease of contact),
- Communication (keeping customers informed in language they can understand and listening to them), and
- Empathy (making the effort to know customers, relate to their needs and emotions) (Zeithaml et al., 1990, Zeithaml & Parasuraman, 2004).

Parasurman et al. (1988) utilized factor analysis to reduce the original 10 dimensions to 5 dimensions. The researchers determined that the three dimensions (tangibles, reliability, and responsiveness) should remain intact and the balance of the 7 dimensions should be combined into 2 dimensions (assurance and empathy). The dimensions of competence, courtesy, credibility, and security were combined into assurance. The dimensions of access, communication, and understanding of the customer were clustered into empathy. Finally, the SERVQUAL consisted of five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance (employees' knowledge and courtesy and their ability to inspire trust and confidence), and empathy (caring, individualized attention given to customers) (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Zeithaml et al., 1990; Zeithaml & Parasuraman, 2004).

The reduction of the factors was useful in designing the SERVQUAL instrument but may have consolidated several key components and therefore reduced the strength or importance of the items. The Experience Factor Model proposes a return to the original ten dimensions. The Experience Factor model includes the addition of assurance and recovery factors to more fully encompass the full spectrum of the service experience. Assurance is an important variable to consider in the service industry in order to capitalize on the returning or referred guest. A loyal guest expects to receive the same quality of service upon return to a business or event. The Starbucks customer expects their Decaf Komodo Dragon Blend to have the same deep, full-bodied flavor regardless of which store or time they visit.

A customer service program or customer loyalty program is incomplete unless it includes a service recovery procedure. When a guest submits a verbal or written complaint an immediate action of the agency to remedy the situation is essential to the retention of the customer. Berry (1995) cites the training of Bank One Texas employees to "run the problem" and assume personal ownership of the problem. The source of the problem may

have been your supplier or a natural emergency, but the service provider that takes particular care of the guest during these "moments of truth" may in fact generate a loyal customer for life. For example, on a recent trip to Ireland a guest's rental car developed mechanical problems stranding the guest at the Clontarf Castle several hours prior to their scheduled check-in on their first day in Ireland. The front desk staff provided immediate storage of their luggage, assisted in calling for the area auto mechanic, and allowed the guest to enjoy a relaxing full Irish Breakfast in the castle's dining parlour while they waited. The automobile problem was not the responsibility Clontarf Castle, but they took ownership of the situation and ensured that their guest was taken care of even before they were checked into their hotel. The goal of service recovery is to address customers' problems even if the problem was not a direct result of the service provider. Research has shown that customers who have had a service failure resolved quickly and properly are more loyal to a company than are customers who have never had a service failure (Berry, 1995; Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault, 1990). Recovery therefore becomes an essential factor in any service experience. Careful attention to these 12 service factors will minimize the occurrence of negative cues that detract from an enjoyable experience.

Experience Factors

The service factors discussed in the previous section provide a foundation for the effective staging of guest experiences. Careful attention to those factors results in the absence of dissatisfaction and critical incidents that yield unfavorable word-of-mouth advertising (Wuest, 2001) and "one-off" experiences (i.e., no return visit). Service factors alone, however, are not sufficient to guarantee that target sensations will be elicited that will congeal into memorable experiences for guests. In order to create such experiences, successful organizations in the experience economy attend to an additional set of techniques, which we refer to as "experience factors." Several sources of such factors may be identified. Perhaps the most notable of these are the experience factors that are described in Pine and Gilmore's (1999) The experience economy.

- Fully theme the encounter
 - Individualize guests' encounters
 - Create targeted impressions
 - Eliminate negative cues
 - Engage multiple senses
-

- Provide memorabilia
- Get into character and act your part
- Perform to form

Pine and Gilmore provide fully developed descriptions of these factors through a discussion that is rich in examples of successful execution. Given our introductory treatment, only the last two items on the list will be elaborated on here, as they are perhaps the least intuitive among the items on the list.

“Get into character and act your part” is a principle that is exemplified by the story at the beginning of this paper. The “servant” described in that paragraph was fully absorbed in his medieval role and was expected to not step out of that character at any time while in the public view. Idle conversations with other cast members that are not germane to the time and place theme constitute violations of personnel policy. Opportunities for establishing characters and playing roles abound in festivals and event settings. Cast members who welcome visitors to an Oktoberfest, for example, can be in full traditional Germanic dress. Similarly, cast members who serve guests to a minor league baseball team that advances a “traditional baseball” theme might dress in classic uniforms and perhaps take on the role of popular players or all-stars of the past.

The phrase “perform to form” also requires elaboration. Pine and Gilmore (1999) describe four forms of theatre that represent most cast job responsibilities. At Disneyland, when Merlin the Magician hosts an event that involves extraction of the sword embedded in the stone by a young guest, the event is fully scripted “platform theatre.” When a cast member of a planetarium who is in-character and costume as a NASA astronaut leads a simulated mission on the moon for guests who participate in a “moon gravity” experience, a general script is in place, but the plot unfolds along with the participation of the guest. The guests and astronaut are then involved in street theatre. When a cast member at a cash register welcomes a guest to a restaurant and finds a way to briefly individualize the guest’s experience (“I like your sailboat tie! Are you a sailor?”), he or she is performing improvisational theatre. When a performer pieces together what she or he knows about guests to create an experience unique to that group, she or he is practicing matching theatre. The point that Pine and Gilmore (1999) make with this distinction is that most, if not all, job assignments of cast members may be viewed from the

perspective of one of these forms of theatre. When jobs are structured such that cast members “perform to one of these forms” they are in a much better position to stage memorable experiences for guests.

In addition to experience factors that are implicit or explicit in Pine and Gilmore’s (1999) work, useful strategies may also be found in other bodies of literature. One such body of literature includes writings about engagement of guests to heritage sites through interpretive talks and media. The classic writing of this type is Freeman Tilden’s book, *Interpreting our Heritage* (1977). Interestingly, Tilden is connected to the “work is theatre” theme of Pine and Gilmore’s work, as he was an accomplished playwright and successful author of fiction prior to undertaking his work in heritage interpretation. His most recognized contributions to theatre are *Five O’Clock* (which was performed at the Fulton Theatre in New York City in 1921 and 1922) and *Old Man Crabtree*, which was produced in 1922.

Later in his career, Tilden accepted an invitation from publisher Alfred Knopf to write a book about the national parks. That invitation led to publication of the enormously successful and popular book, *The National Parks: What They Mean to You and Me*. In that book, Tilden clearly revealed his enduring fascination with the nature of visitor experiences:

When [visitors say] “I didn’t know there were such beautiful and interesting places!” what they are really saying is that they did not know that they had within them such capacity for the realization of beauty and significance. They fall in love with the national parks, not for the spectacular features within them, but for the essence of them. They do not say this in self-conscious words, but they feel it.

Tilden’s inquiry into the National Parks led him to believe that greater attention was needed to increase the quality of guest experiences through improved staging of interpretation experiences. That concern led to a grant from the National Park Service which engaged Tilden in staging interpretive experiences for guests to a heritage site in Florida for two years. These experiences as an interpreter became the seed-bed of Tilden’s seminal contribution to interpretation practice and technique, *Interpreting our Heritage* (1977; first edition published in 1957).

Interpreting our Heritage (1977) advances six principles of successful interpretation. These principles may also be applied to staging of experiences of guests of festivals and other events:

- Interpretation that does not relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality will be sterile.
- Information, as such, is not interpretation.
- Interpretation is an art...any art is, to some degree, teachable.
- The chief aim of interpretation is...provocation.
- Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part.
- Interpretation addressed to children should follow a fundamentally different program.

These principles may also be applied to the process of staging encounters for guests in other settings, including events and festivals. The list does, in fact, lend itself very well to major events that celebrate culture and heritage.

Additional experience factors may be extracted from the social science literature on motivation and emotion. A number of "mini theories" (Reeve, 2005) have been advanced to explain motivation and emotion in particular situational contexts, and many of these may be extraordinarily useful for staging specific types of offerings within the experience industry. In offerings that involve teaching complex skills to participants, for example, experience stagers might do well to borrow principles from self-efficacy theory, which will help build students' confidence in their ability to master skills. Bandura's four major sources of this "efficacy information" may easily be integrated into the learning environment: mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences (e.g. peer modeling, imagery), and situational arousal. In addition, virtually any event may benefit from attention to well-founded mechanisms from arousal theory (Berlyne, 1967) that serves to gain and sustain attention: novelty, complexity, and incongruity (dissonance). Table 1 provides examples of experience factors that may be derived from select mini theories of motivation and emotion.

INTEGRATED MODEL

In order to create optimal experiences for patrons, customers or spectators, it is necessary to include both service and experience factors. There appears to be a clear relationship between these two set of factors that

would afford more productive planning, management, evaluation and training. While service factors are the center of most evaluation efforts today, there is little evidence that service and experience factors have been yoked in a manner that would lead to increased effectiveness of events or festivals. Service factors should be considered the "denominator" in any model as they are required for staging events and festivals. Service factors include previously excluded elements that were collapsed using factor analysis (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988). This statistical procedure may have marginalized some essential factors that are closely linked to experience factors advanced by Pine and Gilmore (1999). Therefore, the service factors advanced in this integrated model recapture service factors in the initial work of (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Berry, 1985). This more extensive list represents the core elements of service operations that set the stage for creating and executing memorable experiences. Experience factors, on the other hand, represent the "numerator" in the model as they may vary widely, yet are the critical factors that accelerate or propel events and festivals to their zenith.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship of service factors to experience factors. In this integrated model, service factors are weighted and summed to provide a "Service Quotient" (SQ) ranging from 0-100. Weighting is assigned to such things as reported or observed Critical Incidents (CI) that clearly detracted from an event or festival's ability to serve its customers or participants. In this case a CI would be weighted in the negative and reduce the eventual SQ. Conversely, outstanding performance on other factors such as stimulating multiple senses, individualizing guests' encounters, or creating targeted impressions would be positively weighted and increase the SQ.

The "Experience Quotient" (EQ) is a product of the experience factors. As with the SQ, the EQ is a product of the weighted factors and has a scale from 0-100. Weighting is assigned to such things as reported or observed moments by customers or patrons referred to as "Wow!" experiences that distinctly and indelibly impact the individuals collective set of experiences derived from an event or festival. For example, a rather uninteresting baseball game may be followed by a spectacular fireworks display that serves as an immediate conscious experience and is talked about for days, months or years by a customer. In this case a Wow! would be weighted in the positive and increase the eventual EQ. Conversely,

marginal or unimaginative performance related to other experience factors such as providing memorabilia, getting into character, and planning a fully themed event, would be negatively weighted and decrease the EQ.

The integrated model also advances the premise that a staging agency must first have a high SQ before it can hope to create high EQ based experiences. Consequently, there is an “Experience Threshold” that

must be breached in order to conduct and deliver high EQ rated events or festivals.

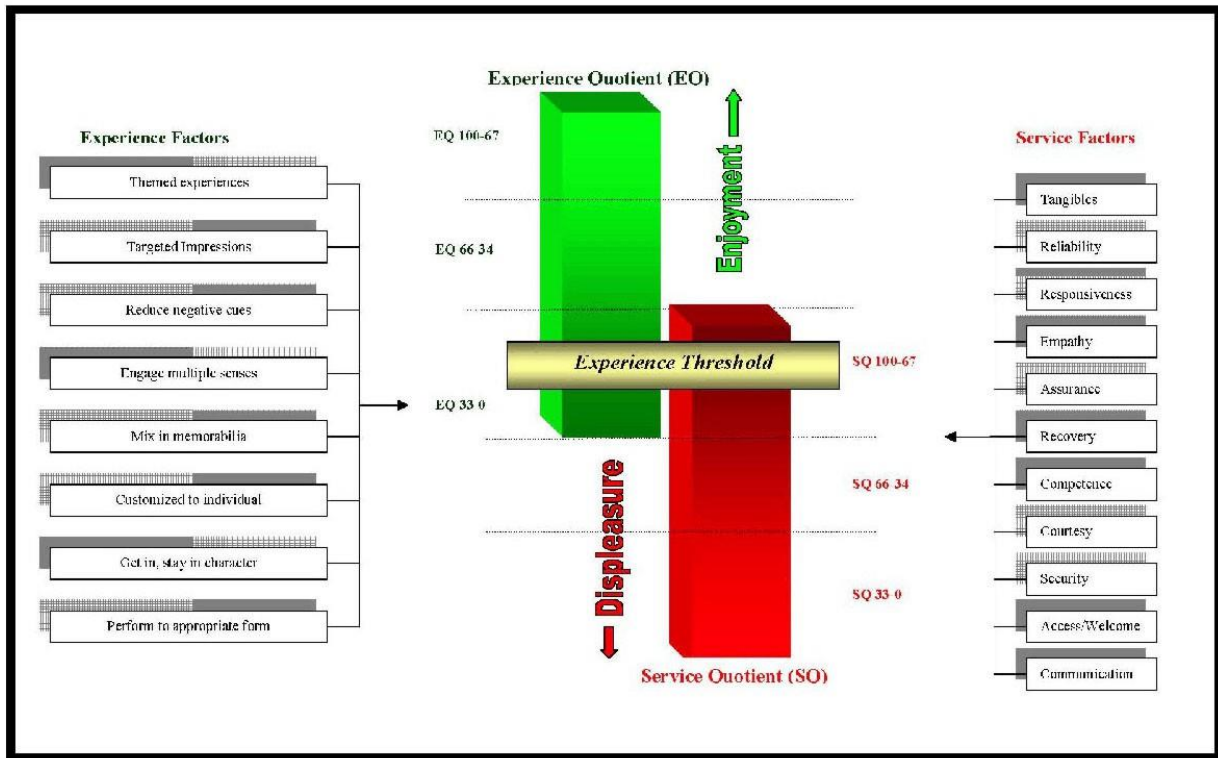
APPLICATION

The Dickens on the Strand Festival, sponsored by the Galveston Historical Foundation, began thirty-one years ago. The objective of that event is to generate sufficient funds to save The Strand’s historic buildings from

Table 1: Examples of Experience Factors Founded in Select Mini-Theories of Motivation and Emotion

Mini Theory	Premise Related to Experience Staging	Experience Factors	Example Application
Self Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997)	The decision to engage in a behavior and exert effort toward success depends on individuals’ efficacy expectations and outcome expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance accomplishments • Vicarious experience • Verbal Persuasion • Emotional State 	A dance instructor asks a student who has mastered a certain sequence to demonstrate for other students (vicarious experience)
Self Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000)	Offerings that meet psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness will be desirable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectance • Relatedness • Autonomy 	A camp counselor encourages campers to make activity choices based on their personal interests
Arousal Theory (Berlyne, 1967)	Interest in an offering may be stimulated through creative use of novelty and incongruity. Adjusting complexity to accommodate increased ability will serve to maintain interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Novelty • Complexity • Incongruity/Dissonance 	The crowd quiets in anticipation of the arrival of the torch when Australian runner Cathy Freeman arrives with the torch to light the Olympic cauldron (novelty)
Opponent Process Theory (Solomon, 1980)	Offerings that extend an emotion to unusually high degrees will be countered by memorably high levels of targeted emotions that are opposite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme emotions, such as fear and surprise 	A costumed character leaps out of a dark corner evokes fear among haunted house visitors who, and, after the experience ends, the opponent process (pleasure) surges
Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997)	Activities that match individual challenges, skills, and salient beliefs within their identity tend to provide optimal experiences that facilitate growth and learning (enjoyment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance challenge of the activity with skill of the participant, in an activity that is identity-relevant to that participant 	A personal fitness specialist increases the rigor of the exercise as the fitness level of the participant increases. The specialist also points to specific gains to encourage integration of fitness as a salient part of the participant’s identity.

Figure 1: Experience Factor Model: Salt Lake Bees Experience and Service Quotient



demolition. Today the historic buildings have been faithfully restored and the festival continues to attract holiday shoppers to a 10-block area of Galveston. The event is centred along The Strand National Historic Landmark District, which is located on the east end of the island, approximately one hour south of downtown Houston, Texas. The Strand features many buildings with Victorian-era architecture that have been restored to their mid-1800's beauty and now feature hotels, restaurants, antique stores and curio shops. This event provides an opportunity to examine the application of the *Experience Factors*.

A Clear Theme: The Victorian architecture provides an appropriate stage for bringing to life the memorable characters of many Charles Dickens's novels. Guests are surrounded by bustling activity reminiscent of a busy London street just before the Christmas holiday. Decorations adorn the buildings, gas lanterns light the

stage, and costumed vendors and performers fill the streets with a celebration of colour and amusement. Even the guests are encouraged to attend the festival in full Victorian-era costume with a reward of half-price admission.

Targeted Impressions: The festival includes a special parade featuring Her Majesty Queen Victoria. The Queen rides an elegant horse-drawn carriage draped with Christmas garlands. She is escorted by a colourful guard of Beefeaters, who provide the perfect picture taking opportunity. The evening hours take on a romantic glow from the gas street lanterns and the holiday melodies from roaming carolers and bagpipe bands. A gala after-dark parade includes musical groups, horse-drawn carriages and wagons, Victorian costumed passengers and lantern carrying escorts.

Multiple Senses: The Strand is filled with wandering characters offering roasted chestnuts served appropriately in a paper with the news of the day. The air is laden with

the delicious odors from the roaming food merchants with traditional Victorian foods, such as hot meat pies. Three parades, multiple stages, and the theater provide non-stop entertainment. The entire area is designed with sights and smells that take the guest back to another era.

Mix in Memorabilia: The streets are filled with rolling carts laden Victorian-inspired crafts, clothing, jewelry, holiday decorations and gift items. The permanent shops located on The Strand are decorated to reflect the Victorian era and feature handcrafts, clothing, and fine arts. Guests may purchase any one of the official "Dickens on The Strand" commemorative items or a one-of-a kind nautical craft made by ELISSA volunteers.

Get into character, stay in character, and act their part: The Dickens on the Strand is replete with strolling carolers and roving street musicians, bagpipers, and even her Royal Majesty the Queen. The foot traffic and parades are directed by stern looking "Bobbies" who are often distracted by the crafty street urchin that just stole a meat pie from a nearby vendor and are hiding behind an unwary guest and their shopping bundles. The proper Victorian-clad gentlemen tip their hats to the ladies as they pass. Queen Victoria can be seen knighting those individuals who have served the crown with distinction. The festival even hosts book signing by Mark Charles Dickens, the great-great-grandson of the legendary author Charles Dickens. Guests can be seen posing with any number of characters and even the visiting children can be seen running about with the street urchins.

Perform to the appropriate Theatrical Form: The Strand Theater, six theatrical stages, and Piccadilly Circus feature performances of Victorian-era productions. Popular Victorian music may be heard including hand-bell choirs, children's choirs, bagpipe bands, or symphonic concerts. There are readings from and even full performances of *Oliver Twist*, *The Pickwick Papers*, *A Christmas Carol*, or any number of Dickens' Christmas short stories.

These fully scripted, blocked, and choreographed "platform theatre" performances are supported by other "actors" using theatrical forms appropriate to their roles. Actors playing Dickens era characters, for example, play to improvisational theatre form as they converse freely with visitors, while never stepping out of their period role. "Good day! Welcome, to the festival m' lord! Have your horses and carriage been well taken care of by our livery? If so, may I serve you a spot of tea?"

Customized to the Individual: Victorian wedding bells can be heard each Saturday at noon during the festival; the bells draw the attention of festival guests to the start of a unique event. Brides and grooms in attendance may elect to exchange vows for the first time or renew their vows in a one-of-kind ceremony conducted by a licensed minister. The Queen's Christmas Tree features an opportunity for guests to don Victorian-era clothing for tin-type photographs. The Piccadilly Circus provides opportunities for children to make their own unique creations from freshly made snow, converse with puppets following a show, join magicians in performances, or craft their own fashion statements by creating a unique Victorian-era memento to take home. All actors strive to personalize experiences by surprising individual guests with unexpected delights and engaging in conversation about individuals' preferences and experiences.

Dickens on the Strand has enjoyed tremendous success due in large part to their attention to the service and experience factors. The event is the largest single fundraiser for Galveston Historical Foundation and enables the organization to continue their efforts to "preserve and revitalize the architectural, cultural and maritime heritage of Galveston Island for the education and enrichment of all."

AUDITING

The integrated model can be used as one approach to auditing events and festivals. Although the type of event may vary widely, the integrated approach assumes that each agency seeks to improve its service quality and make memorable impressions on customers that lead to repeated engagement, deep immersion in their event, festival or activity. Eventually, every agency has the desire to advertise through their patrons who provide vivid images of their experiences. It is this level of customer that Pine and Gilmore (1999), Arussy (2002), Schmidt (1999; 2002) refer to as the customer experience that leads to branding and loyalty beyond reproach.

The authors have been engaged with several agencies who seek to improve their market position in the sport, event and festival arena. They seek to distinguish themselves among their competitors (known and unknown) by reaching beyond merely service quality factors. The case of the Salt Lake Bees is an excellent example of a major league baseball team (AAA level and an affiliate of the Major League Baseball team the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim) who resides in a small

market and competes for the entertainment dollar with university intercollegiate athletics, two other minor league baseball teams, arena football, the Nationwide national golf tournament, an NBA basketball team, and a host of other startup sport businesses that come and go. The Bees are a perennial league champion despite the fact that they must frequently send their most talented players to the parent team (LA Angels) throughout the season. During the summer of 2006, an evaluation team of ten observers conducted an experience audit of a game billed as a major event preceding a Utah state holiday, complete with a post game fireworks display. Attendance throughout the season averages 3,800 yet on this evening the game drew nearly 14,000. The methods used in this audit were anchored in the "mystery" (or "secret") shopper technique, coupled with interviews with select staff and patrons. The observers ranged in age from 12-65 years of age. There were five men and five women on the team.

The results of this audit revealed some very interesting observations that may lead to fundamental changes in the goals set forth by management for the 2007 season. This audit addressed six specific evaluation questions:

Evaluation Question 1: What service factor strengths, weaknesses, threats, and critical incidents were observed?

Evaluation Question 2: What experience factor strengths, weaknesses, and threats were observed?

Evaluation Question 3: What specific opportunities for implementing new experience factors were suggested by the evaluation team?

Evaluation Question 4: What critical incidents were experienced by members of the evaluation team?

Evaluation Question 5: What Wow! Experiences were reported by members of the evaluation team?

Evaluation Question 6: What were the service quotient and experience quotient for the Salt Lake Bees?

Table 2 illustrates the data secured from observations by the evaluation team in response to evaluation question 1 regarding service factor strengths, weaknesses, threats, and critical incidents. Almost 61% of the responses from the evaluation team in regard to the service factors were chronicled as weaknesses. Among these, 60% were in the area of reliability, which suggests that the "performance of promised service dependably" was absent or in some manner clearly lacking. Waiting in food service lines for 20-30 minutes while the game is underway, is not only frustrating but detracts significantly from the actual game experience. There were ten compliments rendered in the area of service with half (5 comments) appearing in the area of reliability. It appears that there are some things that the staff do that are dependable and merit recognition. For the most part these occurred at the front gate with the ticket takers. There were four Critical Incidents (CI) which were characterized as severe, memorable instances in which basic customer service principles were violated. First, there was inattention to a person with quadriplegia in a wheelchair who required attention to avoid illness from heat during a 20-30 minute stay in line. Equally important is the demeanor of key staff in the VIP area. Some individuals are rude and inattentive. An employee in the VIP reception area in particular, presented as a classic example of a person who is misplaced. She was inattentive, arrogant, and condescending in response to our question about bringing photographic equipment into the stadium.

Table 2- Observed service factor strengths, weaknesses, threats, and critical incidents - Service Factors

Factor	Critical Incidents	Strengths	Threats	Weaknesses	Total
Eliminate Negative Cues	1			2	3
Empathy	2	2	1	4	9
Recovery	1				1
Reliability		5		15	20
Responsiveness			1		1
Tangibles		3		4	7
Total	4	10	2	25	41

Table 3 addresses what experience factor strengths, weaknesses, and threats were observed prior to, during and following the game. The Salt Lake Bees clearly attempt to stage memorable experiences for their customers. Nearly 64% of the observations regarded as "strengths" were aimed at customizing experiences to the individual and having cast members (employees) performing to the appropriate theatrical form. In customizing experiences to the individual, the following observations are indicative of this favourable practice:

- Excellent individualized greeting by ticket-taker
- Exceptional food variety, shows sensitivity to individual preferences
- Guest Services Personnel initiating conversations with guests
- Text message vote on favorite former Bees player

Strategies for creating the theme, "Classic Baseball," were evidenced by the following observations:

- Excellent use of theme outside park with photo's of baseball greats
- Excellent use of theme via naming of seating areas (e.g., Babe Ruth area- \$20.00)
- Excellent use of theme on higher windows outside stadium
- Nice use of Bees colors for uniforms of ticket-takers and guest services personnel
- Outfield grass seating highly consistent with bleacher use in "classic baseball"

While the majority of observations were positive, some "weaknesses" and "threats" observed that require attention. Of the 47 observations related to "experiences" nearly 30% were considered weaknesses. Of particular importance were the following:

- Honey Bees" out of character, converse with one another rather than guests, and out of character during dugout roof dance; "Honey Bees" appear to be exploiting sex and do not represent "classic" baseball; must use in a more appropriate way such as with charity or civic group recognition
- Food service personnel talk with one another rather than with guests
- 2nd inning running contest ignored the little girl participant, who finished far behind the Bee

- Food service personnel wearing shirts unrelated to either Bees theme or Classic Baseball theme
- Scoreboard very hard to read. Does not convey "classic" theme items
- 98.7 FM announcer is totally out of character; is annoying and not a draw; replace with a themed "Olde Time Player" for giveaways or celebrity
- Fanzz store personnel not cognizant of "memorabilia" or theme "classic baseball"
- Security personnel appear very officious versus fan friendly; overbearing uniforms and presence

Several "threats" to cultivating positive experiences were observed that definitely should be addressed by management. These include engaging fans' multiple senses and simultaneously customizing the experience to the fan. The Bees' coaching staff and players must "press the flesh" and come closer to the fans. They are really unknowns to most of the fans who attend. The point is to create player and coach identity that results in attachment to the Bees baseball team and principal actors. A second threat to the experience is creating targeted impressions with patrons that have lasting qualities. In some 100+ interactions with staff, the observers had to initiate the conversation as no one except the ticket takers were proactive in their communication. They appear to only respond when the customer initiated the communication. This does not create salient beliefs that the staff cares about the patron. In several direct interactions with Bee's staff, when asked what "classic baseball" meant, the response was that it was just a name and didn't really mean anything. It is clear that there is little buy-in to the "classic baseball" theme.

Table 4 provides a capsule of specific opportunities for improving the Salt Lake Bees Experience Quotient (EQ). Throughout the entire evening the evaluation team took notes from their observations. The list of recommendations generated by the team member was compiled in a spreadsheet by the experience factors. Based on the observers comments there are numerous opportunities for improvement in theme, multiple senses, customizing to the individual and memorabilia. The most frequent observations centred around fully developing and acting on the theme of "classic" baseball. It is apparent that in some respects the theme is in operation through fixed symbols such as the signage in the concourse, outside

windows, etc. Yet the opportunity lies in constructing

thematic aspects throughout the entire Bees operation.

Table 3- Observed experience factor strengths, weaknesses, and threats - Experience Factors

Factor	Strengths	Threats	Weaknesses	Total
Customize to individual	15	1		16
Engage multiple senses	2	1		3
Memorabilia	1			1
Perform to Form			2	2
Stay in Character			9	9
Targeted Impressions			1	1
Theme	12	1	2	15
Total	30	3	14	47

Uniform approaches to outfitting staff and expecting them to act in character as though it were “classic” baseball represent an opportunity to carry the theme from the parking lot to the plaza to the concourse and in the stands. Currently there are numerous disconnected parts that approach being themed but are out of context (e.g.) concession staff shirts, signage, etc. Additionally, there are other opportunities to construct themed experiences through the multiple senses (e.g.) music, video clips, actors of the vintage years of baseball or actual old celebrities on the plaza or concourse.

Two opportunities exist that require capital investments. First, the public address system (PAS) is dysfunctional to the point that it is inaudible to the fan. An investment here would provide a more engaged fan and provide the sponsors with audible messaging. Coupled with an effort to make the PAS of high fidelity and audible to fans, this fundamental change would represent an opportunity to assure sponsors that their messages are being heard and acted upon. The fidelity of messages may require a new voice to insure that the messaging is clearly delivered and received by varying level of fans. Live, “real time” fan research may be necessary to document that the messages prior to, during and between innings are being received with clarity. The second opportunity requiring capital investment is the scoreboard. Currently the scoreboard does not present a crisp, clear picture that is discernable by the average fan. In addition, the scoreboard is not fan interactive and does not contain the

“classic” elements that are advanced as the major theme of the organization.

Results of the audit suggest that the Bees organization could examine the theme (“Classic Baseball”) and decide if they are willing to fully pursue it as a corporate strategy. If so, a fully themed effort would require training of staff, attention to details as they relate to scripting experiences (e.g.) the Disney corporation emphasizes to its cast members, that the experience “is in the details”, coordination of all aspects of the operation (e.g.) concourse food services, security, during the game promotions, pre-and post-game activities, Fanzz store, etc. In order to create a fully scripted experience, the organization should engage in careful planning (staging) of each home game with the management team.

There were several critical incidents (CI) that occurred during the course of the observations by the evaluation team. While CI’s may occur in an event, they are a source of concern for any organization. They are the primary responsibility of an organization to prevent and are nested in the ability of staff to detect and act upon cues from a customer point of view. One CI is of particular concern:

CI# 4- Observed a young man in a wheelchair who appeared to be tetraplegic (wheelchair user, substantial impairment in ability to use of all four extremities) waiting a long time in line for

refreshments. Due to the physiology of tetraplegia, guests with that disability are much more sensitive to the extreme heat on the concourse and at risk for heat stroke. The temperature on the concourse was near 90° F and a clear issue of concern. Observant staff, in touch with the need to individualize experiences, could have taken his order without his being required to wait in line. CI #4 is a vitally important incident that could have escalated into a health emergency. Given the environmental conditions and the status of the patron, this situation could have been easily avoided by observant staff in the concession area or on the concourse.

Collectively the four CI's represent a low level of service and experience quality. They are the bane of any organization who seeks to build loyalty, and credibility among its customers.

Evaluation Question 5 sought to determine what "Wow!" type experiences were evident at the Salt Lake Bees baseball game. Customers seek indelible experiences that evoke positive memories about a particular event or venue. In the case of the Salt Lake Bees, there were several very memorable experiences as reported by the evaluation team. First the pre-game activities surrounding the national anthem were very memorable. Releasing the doves following the singing of the national anthem raised the level of patriotism and created a level of dissonance that focused the fans. The evening was billed as a night to celebrate with fireworks and the display was not only entertaining but captivating. The quality of the show following the game was not only excellent but beyond the expectations of the observers, and more than likely, the fans. With nearly 14,000 spectators in attendance at the game, few left afterward. The opportunity to be on the ball field was an excellent strategy for getting the fans closer to the show, but also closer to the game.

Evaluation Question 6: Sought to determine the service and experience quotients for the Salt Lake Bees. Using the service factors and experience factors outlined earlier in this paper, single event scores for the Salt Lake Bees home baseball game of July 21, 2006 were computed. The result was a Service Quotient® of .17. This low score is reflective of several core service elements that are in need of correction through planning, training, capital investment and/or programmatic change. The Experience Quotient® of .60 approached good quality but remains moderately low due to the inconsistency in efforts to

provide scripted experiences that are customized to the individual and themed. In addition, it is vital to note that a high service quotient is necessary for guests to have memorable and engaging experiences. Sensational planning and execution of experience factors can in no way compensate for the guest displeasure resulting from failure to implement service factors to an acceptable degree. The service and experience quotients indicate some initiatives are very well planned and executed, while others are in need of immediate correction. Overall, the data indicate great potential to provide memorable experiences for guests, given adoption of several strategies for optimizing customer service and cultivating captivating and memorable experiences in the tradition of classic baseball.

STAGING ENCOUNTERS IN THE FUTURE

There have been hundreds of books and articles written on the topic of service quality. Everyone seems to agree that quality customer service is essential to long-term business success, especially in our competitive global market. In the Pursuit of Wow, author, Tom Peters (1994), identifies two characteristics of outstanding service champions - they step out and they stand out. Delivering WOW service is a commitment to do whatever it takes to serve our guests, and that commitment must begin with quality service and evolve into dynamic experiences. Pine and Gilmore (1999) propose that the Wow factor is more the outcome of the experience than simply service. Shaw and Ivens (2002) identified customer experiences as the next competitive battleground. This article proposes that an integrated experience and service model anchored in a Service Quotient® and Experience Quotient® would provide an evidence-based approach to staging exceptional events. In the integrated model, event managers are encouraged to engineer an event that is extraordinary, resulting in memorable customer experiences. Although attention to service factors will establish the foundation upon which experience factors can be designed, they must be linked and integrated in order to create indelible experiences needed to generate a long-term competitive edge.

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AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

David Compton
David.Compton@health.utah.edu

JOURNAL CONTACT DETAILS

Executive Editor
Charles Arcodia
c.arcodia@uq.edu.au

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