

BUSINESS

connections



Meeting the high expectations of Sugartop

Brent Keith and Michelle Scott from SkyLine/SkyBest enjoy the mountain views with Sugartop General Manager, Dennis Lacey



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Customer service has been the focus of SkyLine/SkyBest since the cooperative was established in 1951. We have remained true to our heritage of superior, local customer service while also keeping our sights on the changing technology of our industry. From department to department and employee to employee, SkyLine/SkyBest strives to deliver excellence.

On pages 4 and 5 of this issue of *Business Connections*, we feature an article about going above the rest; it's a look at the unique Sugartop condominium community that sits atop Little Sugar Mountain. SkyLine/SkyBest has enjoyed a long relationship with Sugartop and we're pleased to meet the high expectations of its staff and residents.

You'll also find two other articles related to customer service. On page 6, we discuss the concept of the customer experience, defined as how customers feel about doing business with you. Then on page 7, the focus is on what your customers say about your business through word-of-mouth advertising and consumer-generated media. I think you'll find plenty of food for thought in these pages.

What will SkyLine/SkyBest do to keep our customers satisfied in the years ahead? You could say the sky's the limit. In the meantime, please let us know what challenges we can solve for you today.

Sincerely,

Jimmy C. Blevins
Chief Executive Officer



Cover photo provided by Todd Bush Photography

The Computer Security: Human Factor

How to help protect your company from social engineering



To ensure your company's computer systems are secure, you back up your data regularly, use robust passwords, promptly address any problems reported by your staff, register your software, have an antivirus application installed, have a disaster recovery plan in place and use all other necessary measures. So, you're all set, right? No—not until you consider that your biggest computer security threat could be *you*.

What is Social Engineering?

Social engineering is a form of intrusion into a computer security system through the people that operate it. Rather than breaking into systems using technology, social engineers gain the confidence of system users and then trick them into performing actions or divulging information that result in a security breach. Social engineers rely on people's natural inclination to trust others at their word and respond to authority, as well as their disinclination to appear paranoid. They also rely on key information seeming unimportant to those who hold it.

For example, a person posing as a company executive calls a system administrator, demanding that certain actions be performed immediately. The system administrator, intimidated by the person calling, complies, without checking the caller's credentials. Before realizing the consequences, the system administrator divulges a password, leaks confidential information or compromises a network.

As another example, a person posing as an IT consultant walks into a company and makes requests of the receptionist. The receptionist, not wanting to appear paranoid, refrains from checking the "consultant's" credentials, and offers passwords and other information that lead to an attack.

STRATEGIES FOR FOILING SOCIAL ENGINEERS

Here are some strategies for avoiding such situations:

1. Do not share passwords with anyone other than known employees and company contractors. (Generally, system administrators will not need your password; rather, they will have their own.)
2. Make it a policy that all IT professionals entering the premises must be accompanied by your company's system administrator.
3. Shred all documents containing specific information about the company, even if they are not "confidential," per se. Such documents include calendars, organizational charts, contact lists, policy manuals, vacation lists and so on.
4. If someone claiming to be from a trusted outside source calls and requests information, insist on hanging up and calling back at the known number for that source.
5. Do not follow instructions received in an e-mail (such as following a link to a Web site, replying with your password or running an attached executable file).
6. Do not share information with anyone you don't know claiming to offer help on a known problem, especially if you're not aware of the problem.
7. Do not be afraid to check someone's credentials. Anyone with a legitimate reason to be contacting you won't mind.

Remember, social engineers rely on people's inclination to trust, so learn to be just suspicious enough to outsmart them.



BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT:

Close to the **Sky** **Far** from **Ordinary**

*Sugartop counts on SkyLine/SkyBest
for high levels of service*

*Pictured above:
Spectacular views
are the top attrac-
tion of the Sugartop
condominium com-
munity near Banner
Elk, North Carolina.*

To say that Sugartop is a unique condominium community is no overstatement. Perched atop Little Sugar Mountain at an elevation of approximately 5,000 feet, Sugartop is famous for its breathtaking views of Grandfather Mountain and the Sugar Mountain ski slopes.

Completed in 1983, it also became the most controversial living quarters in the history of North Carolina; people feared that Sugartop would disrupt the natural beauty of the rolling mountain landscape. This led to the passage of a State Ridge Law, making Sugartop the last high rise of its kind to be built on the ridge of a mountain.

Today's View

Dennis Lacey, General Manager of Sugartop, explains, "As a result of that 1983 law, our building can never be duplicated. Over time, the controversy was replaced with support; Sugartop is now widely considered to be a unique landmark and an asset to the area. We employ 20 full-time local people and those numbers increase to 26 in the summers. What's more, we're the second largest tax payer here, topped only by the ski resort."

For most of its 28-year history, Sugartop's communications solutions have been provided by SkyLine/SkyBest. These now include a PBX telephone system, wireless Internet and TV service. Notes Lacey, "We love working with SkyLine/SkyBest. Their employees are professional, prompt and responsive. And they're also super-friendly and courteous."

Brent Keith, SkyLine/SkyBest Business Sales Executive, is part of the team that works with Sugartop and is pleased with the relationship that's been built. He explains, "I feel that we've developed a solid business partnership over the years. SkyLine/SkyBest continues to adapt our offerings, on an ongoing basis, to meet the needs of Sugartop's staff and residents."

Convenient Connections

Sugartop features 320 fully furnished, two-bedroom

We love working with SkyLine/SkyBest. Their employees are professional, prompt and responsive.”

— DENNIS LACEY, GENERAL MANAGER, Sugartop

condos, all with majestic views. On-site amenities include an indoor pool, Jacuzzi, steam room and exercise room. Says Lacey, “Only 23 of these condos are owned by people who live at Sugartop year round. Another 80 or so owners rent their condos out when they aren’t living here, and the rest of them use their Sugartop condos as second homes. For example, about 90 of our owners have homes in Florida and spend five or six months here in the summers to get away from the worst of the Florida heat.”

Whether owners or guests, those staying at Sugartop expect top-notch communications services. The PBX system installed by SkyLine/SkyBest at Sugartop is a MITEL VoIP system that can work as a hybrid digital and VoIP PBX. Explains Keith, “This system provides reliable telephone service throughout Sugartop and allows for streamlined unit-to-unit calls



Photo by: Todd Bush Photography

Arrington Rankhorn, Office Manager at Sugartop.



as well as the efficiency of the automatic attendant feature.”

Lacey adds, “We started leasing this PBX system several years ago and it’s still working great, so we’re sticking with it. To enhance its capabilities, we added the 911 upgrade. If a condo owner calls 911, the front desk is automatically alerted that there’s an emergency through a special ring. The system also displays which unit is dialing 911. This feature has proved to be very useful at Sugartop, enabling our staff to better manage emergencies. Given the number of elderly residents here, that’s reassuring to everyone.”

When installing the wireless Internet at Sugartop, SkyLine/SkyBest had the task of dealing with the challenges presented by the unique concrete-and-steel building. Explains Lacey, “There are access points on each floor, and every condo gets a wireless Internet signal.”

Offering TV service to Sugartop was another interesting challenge. Lacey says, “SkyLine/SkyBest hadn’t provided TV service in a building like ours in the past, but they were willing to take on the project and invest in the needed equipment. Both the signal and picture quality we get from SkyLine/SkyBest are excellent.”

Granted, with the spectacular mountain views offered by Sugartop, residents may not spend much time looking at their TV or computer screens. But when they do, they’ll be pleased. SkyLine/SkyBest aims high in everything it does.



Shown with current Foundation President Martha Beasley are SkyLine’s Avery County Board members Buster Bureson and D.C. Smith.

Banner Elk Celebrates Centennial

SkyLine recently made a financial contribution to support the Greater Banner Elk Heritage Foundation as part of Banner Elk’s Centennial celebration in 2011. Upcoming projects for the foundation include the restoration of the original deeds to the Banner House and surrounding lands, creating enlargements of old photographs depicting Banner Elk from the late 1800s through the 1920s that will be part of next season’s exhibit and the creation of a centennial commemorative DVD.

The foundation devotes its energies and funds to protect the heritage of the greater Banner Elk area and strives to ensure that the infrastructure and cosmetic appearance of Banner Elk remains appealing to our local residents and visitors while retaining the “small town” atmosphere. The heritage of the Greater Banner Elk area will be recorded and maintained by the foundation for future generations.



Going Beyond Customer Service

Build loyalty by providing a great customer experience

What is it about your company that makes customers want to do business with you, and even tell others about it? Is it your fantastic products? Great selection? Impressive expertise? It's probably all of these things to some degree. But, to an even greater extent, it's how they feel about doing business with you, or what is known as their customer experience.

Improve Customer Experience, Improve Business

A 2010 study by RightNow Technologies found, "Customer service is the most influential thing a company can do to increase customer advocacy [focus on what is best for customers]." The study revealed that 55 percent of consumers recommend a company because of its customer service, compared to products at 49 percent and price at 42 percent. In addition, customers are willing to pay more for a great customer experience—up to 25 percent more!

Incredibly, according to a MarketingCharts.com article about the RightNow study, "RightNow estimates the U.S. airline industry could make an additional \$10.6 billion in revenue this year if they could guarantee a superior customer experience. That is more than five times the predicted deficit for the airline industry this year." Just think what your company might accomplish with additional attention to customer experience.

Emotional Bonds are Hard to Break

Customer experience is a somewhat new concept in business. Wikipedia defines it as follows: "The sum of all experiences a customer has with a supplier ... awareness, discovery, attraction, interaction, purchase, use, cultivation and advocacy." With each of these stages in the relationship, there are many opportunities to provide an excellent customer experience.

The key to doing so is identifying what emotions customers want to feel when doing business with you, then creating situations that enable it to happen. Examples of positive customer emotions include joy, trust, contentment and the feeling of "being taken care of." The cumulative emotions customers experience as they do business with you result in an emotional bond that becomes hard to break over time.

Practices that can instantly improve your customers' experience include making them feel valued, listening carefully to their concerns and overdelivering.

Benefits of a Customer Focus

You may be concerned that improving customer experience will cost you more in staffing, marketing and training; however, such improvement can actually help your bottom line in these ways:

- **Customer Loyalty.** It costs less to retain current customers than to attract new ones.
- **Additional Income.** Happy customers are willing to pay more for your products or services.
- **Word of Mouth.** Customers who love doing business with you will tell others about you.

Remember, it's not only what your customers think about your company, but also what they feel about it, that matters. Customer experience is at the heart of it all.

Word-of-Mouth Advertising

Greatly exceed expectations to get your customers talking

Word-of-mouth advertising is highly valued because of its power to bring in new customers without the expense of paid media. It's also one of the most credible forms of advertising since people tend to trust recommendations made by their friends and family. Once limited to in-person conversations and phone calls, word-of-mouth advertising now has a much broader reach thanks to consumer-generated media such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs and online product reviews.

It's important to note that word-of-mouth advertising should never be faked or invented; attempting this is unethical and can create a backlash against the brand and damage a company's reputation. Businesses can, however, take steps to foster the level of excitement and confidence necessary to get customers to recommend them.

What can your business do to help trigger word-of-mouth advertising about your products and services? It all boils down to providing a customer experience that goes far beyond what's expected. Just slightly exceeding expectations isn't enough. You must truly go the extra mile if you want customers to freely recommend your business to others. Here are some proven techniques to consider:

Create special spaces

Some businesses make themselves unfor-

gettable through distinctive buildings or spaces. One dramatic example is the erupting volcano outside the Mirage in Las Vegas. But this principle can be applied on a simpler scale — such as a very comfortable and well-furnished waiting room at a car-repair shop or a restaurant located in a former schoolhouse or factory.

Provide memorable experiences

The tossing of fresh fish from one employee to another at a fish market in Seattle is a famous example of a business that offers customers a unique shopping adventure. Other examples include the hotel that gives freshly baked chocolate-chip cookies to guests, the electrician who offers to do a free safety inspection of each customer's home, or the retail store that follows up major purchases by sending a handwritten thank-you note.

Be thoughtful and generous

Businesses with strong customer-service cultures are proactive and look for ways to deliver even more than the customer expects. Perhaps this means patiently explaining how to use new technology, offering a toy or snack to a mother with a fussy child, or sending a book or article to a client that you think they'd enjoy reading. While it's common to overdeliver to new customers, the key to success is to exceed expectations consistently, for all customers, in all areas of interaction, over the long haul.

Consumer-Generated Media Influence Sales

While the marketing messages about your company's products and services are certainly important, consumer-generated media (also known as user-generated content) is becoming an increasingly influential factor in the sales process.

Here's a look at some interesting statistics regarding consumer-to-consumer recommendations:

- The average consumer mentions specific brands over 90 times per week in conversations with friends, family and co-workers. (*John Moore, WOMMA, 2010*)
- In a study conducted by social networking site myYearbook, 81 percent of respondents said they'd received advice from friends and followers relating to a product purchase through a social site; 74 percent of those who received such advice found it to be influential in their decision. (*Click Z, January 2010*)
- Ninety percent of consumers trust recommendations from people they know; 70 percent trust opinions of unknown users. (*Nielsen Global Online Consumer Survey, July 2009*)
- Eighty-three percent of online shoppers said they're interested in sharing information about their purchases with people they know. (*Manage Smarter, September 2009*)

Looking for more ideas? Visit the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) Web site at <http://womma.org/casestudy> to see case studies of word-of-mouth programs from a variety of organizations.



60 Years of Great Connections

This year we're celebrating the vision and commitment of SkyLine's founders, along with our many employees, past and present, who have kept this community on the cutting edge of communications technology.

**Local/Long-Distance | High-Speed Internet
Business Systems | Metro-Ethernet | Security Systems**