

Red Tape? - Not here

By Dr Uwe H Kaufmann

Everyone, undoubtedly, has had the unenviable honour of experiencing 'bureaucratic government processes.' Be it applying for your first ID or passport, to initially obtaining a driving license and the inevitable dealings with the tax man. Judging by the time it takes and the "milestones" or number of departments one has to go through when dealing with German government bodies, the processes behind ID, passport or driving license must be highly complex and are usually being done by constantly overworked people.

Some time ago, I had to go to the Singapore Immigration and Customs Authority to receive my PR stamp in my German passport. The process was quite fast and the service very nice. I was about to leave the building when I saw a signboard which 'advertised' - "Get your Access Card now". Since it seems to be a fashion to have a card for almost everything I stopped at the signboard and read the fine print. My conclusion was: "If you travel a lot you can make your life easier with an Access Card". I turned around to ask a friendly officer for the Access Card counter.

Arriving at the second floor, I approached the counter. "Good afternoon, Sir. How can I help you?" After I had explained my interest in the card the lady behind the counter asked me with a smile: "Do you have your passport?" "Yes" "A passport photograph?" "Yes" "Some money?" "Yes" "Your thumb?" "Yes" "Then we can proceed."

Being accustomed to typical government processes I imagined receiving my application form and being asked to fill it in, then submitting it and coming back a few weeks later to pick up my Access Card. I was under no illusion that this process would take less than a month.

The first surprise: this nice lady at the counter did not ask me to fill in an application form. She did it for me! I cannot recall any encounter with a German government clerk who would have done this.

After signing my application form she asked me to take a seat. About 15 minutes later, she called me back to the counter - presenting my plastic Access Card with chip and my photograph on top: "Sir, this is your Access Card. Please try at the simulator over there whether it works." I tried. It worked - of course.

I could not believe what I had just experienced. Between not knowing that an Access Card exists until holding my personal card in my hands – with programmed chip embedded and photograph printed in plastic – pass less than 30 minutes in Singapore. Impossible! Unbelievable!

This is what I call Process Excellence for Customer Satisfaction, or better: Customer Delight. I would not even expect this kind of performance from a private company, let alone a government agency. Thank you, ICA!

Conclusion

Only outstanding products or services are able to get customers noticing your company, talking about it and recommending it to their business partners and friends. Delivering what customers request is not enough. Customers would not ask for an Access Card delivered within 30 minutes because – for most of them - this is beyond their wildest dreams as it was for me. This kind of solution needs a creative mindset and an innovative organisation.

Keep in mind: Impossible is nothing.