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CASE 20

Susan Munro, Service Customer

Christopher Lovelock

In the course of a single day, a busy young woman makes use of a wide array of services.

Susan Munro, a final-year business student, had breakfast and then checked the local weather forecast on the Internet. It predicted rain, so she grabbed an umbrella before leaving the apartment and walked to the bus stop for her daily ride to the university. On the way, she dropped a letter in a mailbox. The bus arrived on schedule. It was the usual driver, who recognized her and gave a cheerful greeting as she showed her monthly pass. The bus was quite full, carrying a mix of students and office workers, so she had to stand.

Arriving at her destination, Susan left the bus and walked to the College of Business. Joining a crowd of other students, she took a seat in the large classroom where her finance class was held. The professor lectured in a near monotone for 75 minutes, occasionally projecting charts on a large screen to illustrate certain calculations. Susan reflected that it would be just as effective, and far more convenient, if the course was streamed online and recorded so that students could watch at their leisure. She much preferred the marketing course that followed because this professor was a very dynamic individual who believed in having an active dialogue with the students. Susan made several contributions to the discussion and felt that she learned a lot from listening to the analyses and opinions of her fellow students.

She and three friends ate lunch at the recently renovated Student Union. The old cafeteria, a gloomy place that served unappetizing food at high prices, had been replaced by a well-lit and colorfully-decorated new food court, featuring a variety of small kiosks. These included both local suppliers and brand-name fast food chains which offered choices of sandwiches, health foods, and a variety of desserts. Although she had wanted a sandwich, the line of waiting customers at the sandwich shop was rather long, so Susan joined her friends at Burger King and then splurged on a café latte from the adjacent Hav-a-Java coffee stand. The food court was unusually crowded today, perhaps because of the rain now pouring down outside. When they finally found a table, they had to clear off the dirty trays. "Lazy slobs!" commented her friend Mark, referring to the previous customers.



After lunch, Susan stopped at the ATM, inserted her card, and withdrew some cash. Remembering that she had a job interview at the end of the week, she phoned her hairdresser and counted herself lucky to be able to make an appointment for later in the day because of a cancellation by another client. Leaving the Student Union, she ran across the rain-soaked plaza to the Language Department. In preparation for her next class, Japanese for Business, she spent an hour in the language laboratory, watching an engaging video of customers making purchases at different types of stores, then repeating key phrases and listening to her own recorded voice. "My accent's definitely getting better!" she said to herself.

With Japanese phrases filling her head, Susan set off to visit the hairdresser. She liked the hair salon, which had a bright, trendy décor, and well-groomed, friendly staff. Unfortunately, the cutter was running late and Susan had to wait 20 minutes. She used this time to review

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a chapter for the next day's human resources course. Some of the other waiting customers were reading magazines provided by the store. Eventually, it was time for a shampoo, after which the cutter proposed a slightly different cut. Susan agreed, although she drew the line at the suggestion to lighten her hair color as she was unsure how it would look. She did not want to take the risk, especially not just before her job interview. She sat very still, watching the process in the mirror and turning her head when requested. She was pleased with the result and complimented the cutter on her work. The process, including the shampoo, had lasted about 40 minutes. She tipped the cutter and paid at the reception desk.
The rain had stopped and the sun was shining as Susan left the store, so she walked home, stopping to pick up clothes from the cleaners.

This store was gloomy, smelled of cleaning solvents, and badly needed repainting. She was annoyed to find that although her silk blouse was ready as promised, the suit she would need for her interview was not. The assistant, who had dirty fingernails, mumbled an apology in an insincere tone without making eye contact. Although the store was convenient and the quality of work quite good, Susan considered the employees unfriendly and not very helpful.

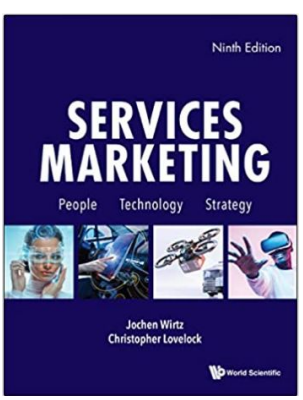
Back at her apartment building, she opened the mailbox in the lobby and collected the mail for herself and her roommates. Her own mail, which was rather dull, included a quarterly bill from her insurance company, which required no action since she had signed an agreement to deduct the funds automatically from her bank account. There was also a postcard from her optometrist, reminding her that it was time to schedule a new eye examination. Susan made a mental note to call for an appointment, anticipating that she might need a revised prescription for her contact lenses. She was about to discard the junk mail when she noticed a flyer promoting a new dry-cleaning store and including a coupon for a discount. She decided to try the new firm and pocketed the coupon.

Since it was her turn to cook dinner, she wandered into the kitchen and started looking in the refrigerator and then the cupboards to see what was available. Susan sighed — there wasn't much in there. Maybe she would make a salad and call for home delivery of a large pizza.

Study Questions

1. Identify each of the services that Susan Munro has used or is planning to use.
2. What needs is she attempting to satisfy in each instance?
3. In each case, are there any alternative goods or services (including self-service) that could solve her need?
4. What similarities and differences are there between the dry-cleaning store and the hair salon? What could each learn from studying the other?

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