Electronic Commerce
- In Customer Service We Trust

Authors:  Viktor Petersson 840808
          Master Marketing
          Markus Svensson 860520
          Master Marketing

Tutor: Åsa Devine
Examiner: Sarah Philipsson
Subject: Business Development Marketing

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Abstract

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Authors: Viktor Petersson and Markus Svensson
Tutor: Åsa Devine
Examiner: Sarah Philipsson

Title: Electronic Commerce - In Customer Service We Trust

Background: Technological innovations have changed the business environment, and using E-commerce has increased in importance over the last decade. Two aspects that have been discussed within E-commerce are the possibilities and concerns of offering customer service and communicate trust towards customers.

Purpose: Increase the understanding of how companies use E-commerce, to provide customer service and trust.

Delimitation: During theory funneling many different aspects and theories discussing problems, opportunities and risks within E-commerce was found. After evaluating this existing material, it was concluded that the whole E-commerce phenomenon was a huge task to study. Therefore, this study is limited to focus on customer service and trust aspects within E-commerce.

Research question: What web site attributes are used to provide both customer service and trust, within E-commerce?

Method: The empirical material was gathered through semi-structured interviews and web site observations of three Swedish hotels. Follow-up phone interviews and email conversation with the hotels was made to get deeper understanding of the subject.

Conclusion: This research shows that especially three web site attributes for these hotels were used to provide both customer service and trust through E-commerce. The three attributes were (1) interacting with customers, (2) an easy to use and navigate web site, and (3) offering updated and relevant information.

Keywords: customer service, customer service online, E-commerce, electronic-commerce, trust, trust online.
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Markus Svensson

Viktor Petersson

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1. Introduction

This part introduces the reader to how technological innovations on the Internet can affect the business environment. An introduction to customer services and trust concerning Internet is discussed in the problematization, followed by the purpose and delimitations of this research.

1.1 Background

Technological innovations such as the Internet can reconfigure whole industries and the approach by which business is conducted (Normann, 2001). Within Internet new technological innovations have been developed, which have influenced the global electronic marketplace and created new business opportunities (de Klerk & Kroon, 2004). An innovation that has changed the business environment is the communication possibility (Porter, 2001, de Klerk & Kroon, 2004). This has reduced the impact of geographical distance but also increased the competitive pressure (Porter, 2001, de Klerk & Kroon, 2004). The technological changes can also be seen in an example taken from the banking industry, where the development of Internet changed how people handled their payments and banking errands. The banking industry became an electronic industry where most people pay their bills, transfer money, and make errands online (Daniel & Storey, 1997). If a bank did not adapt to the technological changes they would have had a hard time surviving. This example can also be connected to Normann’s (2001) argument that the market environment is dynamic and that a company has to change in order to retain their position on the market.

The Internet is useful for promoting products and services when the shopper seeks greater ordering convenience or lower costs (Hu et al, 2009). Convenience is defined as “the consumer’s ability to receive a service when he or she wants it” (Hu et al, 2009:296). The Internet also provides great value to buyers looking for information about product features and delivery (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007). Internet is an attractive market for all kinds of companies, from florists and automotive retailers to travel sites and financial service providers (ibid). According to Armstrong & Kotler (2007) all companies need to consider to be represented online.

Electronic commerce (E-commerce) that allows companies to be represented and conducting business through the Internet has been a major trend in this century (Huang et al, 2006). Internet and web site services are being developed and used throughout industries, governments, and other institutions (ibid). Gregory et al (2007) referred to E-commerce as the buying and selling or exchanging of products, services, and information through computer networks, such as the Internet. Tony Blair, the former UK prime minister (1997-2007), did in 1999 emphasize the importance of E-commerce and asked his government to formulate a strategy that would put UK businesses in a good position for developing E-commerce (Cabinet Office, 1999). According to the Cabinet Office
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(1999) E-commerce is interesting because of its dramatic growth and the major impact it has on market entry. It increases the possibilities to reach customers domestically and internationally. It can also reduce the time limits that none E-commerce companies have, by being able to offer customers product information and services twenty-four hours a day (ibid). E-commerce also increased efficiency and effectiveness, by presenting alternative ways to communicate to customers (ibid).

Promoting products and services through E-commerce, e.g. via a website, is a low cost approach in order to reach a wider customer segment (Yasin et al, 2010). It is also an important tool for advertising; by increasing the corporate visibility, brand name, direct sales and customer support (Hamill & Gregory, 1997). According to Gunasekaran et al (2002), E-commerce that in the beginning was complex and costly now has become more accessible and beneficial. This has made E-commerce, from a cost perspective, a viable option for all companies that seek its advantages and benefits (ibid). Daniel & Grimshaw (2002) argues that E-commerce offers an opportunity for all companies to take part in national and international marketing campaigns that previously would have been unaffordable.

According to de Klerk & Kroon (2004) the rapid growth and development of Internet has changed the mindset from traditional in store shopping to the possibility of Internet shopping. This is shown by the online sales, which alone increased in turnover by 13.1% between 2009 and 2010 (Wass, 2011). The turnover from online sales in Sweden during 2010 was 24 billion SEK, which was 4.5% of the total sale for the retail industry (Findahl, 2010). Piris et al (2004) emphasize that companies have to take advantage of the increasing use and opportunities of E-commerce, otherwise they risk losing against competitors.

1.2 Problematization

The development of new information technology enables companies to offer customer services more easily (Grönroos, 2007). Levenburg & Klein (2006:136) define customer service as “those additional services provided to customers above and beyond a product’s basic benefits”. This definition can be extended to include services as well as products, since Grönroos (2007) states that the process of offering customer services is described as value-creating support to regular activities and processes. Turel et al (2008), state that the popularity of online communications has resulted in an increasing number of customer service interactions, which are conducted via electronic media. Moreover, customers expect to get customer service through Internet if the organization is present on the Internet and is selling products or supplying information through it (Levenburg & Klein,
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2006). Furthermore, according to Grönroos (2007) a service offers solutions to customer problems. Customer services delivered through E-commerce may include using email to communicate with customers, using real-time live chats, providing product ordering, and tracking capabilities (Levenburg & Klein, 2006, and Piris et al, 2004). An example is Sony, which provides in-house customer support via its web site, through which customers can chat with personnel from the company, address technical problems, resolve commercial disputes, and receive product information (Turel et al, 2008). E-commerce has also automated many services by replacing person-to-person interaction with person-to-computer interactions (Posselt & Gerstner, 2005).

According to Daniel & Storey (1997) it is important for companies to react on the request for online customer services or they risk losing customers to a competitor. Hu et al (2009) argues that customers online generally expect online customer services to be more efficient and convenient to retrieve than ordinary face-to-face customer services. It has also been shown that customers prefer online technological self-services to face-to-face customer services because of the perceived reduction of time, increased control, and ease to use (ibid).

Another factor that is important when discussing E-commerce is trust (Ayanso et al, 2010). Shopping risks that may compromise private information causes customers to lose trust towards the company (ibid). This is one of the most critical criteria for customers when they decide to make a purchase online (ibid). Grönroos (2007:40) defines trust as “one party’s expectation that the other party will behave in a certain predictable way in a given situation”. There are two aspects to consider within trust in E-commerce; it is the trust towards the Internet as a platform and towards the company. If consumers are unfamiliar with a company’s web site, they are less likely to trust it and are therefore, less likely to purchase products or services from it. According to Bart et al (2005) there is a problem to communicate trust without any personal interaction. Through their web site companies have to convince customers that the company are trustworthy (ibid). Turel et al (2008) discuss that through customer services online customers form trust perceptions regarding the E-commerce service, and the service representative. These trust relationships are believed to affect user’s decisions to use E-commerce for several reasons. For instance, the service can be the subject of trust because users may be concerned about the integrity, competence, and generosity of the service provider (ibid).

Offering customer services has increased in importance, since the core product offerings are getting more similar (Grönroos, 2007). This has made additional offerings, such as customer service, become more influential and has a bigger impact on buying decisions (ibid). Trust is also a factor
discussed when it comes to offering products and services through E-commerce (Ayanso et al, 2010). It is argued that without communicating reliability and trust towards a customer, a purchase cannot take place (Bart et al, 2005). For companies using E-commerce, offering customer service and communicating trust is therefore, an important factor.

1.3 Purpose
Increase the understanding of how companies use E-commerce, to provide customer service and trust.

1.4 Delimitation
During the theory funneling we came across many different aspects and theories that discuss problems, opportunities and risks within E-commerce. We realized when examining the existing material in the area that the whole E-commerce phenomenon was a huge task to study. Therefore, we decided to delimitate and focus this research towards customer service and trust aspects of E-commerce. These two aspects were also in our field of interest, which eased the decision.
2. Theory

This chapter develops E-commerce, customer services and trust through E-commerce in order to follow the purpose. This is followed by a literature discussion, which results in a research question for this research.

2.1 E-commerce

The most cited and accepted definition of E-commerce is Kalakota & Whinston (1997:8) who define it as “the buying and selling of information, products and services via computer networks”. However, Gregory et al (2007:31) have developed this definition of E-commerce further, and define E-commerce as: “buying and selling or exchanging products, services, and information through computer networks, such as Internet”. Gregory et al’s (2007) definition will be the definition in mind when E-commerce is further discussed. This definition corresponds with the view of customer service, since customer service does not always have to involve a buying or selling intention as Kalakota & Whinston (1997) definition states. Customer service can also be actions such as presenting product information through Internet, which is considered as exchanging information (Gregory et al, 2007).

Yasin et al (2006) claim that E-commerce is transforming the way customers, employees, suppliers, and even firms within their own organization, are relating to one another. These changes have lead companies to develop new strategies and adapt to new methods of doing business. According to Sharma (2002) E-commerce makes information flows more efficient. For example, a web site has manuals, sales offers, and frequently asked questions posted in order to reduce time-consuming interactions for both buyer and seller (ibid). Figure 1 shows how interactions are made without the assistance of E-commerce, where each interaction has to be made each single time.

![Figure 1 Traditional communication patterns](Sharma, 2002:79)
Figure 2 shows how E-commerce makes information flow more efficient. Suppliers, buyers, and customers have the Internet as a common platform where, they find information and can connect with individuals or departments in an easier and less time consuming way (Sharma, 2002). Therefore, through self-service for the customer and automated information systems for the company E-commerce reduces the costs for both parts (ibid). For the customers through less time consuming interactions and easier access to information, while companies reduce the workload and save money (ibid).

![Diagram of E-commerce platform](image)

Figure 2 E-commerce as a platform (Sharma, 2002:80)

It is also stated by Porter (2001) that E-commerce will make information more available. It will reduce the difficulties of purchasing, increase the access to marketing information and improve distribution. This allows the buyer and seller to make transactions more easily (Figure 2 depicts an easier communication method than Figure 1). However, the low entry cost and entry barriers of conducting E-commerce will increase the possibility for increased online competition (Globerman et al, 2001). According to Daniel & Grimshaw (2002) increased information availability, easier ways of purchasing, and better access to marketing and distribution can lead to new customers and increased competitiveness.

According to Poon & Jevons (1997) consumers’ demand for better product quality and services as well as the E-commerce are driving forces behind global competition. Globerman et al (2001) also state that the entry cost of E-commerce is low and more companies have become interested in the opportunities and benefits that come with E-commerce. Piris et al (2004), mention that the value of
E-commerce seems to vary between industries. In those industries where E-commerce is well developed and all companies use it, it is seen as a necessity in order to compete. However, in industries where E-commerce is less common and where there are no strategic considerations regarding E-commerce, there is a potential to gain a competitive advantage (ibid).

Armstrong & Kotler (2007), mention that there exist benefits with E-commerce for both buyers and sellers. Claimed benefits for sellers are reduced cost and increased efficiency in communicating with customers. E-commerce can also offer great flexibility for companies, by being able to adjust market offers and programs to make them more up to date (ibid). However, some of the benefits that the buyer has could be negative for a seller. For example, when a consumer can view and compare different products more easily through the web and also avoid potential persuasion or emotional pitches from sellers (ibid).

The advancement of E-commerce technologies has led to new possibilities for companies to access new markets and reach new customers that were not possible before (Gregory et al, 2007; Armstrong & Kotler, 2007). It gives companies an opportunity to create value with low financial resources and marketing efforts (Gregory et al, 2007). E-commerce also reduces the importance of location for conducting sales, since the virtual market is accessible, in most parts of the world, at anytime and anywhere (Daniel & Grimshaw, 2002; Yasin et al, 2010). It also eases for large and small businesses to communicate the marketing message in the domestic and international market (Gregory et al, 2007).

Another opportunity that is gained with E-commerce is unlimited “shelf space”, which gives an opportunity to provide endless amount of products (Kotha et al, 2004). Kotha et al (2004) argue that communicating product and service information and having a broad product mix attracts customers. Furthermore, displaying detailed information such as; price, technical specification, product reviews and customer recommendation are getting more common (Dewan et al, 2007).

According to Al-Mashari (2002) E-commerce enables customers to access product information, place orders, and track orders. Involving customers in the business process will give sellers and buyers a better relationship and gain knowledge to ease future business together (ibid). According to Daniel & Grimshaw (2002) using E-commerce customer services also contribute by creating a personalized customer feeling, which attracts customers.
2.2 Customer service

During the past two decades, customer service has emerged as a strategic necessity for most companies, and service quality has been the subject of considerable interest among marketing academics and practitioners (Ray et al, 2005; Levenburg & Klein, 2006). As mentioned earlier Levenburg & Klein (2006:136) define customer service as “those additional services provided to customers above and beyond a product’s basic benefits”. The process of offering customer services is described as a value-creating support to regular activities and processes (Grönroos, 2007), and therefore, does not only include products as Levenburg & Klein (2006) definition state. Customer services are considered to be add-ons, which mean that they are seen as supporting activities to the core solution of a product or service (Grönroos, 2007). These additional services are designed to enhance the total value proposition and add customer value (Levenburg & Klein, 2006). Superior customer service (service that exceeds customers’ expectations) is a great way to add value to a product or experience (ibid). According to Ray et al (2005) there is a general agreement among marketing scholars that customer satisfaction is the most important factor for achieving high marketing outcomes, which emphasizes the value of offering a good customer service. Furthermore, Grönroos (2007) state that companies that offer good customer services will gain a huge benefit in the long term.

According to Ferri-Reed (2011) effective customer service is a competitive advantage in any marketplace and Turel et al (2008) claim that it is a fundamental component of companies. Turel et al (2008) also state that high-quality customer service is an integrated part in any successful company. Normann’s (2001) general thoughts are that customers have become more demanding and as he states; “if you don’t take care of your customers, someone else will” (Normann, 2001:18). Furthermore, Levenburg & Klein (2006:138) state that “today’s consumers do not just expect a high level of service, they demand it”. Therefore, it can be seen that, as Piccoli et al (2004) state, the rising importance of supplementary services as a source of customer value and of competitive advantage is widely recognized.

Although customer services may be delivered face to face, they may also be delivered through E-commerce (Levenburg & Klein, 2006). Turel et al (2008) further state that effective customer service operations can enhance customer loyalty, ease creation of customer trust and increase likelihood of repurchase.
2.3 Customer service through E-commerce

Providing quality customer service in person tends to be labor-intensive and can strap resources already in short supply (Levenburg & Klein, 2006). E-commerce and its ability to conduct business online could represent a powerful tool to increase customer service offerings, and at the same time ease the time constraints with providing customer service (ibid).

Over the last decade there has been a continually increasing interest in the use of the Internet for online purchasing purposes (Levenburg & Klein, 2006). This increasing interest has produced a corresponding need to provide additional customer-related service through E-commerce (ibid). Companies have shown an interest in using E-commerce as a mean of interacting with customers, in order to build stronger relationships (Yasin et al, 2010). Offering services where customers have the possibility to monitor the delivery process increases, the customer involvement and is beneficial for a company (Daniel & Grimshaw, 2002). According to Bardhan et al (2010) the customer service through E-commerce approach is not mainly based on the thoughts of reducing costs through automation and offering more services more efficient. It is rather focusing on creating higher revenues through improved services and building profitable customer relationships (ibid). The customer service through E-commerce is also intending to help companies to be more outward looking, and emphasizing their interest in understanding the customers’ needs (ibid).

The online environment and E-commerce have increased the possibility for companies to be customer-centric and putting their focus on service marketing (Bardhan et al, 2010). Companies today put their efforts in service encounters and in helping the customers rather than focusing on the goods or products (ibid). E-commerce also offers opportunities to reduce costs associated with providing customer service while simultaneously offering more of these services to more customers (Levenburg & Klein, 2006).

Before a purchase, Internet users expect to be able to find product-related information as well as information regarding the company’s reputation (Levenburg & Klein, 2006). The latter is often used as a measure for quality (ibid). Customer service during and after purchases must be included in the offering and, according to Levenburg & Klein (2006), it is these customer services that are the keys to achieving superior value. According to Levenburg & Klein (2006) even if a sale is not conducted through E-commerce, it is important in other phases of customers’ buying processes. Processes that occur prior to or post purchase, including search for sources, evaluation of alternatives, and customer support (ibid). It is important to deliver successful customer services through E-commerce in order to increase the customer value (Piccoli et al, 2004). However, it should be noted that
increased use of E-commerce might subsequently place additional demands on a company (Levenburg & Klein, 2006). Evidence exists that increasing the use of web-based technology is heightening customer expectation concerning the availability and the nature of such (ibid).

2.3.1 Customer service web site attributes

The developments in technology have produced an endless menu of applications that can be used to enhance customer service offerings (Levenburg & Klein, 2006). Companies are using Internet and innovative features for delivering service to their customers (Ayanso et al., 2010). These advanced features such as personalization; advanced search tools, product cataloging, and product visualization are few examples of retail web site attributes that have gained significant popularity among companies (ibid).

Web-based information technologies allow Internet retailers to handle online customer interactions to improve the shopping experience (Pathak et al., 2010). An example is digital word-of-mouth-based services, where shoppers can submit and share their feedback about products through reviews and rating systems on a company web site (ibid). According to Pathak et al. (2010) Internet retailers have started analyzing online customer interactions to provide various value-adding shopping services. It showed that popular online retailers such as Amazon.com analyze data of various customer interactions, including past purchases, ratings, and browsing patterns, as well as demographic and product information (ibid). Based on this information, they then provide product recommendations to customers (ibid).

Pathak et al. (2010) mention that it has been instinctively assumed that recommendations increase sales by providing high-quality, useful information to customers. However, they also mention that customers may not trust recommendations, which is not properly explained. Moreover, along with recommendations, a typical product web site of an online retailer includes information such as product features, images, expert reviews, customer reviews, and ratings (ibid). Each of these features could add up to information overload, and recommendations might easily become lost in the clutter (ibid). Thus, it is essential to analyze whether value-added services, such as online recommender systems, actually lead to increased sales (ibid).

According to Pathak et al. (2010) recommender systems can affect consumer purchases in various ways. First they mention that the source of quality-related information in the end leads to purchases by customers who would otherwise not have purchased. Thus, they serve as a support for purchase decision-making that can improve decision quality by reducing the number of items to browse and
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the time it takes to decide. Secondly, it is mentioned that recommendations of prior purchases by other consumers may have strong effects and influence purchase decisions. Recommender systems can help those customers who are uncertain about their own taste to identify what their true favorites are and it can also serve as advertisements for relatively unknown items. Third, Pathak et al (2010) mention that recommender systems can help build customer loyalty and increase the customers switching costs. Hence, as retailers gather more data about customers and products they can provide more accurate recommendations to the customer. This makes it less appealing for a customer to switch to another seller due to the difficulty in transferring this knowledge. Moreover, Pathak et al (2010) state that the increased sales of the recommended items primarily depend on the strength of the recommendation. However, Levenburg & Klein (2006) claim that the best practices of customer service applications is through using email to communicate with current and prospective customers, and for customer service purposes.

With a large amount of online stores for customers to choose from, successful companies need to create a productive relationship with their customers (Ayanso et al, 2010). E-commerce enables companies to make service information available to customers at all times (ibid). These services go beyond online personal accounts where customers can track their order shipments, receive discount coupons, and/or obtain product usage information (ibid). For example, companies such as Dell allow customers to communicate with customer representatives using an online chat (ibid). Other companies set up electronic bulletin boards, online circulars, and web logs to allow customers to communicate with experts and service representatives from the company (ibid). Some companies use customer loyalty programs such as store membership, point accumulation, and sweepstakes, to increase customer retention and enhance long-term customer relationships (ibid). These services enable companies to obtain and analyze a large amount of information about their customers in order to further customize their product offerings and incentive programs (ibid).

To maximize the payoff from web site investments, firms need to evaluate their current and potential site functionality (Piccoli et al, 2004). After that the company has to make decisions that lead to their customers’ perceiving high value when using their web site (ibid). Such an evaluation is especially critical given the rising importance of supplementary services and the widespread adoption of the web to interact with and serve customers (ibid).

Kotha et al (2004) argue that almost half of the customers that purchase products or service online use the search function to find what they want. Having a developed search function is, therefore, important. Kotha et al (2004) argue that applying a search function, which makes it easy for the
customer to find and evaluate products, will attract time-sensitive customers. They also state that having a well-designed web site reduces the cost of gaining new customers and the need for extensive customer support, since the customers can navigate and help themselves. A well-designed web site can be used as a differentiator in a highly competitive market environment and attract new customers (ibid). Kotha et al (2004) also mention that a web site that offers customer services such as search and suggestion tools, extensive product reviews, product samples and fast checkout service, will offer better opportunities to attract and retain customers. Dewan et al (2007) argue that it is common that information of inventory status is displayed in order to give the customer updated information about the product before the purchase.

Using personalization is another approach to retain customers and generate repeated customer visits and purchasing (Kotha et al, 2004). According to Kotha et al (2004) companies that offer personalization are having more satisfied customers. A personalized web site can, for instance, have support incentives such as doing repeated purchasing with one click or making service calls directly from the web site. Applying a more personalized web site strategy creates customer loyalty (Phan, 2003; Chaston et al, 2003). High customer loyalty and repeated purchasing leads to lower customer acquisition costs and future profitability (Phan, 2003).

According to Chaston et al (2003) companies should build strong relationships to customers to get them to make repeated purchases. As a company it is important to develop some sort of trust to build customer relations (Kotha et al, 2004, Porter, 2001; Phan, 2003). Chaston et al (2003) argue that good relationships will make the customer more committed to the company. Therefore, it is important to provide technological solutions to make it possible to communicate through the web site (Kotha et al, 2004; Chaston et al, 2003). These solutions can be online forums where it is possible to communicate customer to customer. Forums like these can enhance the buying experience and improve the trust to the company’s product and brand. This is the case since customers have the possibility to communicate with each other (ibid).

2.4 Trust through E-commerce

The lack of trust is, according to Yang et al (2009), one of the most frequently cited reasons for consumers not to buy anything online. Customers seem to have issues to trust unknown, faceless sellers and transactions without the personal contact. The reason is that online transactions often consist of giving out sensitive personal and financial information. The willingness of sharing personal information online often depends on the feeling the customer gets from the source that they will give their information to (Thompson & Shires, 2009). An empirical investigation has
shown that customers tend to have a low willingness to share their information through Internet, since they believe it can be used in an inappropriate way (ibid). Therefore, it is important to develop trust between the company and the customer (Kotha et al, 2004, Porter, 2001; Phan, 2003). As mentioned, Grönroos (2007:40) defines trust as “one party’s expectation that the other party will behave in a certain predictable way in a given situation”. Furthermore, if the other party does not behave as expected, the customer will experience a negative outcome (ibid).

Trust is also found to differ between websites, mainly depending on security information presented and whether or not the website gives the customer a secure impression (Thompson & Shirish, 2009, Bart et al, 2005; Lowry et al, 2008). Furthermore, when customers buy products online they often have no influence or direct control over the merchant’s action (Kotha et al, 2004). The trust variable within E-commerce is therefore, as argued by Phan (2003) and Turel et al (2008), essential to create relationships with customers.

2.4.1 Developing trust through E-commerce

According to Bart et al (2005) there is a problem to communicate trust without any personal interaction. Companies using websites to promote their products or services have to convince the customers that they are secure, in order to gain the customers trust. According to Kotha et al (2004) companies can gain trust by providing explicit statements of privacy policies, operating reliable websites, displaying information on return policies and offering possibilities of customer support through telephone or mail. This may affect the customer purchase decision and increase the trust towards the company. Kotha et al (2004) state that providing these services will retain customers, attract new customers, and increase the future profit. However, Bart et al, (2005:148) state that; “managers must go beyond privacy and security and focus on factors such as navigation and presentation, advice, and brand strength to enhance trust of their web sites”. This statement is strengthened by findings made by Belanger et al (2002), which find low support that privacy and security is enough to increase the trust towards websites. However, the study showed that reputation, website design and other website attributes appear to encourage trust.

Lowry et al (2008) mention that the design and perceived quality of the website increase the trust towards brand and products. A well-designed website will reduce negative impressions and the customer will associate the experience of the website with that brand (ibid). A user-friendly website and a good presentation of the products or services also give a trustworthy impression of the company (Urban et al, 2009). According to Urban et al (2009) another important aspect for giving a trustworthy impression is to use interactive tools. These tools help customers to browse
product information at a web site (ibid). An example of an interactive tool is recommendations systems, which present different alternative products that the customer can purchase (ibid). Urban et al (2009) also stress that customers that browse a user-friendly and well-designed web site tend to stay for a longer period of time strengthening the web sites possibility to gain customer trust. Furthermore, a well-designed web site that gives a professional impression will increase the trust feeling (ibid).

The level of trust between product categories’ and the characteristics that create trust towards one kind of product can differ (Bart et al, 2005). For example, a travel site emphasizes the privacy and fulfillment while a car companies’ site focuses on financial risks, involvement and advising (ibid). Furthermore, customers’ awareness of security standards within E-commerce has shown to be a contributing factor to increase the trust online (Thompson & Shirish, 2009). The brand strength has been shown to be an affecting contributor, which can increase the trust before making a purchase. According to Lowry et al (2008) consumers find brand image more influential on trust than brand awareness. Therefore, providing well-known brands or align with well-known brand will increase the trust factor (ibid).

Yoon (2002) summarizes that trust can be developed through six different factors, that over time all increase trust towards the company;

- Security assurance: providing security assurance on the website will improve the trust feeling.
- Brand: the company’s brand affects the customer’s perceived trust. This is mainly based on brand reputation and past experience of web site visitors.
- Search: a search function makes it easier for the customer to find what they look for and, therefore, will increase the trust factor.
- Fulfillment: providing accurate information about products, service and the order process will increase the customer trust perception.
- Presentation: design attributes and the quality feeling of the website increase customer trust perception.
- Technology: having an updated website and providing trust ensuring technology will increase the trust factor. Trust insuring technology can be such as pay pal payment functions or interactive tools.
2.5 State of the Art

In our research we identified that only a few authors have conceptualized every aspect of customer service through the phenomenon of E-commerce. The theories used discussing customer service were mainly based on thoughts and ideas from Levenburg & Klein (2006), Pathak et al (2010), Ayanso et al (2010), and Kotha et al (2004). These authors all discuss the importance of customer service through E-commerce. They also state several web-site attributes that can be used to develop customer service through E-commerce.

On several occasions during our theory funneling, we came across trust within E-commerce. The authors that discussed the methods used to create trust are Bart et al (2005), Lowry et al (2008), Urban et al (2009) and Yoon (2002). We found that there was a resemblance between the web site attributes used to develop customer service and trust through E-commerce. The theoretical stated attributes used to provide customer service and trust seemed to have an overlap (Figure 3).

This raised the question if companies use these web site attributes with the intention of providing trustworthiness, better customer service, or both. When we investigated this issue we found articles that separately discussed customer service and trust through E-commerce. However, we only found one article that discussed both customer service and trust together in this context; it was Lowry et al (2008). Lowry et al.’s (2008) research mainly focuses on the brand awareness and its linkage to web site quality. They only briefly mention the connection between customer services online and trust. Lowry et al (2008) argue that having a well-designed web site provides an impression of both customer service and trust.

Lowry et al (2008) developed their empirical study based on data collected from 298 university students in the United States. The research was conducted from the consumer perspective and based on students’ evaluation of a hotel reservation web site. This was the only article we found that briefly discussed web site attributes that contributes to both customer service and trust. We, therefore, believe that it is interesting to investigate the overlap between customer service and trust within the phenomenon of E-commerce, as Figure 3 illustrates. This overlap is a theoretical gap, since not many authors have researched these attributes within E-commerce. Therefore, our contribution will be to dedicate this study to examining how companies use E-commerce to provide both customer service and trust.
Figure 3: Theoretical concept and research gap for this study (own).

2.6 Research Question
What web site attributes are used to provide both customer service and trust, within E-commerce?
3. Method

In this chapter a presentation of the research design and choices regarding data collection is stated. Followed by how all these choices have affected this research’s validity and reliability in different ways.

3.1 Scientific approach

Patel & Davidson (2007), claim that the scientific approach is how scientists are relating theory to reality through empirical findings. If a research is trying to find data that match a theory or to test already existing theories, it is a deductive research (Merriam, 1998). With a deductive way of making research, the process is considered to be objective when the theory tested is already an existing theory. It makes the research less affected by the researchers own opinions (Patel & Davidson, 2007). These arguments correspond to what we did in this study, which was to test and get a greater understanding of already existing theories. This research is, therefore, having a deductive research approach.

3.2 Research strategy

There are two main research strategies; it is a quantitative and a qualitative strategy. These techniques are two different ways of defining approaches and procedures for a scientific study. Qualitative research tends to be more explorative and unstructured with a focus on understanding while quantitative research tends to test and draw conclusions from existing theories (Bryman & Bell, 2005).

Ghauri & Grønhaug (2005) argue that the key purpose of a qualitative research strategy is to understand and gain insights into phenomenon. Furthermore, when conducting a qualitative research it is stated by Merriam (1998) that it usually involves fieldwork. This means that the researchers have to observe the objects and conduct the research in their environment, in order to observe their behavior in the most neutral way (ibid). For a qualitative research the researchers are the main tool of gathering and analyzing data (ibid). Considering that these aspects of conducting a qualitative research were corresponding to what we intended to do, the selection of doing a qualitative research was made. We believe that it corresponds to our intentions perfectly, since we are examining how companies are providing customer service and trust through E-commerce. Merriam (1998), claims that qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning of the object that is studied. This corresponds to our intention of finding out how companies view E-commerce as providing customer service and trust.
3.3 Case Study

A case study is good when those involved want to gain an in-depth understanding of a situation or phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). When a case study is done it is generally connected to a qualitative research strategy (ibid). As mentioned earlier this will, therefore, also be the case in this research. A case study discovers the extent to which a “specific program” has been implemented (ibid). In our research we see the “specific program” as our customer service and trust, and we wanted to see how these aspects have been implemented through E-commerce. Following Merriam’s (1998) arguments that a case study is good when researching a phenomenon and when the researchers want to find knowledge that would be hard to get in other ways. Ghauri & Gronhaug (2005) mention that when conducting a case study it involves using multiple ways. It can be through interviews and observation of the environment as a primary source, and then financial reports, archives, and marketing and operation statements as a secondary source. Furthermore, we believe that using a case study and not only a single way of researching a phenomenon gives us more in-depth knowledge about our field of study.

3.4 Population

We decide to focus on the hotel industry. We found hotels interesting to study since many of their activities involve customer services. Therefore, how they look at providing customer services and trust was interesting to study within the hotel industry. The first delimitation was that we focused on Sweden. After that, we decided to focus only on privately owned hotels, and not hotel chains. This was done because we believe that they have more control over their own customer service and trust through E-commerce. We believed that being a part of a larger hotel chain gives single hotels less control over E-commerce activities. Therefore, it would be harder to get any valuable information about their reasons of providing customer service and trust through E-commerce.

The selected hotels were chosen based on the possibility that we, as researchers, had to get in contact with them. The selection of the specific hotels is referred to as a convenience sample. A convenience sample is something that is easily accessible for the researcher (Bryman & Bell, 2005). This method of using a convenience sample when selecting hotels to interview was employed because of our limited budget and in order to narrow the search. The choice of convenience sample makes it more difficult to generalize the results (ibid).

We chose to focus on three hotels with conference facilities since we believe that we can get more information by looking at a few specific cases more in-depth. We understand that the generalization
that can be done out of this research is low. Our intention is not to be able to generalize the result, since the study’s purpose is to increase an understanding.

This research was narrowed down to researching hotels in the regions of Skåne, Småland, Blekinge and Halland. The specific selections of these hotels were depending on size, personal interest and our success of getting in contact with them. The hotels felt that the data collected was involving sensitive information and, therefore, we chose to only name the hotel’s A to C throughout this study.

3.5 Data Collection
The empirical framework consists of primary data. Methods of collecting the empirical data, were onsite personal interviews, telephone interviews, email conversations, and web site observations.

3.5.1 Personal interviews
According to Merriam (1998) when conducting qualitative research most of the data are collected through interviews. In-depth interviews have the advantage of gaining a more accurate and clear picture of respondents’ views and feelings. Interviews can be claimed to be conversations with a purpose (ibid). Generally there are three types of interviews; unstructured, highly structured, and semi-structured (Merriam, 1998; Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). For this research a semi-structured interview method were used. This was because when conducting a semi-structured interview the researcher often has some specific subjects that will be discussed and the respondents have a big freedom in formulating the answers (Bryman & Bell, 2005). This we believed was good, since we could control the interview subject and also give the companies freedom to give us developed answers. Furthermore, if the hotel values some areas of customer service or trust attributes on their web site more then others, we had the possibility to ask more about that subject. Therefore, a semi-structured interview gave us more in-depth knowledge of the company’s views.

The empirical data for this research were collected through face-to-face interviews, telephone, and email contact. The reason for face-to-face interviews was that we wanted to get a feeling for the hotel environment and the persons’ we interviewed. Before starting the interview we presented our subject and purpose. Then we asked each interview person to shortly describe themselves and the hotel’s background, to smoothly start the conversation.

After the short presentation we started the actual interview and followed the question structure presented in Appendix 1. Our feeling was that the respondents really tried to answer as much as possible. As a strategy to get them to extend their answers further, we used extra long pauses before
asking the next question. We noticed this strategy to be effective. For the questions where the answers and information gathered was not that explicit, we contacted the hotels again through telephone and email, to get this information. The spirit and environment during the interviews was relaxed and friendly, which made it easier for us to ask our questions. The interview with hotel A was through Skype and B was done in the hotel lobby. The interview with hotel C was conducted during lunch in the hotel’s restaurant.

Afterwards we transcribed all the interviews and complementing questions. After that we sent them to the hotels for validation. This was made to get as accurate information as possible, and to reduce the possibility of misunderstandings. The interviews were made and transcribed in Swedish to make it easier for the hotels to express, read and correct the information.

3.5.2 Web site field study
According to Bryman & Bell (2005) the development of Internet has made research through Internet an option for collecting empirical data. We decided to gather empirical information through our personal observations of the selected hotels web sites. The Internet observation was used in order to study hotels’ web sites and see if they offer customer service and communicate trust through E-commerce. According to Merriam (1998) observational data is used to get firsthand information on the phenomenon of interest, and not to be affected of secondhand information. Our aim was to research what web site attributes the three hotels are working with in order to provide customer service and trust through E-commerce. Therefore, we thought it was important to do web site observations, since the web site was the environment of the phenomenon. The decision of making web site observations was also concerning the fact that we wanted to see if the hotels web site provided what the hotels mentioned during the onsite interviews. We did study these web sites in a critical way, as Bryman & Bell (2005) argue, is important when analyzing information online. Bryman & Bell (2005) also discuss that it is difficult when conducting a research through Internet, to select relevant web sites to research. In our case this was not a problem since we already had selected hotels and, therefore, the web sites to this research were given.

3.6 Operationalisation
The operationalisation and the variables used for the interviews and Internet observations are further presented through tables in Appendix 3 and 5. Under the headings 3.6.1 Interviews and 3.6.2 Web site observations we will in more depth discuss our reasoning about how to connect theory with empirical data. This is made together with the questions used to collect the empirical data. The structure of the operationalisation follows the structure of the theoretical chapter. However, during the interview the questions were asked in a different order to get a better interview flow.
3.6.1 Interviews

E-commerce

To obtain an in-depth knowledge regarding the use of E-commerce in the hotel industry, we asked the following question: *Why did the hotels have a web site?* With this question we intended to see if companies’ arguments were the same arguments as Sharma (2002), and Armstrong & Kotler (2007) mention. Sharma (2002) and Armstrong & Kotler (2007) state that having a web site for example leads to less time consuming interaction and that information flows will be more efficient (see Appendix 3).

Our study focuses on how hotels provide customer service and trust through E-commerce. Theories mentioned by Kotha *et al* (2004), Gregory *et al* (2007), Daniel & Grimshaw (2002) and Yasin *et al* (2010) regarding E-commerce and potential internal benefits. This is benefits such as lowering the financial resources and unlimited “shelf space”. We wanted to compare their theories with empirical data from the hotel industry. Therefore we designed the following question: *Have the hotels seen any internal benefits with having a web site? If so, which?* In an attempt to evaluate the impact of E-commerce for the hotels.

To get a better view of the positive and negative effects of using E-commerce, we decided to ask the following question: *Has the development of Internet had any effects on the hotel? If so, what effects?* Our intention with this question was to understand if the development of Internet had made it easier for customers to for example, find alternative products. This is related to what Armstrong & Kotler (2007) argue in their theory (see Appendix 3).

Customer service

In the hotel industry customer service is central, and to get a background of the hotels’ view of customer service we asked the following questions: *How are the hotels considering and working with customer service? What is the hotels’ goal with offering customer service?* We wanted to evaluate if the hotels’ view of customer service had any resemblance with the definition stated by Levenburg & Klein (2006) and Grönroos (2007). This question was also to get the participants in the interviews to start thinking about the customer service subject.

Additionally we asked the following question: *How do hotels try to offer customer service in general?* In order to see if hotels would use any arguments that Normann (2001), Turel *et al* (2008) Levenburg & Klein (2006) discuss regarding the importance of high service quality and the risk of not offering a good service.
Method

**Customer service through E-commerce**

The following question was asked in order to get a broader view of what companies consider as customer service online. *What are hotels consider offering customer service on a web site to be?*

The importance of customer service online can vary between industries. However, several authors such as Levenburg & Klein (2006), Piccoli et al (2004) and Piris et al (2004), emphasize that customer service is important. Therefore, we develop the following question: *Do hotels believe that offering customer service through the web site is important in their industry? If so, why?* In order to obtain a better knowledge of how the hotel value customer service online.

We also wanted to get a better understanding of what features the hotels believe to be important from the perspective of customer service. To answer this we asked: *What functions related to customer service do the hotels offer on their web site?* We applied the theoretical work of Pathak et al (2010), Dewan et al (2007), Ayanso et al (2010), Levenburg & Klein (2006), Phan (2003) Chaston et al (2003) and Kotha et al (2004), which all discuss different important features in a customer service perspective. It can be such as online chat functions, search functions or feedback possibilities (see Appendix 3).

The idea of using E-commerce as a mean to interact with customers and to involve the customer online is mentioned to be beneficial. Theories presented by Yasin et al (2010), Daniel & Grimshaw (2002), Ayanso et al (2010), Kotha et al (2004) and Chaston et al (2003) all stress that involving the customer online is important and that it increases customer relations. Therefore, we wanted to ask the following question: *Have the hotels ever encouraged and involved customers in the development of their web site? For example, have they ever used suggestion boxes online?* The reason is that we wanted to study to what extent the hotel involves its customers online and if they consider this important.

In the theory we found several variables that explained what customer service online could lead to for the customers. These variables were stated by several different authors, such as Porter (2001), Levenburg & Klein (2006), Dewan et al (2007), Al-Mashari (2002), Kotha et al (2004) Daniel & Grimshaw (2002) and Armstrong & Kotler (2007) to be able to measure what the hotel perceived customer service would lead to for their customers. We decided to design the following question: *What is the hotel’s goal with offering customer service online?* This question was created in an attempt to evaluate what theory that is most consistent with the hotel industry.
Trust through E-commerce

The lack of personal interaction online makes it more difficult to create a buyer-seller relationship. The trust factor, therefore, gets important to persuade customers. Several authors emphasize the importance of increasing the website trust factor, for instance Porter (2001), Phan (2003) and Ayanso et al (2010). We also decided to take a closer look at the theories from Kotha et al (2004), Turel et al (2008) and Lowry et al (2008) who suggest different functions to affect the trust value of a website. They also mention the respective consequences of these functions. To evaluate if the hotel’s view is consistent with the theory mentioned, we therefore, developed the following questions: How are the hotels trying to communicate trust to customers through their website? Have the hotels tried to increase the trust towards their customer through their website? Do the hotels have any certain functions on their websites that they believe increase the trust customers get towards their website?

The theory stresses that it is important to increase the trust through the website. The ideas were discussed by, Lowry et al (2008), Yoon (2002), Thompson & Shirish (2009) and Urban et al (2009). Therefore, we wanted to examine if the hotels have had any thought of increasing their trust through the website. We asked the following question: What functions and features do the hotels believe increase trust for their customers? in an attempt to gather the hotel’s view.

3.6.2 Web site observations

To get a more extended view of the companies’ websites we decided to do web site observations. This was mainly due to the fact that we wanted to evaluate if the interviewed hotel representatives expressed view of their website was coherent with what we believed it expressed. These observations were made to obtain a deeper understanding of each case in the study. To get this understanding we evaluated the website under three important aspects mentioned by Lowry et al (2004), Kotha et al (2003) and Chaston et al (2003). These factors were website function, design, and navigability. With these factors in mind we based the empirical data out of our own impression and opinion of the website functions. We are aware that this empirical data was based on our own interpretation. However, we believed it contributed to a better overall understanding of how hotels work with customer service through E-commerce, and if the website increases a company’s trustworthiness.

To evaluate the website functions we used the following questions: What website functions involving customer service and trust do the hotels offer through their website? We connected this question to the different website functions (see Appendix 5) mentioned by Pathak et al (2010),

### 3.7 Empirical data analysis process

During the interviews we obtained large amounts of information. We transcribed the information after each interview to get a better understanding of the substance of the collected information. We made summaries of the information gathered from each case in the empirical chapter, since we understood that not all of this information was relevant for our research. From this, we made an analysis of the summarized data and searched for resemblance, patterns and keywords. The keywords we gathered were in many cases very specific (see Appendix 9) and we decided to sort them under more generic keywords (see Table 1, p.40). These generic keywords were also further discussed in the end of each empirical section. The generic keywords were then used in the analysis, where we compared theory and our findings according to the operationalisation.

### 3.8 Research Quality

According to Bryman & Bell (2005) reliability and validity are two important criteria when conducting a research. Therefore, we will discuss the reliability and validity in this research.

#### 3.8.1 Reliability

The term reliability concerns the matter if a research result is possible to repeat or not, and the issues of having consistency in the research measurements (Bryman & Bell, 2005). The study would be easy to repeat because the questions asked were basic and all people interviewed had something to say about each question. The hotels were also open with their answers and all very helpful in the contacts we had with them. If another study would be done, following the operationalisation of this paper we believe would result in the same conclusion as this research. The reliability concerning the consistency in the research measurement can however, be questioned, since we talked to employees with different positions at each hotel. At Hotel A it was the reception manager, who contributed with data, at Hotel B it was the selling manager and also the marketing manager, and for Hotel C the financial manager and the marketing manager/CEO. If we would have interviewed employees with the same position the result might have been more comparable.

#### 3.8.2 Validity

Bryman & Bell (2005) state that validity is to which extent the research really measures what it intends to measure. Our questions for the interview guideline and Internet observations are based on
the theoretical framework and are, therefore, highly connected to our purpose and research question. This, we believe have strengthen the validity of this research because we measured what we intended to measure. We are sure that our questions were relevant to meet the purpose of this research and that the answers collected are clearly connected to the subject. Bryman & Bell (2005) also mention that validity is concerning if the research is giving a real picture of the phenomenon. The semi-structured interviews, telephone interviews, email conversations contribute to making this research giving a clear view of hotels thoughts and arguments of customer service and trust within E-commerce. Therefore, we believe that this research gives an extended view of the phenomenon of E-commerce and the two aspects of customer service and trust.
4. Empirical Framework

This chapter presents summaries of the collected empirical data. The empirical data is structured in the same order as the theory is presented and each section is followed by a short discussion around selected generic keywords. These generic keywords are based on keywords gathered from the interviews (see Appendix 9), which then will be used further in the analysis chapter. The generic keywords are also presented in Table 1, under the heading 4.5 Summary of generic keywords of interviews, for an easy overview.

4.1 E-commerce

Why did the hotels have a web site?

**Hotel A:** The goal with the web site is to marketing the hotel. The web site is also a portal where the hotel can communicate with their customers by showing new offers, different campaigns and price information.

**Hotel B:** It is a necessity for a hotel to have a web site today. However, 10-15 years ago it was no big deal if a company did not have one. If a company does not have a web site today, they do not exist. Offering information about the hotel through their web site is important, and that the information is accessible anytime and anywhere.

**Hotel C:** Today companies need to have a web site if they are active in the hotel industry. The web site has become more and more important during the years, and it is not possible to manage a business like hotels without having a web site. Conference and regular customers search for information and offering through the web site that is appealing to them. The web site is central when it comes to gathering information and it gives the customer possibility to be anonymous. There is a tendency that customers want to be anonymous, because many customers feel a resistance to contact the hotel by phone. Hence, if customers call and present themselves they feel that they are demanding.

Have the hotels seen any internal benefits with having a web site? If so, which?

**Hotel A:** There have not been any economical benefits with offering customer service online. The customer still wants the personal interaction with making reservations through phone calls. However, providing customer services online have helped the hotel to communicate their price information.

**Hotel B:** The hotel tries to reach all customer segments. Offering services through the web site has made it easier and faster to communicate, but the hotel have no intention to leave the traditional way of receiving reservations through phone calls. Many customers want to speak with someone in
person, but this is claimed to be a generation issue. Younger generations tend to do all their reservations through the web site, when older customers prefer the traditional way of calling.

**Hotel C:** There is a tendency that customer’s that only look for an accommodation, normally make their reservation through the web site. However, conference customers always call since these offers often consist of a more complex arrangement than making a room reservation. When offering customer services to conference customers there are always a need for a dialog.

**Has the development of Internet had any effects on the hotel? If so, what effects?**

**Hotel A:** Only positive effects. It has opened up the opportunity to be seen on more platforms and in more ways. The more visible a hotel can get the better, but of course not on web sites with bad reputation. It is attractive to be on as many places as possible as long as there is a potential gain of it, and reliable information should be presented. A positive effect has also been the increased number of customers from Denmark. This development is claimed to be because the Danish people easily can find information of the hotel through their web site and in their own language.

**Hotel B:** Only positive effects have been seen. However, it has been frustrating when online companies call and wants them to pay a certain amount in order to be seen on that company’s web site. Many of them are unserious and the potential gain is very small since the companies calling are less recognized than the hotel itself. However, sites as hotels.com, bookings.com and other well-recognized sites are the hotels connected to. For the spa packages it is a goal to become one of the top hits on Google, if someone searches for a spa in southern Sweden.

**Hotel C:** Right now there are many web sites and techniques to communicate through, for example, facebook, twitter, and blogs. This has made it hard to realize where the future lies, and what the next hype that everyone has to be ready for is. Everything has become faster, communication, tender writing and handling, placing orders, email. It is almost as if a customer sends an email and do not get an answer in two minutes it is bad service. The need of always offering satisfying customer service has increased. Customers today can easily write anything negatively on the web about a company, therefore, it is importance to take care of customer’s complaints. Otherwise, there is a tendency that only the smallest problems grow to become a huge deal, and that is something a company does not want. The whole hotel business has become less sensitive when it comes to people paying different prices for the same thing. Customers are settled with the fact that it can differ in price depending on what time you booked it.
4.1.1 Generic keywords for E-commerce

- **Information**: a generic keyword that was found regarding E-commerce was information. The hotels claimed that accessible information, information about offerings, and reliable information was important.

- **Communication**: several aspects that were mentioned are when E-commerce contributes to improve the communication within their business. The hotels used keywords such as faster administration, communication with customer, and demand of faster communication.

4.2 Customer service

*How are the hotels considering and working with customer service?*

**Hotel A**: This hotel is a conference and spa hotel and the ambition is to create moment of happiness. The statement is bold, but offering a world-class experience is possible and that is the aim of this hotel.

**Hotel B**: For this hotel, customer service means that they are open with what they got and that they clearly show that. Customer service is to offer a good service, a pleasant food experience, and answer customers’ request. It is important to take care of the customers and that the customers feel that they are taken cared of.

**Hotel C**: The most important attribute in customer service is to have commitment. This is important in all steps of the customer service process and there is nothing that beats commitment.

*What is the hotels’ goal with offering customer service?*

**Hotel A**: The intention is to offer world-class customer service and be one step better than competitors. Creating a complete experience for their customers is another important factor, not only offering an accommodation. To offer customer service, which triggers the customers to come back for another stay is also one of the hotel’s goals. With good food and services for both body and mind, create a complete experience.

**Hotel B**: The goal is that every guest is satisfied with what they get. That the hotel delivers what the customer expects.

**Hotel C**: Customers shall perceive this hotel’s customer service, as if they get something extra for the money. Expressing something out of the ordinary, not only an accommodation but also a complete experience.
**How do hotels try to offer customer service in general?**

**Hotel A:** Approximately once a week the hotel calls ten customers that have stayed during the week and ask about their experience, to get the feedback of the customer experience. Before checkout, the customer also gets the possibility to participate in a survey and rate different things experienced during their stay at the hotel. This is done, in order to improve the quality of the hotels total experience. A quality group, that has meetings twice a month, discusses the possibilities to improve the hotels total quality. It is one participant from each department in the hotel that discusses different issues, and there is one employee that work full time with service quality.

**Hotel B:** The hotel has surveys at each room that the customer can use. In this way the hotel can detect what parts of the concept that is considered to be a good experience and vice versa. The intention is to get the information in order to be better and the hotel uses surveys to get this information. Another important thing is that customers have access to hotel information. Customers can get information at the room, web site, and reception. If customers have any complaints the policy is that the customer should get a response as fast as possible, since it is better to solve a problem immediately. During weekends the hotel have a hotel supervisor that can take care of customer complains and welcome new guests. The hotel never wants the customer to leave and not being satisfied with their service. It can be dangerous if unsatisfied customer starts discussing their experience of the stay in a negative way.

**Hotel C:** Last year there was a big change with customer service online. It was noticed that it is really important to not have any customers leaving the hotel without the possibility to leave their complaints. Therefore, there has been a change by the hotel creating a policy where the customer’s complaints will be answered within 24-hours. Customers need attention, which is important to give them otherwise they will be unsatisfied. If they have not handled the customer complain within 24-hours there is a risk that the customer will express their disappointment through the Internet. This in turn can damage the hotel’s reputation. Therefore, the hotel has started this system to give the customer their needed attention as soon as possible. Only the fact of answering or coming back to a customer is normally enough, and can turn customer’s negative impression to a positive. In a recent situation one customer complained about people that played beach volleyball at the public beach. Therefore, sometimes the complaints that guests have get out of the hotels reach.
4.2.1 Generic keywords for customer service

- **Customer satisfaction**: during the discussion about customer service the hotels mentioned several different keywords that can be framed within customer satisfaction. The keywords they mentioned was moments of happiness, meet expectations, offer something extra, experience and returning guests.

- **Commitment**: also mentioned is that the most important things with customer service are to provide openness, clarity, take care of the customer and to be committed when offering customer service.

4.3 Customer service through E-commerce

*What are hotels consider offering customer service on a web site to be?*

**Hotel A**: For example, the possibility for a customer to write comments in an old traditional guestbook at the reception desk, that then is published on the web site. Photos are taken of the comments in the guestbook, and then shown as snap shots on their web site. These comments show customers feedback and describe how the customers have enjoyed their stay. Customer service through the web site is also to show the hotels offerings and price information. One function that is used to increase customer service is the possibility for the customer to arrange how they want their conference room to be furnished. This is offered mainly to give the conference customer a better insight to what they can get at the hotel. An important factor on the web site is simplicity and user-friendliness. There is no functions on the web site where the customer is able to complain because the hotel believe it is better to offer this service face-to-face, to better react and understand their issues. Furthermore, providing several different language possibilities at the hotel’s web site can be seen as a customer service for international guests.

**Hotel B**: Giving the customers as much information as possible through the web site. The more information the customers get before making the reservation, the better customer service it is. However, when offering different customer services through the web site it is important with clarity. Mainly due to the fact that customers pay a big amount of money and they want to know what they will get.

**Hotel C**: Customer service through the web site is when the customer easily can find what they expect. The web site should express what the hotel has to offer and make the customer triggered to make a reservation. Through the hotel’s web site the customer can make reservations, see twitters and blogs to get more personal information of the hotel.
Do hotels believe that offering customer service through the web site is important in their industry? If so, why?

**Hotel A:** Yes of course, the web site is the hotel’s portal for communicating, and through the web site most of our reservations are made. The hotel is present on facebook where the customers can interact with the hotel. One of the most important factors seen is the importance of having updated hotel offers and price information on the web site.

**Hotel B:** Yes, it is. In this industry the competitive situation is hard. Therefore, it is even more important to offer customer service through the web site. Probably, it is sometimes more important than in other industries. It is also valuable to have a good web site and presenting pictures.

**Hotel C:** It is important, since the customers often search their way through by visiting different hotels web sites, and there are a huge amount of options to choose from. To marketing and offering customer service through the web site has increased its importance for smaller hotels and bed and breakfast places. These facilities did not have the capacity and money to marketing themselves through newspaper and fairs. The web site for these companies has also increased bookings to come in during off-season, which was not the case before.

What functions related to customer service do the hotels offer on their web site?

**Hotel A:** Functions and features that present information about prices and special offers. Conference guests have the possibility to arrange and design the conference facilities to suite their need. As mentioned, the feedback from customers is shown at the web site and can be seen as a function related to customer service.

**Hotel B:** On the web site customers have the possibility to overview the facilities through a camera with a possibility to turn 360°. This is offered in all types of rooms and conference facilities.

**Hotel C:** On the web site it should be possible to find everything, for example information concerning offers and how the facility looks. The intention is to attract more customers and make them interested. On the blog, which is linked from the web site, the customer can communicate with the hotel. Furthermore, when booking a room it is possible to see the hotel’s ratings. The hotel also communicates through facebook and twitter. A general influence is that it is not about how many satisfied customers the hotel have, it is about how many unsatisfied customer the hotel have.
Have the hotels ever encouraged and involved customers in the development of their web site? For example, have they ever used suggestion boxes online?

Hotel A: No, the hotel has never had any survey box online.

Hotel B: No.

Hotel C: No, not yet.

What is the hotels goal with offering customer service online?

Hotel A: To reach out with offers to customers.

Hotel B: The goal with customer service online is to clearly show what is offered. It is important that the language is easy to understand and that the information customers are searching for is on the web site. For example, the hotel should offer information about check-in and checkout, times for dinners, and all different packages that are offered. Another intention with the customer service online is that everything should be simple and easy to understand, no one should be able to get confused when using the web site.

Hotel C: The web page offers information and is an important tool to attract customers. The information presented on the web site should also be interesting and make the customer interested in coming to the hotel.

4.3.1 Generic keywords for customer service through E-commerce

- **Interaction with customers**: the hotels mention that interacting with customers through their web site is important. It is mainly done in order to reach out to the customer and give the customer attention. Customer services through the web site are also used as a portal to communicate and a possibility to receive feedback.

- **Attracting customers**: the web site shows pictures and offers customer service in order to attract customers. Design and marketing are also two important factors when attracting customers.

- **Information**: in customer service through the web site it is mentioned that it was important to have updated hotel information. The expressed keywords were information availability, information clarity, necessary information, and clearly show what they offer.
• **User-friendly:** in some occasion during the interviews the hotels emphasized that customer service through E-commerce has made it easier to provide services in the industry. Furthermore, the hotels discussed that a web site has to be simple and easy to use.

4.4 Trust through E-commerce

*How are the hotels trying to communicate trust to customers through their web site?*

**Hotel A:** By guiding customers throughout the web site by an easy to follow structure. By showing offerings, all prices, and campaigns increased the reliability of the web sites. The conference part of the hotel is big, and in order to contribute a safety and trust towards the hotel, a function where customers could visually furnish how they wanted their conference room to be. This contributes to increase trust and confidence customers get towards them.

**Hotel B:** Being active on a web site increases the trust customers’ get towards them. If a web site showed inaccurate or old information, all the credibility for the web site and brand would disappear. An example was mentioned that if offers from Easter were still shown on a web site in May customers would start to doubt all the other offers presented on the web site as well. Customers can no longer anticipate that all the other things or offers still exists or is up-to-date. However, if entering an updated web site with new offers and up-to-date information the trust towards it is immediately higher. Therefore, offering up-to-date information is important when creating trust through the web site.

**Hotel C:** The intention with the web site is that it should be clean and nice. Trust from the customers towards a company, can be gained by always having updated and personal information. Furthermore, the best way to communicate trust towards customers would be having two web sites, with focus on two different generations, since they demand different features and functions. The hotel brand itself is also an important tool when it comes to creating trust. If having a good hotel brand a lot is gained concerning customer trust. Having many returning guests, more than what most hotels have, shows that that the customers have some loyalty and trust in what is offered by the hotel. If offering good products it will help the selling of other products as well. When customers try one product and like it they want to come back and try out their other products. Customers have gained trust towards the hotel brand and therefore, want to try other products. However, how to express this brand quality and reputation through the website is difficult.
Empirical Framework

*Have the hotels tried to increase the trust towards their customer through their web site?*

**Hotel A:** The most important thing is to be clear, simple, and user friendly. This goes throughout the website in pricing, easy to find booking and so forth. It is of great importance that the information presented on a web site is relevant. The hotel’s reputation and trust can be damaged if misleading information is distributed. Therefore, it has to be correct, clear, and credible information.

**Hotel B:** What a customer sees on the web page must be what they deliver in real life. The attributes and services on the web site build up expectations and must be fulfilled during the customers’ stay. The information and pictures on the web site is only the first stage of creating trust and it is first as the customers experience the product, that they can form a trust towards the hotel.

**Hotel C:** Having a personal and profiled web site makes the web site genuine and trustworthy. However, this is something that the hotel might not have today because now it was more in line with what everyone else in the industry.

*Do the hotels have any certain functions on their web sites that they believe increase the trust customers get towards their web site?*

**Hotel A:** The functions offered to increase trust are the information that customers can find before they make a purchase. When it comes to the payment online it is not necessary to have any seal that claims their safety of online transactions, but having good information describing that the payment is safe is crucial.

**Hotel B:** This hotel stated that their brand is well known and established, which gives credibility towards other products as well. Furthermore, since not having any payment systems on the web, guests could only book rooms online, not make the payment transaction. This was a problem and a plan to develop this was in progress. This is important, since the general trend today is that everyone wants to be able to do everything online.

**Hotel C:** By having a personal web site that is easy and always interesting to follow. However, there has been a change to a new web site looking more like other web sites in the hotel industry. This was done since a lot of complaints of the old web site were concerning structure, confusion and a low navigability. The web site is the biggest marketing organ which customers use, it is therefore, important that it is delivered in a good way.
What functions and feature do the hotels believe increase trust for their customers?

**Hotel A:** Mainly by clearly showing what customers get before they are booking anything. By letting customers furnish the conference facilities, as the customers want it. Again, clarity and the importance of being simple were mentioned.

**Hotel B:** Customers should not be able to do anything wrong when they book online. Therefore, having an easy to understand booking system is important. The hotel is also in the development stage of introducing some recommendations systems. This make the customer’s in the future able to order, for example, a wine package, or a fruit basket as they book online. However, showing too many offers will make the customer confused and should be avoided, since clarity and simplicity is important. Exactly stating what each package offers can increase the trust from customers towards the hotel. For example, show exactly what customers get, at what time it is, where does the customer have to be, what kind of food it is. Offering information about for example spa treatments, and how the treatment is done and all kind of tips when going to a spa treatment is also beneficial for the customer. Creating trust and offering customer service by always contributing with that extra piece of information that makes the guests not having to think themselves.

**Hotel C:** It is important to stimulate people’s feelings and emotions, by for example, sound, pictures, and colors. Customers being able to get answers directly through the online chat can be seen as offering customer service. The online chat can also communicate trustworthiness since customers directly get answers to any doubts they might have on offers or something stated on the web site.

4.4.1 Generic keywords for trust through E-commerce

- **Updated:** a general answer was that it is important to have an updated web site. With having updated and relevant information about the facilities, offers and price information, the trustworthiness of the hotel will increase.

- **Simplicity:** simplicity of the web site is contributing to trust. To have clear information, that is not confusing, and an easy navigated web site is also mentioned to be important.

- **Brand reputation:** another aspect mentioned is the profile of the hotel and that its brand recognition also contributes to increase the trust.
4.5 Summary of generic keywords from interviews

Table 1. Overview of generic keywords (own)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empirical chapter</th>
<th>Generic Keyword</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-commerce</td>
<td>- Information</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td>- Customer satisfaction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Customer service through E-commerce</td>
<td>- Interaction with customers</td>
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<td>- Attracting customers</td>
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<td>- User-friendly</td>
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<td>Trust through E-commerce</td>
<td>- Updated</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Simplicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Brand reputation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6 Web site observations of hotels E-commerce

The variables used to analyze the web sites are presented in Appendix 4.

*What impression does the web site express? Is the web site easy to use?*

**Hotel A:** The first impression was professional and stylistically pure. The web site has an attractive and well-structured design. It is easy to understand how to browse the web site through simplicity and clearly showed tabs, which makes it easy to find information. Gives a high-tech impression that gives the feeling of a little more luxuries hotel and spa. The hotel’s web site has a high focus on the hotel environment.

**Hotel B:** The first impression is that this is a more traditional web site structure, which has all the basic information about the hotel. The focus is on the facilities, and that the hotel tries to express a more family resort environment. The web site has pictures of families having fun, which is more attracting to families than professional businessmen or women. Could be concluded as function before fashion. It is easy to browse; by having the same concept throughout the web site everything is clear and simple. The technology seems good, has many up-to-date functions such as 360° camera view in order for customers to see how the facility and rooms looks. However, it lacks a paying function online that might affect the overall technology view.

**Hotel C:** This web site is good looking with a professional expression. It also gives an exclusive impression by having pictures of the sea, champagne and seafood. Much focus on the environment,
and it feels like the hotel is showing off with their beachfront position. It is easy to navigate, by having well-structured menu of different web site tabs. These tabs show all the necessary information and also communicate their products and offers. By offering the online chat function, gives the impression that the hotel is updated with all the latest features within the web site technologies.

What web site functions involving customer service and trust do the hotels offer through their web site?

Hotel A: This hotel’s web site does not offer any possibilities to give any feedback directly online. However, they have taken pictures of customers’ reviews in the guestbook from the reception desk and put it on their web site. The hotel has no rating systems online. They offer product catalogues and product visualization on their web site through pictures and text. The hotel offers contact information by phone and email but no online chat function. They were not having any blogs or using twitter, but they expressed that they had a facebook page, however, it was not linked from their web site. Their web site offered no search function but had a frequently asked question tab. The hotels web site also expresses that the hotel has been around for over 110 years and that no hotels and spa facilities in the nearby area can match that.

Hotel B: This hotel had no customer or expert reviews and does not give the customer the opportunity of giving feedback directly on their web site. However, contact information such as phone and email information easily accessible. Rating systems and chat functions where not offered. The hotel offer extensive product catalogues and visualization, by picture, text and 360° camera view. They are not using any blogs to communicate their information. In the website they have a search function, but no link to FAQ. There brand expression is to develop a story about their history and the history of the environment surrounding the hotel.

Hotel C: The hotel uses a menu where the customer directly can write their feedback and express their experience. The hotel do also present a few statements from customer connected to their product offerings. The web site has pictures of product offerings, showing different concept that is possible to experience while staying at the facility. Pictures of previous events also visualize these offerings. A rating system showing the top ten most popular activities is used. The hotel also has an online chat and is using blogs to communicate with their customers. The web site offers no search functions and it has no menu with FAQ. This hotel does not express any historical brand information. However, the hotel presents a logo expressing their quality standard.
5. Analysis

This chapter presents an analysis of the theoretical data and the collected empirical information. It is structured to follow the theory and empirical framework.

5.1 E-commerce

Gregory et al (2007) extended the view of E-commerce to involving exchange of information. This can be connected to that distributing and offering information was one of the most important things of why hotels take advantage of E-commerce. The hotels also claimed that customers can find information easier and that through E-commerce the information flows is more efficient, which is along with what Sharma (2002) mentions as effects of E-commerce. Sharma (2002) mentioned that E-commerce contributes with less time consuming interactions and easier access to information, while companies save themselves workload. This shortening of the administration process is leading to a reduce in cost for the hotels, maybe not reduce cost on paper, but since every order or task is done faster the number of tasks done within the same time as before, is higher. That the hotels also use these arguments of why E-commerce is good, strengthen the fact that E-commerce can have different valuable benefits for a company.

Porter (2001), Daniel & Grimshaw (2002), and Al-Mashari (2002) also mentioned that E-commerce makes information more available and that it increases the access of marketing information for customers. This is something that the hotels argued as being a key factor within E-commerce. Through the web site observation it was seen that all the hotels put a lot of focus on presenting information. It was information regarding prices, availability, how to get in contact with the hotel, what there is to experience at the hotel. Even if the hotels presented the information in different ways the common theme was to have a structured web site, with easy to find information. This shows how important the hotels believe offering information is. That the customer only by searching the web site should be able to find all the needed information, and answers to the questions a customer might have. This could also reinforce what one hotel mentioned about people hesitating to take contact verbally.

It was stated by the hotels that they always kept the information available and updated. For the hotels studied a connection to theory was seen, since Armstrong & Kotler (2007) also mention the potential advantage of E-commerce in order to always presenting updated information. Dewan et al (2007) mention that E-commerce can be used to show detailed information such as price and customer reviews. This is something that the hotels mentioned under the importance of making information more available. That information about offerings and products needs to be clear and
reliable. Two out of three hotels also presented customer reviews in some way, which also can be connected to Dewan et al (2007) earlier statement of how E-commerce can be used.

Another generic keyword that was found was communication. All the hotels mentioned this as an important factor. Furthermore, Yasin et al (2006) claim that E-commerce changes the way companies and customers interact with each other. To some extent that is true for these hotels, since the hotels argue that customers from a younger generation seem to gather information and book online more than older generations. However, the hotels also stated that customers do still call to a large extent and using E-commerce has not lead to any reduction in personal interaction through phone. This slight change of behavior from customers can be connected to the development of Internet and the amount of people using Internet and web sites to gather information.

The researched hotels are putting a lot of effort into the development of their E-commerce. Based on Piris et al (2004) statements it is therefore, an industry where it is a necessity to have a developed E-commerce rather than increasing competitiveness. Even though it can be seen as a necessity to use E-commerce in the hotel industry, we believe there is still a potential competitive advantage that can be gained by using E-commerce in an efficient way. What the web site express could be seen as a vital factor when customers are planning a hotel stay, and it is thereby important to have an attractive web site.

Neither of the hotels mentioned that E-commerce has made it possible for them to show a wider variety of product offerings on their web sites. Therefore, Kotha et al (2004) arguments about endless shelf space and broader product mix might not be a factor for these hotels. Although, the hotels did not state it, it was seen by web site observations that the hotels had information about many products and in many categories. This could mean that it has helped hotels to show a broader product mix and offerings, only that the hotels were not aware of this fact.

5.2 Customer service
Levenburg & Klein (2006) and Grönroos (2007) both discuss that customer service is when offering something beyond products’ or services’ basic benefits. Customer service is also described as value adding support to core solution of products and services. The hotels had a common view that customer service was to provide something out of the ordinary. All hotels mentioned that it is important to meet the customer expectations and provide an experience. The hotels also stated that customer service is offering something extra and deliver an experience, otherwise the customer will not return. Compared with theory it can be seen as offering superior customer service. It is evident
that the view of Levenburg & Klein (2006) and Grönroos (2007) are coherent with the hotel’s opinion of customer service. By providing something beyond the basic benefits, the hotels add value to their core offerings, and increase customer satisfaction. However, providing something beyond the basic benefits, or offering something out of the ordinary is not only exclusive for these hotels. This is probably the case in all industries where there is a competitive situation, since it is important to strive for a competitive advantage.

Ray et al (2005) emphasize that customer satisfaction is an important factor when it comes to providing customer service. Customer satisfaction will result in high marketing outcomes and is obtained by providing high quality customer service. During the analysis of the empirical data, customer satisfaction was identified as a generic keyword, when discussing customer service. The hotels did mention several keywords that were framed under customer satisfaction. What they believed was important for the hotels were that the customer never should leave the facility unsatisfied. The hotels had the experience that unsatisfied customer has a tendency to express this impression widely. Unsatisfied customer is a risk factor, which the hotels tried to overcome by giving the customer answers within a couple of hours. In this situation, the customers’ easy access of spreading negative word-of-mouth through personal blogs, twitter and facebook must be reflected. It is therefore, seen that an unsatisfied customer has the power to affect a company’s brand reputation. Grönroos (2007) also mention that it is important to offer good customer service to gain benefits in the long-term. For these hotels it is therefore seen, that it is important to offer good customer service and give fast responses to customers’ complaints, otherwise the customer will not come back.

The hotels mentioned that being open, clear and take care of the customers is a way of showing commitment. The hotels argue that being committed and giving the customer attention is important when offering different customer services. There is no theory that emphasizes the importance of being committed, when offering customer service. However, there is a resemblance with the statement made by Norman (2001:18); “if you don’t take care of your customers, someone else will”. Nevertheless, the hotels thought that commitment is an important factor and is common sense when offering customer service.

5.3 Customer service through E-commerce

According to Levenburg & Klein (2006), Yasin et al (2010) and Daniel & Grimshaw (2002) the increasing use of Internet have increased the importance of offering customer service through E-commerce. This tendency has also been applied in the hotels, where customer service through E-
commerce has become more central than before. The hotels mention that they provide different customer services through E-commerce, with the intention of interacting with the customer. Customer service such as, blogs, email, online chats and feedback, makes it easier to interact with customers and increase the customer service feeling. During observations of these web sites, there was one hotel that had a menu where the customer had the possibility to directly write their feedback and express their experience. However, it was observed that two out of three hotels used blogs, facebook and twitter to communicate with their customers. Using these types of functions is mention by Pathak et al (2010), Turel et al (2008) and Dewan et al (2007) to be important customer service functions on a web site. The hotels mentioned that offering customer services through E-commerce also gives a good possibility to show customer attention and reach out with marketing messages. All the hotels mentioned that communicating is important. It can be question why not all the hotels use all the functions available to communicate. Hence, only one of the hotels used online chat.

Bardhan et al (2010) and Levenburg & Klein (2006) discuss that interacting with customers online reduces costs. However, the hotels mention that reducing cost is not central when interacting with customers through E-commerce. The hotels are more interested in increasing the revenue by attracting new customers and reach out with their offerings. The hotels also mention that interacting with customers creates relationships, which increases the possibility for returning customers. It is seen that the intention with using E-commerce is not to reduce the cost. However, using e-commerce has probably lowered the marketing cost, compared with traditional marketing, such as advertising in newspapers. Mainly since their focus with E-commerce are to marketing the hotels and communicating offers to customers. For the hotels it is more important to increase the revenue then reduce costs with offering customer service. This could be because the earning is greater then the possibility to reduce costs with offering customer service online.

In order to attract customers, the hotels emphasized the importance of showing pictures and offering customer service through E-commerce. To visually show what the customers will get have been an effective tool to attract customers. The hotels give the customer possibilities to see pictures of their facilities and one hotel had a 360° camera showing the hotel facilities. The hotels believe that the web site design has high influence on customer perception and the design should be simple, clear and easy to navigate. This is coherent with the view of Kotha et al (2004) who mention that a well designed web site should be easy to navigate and information should be simple to find. In the theory Pathak et al (2010), Turel et al (2008), Dewan et al (2007) and Levenburg & Klein (2006) mentioned several other web site functions that can increase customer service through E-commerce.
These functions are bulletin boards, recommendation systems and advance search tools. It was only one of the hotels that had a rating system showing the ten most popular activities at the hotel, which can be seen as a recommendation system. For the hotels these functions did not seem to have had a breakthrough yet. Therefore, hotels should consider applying these methods more than they have done so far. Using recommendation systems that can increase sales of additional services, which the customer otherwise would not have considered. It can lead to increased revenue.

Furthermore, the hotels argued that the web site should have updated information. Updated information about the service offerings and price. The web site can otherwise lose its credibility. This is not that widely discussed within the customer service through E-commerce in theory. However, Ayanso et al (2010) states that offering product or service information through E-commerce is important. What we observed was that all hotels openly showed their information. All the information was clear and easy to find. They only delivered the information differently by having the information in different menus at the web site. The hotels only discussed that the price information and service offerings was important, but it is important to reconsider if not the whole concept with the web site make more impression on the observer. A bad impression is not easy to overcome with good information, since the web site probably reflects the credibility of the information even if it is updated.

The hotels argued that E-commerce had led to a user-friendly environment. The hotels focused on the fact that customer service through E-commerce had made the information easier to find for customers. Therefore, the arguments of Levenburg & Klein (2006) that E-commerce led to fewer interactions and less time consuming interactions can be seen as increasing the user-friendliness. The fact that the customers can find the information needed at the time they want it has made the customer service through E-commerce to increase the convenience for customers searching for information. By easier to find information at anytime, the use of E-commerce has made it a user-friendlier environment within the industry and in searching for information. However, no clear connection or theory states user-friendliness to be a main argument of E-commerce. Through the web site observations it was also concluded that all the hotels had easy to browse web sites. The web sites were easy to use and navigate on in order to find information and offers, which also emphasizes hotels intention of being user friendly.
5.4 Trust through E-commerce

The hotels claimed that to communicate trust through E-commerce, it is important to have an updated website. It should always show updated and relevant information, which in turn will lead to increased trustworthiness from the customer towards the hotel. As mentioned, according to Yang et al. (2009) one of the most important factors of getting customers to buy a product or service online is the customers’ trust towards the company. Thompson & Shires (2009) emphasize the importance of what the source is expressing, which communicates the product or services, is important in creation of trust.

Yoon (2002) claims that updated website and trust insuring technologies such as pay pal payment functions or interactive tools, lead to increased trust from customers. It was seen by the web site observations that the hotels had some of the latest features and web site technologies. One of the hotels offered a 360° camera that let the guest scout the rooms in the facility. Another hotel had an online chat, making the customer able to communicate directly with an employee when browsing the web site. This could therefore, mean that these attributes all lead to increase of trustworthiness from customers to the hotel.

One of the hotels also mentioned that if they show old or inaccurate information on their web site the customers would doubt all other information from that source as well. This can be connected to Grönroos (2007) who mention that if companies not behave as expected, it will result in a negative outcome. This being the customer not trusting any information the hotel offering and most likely selecting another alternative hotel to stay at. Furthermore, Yoon (2002) also argued that providing accurate information about products, services and the order process would increase the customers trust perception. This could mean that the hotels by presenting new and accurate information strengthen their trust towards customers.

By observing the hotels web site it was found that they all gave the impression of being professional and stylistically pure. According to Urban et al. (2009), Lowry et al. (2008) and Yoon (2002) a well-designed web site that gives a professional impression increases the trust feeling towards the company. The hotels believed that taking advantage of E-commerce by having understandable, easy to navigate, and clear information on the web site is important. All in all, offering simplicity to the customer. Urban et al. (2009) also argues that a user-friendly and a good presentation of the products, information and services give a trustworthy impression of a company. It can be assumed that simplicity can increase the hotels trustworthiness, by giving the customers the impression that the hotel is not trying to trick them to buy a product or service. Urban et al. (2009) also mention the
advantages of using interactive tools, which helps customers to gather product and service information. The hotels argument of making it as easy as possible for customers using their web site is along with the view of Yoon (2002). He argues that making it easy for customers to find what they look for will increase the trust factor. Urban et al (2009) also stress that customers that browse a user-friendly and well-designed web site tend to stay for a longer period of time, which strengthening the web sites possibility to gain customer trust. A well-designed web site that gives a professional impression will also increase the trust feeling that people get when browsing it. It can be seen that the hotels have understood the importance of having a professional and easy to use web site. All three hotels had many arguments and reasons for why they had a good web site and it can be summarized that a good web site is important in order to attract customers.

The brand strength has been shown to be an affecting factor that contributes to increase trust before making a purchase online. Furthermore, the hotels’ claimed that reputation was a factor that contributed to a company’s trustworthiness and the selling of their products. According to Lowry et al (2008) customers find providing well-known brands or an alignment with well-known brands will increase the trust factor. Therefore, theory and hotels view of that the brand strength contributed to increase trust was similar. The hotels were seen to express their history and tradition within the hotel industry and in the nearby area. This might have been their way of communicating their long lasting brand strength within the industry and trying to assure the customer that the hotel knows what they are doing.

Bart et al (2005), Kotha et al (2004), and Yoon (2002) emphasize the security problem as an important factor when creating trust. Neither of the hotels mentioned security or how they work with security when the area of trust through E-commerce was discussed. This, we therefore, believe means that in the hotel industry the security is not a problem. It might be that the hotels offer the customer to book online and then pay at their arrival, and therefore, there is no transaction or need for customers to give out sensitive information. It could also be that the hotels do not have the knowledge about security; instead they have assigned the task to another actor that takes care of it.
6. Conclusion

In this part the conclusion of the study is presented by offering a further discussion on the answer to the research question.

The research question used for this research was: What web site attributes are used to provide both customer service and trust, within E-commerce?

For these hotels E-commerce is used to communicate service offerings, price information and information about the hotel. It has been seen that using E-commerce to provide customer service through interactions also had lead to communicating trust towards customers. Therefore, taking advantage of interacting tools through E-commerce contributes to provide both customer service and trust. The customer service since, the customer gets the possibility to interact with a hotel representative by online chat, email, and/or feedback. It contributed to trust by letting the customer see what earlier customers said in feedbacks and that customers could easily get in contact with a person from the hotel through online chat and/or email. Therefore, it was a resemblance in using E-commerce to provide both customer services and trust.

A commonly argued reason of using E-commerce for both customer service and trust was an easy to use and navigated web site. It is claimed that having an easy navigate web site contributes to customer service, since the hotels are providing the service of making it easier for a customer to find all the information they need and want, by as little efforts as possible. To have an easy to navigate and use web site also contributes to trust by customers staying on the web site for a longer period of time and therefore, give the customer more time to gain a trustworthy perception of the hotel.

The hotels argued the importance of always providing updated and relevant information as a customer service. It was also argued that if not providing relevant information that would damage the trustworthiness of a company. It can therefore, be stated that presenting relevant and updated information through E-commerce is important out of both the customer service and trust perspectives.
7. Reflections

In this part a short reflection of the result is presented, followed by some suggestions to further research and recommendations to the hotels.

During this study we have realized that offering customer service through E-commerce for these hotels is essential. However, the hotels in this study had not a huge experience and knowledge of the trust aspect. We identified that offering good customer service on the web site also increased the trust aspect. Therefore, we believe there exists a cause and affect relationship between customer service and trust through E-commerce. Offering good customer service through the web site also results in a higher trustworthy impression for customers.

We believe that the result of this study gives a better understanding of that trust through E-commerce is not central when developing a hotel web site. We are aware that it might differ within the industry, but we think the main focus is communicating customer service when using E-commerce. As we only used three case companies, these results cannot be generalized throughout the whole hotel industry. To be able to generalize this study we would have needed to make more interviews with more actors in the hotel industry. We understand that it would have provided a wider understanding of the industry. However, since our purpose was to give a better understanding of how companies use E-commerce, to provide customer service and trust. We believe that a multiple case study gave us more in-depth data to be able to fulfill the purpose.

7.1 Further Research
An interesting observation during the gathering of empirical information was that all the hotels taking part in the research, have during the last year replaced their old web sites with a new one. If it was a coincidence or if the industry is going through a development we believe can be further studied. Another interesting aspect that can be further researched is how a web sites trust impression reflects the attitude towards the company brand. Our believes are that many company’s do not really know what impact the design, function and navigability of a web site actually has on their brand.

7.2 Recommendations
Our recommendations for the hotels are to continue their development with their web site, since we believe it will not become less important in the future. It is not only important to present updated and relevant information on the web site, but actually providing an updated web site in general. It is also important to not be left behind in the development. If doing so, it can be difficult to catch up with competitors. Furthermore, none of the hotels had reflected on trust as much as customer
service through E-commerce. Our recommendations are, therefore, that they start involving trust-
creating attributes in the web site development process, since the web site design are affecting the 
hotels credibility.

All the hotels mentioned that offering an experience is important in customer service by personal 
interactions with guests. We, therefore, recommend that the hotels try to offer the customers an 
experience only by visiting the hotels web site. One suggestion could be to make the web sites more 
personalized, in order to differ from other hotels.
References


Norman, R. (2001). Reframing Business - When the Map Changes the Landscape. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.


Appendix
Appendix 1 – Interview Guideline (Swedish)

This is the interview guideline that was used when interviewing the companies; a translation of the interview guideline is presented in Appendix 2.

1. Vad är er syn på kundservice och vad innebär det för ert hotell?
2. Vad har ni för mål med er kundservice?
3. Varför har ni en hemsida?
4. Vad anser ni är att erbjuda kundservice via en hemsida?
5. Har ni sett några interna positiva följer med att erbjuda kundservice online? Vilka?
6. Tror ni att erbjuda kundservice online är viktigt inom hotellindustrin?
7. Hur försöker ni att erbjuda kundservice generellt?
8. Vilka funktioner angående kundservice erbjuder ni via er hemsida?
9. Har ni någon gång uppmanat eller låtit era kunder vara involverade i utformandet av er hemsida eller era erbjudanden online? T.ex. genom en “förslagslåda” via nätet?
10. Vad är det ni vill uppnå med att erbjuda kundservice online?

För att kunder ska boka ett hotellrum eller nappa på ett erbjudande ni har, krävs att kunderna har ett förtroende att ni kan leverera vad ni säger att ni gör.

11. Har ni reflekterat över att skapa ett förtroende via er hemsida?
12. På vilket viss försöker ni skapa ett större förtroende gentemot era kunder genom hemsidan?
13. Har ni särskilda funktioner på er hemsida som försöker öka förtroendet eller hur arbetar ni med detta?
14. Vilka funktioner tror ni generellt skulle kunna skapa ett större förtroende hos era kunder?
15. Har utvecklingen av Internet haft några effekter genom t.ex. ökad konkurrens?

b) På vilket sätt har detta påverkat er?
Appendix 2 – Interview Guideline (English)

1. What is your expressed definition of customer service at your hotel?
2. What is your goal with customer service?
3. Why do you have a homepage?
4. What do you consider is customer service on a homepage?
5. Have you seen any internal benefits with offering customer service online? If so, which?
6. Do you believe that offering customer service is important in your industry? If so, why?
7. How do you try to offer customer service in general?
8. What functions related to customer service do you offer on your homepage?
9. Have you ever encourage and involved your customer in the development of your homepage? Ex (have you ever used suggestion boxes online?)
10. What is your goal with offering customer service online?

In order for customers to book hotel rooms or go through with a purchase you offer, the customers must have a trust in towards your ability to deliver what you say you do. Therefore, the following questions;

11. Have you considered the matter of creating trust through your homepage?
12. How have you tried to increase the trust towards your customer in your homepage?
13. Do you have any certain functions in your homepage that increases the trust value?
14. What functions and feature do you think can increase trust for your customers?
15. Do the development of Internet have any effects for example by increased competitiveness? If so, what effects? How has that affected you?
## Appendix 3 – Operationalisation for Interview Guideline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Intended variable to measure</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Section in theory chapter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have the hotels seen any internal benefits with having a web site? If so, which?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the development of Internet had any effects on the hotel? If so, what effects?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are the hotels considering and working with customer service? What is the hotels’ goal with offering customer service?</td>
<td>- Definition of customer service</td>
<td>- Levenburg &amp; Klein (2006)&lt;br&gt;- Grönroos (2007)</td>
<td>2.2 Customer service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do hotels try to offer customer service in general?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do hotels believe that offering customer service through the web site is important in their industry? If so, why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are hotels considering offering customer service on a web site to be?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What functions related to customer service do the hotels offer on their web site?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have the hotels ever encouraged and involved customers in the development of their web site? For example, have they ever used suggestion boxes online?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Customer demand customer service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If not, someone else will take care of them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Necessity in the industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- High quality customer service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Feedback, customer and expert reviews, rating systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Search tools, product catalogues, product visualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Recommendation systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Online chat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bulletin boards, web-logs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Search function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Customer involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Access to product information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Access to track orders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Access to places orders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Communication with expert and service representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Customer loyalty programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Build stronger relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| - Normann (2001) |
| - Pathak et al (2010) |
| - Ayanso et al (2010) |
| - Daniel and Grimshaw (2002) |

2.2.1 Customer service through E-commerce

2.2.2.1 Customer service web site functions
| What is the hotel's goal with offering customer service online? | - Personalized customer service  
- Perceived higher customer value  
- Reputation and quality measurements  
- Faster customer support  
- Forum or communities to communicate | - Levenburg and Klein (2006)  
2.2.2.1 Customer service web site functions |
| How are the hotels trying to communicate trust to customers through their web site? | - Design and quality of website  
- Explicit statements and private policies  
- Information of customer support  
- Trust options  
- Security assurance  
- Brand  
- Search  
- Fulfilment  
- Presentation  
- Yoon (2002) | 2.3 Trust through E-commerce  
2.3.1 Developing trust through E-commerce |
### Variables used for Internet observations

#### Question 1
*What impression does the web site express? Is the web site easy to use?*
- Design and quality of web site
- Professional expression
- Navigability - easy to browse
- Updated technology features

#### Question 2
*What web site functions involving customer service and trust do the hotels offer through their web site?*
- Feedback
- Customer and expert reviews
- Rating systems
- Product catalogues
- Product visualization
- Recommendation systems
- Email
- Online chat
- Bulletin boards, web logs
- Search function
- Security assistance
- Expressed brand reputation
- FAQ
### Appendix 5 – Operationalisation for web site observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Intended variable to measure</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Section in theory chapter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **What impression does the web site express? Is the web site easy to use?** | - Design and quality of website  
- Professional expression  
- Presentation  
- Technology  
- Yoon (2002)  
- Lowry et al (2008)                                                       | 2.3 Trust through E-commerce  
2.3.1 Developing trust through E-commerce                                    |
| **What web site functions involving customer service and trust do the hotels offer through their web site?** | - Feedback, customer and expert reviews, rating systems  
- Product catalogues  
- Product visualization  
- Recommendation systems  
- Email  
- Online chat  
- Bulletin boards, web-logs  
- Communication with expert and service representative  
- Customer loyalty programs  
- Search function  
- Security assurance  
- Brand reputation  
- Fulfilment                                                                | - Pathak et al (2010)  
- Ayanso et al (2010)  
- Ayanso et al (2010)  
- Ayanso et al (2010)  
- Yoon (2002)                                                              | 2.2.1 Customer service through E-commerce  
2.2.2.1 Customer service web site functions  
2.3.1 Developing trust through E-commerce                                  |


**Appendix 6 – Interview material Hotel A**

**Bakgrund**


**Vad är ert mål med kundservice?**

Vi är ett konferens- och spahotel, vår ambition är att skapa moments of happiness och deras service guideline ska vara glädjespridare. Återkommande gäster är deras mål. Visionen är att erbjuda service i världsklass, så vi har satt en hög ribba.

**Hur skulle ni förklara er syn på kundservice?**

Vill vara i världsklass ett snäpp vassare än alla andra. Vi slår oss lite på bröstet och vill skapa en upplevelse i världsklass. Arbetar mycket med kundservice genom feedback. En gång i veckan ringer vi upp 10 personer som har utnyttjat anläggningen och frågar vad de tyckte om vistelsen genom vissa frågor. Vid utcheckning får kunderna också utvärderingsformulär där kunderna kan genom ”ratings” 1-10 betygsätta vistelsen. Utöver detta finns även en bäste-gäst som ligger på hotellrummen.

Konferensgästerna har en separat utvärdering. Konferensutvärderingen och gästutvärderingen är uppdela när det gäller utvärdering. Vi har en kvalitetsgrupp som arbetar med kundservice som träffas 2ggr i månaden med en representant från varje avdelning. De tar upp kvalitetsfrågor från kundens perspektiv inte per avd utan helheten i gästens upplevelser. I denna kvalitetsgrupp sitter inga chefer. Vi har också en tjänst som heter ”puts och stutts”, där vi lägger 2x8h/vecka för att se helheten i upplevelse. Så vi har en person som bara sitter och arbeta med kvalitén och utveckling av upplevelser.

**Varför har ni en hemsida?**

Målet är att vi ska synas. Korrigera och kommunicera priser och kampanjer

**Vad anser ni är att erbjuda en bra kundservice via en hemsida?**

Vi har en gammal traditionell gästbok på receptionsdisken, där vi med jämna mellanrum fotografera och lägger upp utdrag ur gästboken för att erbjuda våra besökare feedback via hemsidan av tidigare

Tror du det är viktigt att erbjuda kundservice via hemsida i er industri?

Vilka fördelar eller nackdelar ni har sett internt med utvecklingen av kundservice online?

Har ni någon gång uppmanat eller involverat kunderna i utformningen av er hemsida?
Nej inte vad jag vet. Jag tror inte det har det finns någon förslagslåda eller liknande via hemsidan.

Skapa förtroende via hemsidan?

Har ni några funktioner på hemsidan som uttrycker en säkerhet för kunden?
Vi hanterar betalningar och liknade i anslutning bokningar säkert på ett säkert sätt. Jag känner inte till om vi använder oss av några specifika funktioner så som paypal eller liknande, men det finns information om hur säker betalningen är.

Vilka funktioner på er hemsida tror ni era kunder värdera högt?

X
Det är tydlighet, enkelhet, användarvänligt och enkelt att tyda priserna. Det ska gå snabbt och enkelt för kunden att hitta och boka.

**Har ni några funktioner på er hemsida som kan skapa både förtroende och kundservice?**

Ja, genom att visa via hemsidan hur konferenserna kommer se ut och även hur rummen kommer se ut är en kundservice som vi tror ge förtroende och trygghet innan vistelsen. Tydlighet och enkelhet ger förtroende. Vi är bra på att arbeta med förtroende på konferenssidan.

**Har utvecklingen haft några negativa effekter exempelvis via ökad konkurrens?**


**Har ni ökat geografiskt**

Jag vi har utökat mycket i Danmark, sen är vi landsomfattande men även internationellt hjälper det till att synas via internet.
Appendix 7 – Interview material Hotel B

Bakgrundsinformation


Vad innebär kundservice för er? Har ni någon uttalad policy angående kundservice?


Varför har ni en hemsida?

Det måste man ha i dagsläget för att finnas till överhuvudtaget. För 10-15 år sen krävdes det inte, men har du inte en idag då existerar du inte . Hemsidan har vi så att gäster eller vem som helst kan när som helst på dynget hämta information om oss via hemsidan. Vi försöker vara så tydliga som möjligt, vara tydliga i vår text återgivning, vi förmedlar när gäster ska checka in, hitta den information de önskar. Vid innehåller alla paket, att man kan boka direkt, det ska vara ENKELT. Vi finns på facebook och via Twitter, för att synas och att låta folk uttrycka sig och skriva om oss.

Har ni sett några interna positiva följder med att erbjuda kundservice online? Ekonomiska?

Många vill prata med en fysisk person, men det är klart kan vara olika generationer med. Vissa vill kunna göra allt online, Vi vänder oss från ung till gammal, vi har inte dragit ner på något eller dragit in någon tjänst, Men man försöker förenkla allt så att det går via nätet. Allt ska kunna gå snabbt.

Tror ni det är viktigt med en bra hemsida inom Hotellindustrin generellt?
Ja, det är det. För att det finns så stor konkurrens. På vår hemsida har vi gjort så att man kan titta på alla våra rum och konferenslokaler via en 360°-graders kamera. Detta bidrar till att kunden får så mycket information som möjligt om hotellet innan de kommer hit. När det finns så många alternativ, så gäller det att man visar allt det man kan erbjuda. För att det ändå kostar lite pengar och då vill gästen veta vad det är man får när man betalar. Inom denna bransch kanske det är viktigare än inom många andra att ha en bra hemsida. En bra hemsida har väl mycket bilder och all information gästen kan tänkas vilja ha, och de här bitarna. 

**För att kunder ska boka hotellrum eller nappa på erbjudande så krävs det att de har ett förtryckande gentemot att ni kan leverera vad ni förmedlar via hemsida. Hur jobbar ni med att skapa detta förtryckande?**


**Hur har ni det med betalning av rum via er hemsida? Säkerhetsfunktioner?**


**Har det blivit någon större geografiskt område?**


XIII
Har ni några funktioner på er hemsida som både ökar er gästservice och ökar ert förtroende?

Om man bokar paket kommer det upp förslag om alternativa produkter eller paketer ni erbjuder som ni försöker sälja till kunden?

Har ni sett några negativa effekter från utvecklingen av Internet? Genom ökad konkurrens eller liknande?
Nej, det har vi inte sett. Bara positivt, genom att vara aktiv på hemsidan. Ifall vi visar och har gammal information så lever man inte länge. Man får inget förtroende för en hemsida som har gammal information, t.ex. om jag går in på en sida och läser erbjudanden om påsklen, då får jag inget förtroende och kan inte längre lita på att de har allt de andra de säger att de har. Gästen förlorar trovärdigheten gentemot oss, skapar osäkerhet. Men går jag in på en uppdaterad sida, då kan jag lite på den, det är att få förtroende.

Är ni med på hotels.com eller liknande sajter?
Appendix 8 – Interview material Hotel C

Bakgrundsinformation


Hur skulle ni förklara hur er syn på kundservice? Och vad det innebär för er?

Det viktigaste med kundservice är engagemang, I all led i alla tjänster inom allt vi gör så är det engagemang slår allt.

Vad har ni för mål med er kundservice?

Den är indirekt kunden ska uppfatta oss som att man får ut mer av sin vistelse och att man får mer av sitt satsade kapital än det man förväntade sig. Det är målsättningen att det är prisvärt och att man får ut mer än förväntat.

Vad anser ni är att erbjuda kundservice via hemsidan?

Kundservice via hemsidan på ett enkelt sätt hittar det man kan förvänta sig. Man ska bli intresserad av anläggningen genom hemsidan och vilja boka. Man kan boka direkt via hemsidan, twittra eller blogga och på så sätt komma i kontakt med oss.

Varför har ni en hemsida?


Har ni sett några interna positiva följder av att erbjuda kundservice online? Ekonomiska följder?

Man märker med bokningar som utnyttjar hotell system som de bokar via. Weekend, en konferens innehåller så mycket mer så den bokas mer personligt. Men enskilda gäster kan boka och behöver aldrig prata oss, kommer hit får nyckeln och kan gå igen utan att behöva prata med någon. Det är en
enkel produkt, Men ju mer komplicerad produkt det är ju uppföljning och kontakt med oss krävs. Men en rumsbokning är lätt.

**Vilka funktioner via er hemsida erbjuder ni via er hemsida?**


**Hur har ni reflekerat över hur ni skapar förtroende via er hemsida?**

Vi har bytt hemsida, det är många experter och åsikter om hur en hemsida ska se ut. Men det ska tydligen vara rent och snyggt, vi är inte 100 % om den är det nu, men det är en annan sak. Skapa ett förtroende, att den ska vara uppdaterad är jätte viktigt. Gällande hemsidan så skulle vi haft två, med fokus på olika målgrupper, nya generation kollar lite mer på bilder och inredning. Vi har försökt skapa en profil med oss ägare som profiler.

Vi har haft extremt mycket återkommande gäster, fler än de flesta. Ren enkel marknadsföring, när de testar en produkt vi erbjuder och märker att den är jälligt bra då vill man också prova alla andra produkter vi har för att man vet att det är ett bra märke. Så vi säljer mer av alla produkter på grund av att vi levererade så bra produkter. Vill köpa andra produkter i samma familj fast med en annan

---

XVI
karaktär. Vi ser då att förtroendet för hotellet och det här gör att de vill prova mer. Förtroendet gentemot varumärket är fruktansvärt viktigt.

**Hur kan ni förmedla detta?**


**Hur kom det sig att ni byte hemsida då?**


**Har internet haft några negativa följer för er? Ökad konkurrens?**

## Appendix 9 – Generic keywords finding

### Questions used to obtain empirical data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E-commerce questions:</th>
<th>Hotel A</th>
<th>Hotel B</th>
<th>Hotel C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why did the hotels have a website?</td>
<td>Marketing the hotel</td>
<td>Accessible information</td>
<td>Information and offerings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicating with customers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have the hotel seen any internal benefits with having a website? If so, which?</td>
<td>Better communication methods</td>
<td>Easier and faster to communicate</td>
<td>Faster communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Faster administration handling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have the development of Internet had any effects on the hotel? If so, what effects?</td>
<td>Reliable information</td>
<td>Unserious online company's</td>
<td>Many site and technique to communicate by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wider geographical reach</td>
<td>Demand on faster communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Identified Generic Keywords:**

- Information
- Communication
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customer service questions:</th>
<th>Hotel A</th>
<th>Hotel B</th>
<th>Hotel C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How are the hotels considering and working with customer service?</td>
<td>Moment of happiness</td>
<td>Open and clear with customers</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Take care of the customer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the hotels goal with customer service?</td>
<td>Better than competitors</td>
<td>Meet expectations</td>
<td>Something extra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Returning guests</td>
<td></td>
<td>Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do hotels try to offer customer service in general?</td>
<td>Gathering feedback</td>
<td>Hotel information</td>
<td>Giving customer attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High quality</td>
<td>Security information</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Identified Generic Keywords:**
- Customer satisfaction
- Commitment
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customer service through E-commerce questions:</th>
<th>Hotel A</th>
<th>Hotel B</th>
<th>Hotel C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What are the hotels consider offering customer service on a website to be?</strong></td>
<td>Information availability</td>
<td>Information clarity</td>
<td>User-friendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>User-friendly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do hotels believe that offering customer service through the website is important in their industry? If so, why?</strong></td>
<td>Portal for communication</td>
<td>Competitive situation</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interact with hotel</td>
<td>Pictures of the experience</td>
<td>More bookings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Updated information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What functions related to customer service do the hotels offer in their homepage?</strong></td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Overview of facilities</td>
<td>Find all necessary information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design</td>
<td></td>
<td>Communication methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Have the hotels ever encourage and involved customer in the development of your homepage? For example, have they ever used suggestion boxes online?</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What are the hotels your goal with customer service online?</strong></td>
<td>Reach out to get attention</td>
<td>Clearly show what they offer</td>
<td>Attracting customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Easy to understand</td>
<td></td>
<td>Simplicity</td>
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</table>

**Identified Generic Keywords:**
- Interaction with customers
- User-friendly
- Information
- Attracting customers

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XX
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Trust through E-commerce questions:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Hotel A</strong></th>
<th><strong>Hotel B</strong></th>
<th><strong>Hotel C</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How are the hotels trying to communicate trust to customers through their web site?</strong></td>
<td>Showing offers</td>
<td>Updated web site</td>
<td>Updated and personal information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Offer updated information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visually furnish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Have the hotels tried to increase the trust towards their customer in your homepage?</strong></td>
<td>Easy to find information</td>
<td>What they see is what they get</td>
<td>Personal and profiled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do the hotels have any certain functions on their web site that they believe increase the trust customers get towards their web site?</strong></td>
<td>Easy to find information</td>
<td>Brand reputation</td>
<td>Different profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Safety information</td>
<td>Credible offer</td>
<td>Personal web site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What functions and feature do the hotels believe increase trust for their customers?</strong></td>
<td>Clearly show what customers get</td>
<td>Not confusing</td>
<td>Stimulate feelings and emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>Customer should not be able to do wrong</td>
<td>Easy to get information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simple</td>
<td></td>
<td>Extra information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Identified Generic Keywords:**
- Updated
- Simplicity
- Brand Reputation
Linnaeus University – a firm focus on quality and competence

On 1 January 2010 Växjö University and the University of Kalmar merged to form Linnaeus University. This new university is the product of a will to improve the quality, enhance the appeal and boost the development potential of teaching and research, at the same time as it plays a prominent role in working closely together with local society. Linnaeus University offers an attractive knowledge environment characterised by high quality and a competitive portfolio of skills.

Linnaeus University is a modern, international university with the emphasis on the desire for knowledge, creative thinking and practical innovations. For us, the focus is on proximity to our students, but also on the world around us and the future ahead.