

# Bridging the Global Service Gap: Why US Experience Brands Struggle to Replicate Domestic Success Abroad



In today's interconnected world, creating a consistent and exceptional Service Experience across diverse markets is a significant challenge for US-based brands. Despite their strong service culture and exceptional customer interactions at home, replicating this success on an international stage presents a significant challenge. This article explores the key differences between local US customer service and global service styles, highlighting why US brands often struggle and what they can do to bridge this gap.

## What is the essence of US Customer Service?

US brands are renowned for their highly empowered and personalised customer service. A 2023 report from McKinsey found that 70% of US buying experiences are influenced by how customers feel they are being treated, emphasising the importance of empathetic and flexible interactions. Employees are typically given the autonomy to make decisions, resolve issues, and personalise the customer experience. This empowerment leads to high levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty. And it's fuelled by US tipping culture.

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## How does this influence the Global Challenge?

Translating the empowered approach of US customer service to different cultural contexts can be problematic. A 2023 Gartner report predicts that by 2025, 80% of customer interactions will be handled by AI and digital channels, reducing the opportunity for the human touch that is so crucial in the US. This shift towards digital channels requires US brands to rethink their service strategies to maintain customer satisfaction globally.

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Moreover, cultural differences play a significant role in shaping customer expectations and service delivery methods. For instance, a study by the Harvard Business Review found that cultural factors account for 40% of the variation in consumer preferences for customer service methods across different regions.

## Cultural Nuances in Customer Service

**Asian Service Styles:** Customer service is highly prescriptive in many Asian countries. Employees follow strict protocols to ensure consistency and quality. This approach can clash with the US style of empowerment. According to a 2023 study by Forrester, emotionally engaged customers are 2.4 times more likely to stay with a brand and 2.6 times more likely to recommend it. However, achieving this level of engagement requires an understanding of local service expectations. For example, in Japan, the concept of "Omotenashi" (hospitality) emphasises anticipating customer needs, which contrasts with the US emphasis on flexible problem-solving.

**European Service Styles:** European customers often expect a blend of efficiency and personalisation. European service styles may balance the prescriptive nature of Asian models and the empowered approach of the US, requiring a nuanced strategy to meet these expectations. For example, punctuality and efficiency are highly valued in Germany, whereas a more relaxed and personable approach is preferred in Italy.

**Middle Eastern Service Styles:** In the Middle East, hospitality and service are deeply rooted in cultural norms. High levels of attentiveness and respect are expected, and service is often seen as a reflection of personal and brand honour. US brands must adapt their service philosophies to align with these cultural values while maintaining their core brand identity. For instance, in the UAE, personal relationships and trust are paramount, necessitating a more personalised and respectful service approach.

Adapting to these cultural nuances is crucial for US brands aiming to expand globally. A US-led approach to customer service is unlikely to succeed. Instead, brands must develop a flexible Service Philosophy that can be tailored to different markets. This involves understanding local customer expectations, training employees to deliver culturally appropriate service, and maintaining a consistent Brand Promise.

## How can brands adapt to technology with a human touch?

The integration of AI and digital channels presents both opportunities and challenges. While technology can enhance efficiency and provide valuable data insights, it also risks alienating customers who value human interaction.

A 2023 PwC survey found that 82% of US consumers and 74% of international consumers desire more human interaction in customer service. And 86% are willing to pay more for it.

A 2023 report by McKinsey suggests that 67% of customers across various markets prefer speaking to a human rather than interacting with automated systems.

US experience brands must, therefore, find ways to balance technological advancements with personalised service.

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# 2.4x

more likely to stay with a brand when customers are emotionally engaged

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## What are some Key Strategies for Success?

**Developing a Global Service Philosophy:** Brands must define a Service Philosophy that aligns with their Brand and can be adapted to different cultural contexts. This philosophy should serve as a guiding principle for all customer interactions, ensuring consistency and authenticity across markets.

**Translate This Into Tangible, Observable Actions:** Employees should be trained to understand and respect cultural differences in customer service and how they can impact the experience. This includes learning about local customs, communication styles, and service expectations. Such training ensures that employees can deliver exceptional service that resonates with local customers.

**Balancing Empowerment and Prescriptiveness:** While empowerment is a strength of US customer service, it must be balanced with the need for consistency in markets with prescriptive service styles. Brands can achieve this by establishing clear guidelines that allow for personalisation within a structured framework.

**Leveraging Technology Wisely:** With the rise of AI and digital channels, brands must find ways to integrate these technologies without losing the human touch. Personalised digital interactions can complement, not replace, human service, providing a seamless and emotionally engaging customer experience.

## How can we help?

At People Made, we connect Brand, Culture, and Experience to create cohesive and impactful human connections. We offer a unique approach that integrates Service Culture and Service Experience, ensuring your brand can deliver exceptional service consistently across different markets. We help define the foundations that empower your people to deliver exceptional experiences and the end experience that your people deliver to your customers. Our expertise helps US brands navigate the complexities of global service delivery, driving customer loyalty and business growth on an international scale.

## In summary...

US brands face significant challenges when attempting to replicate their domestic service success on a global stage. Cultural differences, varying service expectations, and the rise of digital interactions all contribute to this complexity. However, by developing a flexible and culturally sensitive Service Philosophy rooted in a strong Service Culture, US brands can create a consistent and exceptional global service experience.

In a world where customer experience is increasingly critical, those who can navigate these challenges will stand out, driving loyalty and growth in international markets. Brands must recognise the importance of cultural adaptation and invest in delivering their brand through service globally.