INTRODUCTION

Customers and their needs have become the most important element in contemporary business. Meeting the customer individual preferences constitutes a key to reaching success by companies, which compete in finding advantages and incentives, in order to attract as many potential customers as possible. There are newer and better tools worked out to support the activities of companies on market, which facilitate a comprehensive customer service providing. A successful company, in order to stay in the market, should use innovative technology, in order to meet the increasing requirements of its customers. Logistics, by providing products or services to its customers, involves at the same time the possibility to offer them additional advantages related with goods providing, being a part of logistic customer service. This refers to various factors and activities which shape the process of the buyer's products and services providing. These are most frequently the activities which refer to order acceptance, its completion, handing over of goods to customers, settlement of payment, and even further care of products subject to sale [1].

1 CUSTOMER SERVICE IN MEANING LOGISTIC

Multiple meaning of measures and interpretation as far as customer service is concerned, involves a necessity for the entrepreneurs to integrate many fields of activities within a company, in order to use their potential and manage logistic customer service efficiently. With a well organized logistic customer service system, a company may have guarantee to possess the best factor which might influence attracting new customers and maintain regular customers.

Customer service constitutes a comprehensive and unequivocal concept. Hence, there are many definitions which refer to it. Logistic functions related with customer service involve acceptance and registration of orders, providing information to customers about goods availability, possible delivery dates, cost, and progress of orders. It is however necessary to handle individually some typical sale functions, such as customer winning and price negotiations, which are mostly not included in the scope of activities of logistic department.

Some authors define customer service as a “fuel which drives the motor of logistic chain” [2]. However some authors list customer service management as one of eight key processes, which constitute the core of integrated supplies chain management [3].

The basis of customer service in logistics is explained not only by elements such as availability of ready made goods on stock, or the delivery time.

D. Kempny includes the following elements in customer service [5]:
- delivery time,
- availability of products from stock,
- flexibility of deliveries,
- frequency of deliveries,
- reliability of deliveries,
- completeness of deliveries,
- accuracy of deliveries,
- convenient method of goods ordering,
- user-friendly documents at goods ordering.

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The above concepts indicate complexity of the logistic customer service definition and the importance of efficient management of this scope of company activities, which may suffer loss due to shortcomings within it.

The most frequent errors within strategy of customer service which have been listed, include [1]:

- incorrect market research or market analysis,
- not taking into account the customer welfare,
- incorrect defining of customer service policy,
- establishing of unrealistic customer service policy,
- economically unsubstantiated expenditure for customer service,
- unilateral treating of customer service policy, only as a source of sale increase,
- consideration of the customer service level, and the quantity of stock as of equal significance,
- increase of staff number instead of processes improvement,
- untrained and poorly paid staff in customer service department,
- lack of awareness among employees, how their job influences the level of customer service offered by the company.

In order to eliminate errors in logistic customer service, companies apply various relations support tools. The most frequently applied tools include IT systems, which facilitate monitoring of the whole logistic customer service process. Various networks which include small, medium size or large companies, support their activities with systems working within a given network, and in accordance with a philosophy introduced, they manage their customer service providing. Properly selected and trained staff allow an optimum level of company activities management and management of contacts with customer. Software applied along with such staff, supports the activities of a company and meets its management needs.

2 SUPPORT CUSTOMER SERVICE

Activities within customer service in logistic integrate many areas within the company, therefore, their proper management involves use of IT tools which are designed to improve them. Small companies use common office software which is sufficient for them, however large companies must invest in IT systems of a higher rank, in order not to lower the level of logistic customer service. IT tools application in company activities support within the area, facilitates maintaining positive relations with customer and obtaining optimum results from the company activities.

The main advantages of implementing IT systems from the point of view of logistics involve [4]:

- improvement of customer service level;
- reduction of the maintained stock level;
- synchronizing of procurement, manufacturing and distribution processes;
- facilitating manufacturing on order, instead of stock keeping;
- reduction of standstills caused by materials shortages;
- reduction of cost level;
- improvement of deliveries times;
- improvement of cash flow data, due to reduction of financial engagement in liquid assets;
- improvement of financial flow surveillance;
- improvement of staff competencies by organization variations which involve delegating higher scope of responsibility to lower management levels;
- reduction of a number of documents at individual procedures.

However, except for advantages also some disadvantages may appear, which occur at such IT system implementing. The most frequent error at this stage deals with an incorrect selection of the system itself, which might have been purchased without previous analysis of variations the company would like to achieve. Another element involves selection of a proper team to deal with the system implementing. The team should include, apart from a person selling the system who should be responsible for training of the system’s operators in the future, also an IT specialist and a logistics specialist from the company. It seems also that a person might be helpful experienced in implementing
of such systems or systems of similar class, whose advice and observations might turn out to be very useful. Success in implementing the IT system depends in this situation, only on staff to be trained, their determination and rate of learning and on financial capacity of a company to pay for the training.

3 CHARACTERISTICS OF RESEARCH AND ITS ANALYSIS

Research performed in Company X (name changed at the request of the company Management) was selected for the needs of the article. The company is located in wielkopolskie province, it is a medium size enterprise, with about 150 employees. The company deals with manufacturing of a wide range of kitchen and living room furniture, including upholstered furniture and chairs. Company X run their business by meeting the customer’s requirements, with high quality of products offered and introduction of technical novelties.

The research has been carried out with a group of employees and customers of Company X, with the purpose of analyzing the impact of IT tools used in logistic customer service. Results of the research have indicated advantages of logistic customer service on the Internet, to the employees and for the customers, and have indicated how the customers perceive the company, whether they are satisfied with the activities of the company, aiming at meeting their requirements.

Questionnaire has been used as a research tool. The research was performed from August to November 2012.

The questionnaire for employees consisted of 11 questions, which referred to IT systems for logistic customer service support in a company, methods of communication with the customer and of using Internet for the activities. The questionnaire has been correctly filled in by 50 employees, at managing positions or at positions related with customer service. 18 women and 32 men took part in the research, most of them between 31 and 45 years old.

The Questionnaire for the customers of the company included 12 questions which referred to logistic customer service and mutual cooperation with the company, its satisfaction with the products and activities of the company, method of use and perceiving of web page and communication channels by the customers. 60 customers of Company X have participated in the research (30 individual customers and 30 companies). 30 men and 20 women have answered questions from the questionnaire correctly. The persons filling in the questionnaire have had mainly secondary (35 participants), or higher education (25 participants) level. Companies which participated in the research are from small and medium size group of companies, with 50-200 employees. Among companies, questions have been answered by managers, with higher education completed, from 31-55 years old, including 23 men.

3.1 Analysis of answers obtained from a questionnaire for the company employees

The questionnaire has started from asking about work experience. The most numerous group of 54% has included persons working in the company for over 6 years, the second group - 36% has included employees working from 3 to 6 years. The smallest group (10%) has included employees employed from 1 to 3 years. We may state, that the majority of employees in the company are young people, with secondary education and relatively long employment time, which may prove their loyalty towards the company and proper salary.

Question 2 has referred to use of all possible methods of communication by the company. 65% of the employees have stated that they use all communication methods, 23% have stated they do not use all possible resources and 12% of the participants could not answer the question unequivocally. It might be assumed, that in most cases they agree with the statement that they use all communication methods.

Question no. 3 has referred to communication channels preferred. A scale of 5 grades has been assumed, where 1 refers to - non preferred, and 5 - the most preferred. The answers have been presented in table 1.

E-mail constitutes the most popular communication channel, evaluated by 37 employees as the most preferred one as well as the direct contact, which has been indicated by 43 questioned participants.
Telephone and fax are not less popular, whereas web page has been evaluated slightly worse, while chat-room is the least popular channel, this channel being still little popular. When analyzing the results from the chart, it should be noted, that the Internet constitutes a very important part of the communication process, and e-mail replaces in many cases telephone contact. Its popularity is already compared with direct contact. Web pages are still not appreciated highly or used very often, but their popularity and functional aspects in logistic customer service is still increasing.

Question no. 4 has referred to access to all information concerning logistic customer service by the employees. The research which has been carried out indicates, that 83% of all employees have access to all information. Merely 17% of questioned persons have stated, that they do not have access to some information. It might be stated that the share of employees who claim not to have access to information is very small, and the level of access to information is satisfactory.

Another question no. 5 was designed to provide information whether there is an IT system in the company used for logistic customer service. The research results are satisfactory. 96% of the employees have responded, that there is such system in the company, and only 4% have responded that they were not sure whether such system existed. The conclusion which may be drawn from it is that the company have got an IT system supporting the logistic customer service and that the employees use it.

Question no. 6 which refers to prices of products of X company, as compared with competitors, has been answered by the participants as "comparable" with competitors. Such an answer has been marked by 83% of participants, whereas 8% have stated that they are "slightly higher", with only 9%, as "slightly lower". None of the participants of the research responded with: “definitely higher”, which might indicate that Company X has a lot of competitors in the field, and a high price offer would cause that customers leave the company in order to go to competitors and result in reduction of profit on sale.

In question no. 7, the employees determined whether the fact of IT system introduction improves their work. The research has revealed that 90% of employees consider it as a tool which helps them in work, and the remaining 10% consider it as certain improvement.

Question number 8 has referred to advantages offered by an IT system implemented in Company X. The participants have evaluated individual areas of advantages, according to a five grade scale, where 1 point means - little important advantage, and 5 - a very important advantage. Individual results have been presented in table 2.

The most important advantage of an IT logistic customer service support system application, listed by the participants is the logistic customer service time reduction – this is an answer given by all employees. The next advantage listed, refers to an increase and improvement of access to information about logistic customer service – 45 employees have qualified it as very good and only two of them as good. Slightly lower evaluation has been indicated for other advantages, which provides optimistic information about the system implemented and its advantages for logistic customer service support.
Tab. 2. Advantages of an IT system implementing. Source: own elaboration, on the basis of research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA OF ADVANTAGE</th>
<th>GRADE</th>
<th>Scale of grades</th>
<th>Number of evaluations obtained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shortens the time of logistic customer service</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases and facilitates access to information about logistic customer service</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases quality of logistic customer service</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases customer satisfaction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitates the process of complaints handling</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves sales process</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows faster recognition of customer’s preferences</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases frequency of contact with customer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another question no. 9 has been designed to test the suitability of the Internet for logistic customer service support. Research results allow for a statement, that the Internet is suitable in the process, because 84% of persons questioned may definitely confirm the thesis, and further 16% rather agree with it. The research confirms, that development of the Internet, its use in a company and Internet marketing support highly the logistic customer service management.

Question no. 10, regarding attractive character of the web page as perceived by the employees, all participants have confirmed that the company web page is attractive. 90% of the employees have confirmed it definitely, and 10% have responded that they rather agree with it. This means, that the web page is considered in a positive way by the employees.

The last question no. 11 has been designed to indicate, whether the information included in the company web page is clear and valid. The employees have been requested to evaluate clarity and validity of information included in it by means of a five grade scale, where 1 - refers to invalid and unclear information, 5 - to valid and definitely clear information. 78% of the survey participants, validity has received 5 points, and 22% of participants have evaluated it with 4 points. The result is satisfactory and proves that data included in the web page is clear and valid. Availability of such service proves that the company is modern and its approach to a customer professional.

3.2 Analysis of answers obtained from a questionnaire for the company customers

The first question has informed about how long the survey participants have been the Company X customers. The largest group includes companies which are the customers of the company under analysis for more than 10 years (53% of the participants), another group includes companies and individual participants who have been the company customers for 5-10 years (27% of participants). Customers who have cooperated with the company for more than 3 years constitute a smaller group of customers (14%), and new customers, up to 1 year with the company, constitute only 6%. Corporate customers of Company X are more committed to it, cooperation is longer than in case of individual customers.

The second question referred to the most popular sources of information about products and services of Company X. The most popular source of information about products is the Internet, indicated by 52% of the participants, the next one, as far as the number of responses is concerned, refers to information obtained from commercial representatives (28%), spots and advertisements (18%) and trade fair and exhibitions (10%). Information obtained by phone or fax have been of smallest significance (merely 2%). None of the participants indicated any other sources. Responses to the question confirm a very high importance of the Internet in the activity of companies nowadays, and its still growing popularity among customers, both corporate and individual ones.

In question no. 3, the customers have specified what is of the highest importance when choosing Company X. The highest importance was assigned to logistic customer service (58 participants), further, high quality of products (52), price (46), wide offer of products (37). Factors of much lower importance include: complaints settlement (32), order handling time (27), competence of commercial representatives (19) and opinion of friends (12). Analysis of the responses provided confirms the
thesis, that proper care for the customer is very important. It is necessary to provide the customer with the best possible service, which might be a factor decisive in deciding about purchase. Except for appropriate customer service for corporate customers, quality and price is important, being of even higher importance for individual customers (26 out of 30).

Question number 4 has been designed to specify satisfaction of customers with activities of Company X. Most of customers of the company under analysis are highly satisfied with its activities (72%), 24% are satisfied, and 4% are rather satisfied. The responses prove that the company is trying to reach and maintain a high level of satisfaction of its customers.

Another question, question no.5 allowed specifying whether products offered by Company X meet the customers expectations. The analysis indicates that they meet them definitely (69% of participants), or they rather meet them (29%). Only 2% (individual customers) consider their expectations have not been met. It is a small number of participants under the research, we may therefore state that the products of the company are attractive and appreciated by the consumers.

Question no. 6 referred to orders handling time as compared with competition. The question analyzed indicates that 43% of all questioned consider the order handling time in the company under analysis is comparable with competition in the market. 52% of customers under the research consider it even slightly shorter, and only 5% state that it is longer than times at companies with similar profile of activities. Results obtained on the basis of the question are positive, and in juxtaposition with views which refer to expectations of customers we may state that Company X meets individual preferences of customers and makes effort to meet them.

Question 7 provides data for evaluation of customers cooperation with the company under analysis in its various aspects. The persons asked, have evaluated individual areas of cooperation according to a five grade scale with the following significance : 1 – very badly, 5, very good. Responses provided have been listed in table 3.

| AREA OF COOPERATION                      | GRADE | | | | | Scale of grades | Number of evaluations obtained |
|------------------------------------------|-------|---|---|---|---|
| Communication with the company           | 1     | 0 | 0 | 4 | 56  |
| Cooperation in logistic customer service | 0     | 0 | 3 | 52| 55  |
| Cooperation with commercial representatives| 0     | 0 | 3 | 52| 5   |
| Competence of employees                  | 0     | 0 | 4 | 56| 5   |
| Scope and method of information          | 0     | 0 | 0 | 11| 49  |
| Time of orders handling                  | 0     | 0 | 0 | 6 | 54  |

The survey participants evaluated very well cooperation with Company X. 58 of the persons asked have marked the highest grade for the competence of employees, with a slightly lower for communication with the company and scope and method of information providing, which constitutes good evaluation of persons employed in it. Cooperation at logistic customer service has also been evaluated very well, which is related with a number of activities and tools which support this field. Lowest evaluation was provided for the cooperation with commercial representatives, however grade 3 was provided by individual customers, whereas companies evaluated it with grades 4 and 5.

Question no. 8 has referred to communication channels. Similarly as in case of questionnaire for employees, the customers have evaluated communication channels by means of a five grade scale, where 1 means - not preferred, and 5 - most preferred. E-mail constitutes the most popular communication channel, 57 participants have marked the highest grade for it. Direct contact has also been highly evaluated by 55 participants, and telephone by 52 participants – by grade 5 provided for the criteria. Web page also constitutes one of popular channels, evaluated by 13 customers as most preferred, and 38 participants have evaluated it well, 9 customers have provided grade 3. The least
preferred channels are fax, with 14 good evaluations and 46 with low evaluations. Chat room is also little popular, with 14 satisfactory grades and 46 low grades.

Question no. 9 has referred to evaluation of usefulness of information included in web page of the company. The customers have evaluated individual kinds of information in a five grade scale, in which 1 point means – not useful, 5 – very useful. Evaluation results have been presented in table 4.

Tab. 4. Evaluation of information included in web page of Company X. Source: own elaboration, on the basis of research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF INFORMATION</th>
<th>GRADE Scale of grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company contact details</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products catalogue</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press releases</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company news</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility of own designs providing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions to consultants</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most important information according to all customers under the research constitute the contact details of the company, with grade 5. The following information includes catalogues of products and company news, with possibility of submission of own designs, which grows in popularity. The lowest evaluation was obtained by a guide on the web page, which was evaluated by five survey participants with grade 3 and by 15 with good. It indicates that the company should modify the function and to improve it. Contact with consultants should be improved by the company as well, because 43 participants evaluated this possibility with grade 4, because the time of waiting for a response was too long.

Question no. 10 has been designed to indicate whether the web page of the company is clear and whether data in it are valid. Most of customers (74%) responded that the web page is rather clear and it is rather user friendly. Only 19% could state definitely that it is easy to use the service and that it is clear, and 7% rather do not share this view. More satisfied with the aspects tested are companies (27 of them have responded definitely positive) however individual customers have certain difficulty in using the web page and their responses have been rather positive.

Further, question 11, has allowed evaluation of the customers relation with the company. Results obtained from the analysis of the question confirmed, that some customers (82%) have been fully satisfied in their expectations with the relations with company, or almost satisfied (18%). General satisfaction of the customers under the research with meeting their expectations in relations with Company X, are on a high level, however the company should not remain at the level, but make effort to improve mutual relations.

The last question in the survey has tested whether Company X is more competitive than companies with similar profile of activity. Most of persons asked responded that the company is more competitive (96%). This group includes mostly institutions (82%), which are able to appreciate the efforts of the company, its technological development and care for relations with the customer and its logistic service, also by activities within network. Survey participants from this group, have provided arguments that the company guarantees fast order handling, easy contact and possibility to use technical support. In general, we may state that the competitive rank of Company X is on a high level, and it strengthens its position within the furniture trade.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH AND FINAL CONCLUSIONS

In a summary of the survey, both for the employees and the customers of Company X, we should state, that the level of the logistic customer service support is on a very high level.
The questionnaire has also checked use of IT system in the company. Company X have got ERP system which supports logistic customer service and over half of the employees have got full access to the information included in it. IT system increases also frequency of contact with the customer, and its skilful use may lead to an increase of the level of his satisfaction and a willingness to continue purchase of goods.

Web page of Company X, constitutes an important tool in building positive relations with customer, being highly appreciated by its employees. Customers indicated necessity to improve Guide in the web page, which has been ranked much worse than any other information on the web page. Access on line to products catalogue on the web page of the company is its function which is very frequently used. It is an element which attracts the most customers to the service. The positive image of the company has been also built by press releases included in the web page, which gives the customers an opportunity to obtain more information about the company and its activities. The consumers evaluated positively the clarity of the web page and level of difficulty to use it.

The opinion of customers indicates, that prices of products and dates of orders execution are comparable with competition. The survey participants have stated that the main reason of the company dominating position is its very good logistic customer service and high quality of products. It is a very important factor, which should not be disregarded, as a company should make all effort to have the highest level of logistic customer service, so that the customer feels fully satisfied. High quality of products offered, along with it guarantees Company X a permanent and continuous demand for their wide range of products.

Customers who participated in the research have evaluated positively mainly the logistic customer service, communication with the company and competence of employees. Customers, similarly as the employees prefer direct communication channel and contact via e-mail. Customers evaluated their relations with the company as very good or good. Most of customers consider that the company is more competitive than companies with similar profile of activity.

The company must remember that customer and his satisfaction is of highest importance for it. Customers express positive opinion about logistic customer service in the company, they are satisfied with its activities and consider it competitive. The activities of Company X which support logistic customer service with use of IT tools, including computer system and the Internet are well analyzed and correctly executed. The company should use data from the research and work even more on the logistic customer service, in order to meet the demand of customers and improve relations with them.

Abstract

The article includes a presentation of IT tools applied in supporting the customer service in logistic on examples of chosen furniture corporations, from wielkopolskie province in Poland. Customer relations from this branch, and the issue of logistic customer service have been described, as well as the role performed by IT tools in support of the customer service, which has been reflected in advantages generated by the company. Research results based on questionnaires filled in by company employees and its customers have been presented. The research results presented indicate significance of IT tools application in logistic customer service, and their impact on their mutual relations. Introduction of customer service supported by IT tools in a company builds strong relations with its customers, and aims at reaching common business targets.
osiągnięcia wspólnie postawionych celów biznesowych.

REFERENCE