

Five business learning points from world-leading Changi Airport

Lessons in being the best

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For the fifth year in a row, Changi Airport has been named the best airport in the world by the Skytrax Passengers Choice Awards.

It's the latest in a long line of awards over the airport's 35 years of operations.

Since opening in July 1981, Changi has built a reputation as a model of service excellence and a Singapore icon.

For many in the industry, and for millions of travellers, it has become the gold standard for what an airport should be.

Here are five business lessons organisations can learn from Changi's success.

Align all that you do to your customer experience

Changi handles about 50 million passengers a year, about the same as New York's JFK airport. But, unlike its distant US cousin, Changi is almost universally praised.

The key is Changi's pervasive culture of service. Changi may be one of the world's busiest airports but its operator, Changi Airport Group, has a surprisingly lean staff count of 1,800 employees – almost a third of whom work in the airport emergency teams.

Nonetheless, it recognises that every one in day-to-day contact with the travelling customer is key to delivering "the Changi experience".

All told, more than 200 companies with a total workforce of around 28,000 run the airport's various operations, but the focus is on delivering a single, consistent "Changi Experience" to all customers.

Changi's management labels this approach "Many partners, many missions, One Changi".

Design and redesign your processes

Changi prides itself on the speed in which it can process arriving travel-



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lers, minimising the time between touchdown and seeing the airport in the rear view mirror of their car or taxi.

For visitors to Singapore, it is their first experience of the city state and one that is often commented on.

But this smooth operation is the result of an extremely disciplined approach that Changi takes towards process design and redesign, continuously examining every stage of the customer experience and how it can be improved.

Anticipate your customers' needs and when they need them

Unlike several modern airports, Changi is not built to be futuristic or stylish, nor as an architectural wonder, but rather to be functional. And this it does exceptionally well.

Certainly, it has its aesthetic features, such as waterfalls and its famous butterfly garden. But all of the airport's features and facilities are designed to be in the place that delivers the optimum, stress-free customer experience.

Of course, one of the best ways of understanding what your customer wants is to ask and observe, and Changi is constantly conducting surveys, gathering data and monitoring behaviour to improve its services.

No detail is too small

While working with Changi's senior management on several projects, I have observed a very close attention

to detail, with no issue considered too small.

This permeates through all levels of the company, with managers sharing photographs, ideas and comments on service aspects that could be improved.

One example I often cite in my business classes is the always gleaming Changi toilets and the customer feedback system built around them.

With touchscreen customer feedback panels in every toilet, the standard and operation of each washroom is closely monitored.

Using simple icons of happy/sad faces, any service issues are immediately flagged for attention to the relevant people and the data gathered is used to motivate staff.

Finally, there's no such thing as "finished"

In service culture, a feature that is innovative, unique and groundbreaking today can quickly become expected, standard or commonplace tomorrow.

That means service providers need to continuously innovate to come up with new ways to add to the customer experience. There's no option to rest on your laurels.

For Changi, much of its business depends on being able to maintain and grow its reputation as a preferred transit stop for passengers.

At the heart of Changi's corporate culture is a constant drive to experiment with and improve the airport's appeal to passengers, while at the same time containing costs.

That has made Changi not just the most awarded airport in the world, but also a highly successful and model business in its own right.

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