

Alexandria Post Gazette — *Carla Branch*

Customer service isn't just a slogan. It's an area in which corporations invest millions of dollars and Customer Care Measurement and Consulting has become a leader in the field.

The Alexandria-based company was begun just over a year ago. Scott Broetzmann and Marc Grainer are the founders. "During the 1990s, upgraded customer care became an accepted marketing strategy for improving brand loyalty," Broetzmann said. "Companies realized that it cost much less to retain customers than to win conquest sales. Companies spend a lot of money looking at better ways to serve their customers."

Broetzmann has been involved in customer care for many years. He worked in the Council of Better Business Bureau's Alternative Dispute Resolution division and assisted in the development of BBB Care, the Better Business Bureau's national customer care program. He joined TARP in 1990 and spent nearly 12 years building a practice founded on significant innovations in customer care assessment and measurement methods.

Grainer, a graduate of the University of Michigan and Harvard Law School, also has extensive experience in the area of customer care. While at Harvard, he founded the customer care consulting and research firm TARP. He served as its chairman and was responsible for that company's survey research, economic modeling, consulting, training and software products. He has provided customer care services to hundreds of companies in most major industries throughout the world.

Recently, Customer Care Measurement and Consulting published the results of a customer satisfaction study. Some of the results were surprising. Nearly two thirds of those surveyed said that they were extremely dissatisfied with a product they had purchased over the past year.

"In many of those cases, that dissatisfaction could have been dealt with by simply listening to their concern," Broetzmann said. "When that doesn't happen, the company loses customers."

One of the biggest mistakes people make in terms of customer service is the use of technology. "Technology is wonderful in many respects," Broetzmann said. "However, when people want to register a complaint they don't want to wait for an e-mail reply or to leave a message. We find that people make large investments in technological solutions, thinking that it is going to save time and money and, in many cases, it does just the opposite. Technology, like all other solutions, should be applied strategically," Broetzmann said.

Broetzmann is using his knowledge of customer service to assist the Alexandria City Public School system. He is working with the Parent Involvement Coordinator, Karen Parker Thompson, to survey the school system's business partners. "Like most companies, the school system needs to communicate better with its business partners," Broetzmann said. "We hope to help them look at ways of doing that."