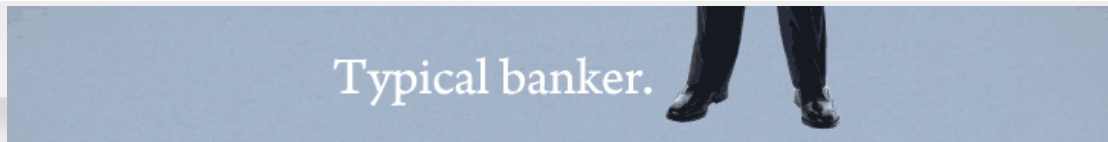




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★ Real estate pros meet today's new customer

CoreNet Global - Atlanta Chapter

Premium content from Atlanta Business Chronicle - by Tonya Layman, Contributing Writer

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As corporate real estate professionals gather in Atlanta on Aug. 25 for CoreNet Global Atlanta's Education Forum to learn how to lead through turbulent times and to transform challenge into opportunity, John Patterson will help them understand how customers have changed and what steps they can take to better serve them.

In the breakout session, "Wired and Dangerous: Your Customers Have Changed — What to Do About It," Patterson will use the book similarly named ("Wired and Dangerous: How Your Customers Have Changed and What to Do About It") that he co-wrote with **Chip Bell** as a guide to help real estate attendees understand that customers are not what they used to be.

Patterson, president of [Progressive Insights](#)

, helps organizations worldwide

understand how customers have changed and creates strategies that drive customer loyalty and business growth.

"Gone are the days when service had to be really awful for us to walk away. Sticking to brands for a lifetime is a thing of the past," Patterson said. "Customers today are picky, fickle, vocal, and 'all about me' vain. They now have an enormous variety of services and products to choose from with unprecedented access to information and reviews. Empowered and wired via the Internet, with its capacity to instantly reach a gazillion fellow customers with the click of a mouse, customers can bring any service provider to its knees."

The Internet has tipped the balance of power and forever changed the way customers and organizations interact. A single critical video uploaded on YouTube or a damning review gone viral stays up perpetually, he said.

He references a YouTube video that has cost one of the nation's leading airlines millions. Musician **Dave Carroll** who, after learning from fellow passengers that [United Airlines](#) , baggage handlers were damaging his guitar on the tarmac, was unable to find anyone at United willing to make the situation right. So he made a music video about his woes and

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posted it on YouTube. More than 10 million people have watched the video. According to a blog posted by The Economist, this incident has cost United Airlines an estimated \$180 million. The video continues to harm the brand as it hangs around cyberspace, Patterson said.

He plans to teach CoreNet's real estate professionals how to transform today's edgy customer into an eager partner. He said simply doing better at old approaches will not address what "new normal" customers require; it takes fresh perspectives and new practices.

Jim Huslig, vice president of sales and marketing at [Ivan Allen Workspace](#) , is part of CoreNet's Education Forum programs committee. He has worked with Patterson as he has helped Ivan Allen create a different customer service experience, so when the event coordinators were looking for speakers for the forum, Patterson was the first person to come to his mind. Huslig has no doubt that Patterson's message will resonate with the audience.

"When you look at how customers are changing in the world today, if you aren't staying on top of what your customers are asking for it's a recipe for disaster," Huslig said. "The amount of responsibility that real estate firms have right now has grown significantly. It is pretty close to being a one-stop shop that handles everything from soup to nuts to make sure the transaction goes smoothly and easily. You really have to stay abreast of the changes and understand what people are asking for currently."

While Patterson's message is useful to leaders in small enterprises as well as in very large companies, from frontline employees to executives, real estate professionals are a perfect audience to address about this issue, Patterson said, since the real estate industry typically embraces long-term relationships with customers.

"Today, we have to develop a deep understanding of what is important to the customer," he said. "Service is about making memories. People who understand good service want to make great memories for the customer, and part of that is knowing your customer and making them feel like they are the only customer that you have. Make me feel valued. It is critical to the relationship today."

Real estate is also a business that relies heavily on word-of-mouth. Patterson believes customers have become more vocal. They are more apt to rapidly and loudly register concerns with their higher standards for value and their expectation of getting a tailored response.

"They assertively tell others their views of service," he said, adding customers are also more likely to listen to fellow customers' reviews.

But word-of-mouth has been replaced by "word of mouse." The interconnections customers now have with other customers via the Internet and social media give them the power to transform an organization overnight from service champ to service chump, Patterson said.

"The customer mind-set coming out of the recession is they are more cautious in their choices and they expect to get obvious value for their money. They are much smarter about the decisions they make today and there is a wealth of information on the Internet to help them make their decisions," Patterson said. "I can go on the Internet and do research and search the background of probably anyone in that room at the CoreNet event and determine if that is the kind of organization I want to work with. About 75 percent of customers are looking at what other customers say about a service provider and they make decisions based on what others are telling them."

Patterson also said the old adage "time is money" is huge in today's workforce.

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"When we say wired we are also referring to the way we think about time today — it is different. People expect us to respond very quickly. If you don't understand that as a corporate real estate director, you are in a world of hurt," he added.


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