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Service Innovation

Service Innovation for Businesses

Service innovation is becoming an important strategy for service-oriented businesses, enabling them to survive economic turbulence.

Service innovation involves;

- presenting a new fresh idea in services;
- a new mode of delivery, new service concept or new service model; and
- often involves technology

Service innovation is relevant today because;

- it improves business operations and processes
- increases productivity
- enhance the customer experience
- may just be the key for survival for businesses during volatile economic condition.

Despite the global crisis, the tougher trading environment and rising competition in the markets, businesses should continue to remain focus on innovation. Through innovation, businesses can continue to **maintain** and **protect their profit margins**.

Why Should Businesses Pursue Service Innovation?

As businesses need to fiercely defend their market position, satisfying their customers' needs and wants is very critical. Businesses need to continuously "streamline business processes and aggressively pursue new opportunities for growth" in order to sustain and remain competitive.

Some potential benefits of service innovation are;

- promotes customer-provider relationships
 - allows businesses to have a greater responsiveness to customers' needs and requirements
- enhance the capabilities of businesses in delivering better services
 - significantly improve or enhance business operations or processes
 - help to decrease production costs and increase profitability
- creates confidence in the brand name for their customers
- coupled with modern technologies, service innovation could provide convenient 24/7 access to the services for the customers
 - eliminates waiting time for the customers, and increase customers satisfaction
- businesses can also gain competitive advantage through service innovation, with better market positioning.

"People have a good idea of what technological innovation is. ... But service innovation is more hidden."

- **Jim Spohrer**, Director of Service Research, IBM Almaden Research Center

Service Innovation and Productivity

Service innovation and productivity are "twin paths" in creating value for both businesses and their customers. A more efficient service, with improved processes, increases productivity and business performance. In return, businesses that consistently deliver the positive outcomes as desired by their customers will be able to command higher prices for their output. Hence, service innovation plays an important role for businesses to secure productivity gains and profit margins.

Industries that May Benefit from Service Innovation

Service innovation is important to all industry verticals but has a major impact on the following owing to globalisation:

- Financial services industry
- Healthcare industry
- Hospitality industry
- Public service sector

- Retail industry
- Telecommunications industry

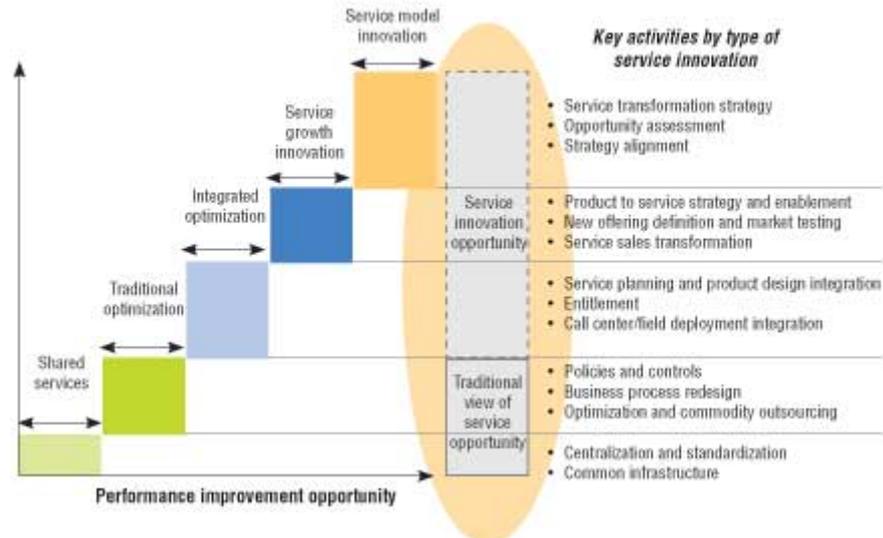
Service Innovation Trends and Examples in Different Industries

Industry	Trend	Example
Aerospace and Defense	Toward performance-based service and logistics agreements with customers, including guaranteed availability and reliability of equipment, modules, and entire platforms (such as jet propulsion) over long time periods.	Rolls-Royce has long been focused on selling "Power By The Hour." Customers can pay a fixed warranty and operational fee for the hours that their engines are running, so Rolls-Royce must focus on the entire package, from products, installation, after-sales maintenance, repair and overhaul, to overall service and parts management to ensure profitable long-term growth. ¹
Automotive, Commercial Vehicles	Excellence in service and parts management is key to the brand reputations and the entire business models of some companies.	For Hyundai and Kia, service parts management is an integral part of the corporate strategy. Many of their vehicles are sold with warranties of up to 10 years/100,000 miles, and the service and parts operation must function at the highest level of efficiency to avoid customer service problems and excessive warranty costs, and to sustain profitable growth. ²
Consumer Goods	As more consumer products are sold with a service component, top business performance relies on service excellence as much as product quality.	With its wildly successful iPod players, Apple Computer is mixing sales of a very attractive tangible product with digital services. While iPod unit sales are impressive enough, it is perhaps more impressive that Apple is selling two million music downloads per day and building fast-growing online video sales. ³
Diversified Manufacturing and Industrial Products	Customers view provider service offerings as an integral part of the business.	ABB offers its industrial automation customers "performance service" tailored to their needs. The offerings range from simple, product-focused maintenance and field services to "Automation Performance Management" where ABB guarantees the performance levels and assumes the risks of the customer's equipment over its life cycle whether or not it was originally made by ABB. ⁴
Life Sciences	As customers keep demanding more, manufacturers expect to see increased requests for same-day (instead of overnight or slower) service plus service-level agreements that put the risks and rewards on manufacturers' backs.	Siemens Medical Solutions responded by creating a more complex and expensive distribution and service network that gets closer to customers and allows faster responses. The system makes wide use of sophisticated technology and workflow processes. ⁵
High Tech and Telecom Equipment	Equipment downtime can cost \$100,000 or more an hour. Ongoing industry consolidation means that many customers now have unwieldy mixes of installed hardware and software that often need to be serviced for decades.	Printer makers, such as Hewlett-Packard and Xerox, have derived more revenue and profit in selling ink and after-sales services than in initial printer sales for quite some time. For semiconductor equipment makers like Applied Materials, service and parts management is at a premium and it is pivotal to selling the equipment in the first place. ⁶

Source: <http://www.customer-experience-labs.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/05/image4.png>

Service Innovation: Framework for Progress

Analysis of service innovation opportunity.



Source: Hiding in plain sight: Service innovation, a new priority for chief executives. (2006). United States: IBM Corporation.

Successful service innovation involves focusing on three areas;

- Service model innovation
- Service operational innovation
- Service growth innovation

Service model innovation establishes a clear direction for the overall service model, as it aligns with the main business strategy. Service operational and service growth innovation are usually tackled concurrently.

Service Model Innovation

Service innovation begins with deciding and finalising the strategic aim for service in the business' overall strategy. Businesses will need to determine which of the following to focus on;

- Reduce the cost of current service offerings, usually through optimising existing operations

“With competition from developing markets in Asia and Eastern Europe only going to intensify in coming years, UK manufacturers simply cannot rely on the quality of products ‘you can drop on your toe’ anymore. Ever increasing numbers of manufacturing firms are putting emphasis on the services they provide, challenging traditional ideas about just what product is.”

- **Professor Andy Neely**, Deputy Director of Advanced Institute of Management Research (AIM)

- Acquire new service revenue through new service offerings
- Both cost optimisation and revenue growth

For each strategic intent, there is a unique value-proposition and implication for the service innovator.

Service Operational Innovation

Service operational innovation serves as the “foundation for improving customer satisfaction”. It greatly reduces the costs of current service operations and at the same time enhances the quality of customer services and user experience. For many successful companies, they work through these four stages;

- Stage 0: Establish baseline
- Stage 1: Integrate the service chain
- Stage 2: Achieve service chain proficiency
- Stage 3: Optimise the service model

Service Growth Innovation

Service growth innovation manages the creation, development and delivery of new services, employing the same “discipline and rigour” as used with new products. While seeking for further growth opportunities based on new service offerings, the leaders in service innovation tend to move their “traditional service functions” towards profit centres. These growth opportunities comprise professional services, outsourcing/alliances, information or financial services.

Three areas for services-led growth for businesses to consider are;

- Create a service growth strategy that recognises the different growth models
- Identify and address process and capability gaps
- Manage services development and delivery differently than product development

By focusing on these three areas of service innovation, businesses can innovate their traditional service operations, and optionally move their service model towards becoming a profit centre.

Challenges in Service Innovation

Service innovation involves risks and needs certain amount of resources to sustain it. Businesses would also need to set aside a budget to implement the new offerings. Often, technology is at the core of innovation in services. Therefore, up front investment is needed for businesses to acquire or incorporate the technology into their innovation project.

The process of turning ideas and concepts into sellable products can be very tough and challenging. Businesses should prepare for the probability that sometimes concepts and ideas may not work out. It is also crucial for businesses to note that service innovation is often “hands-on”, and not something that can be ideated in a laboratory. Once the new service is rolled out, it would be difficult to recall without causing huge impact on their business and their customers. Employees would also need to be equipped with the essential skills and knowledge. Hence, it is important for employees to be briefed and sent for training, if necessary, before the launch of the new service. Service innovation is also easily imitated, making it essential to protect the innovative idea, where possible.

Some of the other challenges are;

- resistance to change within the internal environment
- the need to shift strategic priorities
- lack of project ownership
- inability to engage stakeholders, in particular the customers
- fear of public failure

Key Elements of Service Innovation

A successful business should adopt innovation as its top corporate priority. Businesses should use innovation to respond to trends that affect consumer behaviour and buying patterns. There are three prevailing principles for service innovation and each service should call for at least one of the following;

- a customer focus
- a process focus
- a continuous improvement mindset to do business

Customer Focused	A customer-centric approach to exceeding customer expectations.
	Any new technology, procedure, or method that improves the customer experience. Service innovation is simply new ways of meeting or exceeding customer's expectations.
Process Focused	Synergistic use of technology and process re-engineering to bring about a transformational step change in the quality of services being provided.
	Defines the processes of how significant improvements in products and services are adapted and ultimately delivered to users.
	Increase productivity and improve the customer experience.
Continuous Improvement	Continually seeking out ways to provide intuitive service to customers.
	Continuous improvement of the customer experience, or the cost of delivery of that customer experience; the ability to both anticipate and to invent ways of delighting the customer in an economically sustainable manner.

Source: Verma, R., et al. (2008, November). Key elements in service innovation: Insights for the hospitality industry. United States: Cornell University School of Hotel Administration.

Leadership and Innovation

People and culture within the workplace are the most important drivers of innovation. Thus, innovation also requires strong leadership, which would lead to a more innovative business. Leaders need to drive innovation projects, encourage and convince their staff to contribute and innovate. Leaders' behaviour would also impact the innovation culture in the workplace, and send "strong signals to its employees". Leaders could also undertake the following "practical steps to advance innovation".

1. Define the kind of innovation that drives growth and helps meet strategic objectives.

Leaders should communicate to their employees on their expectations and the outcomes. Failing to do so would result in getting "incremental and often familiar ideas".

2. Add innovation to the formal agenda at regular leadership meetings.

Advocating innovation in meetings would further escalate the awareness of the importance and the value of innovation to the management and their businesses.

3. Set performance metrics and targets for innovation.

Leaders should set metrics that would have the greatest impact on their employees' work. For example, establish targets for future potential revenues that should be obtained from the new service offering.

Customer knowledge

Businesses should know and understand their customer behaviours well before embarking on any new service offering. Businesses with clearly defined customer characteristics lower the probability of incurring risks through innovation, as they are more likely to know their customers' needs and wants. This will also reduce research and development cost.

Information Technology

Information technology plays a key role in service innovation practices, in particular, where implementation of innovation practices is involved. Information technology infrastructure, strategic alignment, organisational structure and individual learning of information technology adoption, are among the components that significantly impacts service innovation. Therefore, it is crucial that businesses carefully consider the role of information technology managers in innovation projects and put in place managerial mechanisms that will guide them in adopting the guidelines and managerial attitudes. This is to ensure a smooth and successful information technology adoption process.

Businesses should also consider applying a two-pronged "process innovation" and "product change strategy". These two factors will pay off significant competitive advantage for businesses as they deal with the challenges of integrating information technology into service innovation. The information technology adoption will also pose more challenges for "managers operating in environments with a high level of supplier interdependence" and business activities that largely involved the

use of information technology. Careful consideration must be given to the planning and implementation of information technology in such circumstances.

How Can Businesses Innovate Successfully?

Service innovation can succeed or fail based on two primary factors;

- correct reading of the market and what matters to customers
- appropriate management of the innovation process

While focusing on the market factors is crucial, businesses should not neglect the management of the innovation process.

Service Innovation Best Practices & Strategies

Before undertaking any service innovation projects, businesses should look at all aspects of customer experience and aim to enhance them. Value adding areas such as product delivery, operations, etc. could be considered. Identify areas where value can be added by forward or backward integration.

- 1. Customers should enjoy and be pleased with the innovation, while meeting the demands of all stakeholders.**

Businesses can consider introducing a new performance measure, “return on innovation investment” (ROI_I), that should be measured over a certain fixed time period.

- 2. Provide vision to drive the change process.**

Leaders should define the vision for putting in place innovation and communicate it to their employees. Physical changes to the environment should also be made to reflect the vision.

- 3. Provide a risk tolerant environment.**

Businesses should be aware that not all ideas are workable, and prepare for failures. Nevertheless, employees should still be given recognition.

4. Establish life long learning orientation that involves all employees of the organisation.

Employees should be given the freedom to choose their preferred projects to work on and time should be set aside, each week, for the employees to work on their ideas.

5. Support creative thinking in a diverse, information-rich environment.

One of the first difficulties faced in the innovation process is to generate ideas. Employees should be exposed to various techniques to stimulate new concepts during their creative thinking processes. Businesses can consider conducting seminars or workshops, and provide access to journals.

Service innovation is a success when significant differences to the ways customers use the service are made, and what they perceived of the service delivered.

World's Most Innovative Companies

Top 10 Most Innovative Companies (Overall)

Rank	2008	2009
1	Apple	Apple
2	Google	Google
3	Toyota Motor	Toyota Motor
4	General Electric	Microsoft
5	Microsoft	Nintendo
6	Tata Group	IBM
7	Nintendo	Hewlett-Packard
8	Procter & Gamble	Research In Motion
9	Sony	Nokia
10	Nokia	Wal-Mart Stores

Top 3 Most Innovative Companies for Services

Rank	2008
1	Verizon Communications
2	ING Groep
3	HSBC

Top 15 Most Innovative Companies for Customer Experience

Rank	2008	2009
1	Target	Walt Disney
2	Walt Disney	Target
3	Starbucks	McDonalds
4	Singapore Airlines	Facebook
5	Facebook	Southwest Airlines
6	Southwest Airlines	Virgin Group
7	Virgin Group	Johnson & Johnson
8	Costco Wholesale	Amazon.com
9	Nike	Iberdrola
10	McDonald's	Volkswagen
11	BMW	Verizon Communications
12	American Express	Coca-Cola
13	Amazon.com	BMW
14	AT & T	Google
15	Google	Arcelormittal

Source: The world's 50 most innovative companies. (2008/2009). *Business Week*.

Case Studies

e-Visitor Programme – The Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA)

The Immigration and Checkpoints Authority of Singapore (ICA) was recently awarded the “Service Innovation” category award in the 2008 Government Technology Award, a regional award handed out by FutureGov. Their e-Visitor programme brought upon their success.

The e-Visitor programme was put in place to allow non-citizens to apply for the various immigration facilities, such as visa applications, extension of visas, and application for long-term visit or student’s passes, via the Internet. The programme, providing access to the service 24/7, was a solution to address “overworked counter staff and rising operational bills” and the surge in applications for visas, visitor and student passes. It not only eliminate the long hours of waiting time for the users, the programme also saves the Singapore government S\$1.2 million a year.

The new service offering, though using technology as a mode of delivery, did not compromised on security. The e-Visit programme had brought satisfaction for the users and increased staff morale. Application and processing of visas are now more convenient and painless. It had also significantly reduced frustrations and unhappy customers. ICA officials credited the main driving force behind the programme to a “radical paradigm shift in mindset”.

With the e-Visitor programme in place, ICA could also now change their focus to other pressing issues such as breaches in immigration rules. Some of their staff, previously handling the visa applications, among other services, had since been re-deployed to face the new challenge.

The Digital Ward – Singapore Health Services

The Digital Ward is “an acute care facility incorporating the widespread use of information technology to dramatically improve the processes and outcomes of care”. The project was initiated by Singapore Health Services (SingHealth), in their bid to transform the processes involved in capturing and getting access to clinical information. The Digital Ward will help to maximise operational efficiency, and enhance patient care and safety in the hospitals. Hence, healthcare professionals will need to spend only a portion of their time tracking and documenting patients’ information, allowing for more time to be dedicated to providing better patient care. The Digital Ward project clinched a bronze award in the TEC Public Service Innovation Award, held locally, in November 2006.

The Digital Ward project team comprised IT professionals who worked closely with the healthcare practitioners such as clinicians and nurses. They aimed to innovate and build a system that will improve operational efficiency of healthcare institutions and bringing added value to their patients. Through the innovative use of IT, operational workflows in healthcare institutions will be more efficient and effective, and further enhance personalised patient care.

One of the innovative services offering under the ongoing Digital Ward project is the virtual ward visit. Family members or friends of the patients are able to make video calls, via their camera phones or webcam-equipped computers, to patients and doctors. Hence, the loved ones are able to get in touch with the doctors for updates on the patients’ health and condition painlessly.

The innovation culture is endlessly encouraged, nurtured and supported by the management in SingHealth. They hope to constantly tap on the rapid technology advancements to implement more innovative service offerings, which will further improve efficiency and patient care delivery, and bring them to a much higher level.

Biometrics Services – Singapore Airlines

The Singapore Airlines (SIA), in collaboration with Changi Airport, uses biometric services as a solution to enhance security, reduce costs, improve productivity and lure customers. Through using biometrics in their services, they are able to improve and speed up processes more efficiently.

In November 2005, a six-month pilot test for their Fully Automated Seamless Travel (FAST) was rolled out. The test involved 9,000 SIA frequent fliers, whom were given a smart card encoded with their fingerprint and facial data each. The check-in process for these travellers simply involved walking through a separate gateway, sliding their cards through a reader, and having their fingerprints and facial data scanned. The system clears passenger's security and immigration once the verification confirms that the card matches the holder's features. The system then proceeds on with preferred seats recommendations and printing of boarding passes. The entire checking-in process for the new pilot system takes less than a minute, as compared to the average 8 to 15 minutes for the current system. A similar system is also being developed for baggage handling, where passengers would be able to "skip lines and drop off biometrically tagged luggage outside the terminal" and to be reunited with it at the destination.

In their attempt to further innovate, SIA is continuously looking for ways to tap on biometrics to enhance their services which includes speeding ticketing and payment, customising loyalty-programme services, and improving efficiency of call centres through voice recognition. Any service offering, in which knowledge of customers' identities and preferences could be used to customise and streamline sales, is a potential candidate. Recently, SIA had identified 113 potential uses for biometrics in its business.

Dell IdeaStorm – Dell

In February 2007, Dell launched Dell IdeaStorm, a social networking site. Dell IdeaStorm was developed and implemented to seek out to its customers to generate ideas about the technology they would like to see, and provides channels for customers to leave their suggestions and feedbacks for the current and future Dell products, services and operations. The interactive web site includes features such as polling system and “post-a-comment” function.

Dell IdeaStorm was very successful. It garnered more than 7,500 ideas, more than 520,000 votes and 46,801 comments. The web site received an average of 40,000 unique visitors per week. From the customers’ suggestions and feedbacks, Dell has put more than 30 ideas into action. One of the ideas submitted by an online customer had more than 25,000 votes concurring to the idea. It led to the preloading an open-source operating system, Linux, on Dell’s notebooks. This shows the community’s measurable and sustainable impact on Dell’s relationship with customers.

Articles may be delivered to clients, upon request.

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