

Nails in the Drive-Thru

June 8, 2020 By [Brad Evert](#)

It takes me an hour to drive to work every day and at least one drive-thru breakfast, lunch or dinner a day is the norm. There are probably a lot of us out there that could write the operations manuals for the likes of Starbucks, McDonalds, and Taco Bell. Over time, we memorize the exact sequence of events and attempt to order in the same sequence, yet the mysterious voice in the box still responds like a deaf robot, repeating questions we already answered and frequently punching in an entirely different order. The courteous person at the second window (who early in the morning is often the same person as the money taker at the first window, or maybe a twin?) will repeat the same questions again. It is ironic that the same operations these companies use to improve their service for infrequent customers cause the most negative impact for repeat customers that know exactly what they want. The takeaway? Sometimes companies alienate repeat customers that generate the most revenue to attract new customers.

We pride ourselves at being responsive to our customers, which is one core value of our brand, and we work hard to align all departments in support. The other day, a community bank had an issue retrieving a report. They received some geek-speak error that may as well have been in Latin. The customer service associate escalated the issue to the bank's account relationship manager. The bank had recently upgraded to new servers, so configuration was the primary suspect. The tech investigated the issue according to the standard playbook and finally responded with the trifecta of defeat: "don't know, can't find out, try someone else." Of course, none of this was helpful to the customer and was counter to our "do what it takes" culture. The takeaway? Was it all on the tech or did we set them up for failure?

There is a common term first recorded by Abraham Maslow in 1966, although coined much earlier. It is formally known as "Law of the Instrument," but we commonly know it as the rule of the Golden Hammer.

"If your only tool is a hammer, everything looks like a nail"



Some approaches are better than others for most situations... that is the reality. Unfortunately, we are predisposed to feel ours is the best unless there is overwhelming contradictory evidence. Organizational and project

management seek to broaden our toolset beyond that of the humble hammer. So why is it, in most organizations, everyone is looking for nails?

"Because most organizations just create a toolbox filled with different types of hammers."

"Know Your Customer" is a common theme for banks, but it extends to all businesses. Work to divide customers into multiple segments that cannot all be grouped as types of nails. Start with the basics:

- Who are your loyal customers?
- What is your target market?
- How do you attract new customers? Is sniping an option?
- What does the conversion from new to loyal look like?



It is imperative to maintain detail in analyzing customers. For each group you identify, keep a top-10 list of use cases to check and recheck against proposed operational improvements to ensure you are considering the impact of change to each customer segment you have deemed important. Solicit feedback through polls and scoring surveys to validate assumptions. Policies and procedures are part of the living documents of your Business Plan and need to constantly adapt to market forces to ensure you pick the right tool for the job.

We are always in a hurry to get results, so we rush to do something tangibly constructive. Think about any home improvement project you have done. How much planning went into it? How much time did you really spend constructing, building, remodeling, or finishing it? If you are like me, you found that the more effort you spend getting organized, the less time it takes to complete. You end up with fewer surprises and better results. The same goes for business, and it gets worse as the business gets larger, because the approach becomes even more standardized and less resilient as the Law of Averages kicks in. Common sense is historically the first casualty when analytics reduce customers to a single group of nails, and it is much simpler to teach everyone to swing a hammer.

James A Highsmith III, *Adaptive Software Development*. Copyright 1999

Peter Convey and Roger Highfield, *Frontiers of Complexity: The Search for Order in a Chaotic World*. Copyright 1995

Jason Collins, *When Everything Looks Like a Nail: Building Better "Behavioral Economics" Teams* – Behavioral Scientist. September 4, 2018

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