

## Customer Service: What can we learn from corporate America?



Every year, my favorite magazine, *BusinessWeek*, publishes a list of the best customer service companies in America or “Customer Service Champs.” I love the list. Each year, I look for ideas and trends from which we in library land can learn and borrow.

This year’s winners include:

- **L.L. Bean** received top marks for their quality staff and efficiency, but it was their great return policy, which includes free shipping *both* ways, that made them number one.
- **Apple** also has great staff and is very efficient, but they are number three on the list because of their “Genius Bars” (awesome in-store tech support) and roving checkout clerks.
- **Nordstrom** was in the top 5 for integrating their store inventory systems so online shoppers can access stock in all stores. This sounds just like an integrated library catalog!
- **Barnes & Noble** put Wi-Fi in 700 stores in early 2009 to encourage longer stays by potential customers. Again, this situation sounds familiar...library as place!
- **Amazon.com** experienced a great 2009 by expanding their tech services and testing same-day delivery. It worked, as sales soared 10% over the previous year.
- **American Express** focused in 2009 on hiring staff with hospitality training and experience rather than call center experience. Again, their ingenuity paid off; they ranked eighteenth on the *BusinessWeek* list.
- **Southwest Airlines** is the only major carrier that does not charge customers to check two bags; revenue per seat was up 7% in December 2009.

So what can library land learn from the list?

- Good customer service pays off! Make the wise business decision to focus staff on the customers’ experience and not what is easier for the library! It’s not about us; it’s all about them!
- Little things, like free shipping or no-fee baggage, really count. A mystery shopper or very short, 2-3 question customer satisfaction survey will tell you a lot about what drives library customers away.
- Be like Apple! Be like L.L. Bean! Make it **easy** for folks to do business with you!
- Customers need to be recognized and greeted within five seconds of walking through the door! This action is no longer an option; it is a business necessity.