

## CUSTOMER SERVICE HEROS

**W**e all need a hero – someone who, by their actions, will inspire us to do better and be better. The five companies I profile here are reaping the financial benefits of being heroes by making customer service a top priority.

Amazon is the best of the best. It builds everything around the customer experience, with speed, flawless execution and exceptional service response. Amazon empowers each of its more than 1,650,000 employees throughout the world to take care of their customers without asking for permission, trusting them to do what's best for the customer.

At Amazon, ease of shopping, along with ease of making returns, is the gold standard. The company uses technology to ensure that its customers will have the best experience possible. Customers are notified within seconds when their orders have been received, when they are shipped, and when they have been delivered. If a customer needs to contact someone at the company by phone, an employee will answer the call – no robotic phone-tag runaround is involved.

Amazon's commitment to its customers has paid off in numbers that its competitors can only dream of. In 2021, sales increased by \$83.7 billion over the previous year's sales of \$469.8 billion.

Costco is another company that provides its customers with incredible service, while offering the highest-quality products at the best prices, including gas at 30 cents per gallon less than the major chains. Costco provides great service at great speed. Checkout lines can be long, but each station is manned by two employees, one scanning products while the other loads them into a cart so the process moves along smoothly.

Costco uses technology to ensure that its customers are well cared-for. When I recently returned some fish that I didn't like, the employee didn't even ask for a receipt; she simply pulled up my purchase information on the computer and instantly refunded it to my credit card.

Costco operates 838 warehouses throughout the world, with 528 in the U.S. Fourth-quarter sales were up 8.7 percent for the year ending August 28, 2022, and sales over that period reached \$70.8 billion, a 14.4-percent increase over the previous year.

Chewy.com makes service a top priority, and is handsomely rewarded for doing so. Chewy was sold to PetSmart in 2017 for \$3.5 billion, and today has a value of \$35 billion.

Chewy.com makes it easy to purchase its products online. Like the other companies mentioned here, it sells high-quality products at great prices. It also has a money-back guarantee and makes it easy for customer to return a product. When my dogs didn't like the type of food

I'd ordered, I contacted the company. Chewy.com's employees answer the phones in person 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and I was told there was no need to return it – the employee said I would get a refund and suggested that I give the food to a friend whose dog might like it.

When it comes to health care, the Mayo Clinic outperforms all others – the standard of care is the best in the world, yet the cost is similar to that of other institutions. The Mayo Clinic goes the extra mile to ensure that patients and family members are comfortable in its facilities, offering attractive waiting rooms, and offices and computers located throughout the facility for use by anyone without a password. While Mayo is the Ritz Carlton of health care, virtually all other healthcare organizations fall in the Motel 6 category.

Mayo's focus on providing exceptional service to patients and their families has resulted in impressive numbers. In 2021, it had more than 1.4 million patients from all over the U.S. and 139 other countries. It had \$15.7 billion in revenues and spent more than \$1 billion on philanthropic endeavors.

Northeast Delta Dental is an insurance company that works with businesses to provide their employees with dental coverage. What sets it apart is its Guarantee of Service Excellence Program that addresses seven areas, ranging from quick processing of claims, to no inappropriate billing by participating dentists.

Northeast Delta Dental backs up those guarantees with money. In 2021, it had \$422.9 million in revenue. In that year alone, the company paid out \$10,843.15 for incidents where it did not meet its guarantees. Today, the company has a market share of 70 percent in New Hampshire, 60 percent in Vermont, and 50 percent in Maine.

These companies go the extra mile in meeting and exceeding their customers' expectations. In doing so, they are hugely successful and can serve as great role models for companies that want to make service their highest priority.

Please visit [www.customer-service.com](http://www.customer-service.com) for more information on John Tschohl and the Service Quality Institute.

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