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Blogs

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On:

Disruptive innovation,
Technology,
Competition

Soothing the Customer's Itch

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The first welt appeared Monday at about 3 p.m.

It was right at the corner of my mouth and looked like a big pimple. I wondered what it was, but didn't think much of it.

Then my forehead started to itch. I looked in the mirror in my hotel room in San Diego, and noticed a collection of about four angry looking welts clustered on the upper right portion of my forehead.

By the time I went to bed that night, I could count more than ten welts on my face, forehead, and on the back of my neck. It was not a restful night sleep.

By Tuesday morning, there were about twenty welts. When I checked out, I told the cashier they might want to check room 226, just to make sure there weren't any bugs lurking in the room. Pleasant thought, huh?

I finished my day on Tuesday (I was facilitating a seven-hour workshop, which was fun) and stopped off at a Walgreens on the way to my red-eye, cross-country flight to pick up some anti-itch ointment. Thank goodness the Walgreens private label products come in smaller than three ounce containers — the branded products were all too big to carry on to the plane.

Wednesday morning the welt count reached about 30, with small clusters now on my right wrist, my left wrist, and the upper portion of my right arm. I told my wife I would see a doctor when I got back to Boston on Friday. She told me I was insane and should see one immediately. My mother (a trained medical doctor) checked me out over a Skype video chat and agreed. The only problem — I was in Richmond, VA for a Media General Board meeting and didn't have hours to spend in the emergency room.

Betty from Media General suggested that I try **Patient First**, a local walk-in health care clinic (I later discovered that there are 26 Patient First clinics in Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia). I left my hotel at around 1, arrived at the clinic at 1:15 p.m., saw a doctor at 1:30 p.m., and had my diagnosis (most likely spider bites) and prescription (for steroids — watch out Mark McGwire!) by 1:40 p.m.

There is an innovation lesson in all of this — that quality is relative. I was absolutely delighted with Patient First's quick, convenient solution. I didn't care that the clinic couldn't treat complicated health care conditions; I wasn't worried that the clinic lacked anything more sophisticated than an X-Ray machine. In fact, an online consultation — like the kind that **American Well** offers in some markets — would have been absolutely perfect.

Similarly, even though I usually choose branded medication (yes, I know the ingredients in many store-branded products are the same as the more expensive alternatives) the Walgreens private label product hit my most important criteria by being small enough to carry on the plane. In that context, size was more important than the confidence that comes from turning to a trusted brand name.

When we innovate, we always need to look at the world through the customer's eyes. Sometimes the customer prefers simplicity, convenience or affordability over bells and whistles. Quality depends on the **customer's job-to-be-done**, their circumstances, and the competitive solution set that is available to them.

For those of you who are wondering, no new welts have appeared since Thursday, and most of them have stopped itching and started to fade. Thank goodness.