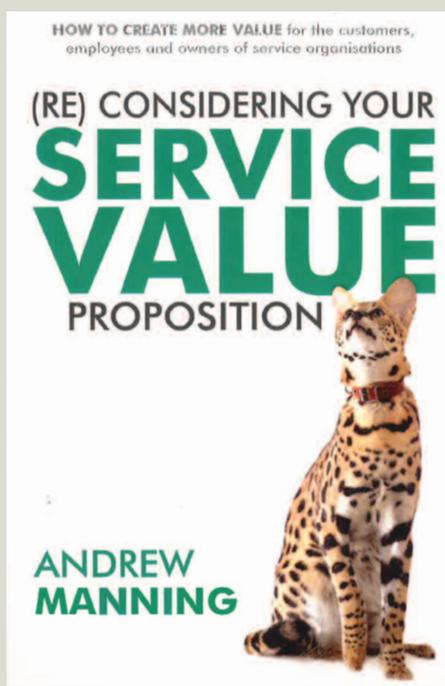


This article originally appeared in *PM* magazine. For further details go to www.pmforum.co.uk

(Re)considering your service value proposition



Andrew Manning
I_AM Self Publishing
£29.99

Competition

To win a copy of this month's book, give the full name the American football quarterback with the same surname as the book's author.

Send your answer, by 15 November, to comp@pmint.co.uk

This book should be called *How to win at running a service in the 21st century*.

It provides a comprehensive framework for anybody whose income depends on providing services to others – either within a business or to businesses or individuals. Thought provoking yet practical, Andrew Manning raises questions then provides the answers in easy-to-access models and examples taken from everyday life. The concepts are complex but easy to understand, even on a first read. But above all, he forces the reader both to examine their competitive positioning forensically and then confront the reality that to grow or even retain market share, they will have to win it from someone else. Increasingly in the professional services marketplace, that someone else is a fully automated service, or an offshore or virtual service with an entirely different service value.

It is fashionable to concentrate on the 'Why?' (Simon Sinek) but instead Manning concentrates on the 'How'. Unlike a business selling products, he says "service organisations can use different combinations of ingredients in their recipes to produce a different SerVal [Service Value] proposition to the one offered by their competitors". They can even adjust the ingredients to vary the service benefit and experience to meet the needs of different clients. It is in these variables and how they are controlled and manipulated that Manning believes competitive advantage is to be found and that is the subject matter of this book.

At the heart of the conundrum are the human relationships between the client, the service provider and their employees. Human beings build variability into the mix, from the way in which they engage with systems and processes (both client and service provider!) right through to the way that employees engage with the client and so affect the client's perception of outcome benefit. In one sense, this is an updated version of the Service Value

Profit Chain, but it is more than that.

Professional service firms increasingly reach for automation, not just to drive down cost but also to create greater standardisation and certainty of outcome. Manning points to the possibilities that automation offers in terms of increased service range and reduced price, speed of response and 24-hour availability. Yet, as he also points out, automation can have a significant impact both on employees – due to job redesign and redundancies – and on clients – whose relationship with the business can be drastically affected by the way they interact with it and the remaining employees.

Yet people are only part of the service value profit chain in the modern world, especially where a business depends on automation and the internet for service delivery. The good news for professional service marketers is that Manning's book contains a comprehensive framework not just to assess how client loyalty might be affected by automation of certain processes but also how and where such automation might improve service experience and so help drive client worth. Using this book, the reader will also be able to work out how to design the remaining interactions for maximum impact. He also makes the point that brand is only likely to become more important, to supplement the human relationship direct with the service provider, if only to reduce the sense of intangibility (many online brands use cuddly toys in their adverts).

But these tools are not just for self-defence. Remember this book is about competitive advantage, so Manning shows us how to use them to assess the weaknesses of other firms. This is not a book for the faint hearted but it is a book for people who like winning.

Sally Calverley
Richmonte Wells