



Competition Will Make Us Better Or Break Us

Taxi cabs have been memorable in Chicago but not for exceptional service. There was a time when you'd get into a cab in Chicago only to discover that your driver spoke little English, if any at all. Nor might they know how to get you to your destination via the most direct route. The cars were old, battered and not well cared for. You felt every bump from worn shock absorbers as the drivers sped their way on cars that logged more than 100,000 miles and bald tires to where they did not know. The interior of the cabs tended to be filthy, the upholstery shabby (and sticky) and the floorboard strewn with refuse from previous passengers, perhaps, from previous days. The radio blared some foreign music but thankfully you couldn't hear it very well with all windows open, and the wind whipping through the cab, because the air conditioning or windows didn't work. It was a service that invited competition.

Enter Uber, and while it has experienced managerial problems and growing pains, being transported around Chicago has taken a turn for the better. The drivers are more courteous than cab drivers. In fact, each has a customer rating, so you know who you're getting and how others feel about their performance. The cars tend to be newer models. Nor does one need to stand out in the street to try to hail down a taxi. Uber comes to you. Drivers use GPS and, for the most part, get you where you need to go expeditiously. Fares tend to be more reasonable and you're informed about what it will cost before you place your order for a car. Payment is automatically charged to your credit card, no exchange of cash needed. Tips are optional.

While taxi companies and city fathers criticized and attempted to make things difficult for Uber it seems that as this new service has grown it has led to improving taxi service in Chicago as well. Competition will make us better or break us.

Amazon has recently purchased PillPack, an online prescription service. They package and deliver patients' medicines, as prescribed by their MDs, directly to their doors. Since the announcement of the Amazon acquisition of PillPack my sister-in-law has been visiting our home. Unfortunately, she had a sinus infection that required antibiotics. Her MD phoned the prescription to our local retail outlet of a major pharmacy chain where we went to make the pick-up. On the way there, she asked me what I thought about Amazon purchasing PillPack might mean to brick-and-mortar pharmacies. After experiencing a hassle in merely picking-up the prescription I mentioned that pharmacies will need to adapt and improve, dramatically (just

the way independent bookstores have had to adapt in ways relevant to their customers in order to survive). The large chain pharmacies such as CVS and Walgreen's are working to improve healthier patient outcomes, which is a major start. But they'll also need to improve their operations and services in ways that will lead to improving customers' experiences or find that their growth will be impeded.

Picture the future for your category and strive to be the first to reach it. Practice kaizen, making continuous improvement to the customer experience. At the very least, look to what competition is doing and anticipate what they might do and use it to make us better or it will break us.

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