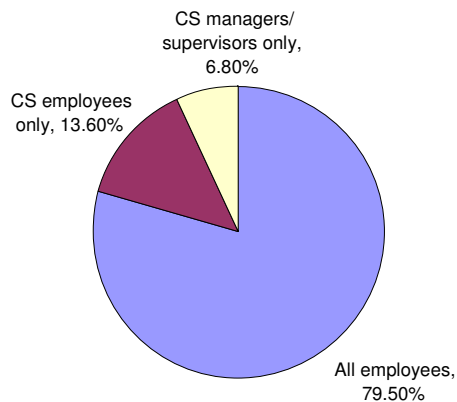


Customer Service Practices and Policies among Missoula Area Businesses
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Dr. Nader Shooshtari
nader.shooshtari@business.umt.edu
Dr. Simona Stan
Simona.stan@business.umt.edu
Both of the School of Business Administration
University of Montana

This is the second part of the report on the survey of the Missoula Chamber of Commerce members with regard to their customer service policies and practices. We asked members about their customer service policies and how they were communicated to employees as well as customers. An important aspect of delivering quality customer service is to have a written set of policies that are clearly communicated to all employees within the organization. As the saying goes, customer service is everyone's business. Written policies reduce the chances for inconsistent treatment of customers or how customer concerns and complaints are handled. We asked survey participants if they had a written set of policies and procedures and how widely they were communicated within the organization. In all, 43.5% of businesses reported having written customer service policies and procedures. Some 56.2% of respondents reported a lack of formally developed set of customer service policies. With regard to communication of such policies, a majority (79.5%) indicated that the policies were communicated to all employees, while 13.6% said the policies were communicated to customer service employees only. A small percentage 6.8% indicated that they shared such information only with customer service supervisors and managers (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Communication of Service Policies to Employees



A parallel to communicating customer service policies internally is sharing this information externally with the customers so they are aware of the obligation of the seller and what they can expect from the company. Setting the appropriate customer expectations with regard to service policies helps avoid customer disappointment or blaming a business for what the customer believes was a service commitment on the part of the firm. As shown in Figure 2, 47% of businesses informed their customers about their service policies at the time of purchase, 42.7% referred the customers to service policy statements and 16.8% posted such information at their place of business. Again, this is an area where it is recommended to have multiple avenues for informing customers about service policies. It will reinforce the policies and increases the likelihood that the information will reach the customers because of both repetition and because not all customers are equally tuned in to the same means for communicating the company's customer service policies.

Figure 2. Communication of Service Policies to Customers

