

No Small Feat



Sam Blaxland and Steven Brett shares their experiences as one of the leaders of the 2019 review of the International Customer Service Standard

Working on the revision of the International Customer Service Standard (ICSS) has been a daunting task. Designed more than 20 years ago, the Standard has been the premier and internationally recognised scorecard for evaluating customer service delivery and has been used by organisations around the world across a diverse set of industries since its inception. Making changes to a standard that is so heavily embedded into organisations globally has been a delicate and oftentimes humbling exercise.

The review committee took a multi-stage approach to this redesign – a review of the current academic literature in customer

excellence theory and practice, a client audit of both new and established users across a range of public and private sector industries in both Australia and the US, and extensive consultation with other organisations within the International Council of Customer Service Organisations (ICCSO).

End to end, this process has taken a total of six months of review and revision to arrive at the new standard. Specific thank needs to be given to **Jeremy Larkins**, Executive Director of the Customer Service Institute of Australia and **Christine Churchill**, CEO of the Customer Service Institute of America for their unwavering support, encouragement and tenacity in driving the redesign of the Standard.

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One of the major challenges in this revision has been in finding the right balance between the amount of content it covers and the push for a more pragmatic design. Many of the clients and users interviewed talked of the complexity of language and ideas in elements of the Standard and the challenges that they face in understanding and demonstrating their performance on these. Throughout the process of evaluating each element of the standard, we worked to a constant mantra – *can this standard and its elements be as easily understood and applied to a local butcher's shop as it can to a multinational company.*

And while our aim in the redesign was to maintain continuity with previous iterations – an emphasis on evolution, not revolution – our focus first and foremost needed to be in ensuring a relevancy and ease of use in the finished version. Several of the elements were removed, recognising the overlap with other elements. Some were split, while others were stripped down.

Similarly, there's been a restructuring of the content into a

more logical and consistent pattern. In the previous version, elements that spoke to customer insights and satisfaction measurement were dotted throughout the Standard. Elements related to HR were in several places. This revision has emphasised a topic grouping to ensure that when preparing for a certification or a healthcheck, a client can supply evidence that fits consistently and logically to each element.

Another common criticism of the previous Standard was the need for a structure that can be applied to all organisations. One of the common challenges that we head in our interviews with users were issues around the Finance and Governance Perspective, and specifically, with 4.1 (*The organisation measures how customer experience creates growth, revenue and profitability*) and the challenges that NGOs and government agencies experience in applying evidence to this – they operate with a fixed mandate, and generally, considerations like profitability and market share are not applicable to them.

We were conscious that much of the value and power of the ICSS is in the idea that it can be applied to any organisation no matter what size and structure it has, and so several elements have been revised (like 4.1) to ensure that the Standard is relevant and applicable.

As a working group, we're exceptionally pleased about where we got to with this revision – the end result is a Standard that is a far more user-friendly design in its language and its structure and more actionable, while still remaining true to its origins as a four-pillar balanced scorecard design and with a clear continuity with the previous version. And we're excited about its roll-out in 2020, as it continues to represent the gold standard in what excellent customer service should look like in Australia, and globally.



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