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Weber's aftersales service pleases customers

Small parts—big results: The grill maker delights its customers with premium service.



Hans-Jürgen Herr selects his company's own "grill oasis" for the photo. It might also be called the company's test lab. This terrace on the eighth floor of a building in the center of Berlin has a number of smoking charcoal grills. It also looks out over the capital city with a splendid view of the television tower on Alexanderplatz. There are surely other labs with less enticing locations. And with less sophisticated fare for their employees. Herr lifts a tomahawk steak with a pair of tongs. The meat and bone weigh a good 1,500 grams, and would easily make a meal for three people. The beef steak gets its name from the impressive-looking rib.

Weber seeks to design its processes with customers, business partners, and other companies as effectively as possible. That starts well before the phones on its customer service lines begin to ring. Although barbecuing has long since ceased to be a seasonal activity, more than six million Germans will fire up their stainless steel grills from March to September. But they frequently have to wait quite a while if their device is missing a part. That can happen. Delivery times for the small silver Phillips screws and hexagonal bolts can be considerable in the high season with its correspondingly high level of demand. Not because the delivery service as such takes so long, but because response times to customer queries are longer throughout nearly the entire grilling season. "We work with a very discerning clientele, which is willing to pay as much as €4,000 for a gas grill. So our customer service needs to have the highest possible levels of flexibility and dependability," says Herr. To uphold these standards, Weber asked Porsche Consulting for support. The specialists at Porsche Consulting were commissioned not only because they command classic methods but also because they could provide a customized set of instructions for improving customer service. One tailored specifically to Weber and all the applications on its European market. Which can differ widely. From customers in Denmark who fire up their grills along the country's rocky coastline in winter or any weather, to occasional users in southern Italy who only roll out the smoker for a family gathering on the sunny terrace of their estate. David Blecher, a partner at Porsche Consulting, sketched out the project at the end of the high season, and three weeks later it began. The Porsche consultants carefully examined the situation, analyzed how Weber could shorten response times, and used the extensive data to derive a new customer service approach—including a new strategy to let barbecue fans keep their garden parties going even if problems should arise with their grills in summer. "We've worked with Porsche Consulting's experts a lot in the past to improve our service quality and shorten waiting times instead of 'stamping out fires' in unsystematic ways," says Herr. "As a

grill developer with a long tradition, we place a priority on consistently improving customer satisfaction. Because you don't become a leader on the market overnight."

To put the new service concept into practice and to meet higher expectations for the barbecue experience, the Porsche consultants worked together with a team of Weber employees. The next barbecue season was fast approaching. In less than two months, Herr and his colleagues had a new system on hand to respond faster to customer queries. A standardized system. And one that could be used throughout Europe. Good planning has now measurably improved the results, and Herr has the figures to back it up. "Our new concept has enabled us to shorten response times to customer queries by 90 percent. Customers used to have to wait more than two weeks at the start of the barbecue season for a response and replacement parts, but we now solve every query within two days at most—with the same level of quality." This was brought about by the new concept and an intelligent IT system that connects Weber employees at different sites and enables them to work together in providing the relevant services. The result is both digital and customer-friendly. Back to Berlin. It's one in the afternoon on the rooftop terrace. Herr lifts the lid of the black grill. Very slowly and carefully. The suspense is palpable. All eyes are on the steak. He cuts fine pink slices and serves them. Here too the service is superb. As is the timing.

Info

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