

WINNER

BACKUP DIRECT

"We talk about a Korean ending," says Brett Raynes, founder of Backup Direct. "Don't worry. It's not filthy." The term is, in fact, a customer-service philosophy invented by Raynes, who founded the online back-up service in 2002.

"It came from a story I read about Korean Airlines. Apparently, they hid a hostess in the jacket cupboard so, when passengers hung up their coats, she could help them from the inside. I loved the idea of being that dedicated to customers. We wanted to bring the same obsessive ideology to Backup Direct."

No, there aren't IT guys hiding in computers. Instead, Backup Direct's service agents are trained to actively find ways of helping clients in unexpected ways. "If a client rings us to reset a password, we find ways of doing something else – something useful – for them.

"All our agents have full access to customer records, so they can have a quick look for outstanding issues and ask if they have been resolved adequately. We check whether they have done a data restore recently, and ask them whether they would like to do a test run with one of our engineers. This is not something we are obliged to do, but we offer it all the same." By the end of the phone call, the customer ought to be beaming. "We want to delight, not just satisfy."

Raynes is the figurehead of this Korean approach. Every client gets

his personal mobile number, so they can call him any hour, day or night. "I don't get inundated, but when I do get a call, I deal with the matter personally. Customers like this; they know they aren't dealing with a faceless monolith."

His service agents also work 24 hours a day, seven days a week. "In the beginning, we opened at normal office hours, but a year ago, we went

round the clock. We use VoIP and iPhones – our service guys are available even on Christmas Day." There's a Live Assistant option on the website to help customers work through their queries or complaints using live chat, as well as free, step-by-step video tutorials.

Crucially, Backup Direct makes sure its clients' data is completely secure. "We don't do the

configuration – they do that, but we don't stay quiet. We frequently check in with them to confirm they are able to do a full restore at the touch of a button."

The Korean attitude has helped Backup Direct grow 20 per cent year on year through the recession.

It now has almost 2,000 clients.

Raynes' advice to those thinking of going Korean:

"It takes a great deal of time and effort. At first, we faced a lot of setbacks – people said they were too busy. It takes hard work to make it an endemic part of your company culture."

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My brilliant Korea: Brett Raynes of Backup Direct uses the "Korean approach" to ensure his company is dedicated to customer service

HIGHLY COMMENDED

FIGLEAVES

Figleaves.com is a giant of online retail. Selling bras and knickers, it is a 100-employee blue-chip brand, rivalling the likes of Tesco and M&S in cyberspace. Because it is privately owned, primarily by founder Daniel Nabarro, Figleaves is still an agile, ever-adapting company.

The lure of Figleaves is the outstanding degree of convenience it offers customers. The product range is vast. In addition to the normal suite of underwear, pyjamas and swimwear from more than 100 brands, it has expanded further into niche markets. There are post-mastectomy ranges, bridal, maternity and ultra-large sizes (the lingerie ranges from sizes AAA to K). Figleaves even offers a personal shopper service for free.

There's a gift shop with an interactive gift-finder service; a gift-wrapping option and videos helping women measure themselves perfectly. Customers are encouraged to leave feedback underneath each product for all browsers to see. All returns are free, and the payment options are exhaustive.

The site is constantly reviewed using focus groups and surveys. The information is being used to completely relaunch the lingerie business in the spring – a bold move for a firm already known for its slick web interface.

It's a stunningly customer-centric approach, which is how Figleaves has been able to grow steadily in the face of tough high-street competition.