



**Qminder**

# The Fundamentals of Queue Management

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# Credits

In *The Fundamentals of Queue Management*, we share what we've learned about waiting in line and queue management over the course of more than nine years.

Our software has helped dozens of companies across the world declutter the queuing experience for more than 5,000,000 customers — and counting.

If you'd like to learn more about boosting your customer service, untangling the crowded queues, we regularly share our thoughts and tips on [Qminder blog](#).

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Feel free to share this ebook with friends and colleagues, but make sure to give Qminder a proper shoutout.

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# Foreword

If you've picked up this book, it's likely that the problem of queues is something that's crossed your mind at one time or another.

(It's also possible that we sent you this book as a free content addendum, and you opened it up on a limb. In which case, thanks!)

To paraphrase a famous saying, queues are a great equalizer. Whether you're young or old, poor or rich, male or female, waiting in line is not some unknowable phenomenon.

A common misconception about queues is that they can, if not must, be left on autopilot. Put a crowd fence here, place a sign there — and you're done!

Naturally, if this were the case, this book would never have to be written.

Queues are all around us: in traffic on our way to or from work, in supermarket checkout lines, even when waiting for your turn at a coffee machine. A big chunk of our lives revolves around waiting in queues.

In fact, some estimate that the time spent in lines adds up to **37 billion hours per year** in the United States alone. That's more than four million years, every year.

Yeah, try to wrap your head around *that*.

They also say it takes 10,000 hours to get proficient at something. Yet, despite our immense experience at waiting, your average Joe is no better at standing in line and your average Joe Business is no wiser at managing it.

Queue management is hard as it is. And great queue management — one that boosts customer service and feels a part of the process— is more elusive than the Holy Grail.

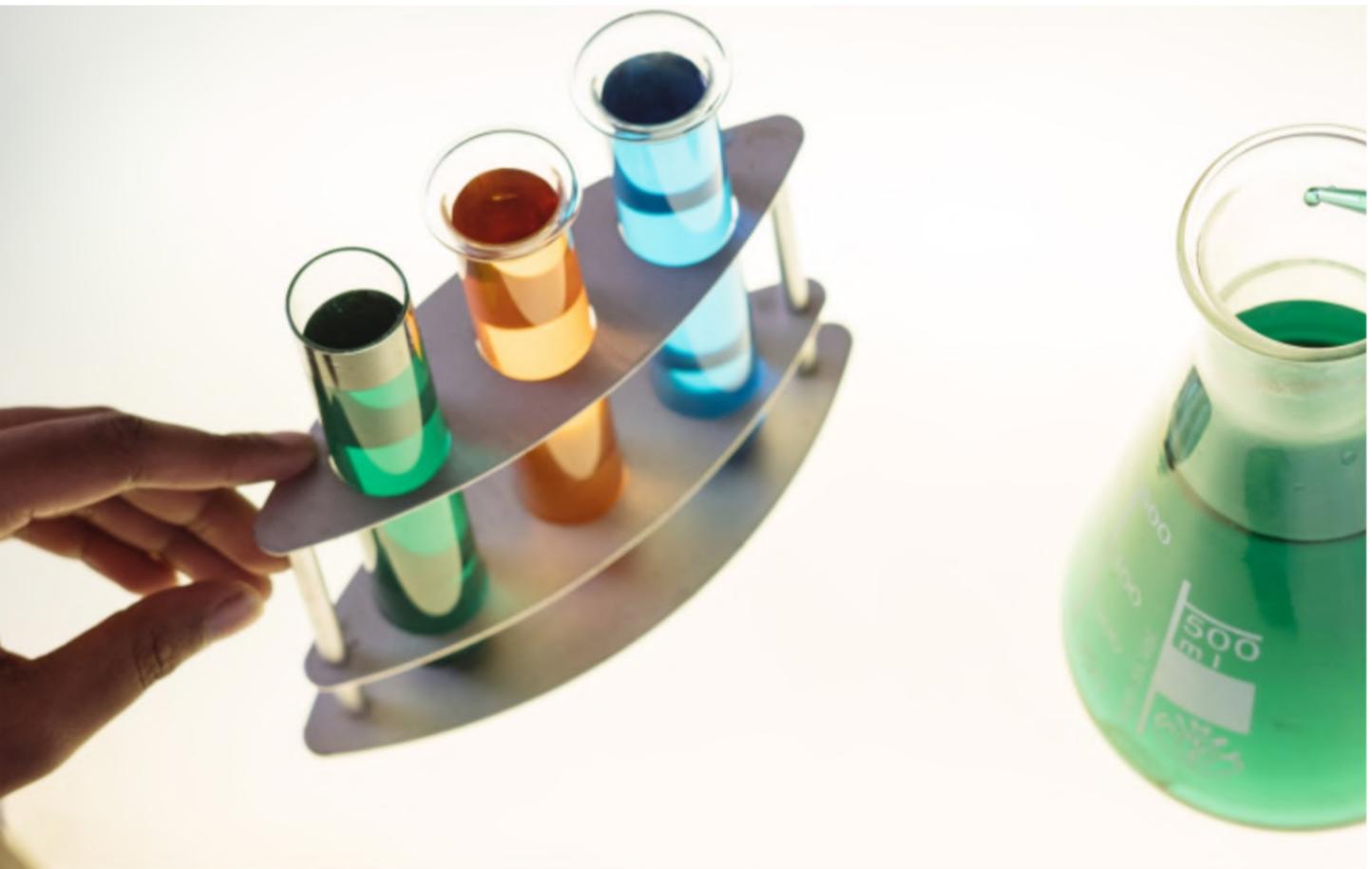
In a lot of ways, it's like making a casserole: every housewife has her own family recipe, mostly inspired not by objective measures but by gut feelings (no pun intended). You can find a lot of such advice for queue management too, sometimes masking its simplicity with clever acronyms or alliteration (“Want to get rid of queues? Follow this simple BRAARPA system!”).

This book shuns shallow advice. We at Qminder prefer hard numbers to hypotheticals. Everything you're going to learn from this book is a result of careful years-long studies, based on lived experience of real companies and real people.

**Rauno Rüngas**, co-founder of *Qminder*

## Chapter 1

# The science of waiting in line



**Most of us take queues for granted and don't give them much thought unless we happen to stand in one. "What causes queues?" isn't as big of a question as "How long do I need to wait here?" But to understand the way to fix queues, we need to understand where they come from, first.**

## Brief history of waiting lines

Throughout human history, waiting lines have been about exclusive access.

Some historians say that queues date back to primitive times. When hunters brought fresh meat, everyone in a tribe had to wait for their turn to take a bite. Most likely, these crude "waiting lines" resembled animal queuing, where tribe hierarchy determines the order.

Luckily, since then queues became more refined.

The first mention of waiting lines as we know them now dates back to 1837. The word "queue" comes from Old French and means "tail". That's how Thomas Carlyle described post-war bread lines in Paris in his book *The French Revolution*.

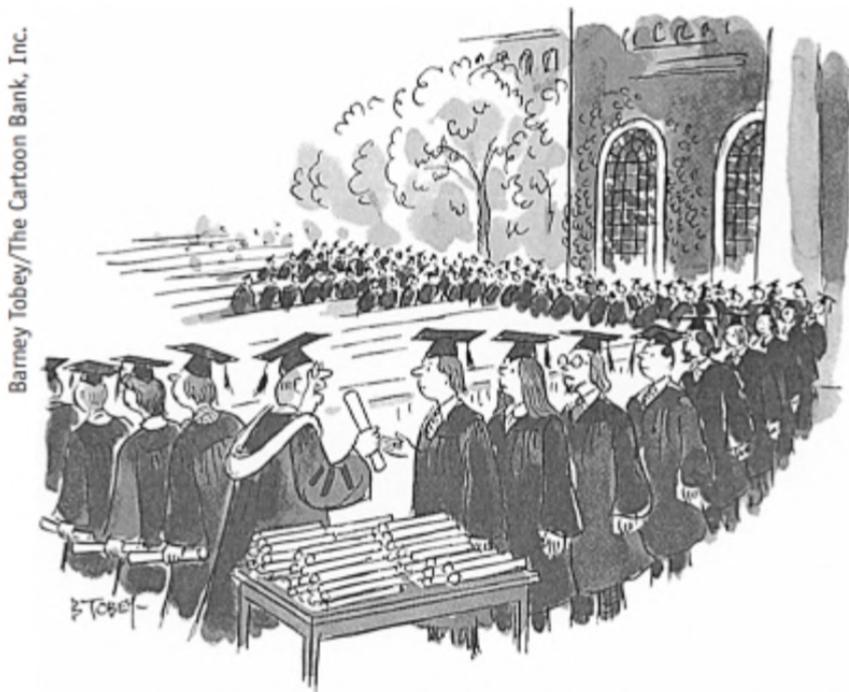
It was another revolution that kickstarted the next generation of queues — but this time, it was the *industrial* revolution. Heavy urbanization meant that shops could barely handle the newly-formed flow of customers.

To give a little bit of structure to this chaos, people would start forming queues that have survived, unchanged, to this day.

The other factor in creating queues as we know them was the emerging telephone industry. Telephone operators would connect callers to their destination by hand. The limitations of manual call routing placed great stress on operators, which called for a more efficient management method.

This paved the way for a scientific theory called **queuing theory**, first developed by Agner Krarup Erlang in *The Theory of Probability and Telephone Conversations* (1909). Erlang used statistical analysis to predict when calls would arrive.

More than a hundred years later, we are still using the foundation laid by Erlang to run wait time simulations.



*"Congratulations, keep moving, please. Congratulations, keep moving, please. Congratulations . . ."*

# Why queues are formed

According to Professor Nick Haslam, from the Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences at the University of Melbourne, queuing is a “social norm that is governed by unspoken rules promoting efficiency and equality”.

He adds that “in a world where there is more demand than supply, queuing is a very efficient way to deliver a service without having a scrum of people fighting to get to it first.”

Queuing exists because there is an **imbalance between the supply and demand side of services**. If consumers could get whatever they wanted whenever they wanted it, queues would not be needed.

In a Freakonomics episode titled *What Are You Waiting For?*, Felix Oberholzer-Gee, an economist at Harvard Business School, describes queues as a “way to deal with short-term fluctuations in demand”.

**Queues don't have to be long to be classified as queues.** As long as there is at least one person waiting for their turn, there is a queue.

# Types of waiting lines

Not all queues are created equal. They differ not only by length and speed, but also by their structure.

In queuing theory, there are different models for service systems with queues. They are categorized by:

- the number of servers: most typically, a service agent who can only serve one customer at a time.
- the number of lines: how many concurrent queues there can be in a service system.
- the number of phases: how many stages there are to the complete experience.

For simplicity, the number of each category is expressed as either **single** or **multi**.

Thus, queuing theory recognizes, for example:

- **single-server, single-line, single-phase queues:** one checkout point which all customers go through in an orderly fashion.
- **multiserver, multi-line, single-phase queues:** several checkout points, with a line for each.
- **multiserver, single-line, multiphase queues:** the customer next in line goes to the available checkout point, after which the service proceeds with another line.

Has your head started spinning yet? Don't worry, now we're jumping from dry theory to exciting practice.

## Serpentine lines

In a single serpentine line system, the supply of services is distributed to the customer who queued first.

**Example:** airports, customs.

**Pros:** there is a clear sense of progress and logic. First-come-first-served is always true, as the first in line gets serviced earlier.

**Problem:** the length of the queue is intimidating and may discourage customers from joining. Serpentine lines also usually employ queue barriers, or stanchions, which invoke the feeling of being seen as cattle.

## Parallel lines

In a multi-server system, parallel lines give customers the freedom to join any queue.

**Example:** supermarkets, banks with multiple tellers.

**Pros:** parallel lines make the process of checkout faster.

**Problem:** customers may join the wrong queue if there's segmentation by the type of service. When the queues are equal, they may spend too much time deciding which line to join. This is caused by the illusion that the other line always moves faster.

## Take-a-number lines

In a take-a-number model, queuing begins by taking a ticket generated at the counter. This ticket has a number printed on it, which determines the order of service.

**Example:** deli counters in supermarkets.

**Pros:** the progress is tracked. If tickets are in a sequential order and there is a screen with ticket numbers, you can calculate how many people are currently in front of you.

**Problem:** this model may be confusing in a system with multiple lines, each having a different sequential order. Paper tickets are also wasteful, and their use of numbers in lieu of names is grossly impersonal.

## Virtual lines

In a virtual queuing model, customers join the queue via check-in kiosks, apps, websites or QR codes. The queue is virtual, which means the digital system keeps track of the order of customers at any given time.

**Example:** any business which uses a digital queue management system.

**Pros:** no need to physically stand in line. Easy to update in real time and fix small issues (e.g., a customer joined the wrong queue).

**Problem:** although efficient, it is not fit for all of the industries.

# Customer behavior in queues

Each line comes with its own set of rules and conditions. If you don't want to stand in a long line in a cafeteria, you can opt out for some place else. This doesn't work for airports, where — provided that you have bought a ticket — the stakes of leaving a queue are that much higher.

Depending on how they react to queues, customers can be broken into three categories:

**Jockeying:** customers switch to a different line in an effort to reduce their wait time.

**Balking:** customers decide to leave the location without joining the queue at all.

**Reneging:** customers join the queue but decide to leave after some time.

## How long customers are willing to wait



## The effect of queues on customers

Before we're ready to discuss the how's of queue management, we need to focus on why. Namely, why queue management is important at all.

The impact of poor queuing on customers is much more than just frustration and boredom. Lack of proper queue management affects consumer behavior, purchase intention and even conversion rates — in short, your bottom line.

(Since this chapter is called The science of waiting in line, there will be a lot of numbers and percentages. You've been warned.)

Over 75% of shoppers say that queuing to pay for a product is the worst part of the in-store experience.

Customers are willing to wait, at max, 14 minutes before being served. As the length of time spent in queues grows longer, the customers' patience grows shorter:

- 25% would only wait a maximum of two minutes
- 59% would wait no longer than four minutes
- 73% would abandon their purchase if they had to queue for more than five minutes.

Even UK shoppers, renowned for their tolerance of queues, consider nine minutes long enough to make them reconsider a purchase and walk out from queues more than seven people deep.

Negative queuing experiences have a serious impact on customers' psyche. 27% of consumers get annoyed by fellow shoppers when queuing, and 19% of shoppers have even had an argument with a partner or friend in a queue.

74% would shop in a competitor's store if they perceive the queue time to be quicker. 70% would be less likely to return to shop again if they had experienced long waits.

Creating a frictionless customer journey plays a big part in converting casual shoppers into loyal customers.

## The monetary value of long queues

Long queues are among the chief contributors to lost store revenue, behind only out-of-stock items.

A research released by Adyen found that long queues are costing retailers up to £12 billion each year in potential sales losses:

- £6.4 billion lost by retailers to their competitors
- £5.6 billion lost due to customers leaving or deciding to spend less

A 2012 research paper called *Measuring the Effect of Queues on Customer Purchases* estimates that “increasing the queue length from 10 to 15 customers would reduce purchase incidence from 30% to 27%”.

Losses come from negative advertising, too. An unhappy customer will tell between 9-15 people about their experience, thus discouraging them from visiting a venue with improper queuing practices.

## Bad queuing experience across the world

Poor queue management is a universal language, and it is as easily understood in Asia and Europe as it is in America.

Lack of good queuing options reportedly costs UK retailers up to £3,581 per day in lost revenue. These estimates are based on a 53% potential monthly revenue loss due to walkouts, with an average daily revenue of those polled at £6,757.

On the other side of the globe, in Singapore, 89% of shoppers routinely leave a store because the queues are too long. Among those, 34% do not attempt a new purchase, and 27% decide to purchase a similar item from a different retailer.

As a result, Singaporean retailers incur over \$1.6 billion yearly due to mismanaged queues.

Similarly, retailers in Hong Kong lose up to \$2.35 billion because of shoppers discouraged by long queues.

\$1.26 billion is lost explicitly due to long wait-to-pay times, with 87% of shoppers choosing another venue and 13% not making any purchases at all.



## Queues and the bandwagon effect

There is a myth surrounding businesses with long queues that lengthy wait times are actually a sign of popularity. We see it with Apple and venues who wish to simulate it.

That's because people tend to assign subjective values to products they acquire after a lengthy wait. This is the bandwagon effect of queues.

An experiment designed by Minjung Koo and Ayelet Fishbach found out that queuing increases the value of products by stimulating the enjoyment we get out of them. In this context, the longer the line, the greater the value people put on the product or services.

In the *Freakonomics* episode on queuing, Fishbach describes how she and her colleagues designed an experiment disguised as a smoothie sample-tasting study. Researchers stood in line behind half of participants and in front of the other half.

The result? People who thought there was a line behind them reported that the smoothie tasted better.

“In other words, once we wait for something, we value it more than if it was effortless, than if we never had to wait.”

That is not to suggest that queues should be taken to their extreme, to take advantage of their 'exclusivity'. Proper queue management has a lot more to offer to both customers and business owners.

## Chapter 2

# Best practices for waiting lines



**When was the last time you didn't mind standing in line? Unobtrusive queues are few and far between, but memorable queues are something else entirely. Most businesses treat queue management as an afterthought, thinking that it's only customer service that matters. But standing in line is already part of the service, and you can tell a lot by the way a business engages you from the get-go.**

If you only care about getting profit hand over fist, improving your queues may seem like a waste of time and effort. But that is a very shallow, short-term way of looking at things.

No matter how sturdy your business ship is, if you aren't careful, it's going to run aground.

To quote a Cornell study on customer wait experiences:

**“Since peak experiences, positive and negative, influence perceptions of the service encounter as a whole, managers should carefully consider the design of the wait experience and waiting environment, as an integral part of the entire service experience.”**

# How queue management helps

So what is queue management, you ask? We define queue management as:

A set of principles aimed at controlling customer flow and streamlining the queuing experience.

Or to put it even more simply, a system that balances supply and demand of queues.

The thing with good queue management is that you don't notice when it's there; you notice it when it's not there. If you're feeling frustrated while standing in line, chances are, the business owners have not read this book.

As for the benefits of quality queue management, the inverse of all negative effects mentioned above applies here. Thus, satisfaction instead of frustration, positive advertising and word of mouth, more opportunities to upsell and cross-sell, and higher customer retention.

But there are also some less-talked-about benefits of good queue management. Something called **Parkinson's Law**.

In 1955, historian Cyril Northcote Parkinson came up with a humorous law that was based on his experience in the British civil service. The law stipulates that "Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion".

Initially, the law related to bureaucracies (“If something must be done in a year, it’ll be done in a year”). Since then, this principle has been appropriated by sociologists to explain, among other things, how an increase in prison capacity leads to greater incarceration rates.

How does Parkinson’s Law relate to reducing queues?

The other side of the coin is that liberation of resources results in reinvesting these same resources back into the original context. That is to say, if you free up customers’ time by reducing wait times and taking the frustration out of the picture, guess where they will spend this free time.

That’s right, they will spend it at your store — either window-shopping or looking at potential purchases for later.

Similarly, by lifting the burden of having to manually manage crowds, you help your employees gain confidence in your business and their role in it. No longer needing to focus on visitor management, they are now free to keep making service the best it could be.

# The psychology of waiting

We've deliberately omitted this section from the 'science' part of our book, although most of the things we're going to talk about here is backed by scientific research.

Dr Richard Larson, "Doctor Queue", said, "Often the psychology of queuing is more important than the statistics of the wait itself."

The core keyword when talking about wait times is perception. Perception is everything when it comes to queues, so solving wait times alone is not enough.

People's perceived wait times are as, if not more so, important. On average, customers overestimate how long they've waited in a queue by 36%.

This happens because companies do not pay attention to the psychology of waiting in queues.

This section is based on Harvard Business School professor David Maister's article *The Psychology of Waiting in Lines*. Regardless of who you are as a person, chances are, your queuing behavior and your perception of queues are governed by these fundamental principles.

## 1. Occupied time feels shorter than unoccupied time

Houston airport was no different from other airports and has had a handful of such complaints as well. People spent no more than minutes waiting for their luggage at the arrival gates, but even these minutes felt rather long.

And with one simple decision, Houston airport decreased the number of complaints to practically zero.

Their solution?

Instead of placing arrival gates close to incoming planes, the administration moved them farther. Passengers now had to walk the distance, thus spending time on walking and not simply waiting.

To quote philosopher William James, “Boredom results from being attentive to the passage of time itself”. Or, in the words of every mother ever, “A watched pot never boils”.

## 2. Finite waits feel shorter than uncertain waits

From the standpoint of a customer, any amount of waiting is already unnecessary. Seeing an employee not paying any attention to you — even if they're visibly busy — adds to the injury.

Uncertainty in service breeds nervous anticipation, anxiety, and the feeling of powerlessness. Customers are not willing to fully commit to staying nor to walking away. As a result, they're effectively stuck in the middle.

Then, there's such a thing as the appointment syndrome. Clients who arrive early for an appointment will wait until the scheduled time arrives, even if it takes long.

Once the appointment time is over, however, every additional minute feels like two.

### 3. Explained waits are shorter than unexplained waits

Most serving personnel are repeatedly asked about the circumstances in waiting situations. The lack of an explanation is one of the prime factors adding to a customer's uncertainty about the length of the wait.

Naturally, justifiable explanations will tend to soothe the waiting customer more than unjustifiable explanations. A subtle illustration of this is provided by the practice of many fast food chains which instruct serving personnel to take their rest breaks out of sight of waiting customers.

The sight of what seems to be available serving personnel sitting idle while customers wait, is a source of irritation.

Even if such personnel are, in fact, occupied (for example, a bank teller who is not serving customers but catching up on paperwork), the sight of serving personnel not actually serving customers is "unexplained." In the customers' eyes, he or she is waiting longer than necessary. The explanation that the "idle" personnel are taking a break or performing other tasks is frequently less than acceptable.

## 4. Fair waiting feels shorter than unfair waiting

Perceived duration of waiting has a bigger impact on consumer satisfaction than the actual wait time.

Measuring the Effect of Queues on Customer Purchases: “Purchase incidence is affected more by the length of the line rather than the speed of the service.”

Nothing gets your blood boiling quite as seeing someone come later and still be serviced before you. In the words of sociologists Sasser, Olsen, and Wycoff, “The feeling that somebody has successfully ‘cut in front’ of you causes even the most patient customer to become furious.”

But what makes queues “fair”, exactly? It’s mostly about their conformity to the first-come-first-served model of service (sometimes referred to as first-in-first-out, or FIFO).

FIFO works exactly as the name implies: people who join the queue earlier expect to be served sooner than those who joined after. It is the most reliable model when it comes to queue fairness, as:

1. Its rules are simple to follow.
2. All potential violations are observable.

People closer to a service agent are more satisfied with service and waiting than those further away.

## 5. Reducing anxiety makes waiting feel shorter

Have you ever noticed that the other line always moves faster?

That's not something that only happens to you. In fact, there's the so-called Erma Bombeck's Law which describes this phenomenon.

It's in human nature to second-guess everything, so the feeling of having chosen the wrong line is here to stay.

As a business, it's extremely important for you to be upfront with your customers about the expected wait time. When queuing is handled manually, the slightest disturbance can lead to serious chaos.

It's what they call the domino effect.

To battle the prospect of anxiety in your customers, it's best to set the right expectations and overestimate the time required for service.

## 6. Customers want to get started ASAP

According to the study on customer's perceived value of waiting time, any waiting can be divided into three separate stages:

Pre-service: Customer is in line waiting to make an order.

In-service: Customer is at the counter, gives his order to the employee and pays.

Post-service: Customer waits for their order to be ready

Although preceding the actual service process, pre-service influences the most how customers score the service quality.

Here's an example: one customer has waited in the line for 10 minutes before ordering a cup of coffee, and another has waited as long to have his already-ordered coffee prepared.

Will they be equally satisfied with their service?

The answer is no, because the first customer, even if his or her order is fulfilled immediately, will feel that subjectively, his wait was longer.

Researchers have found that perceived wait times feel longer than actual wait times. A five-minute queue in an oppressive waiting room can feel draining.

That's why it's harmful to think of queues as anything other than a part of your service. As soon as customers get to feel involved in the servicing process, the wait effectively ends

## 7. Shared waits feel shorter than solo waits

Dr Larson refers to Disney as the master of queuing psychology — and for good reason.

Disney amusement parks are a great source of customer service inspiration when developing your queuing strategies.

Our perception of a queuing experience is strongly influenced by its final moments, according to a research conducted by Ziv Carmon and Daniel Kahneman. If these moments are miserable, the overall waiting time will seem awful in retrospect.

However, if your queue experience ends on an uplifting note, customers tend to forgive or even ignore less positive bits. And nothing gets more uplifting than spending your time in a group of familiar faces.

After all, queues are a social phenomenon, so it doesn't hurt to underscore the "social" part.

# Queue management equipment

Simply knowing the psychology of waiting won't get you anywhere.

A man is only as good as his tools, and without proper queue management equipment, even the most well-thought-out queuing strategy is bound to fail.

The best thing about these tools is that you can pick and choose which ones you need the most. Treat them as puzzle pieces.



## Check-in kiosk

Digital check-ins allow visitors to enter the information required for high-quality service. In short, self-service kiosks put your customers back in control.

Here's how they work: a customer enters the location, they go to a kiosk installed at the entrance or other high-traffic point, they fill out the information according to their preferences, and their data is fed to the system.

Check-in kiosks are a big part of the system that allows staff to engage customers immediately, capture pertinent information, and use branching service paths to adapt the process to each customer case.

Check-in kiosks can be used to manage customer flow in banks, hospitals, shops, service centers, public administration offices, and more.

It can be programmed to ask custom questions, and unlike sign-in sheets with messy handwriting, kiosks give you neat, clean data straight from the customers' fingertips.

Self-service kiosks also reduce the workload of clerks, which means they are free to manage higher-level tasks.

## Waitlist monitor

The next item on the list is a waitlist monitor. Its purpose is easy to grasp: it shows a digital waitlist of customers currently standing in line (be it physical or virtual).

The monitor is connected to the central system, and as soon as the new customer checks in, they appear at the end of the waitlist.

And when their turn finally arrives, the monitor displays a special notification and explains which desk the customer should proceed to next.

Essentially, lobby display monitors keep customers happy and in the know: you know exactly where you stand in a queue, and how quickly the line progresses. The monitor provides real-time data on the approximate number of people queuing and gives insight into queue fluctuations

The additional advantage of waitlist monitors is that they allow you to show the customers' names instead of just numbers. When you check into a kiosk upon entry, you're required to give the system your name.

Once you're done, your name pops up on the screen, giving you the warm, cozy feeling of getting catered to.

## Remote check-in

The year of 2020 has shown the cracks in the queuing model that we all took for granted. The world has gotten so used to physical lines that the moment they started posing danger due to a risk of infection, we've

Remote queuing is a non-essential-made-essential part of queue management that's been making strides in 2020. It helps disperse crowding in waiting areas by keeping queues strictly virtual.

The mechanics are thus: a customer checks queue availability of a given location from afar, checks into the queue online, and gets SMS text messages alerting to the queue status.

As a result, the businesses get to control the current capacity and only host those customers whose turn has arrived.

Using SMS two-way communication, employees also get to chat with customers while they wait. If there are any changes, delays, cancellations or additional requirements, it can all be communicated before the service begins.

## Service dashboard

The last piece of the queue management puzzle is the service dashboard. What it does is centralized management of front and back office activities.

Using the service dashboard, employees get to guide and change the service process on the fly, all from one place:

- Arrange and prioritize customers based on their specific needs.
- Call in the next customer and mark them as no-show in case of a cancellation.
- Look at each customer's history of service interactions.
- Assign a customer to another agent without sending the former back to the queue.

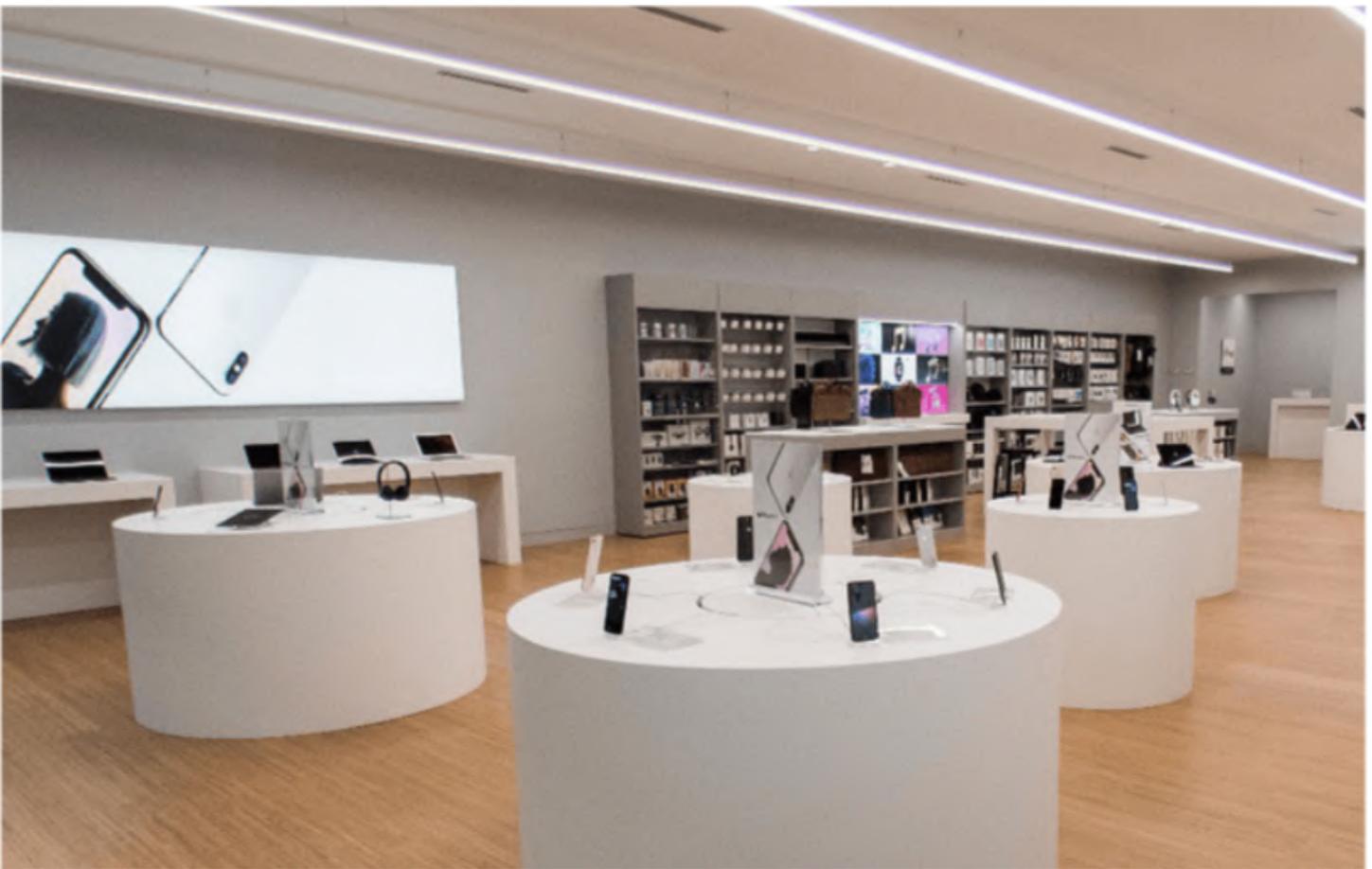
This guarantees that people responsible for service quality are always in the loop and know what the current situation is. In other words, they get the tools to identify where bottlenecks are occurring.

Among other things, the service dashboard also provides performance metrics: how many customers each agent took care of, what the average wait time stats are, which service line is the busiest, when the peak hours are, etc.

Service data is worth its weight in gold. Managers and administrators can use it for performance reports, to justify making adjustments to the workplace: resource allocation, shifts, additional training of staff, etc.

# Chapter 3

## Success story

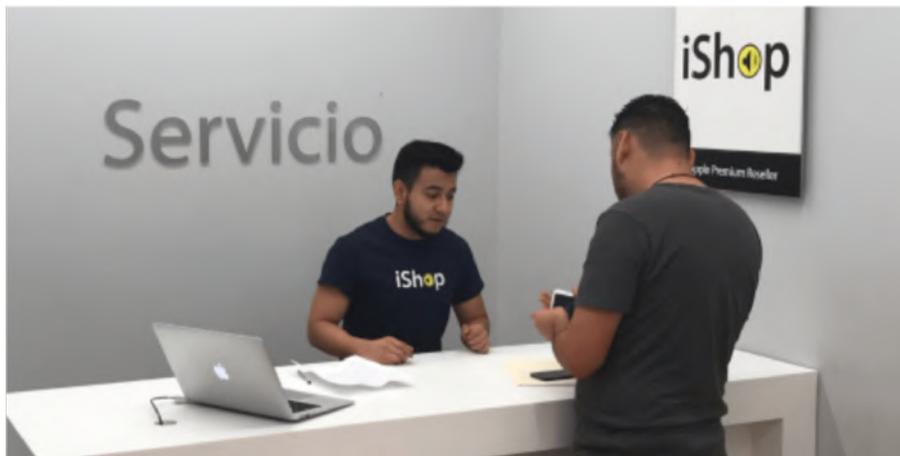


**So far, we've only been dealing with theory. How does digital queue management fare when put to practice? Let's take a closer look at one of Qminder's more successful graduates, and see how exactly they've managed to refine their queuing strategy.**

## How iShop Guatemala managed to reduce its wait time by half

Founded in 2007, iShop Guatemala is the leading Apple Premium reseller in the Republic of Guatemala, with 12 stores, 60 Apple specialists, and 4 Apple-authorized service centers.

The aim of iShop is to provide the best tech solutions while offering friendly and smooth customer service. They want to not only sell major Apple-related accessory brands — which include Bose, Sonos, Marshall, and others — but also build lasting relationships with their customers.



## iShop's new service strategy

Prior to Qminder, iShop did not use any queue management system whatsoever. Customers got served on the first-come, first-served basis, without much thought given to effective crowd management.

In the beginning, when iShop had only a few stores, that seemed like enough. As the number of iShop locations — and with it, the number of daily visitors — grew, it was apparent that disorganized waiting spaces were becoming a huge problem.

One of the customer service centers in particular was getting overcrowded. The problem became exacerbated when iShop agreed to service all iPhones for three separate phone carriers in the Republic of Guatemala. This has opened the gates to many more new customers.

In an attempt to reign in customer waiting times, the CEO of iShop himself started looking for the right queue management tool. After weighing in all the pros and cons of different alternatives, he decided to go with Qminder as he felt the iShop team would benefit the most from its features:

- Ease of setup
- No staff training required
- Performance reporting tools

The first two points were especially critical, as they were looking for a quick solution. The setup of Qminder was indeed a “breeze”, and the system proved to be intuitive and user-friendly enough for every employee to get accustomed to it during the testing period.

## A closer look at iShop's success

The positive results from implementing the new system were quick to show.

The main aim of iShop was to reduce their waiting times, which they did — by more than 50%. Waiting times went down from 40 minutes to under 20 minutes.

**“Our focus has been on making waiting times shorter for our customers. We managed to reduce them by more than 50%.”**

The response from the customers has been especially incredible. Customers were as quick to adapt to the new system as the iShop team, and they found it helps make the shopping experience not only faster but more pleasant as well.

iShop locations don't have a dedicated greeter to welcome each visitor individually. Instead, Qminder plays the greeter's role and gives customers the means to sign themselves up and join the queue.

An Apple TV installed in the largest service center lets visitors know when their turn comes, what their estimated waiting time is, and where to go. This saves everybody the usual queue-related confusion: “Is it my turn yet?”, “Where do I go next?”, “How long do I have to wait?”, etc.

The iShop staff also works more efficiently thanks to Qminder, as the new system gives them structure and deeper understanding of what is going down at every location.

Each week, employees get a performance report for all service centers. This helps them make educated decisions when it comes to staffing questions, such as adding personnel to a certain location or changing the workload.

The last benefit was more of a surprising bonus. As the reseller of Apple products, which are known for their sleek visual aesthetic, iShop takes great pains to look tidy, appealing and innovative. The new queuing system has helped upgrade the look of the waiting spaces, and the fact that Qminder is an Apple-based technology means it gels well with iShop's aesthetic.

## Innovative systems shaping the experience

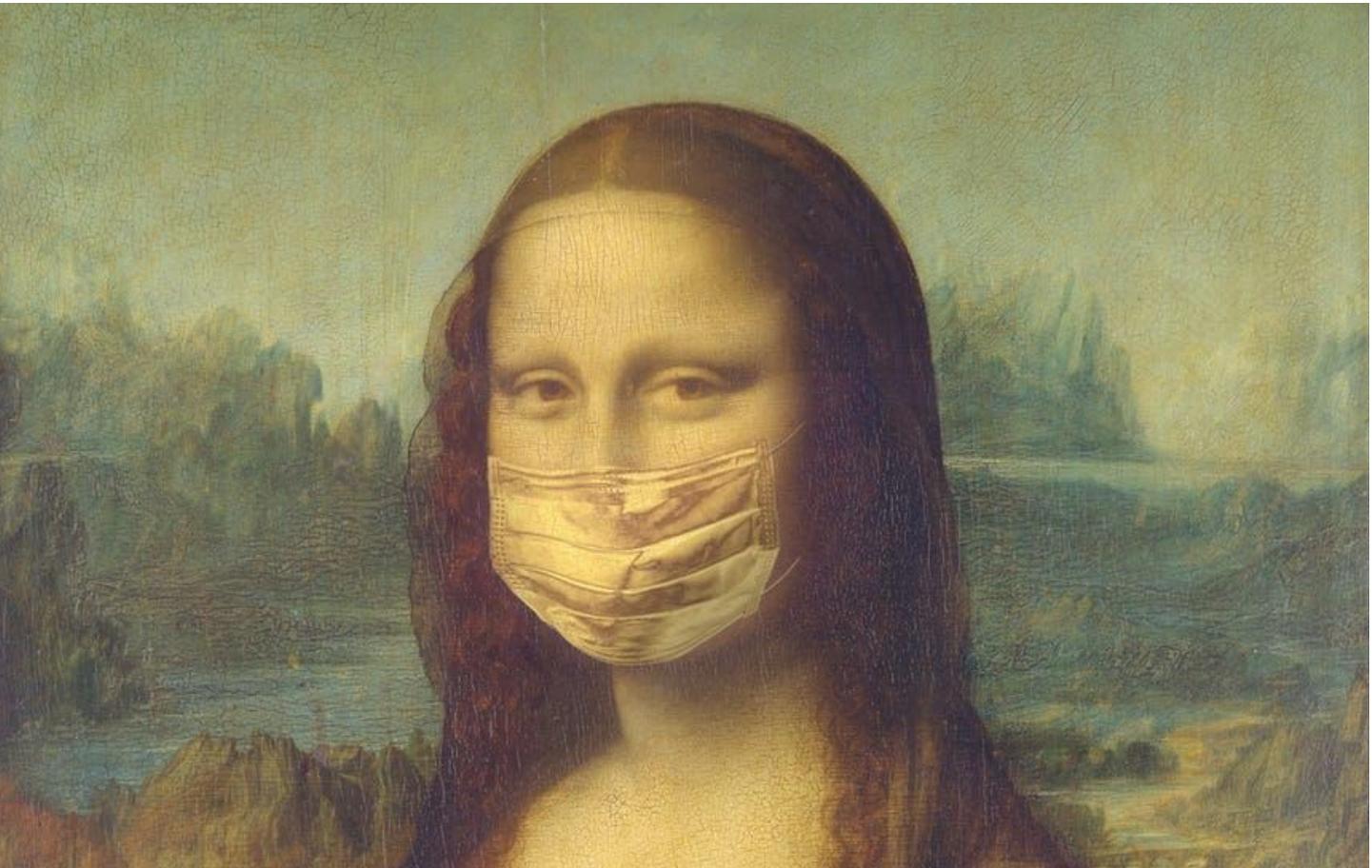
Since they've partnered up with Qminder, iShop opened two more Apple-authorized service centers in Guatemala. Needless to say, they plan to keep using Qminder in all future locations.

**“Qminder is an important part of our day-to-day process and an amazing aid when analyzing traffic and CS rep load.”**

The reduced wait times are the most visible benefit, but not the only one. Efficient customer service is about two things: serving customers fast, and providing memorable experiences. It's Qminder's ability to do both that the iShop team found so valuable.

## Chapter 4

# Social distancing and queuing



**As the governments around the world continue their battle against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), this is a chance for everyone to pitch in and fight the good fight. Queue management exists to help make the experience not only more pleasant, but also safer.**

The year 2020 has stored a few paradigm-shifting surprises. Coronavirus brought entire countries to their knees and forced industries to adapt to how people interact in crowds.

There are several things we can do collectively to stop the spread: personal hygiene, following the official recommendations of the WHO, and practicing social distancing.

## Enforce social distancing

Right now, the best we can do to stop the contagion is to maintain a safe distance of minimum one meter (three feet) from other people. Two meters (six feet) is ideal.

Businesses have started demarcating proper distances with floor markers, so that customers could stand apart safely and reduce the risk of infection.

Additionally, they provide signage and guidance to help keep a safe distance. The general idea is to make queues move quicker so that customers aren't waiting longer than required.

People have already started to respect the distance on their own, but it is sometimes difficult to gauge how close the other person is. To help them, you can put adhesive marks on your floor.

For example, this is how German and Danish supermarkets designate where people should stand to keep the distance (courtesy of Twitter):



Moreover, you should regularly disinfect and wipe down all the surfaces that people come into contact with. This means sign-in kiosks too, as they are frequently touched by visitors.

Invest in alcohol-based disinfecting wipes and have a person stand by to make sure the screen stays clean at all times. Also consider providing your visitors with a hand rub for extra protection.

## Keep your queues virtual

Another way to social distance is to get rid of crowds and physical waiting rooms altogether. If people don't have to stand in a physical line, there are fewer opportunities for the virus to spread.

There might be a way for you to provide service in a contactless manner, while still having an organized queue. For example, you can have designated service agents accepting phone or email inquiries. The visitors are then added to the virtual queue in Qminder.

Here's how one of Qminder clients has been operating during the quarantine period:

"Our walk-up service desk is unmanned, with no waiting area to maintain social distancing. The customers log in on the iPad, we greet them with a text message and see if we can resolve the issue remotely. Only then, we request to meet them in a large open area to resolve their IT issue, with absolute minimum contact with customers and their IT assets."

Migrating queues to the virtual space is a sure way to keep the contagion at bay.

## Use SMS messages for contact-free queuing

Since your main goal should be to empty your lobbies as much as possible, Qminder TV is not as relevant. You want to inform visitors outside your location, not only those currently in your waiting area.

SMS text messages are ideal not only for notifying your customers about their upcoming turn, but also to keep them posted about potential changes in the service: working hours, delays, lunch time, etc.

From their side, customers get to warn you about their wish to cancel or reschedule. All of that — and without the need for face-to-face contact.



# Let customers pick the best time to visit with remote check-in

Quarantines are only effective if people leave their home as seldom and for as little time as possible.

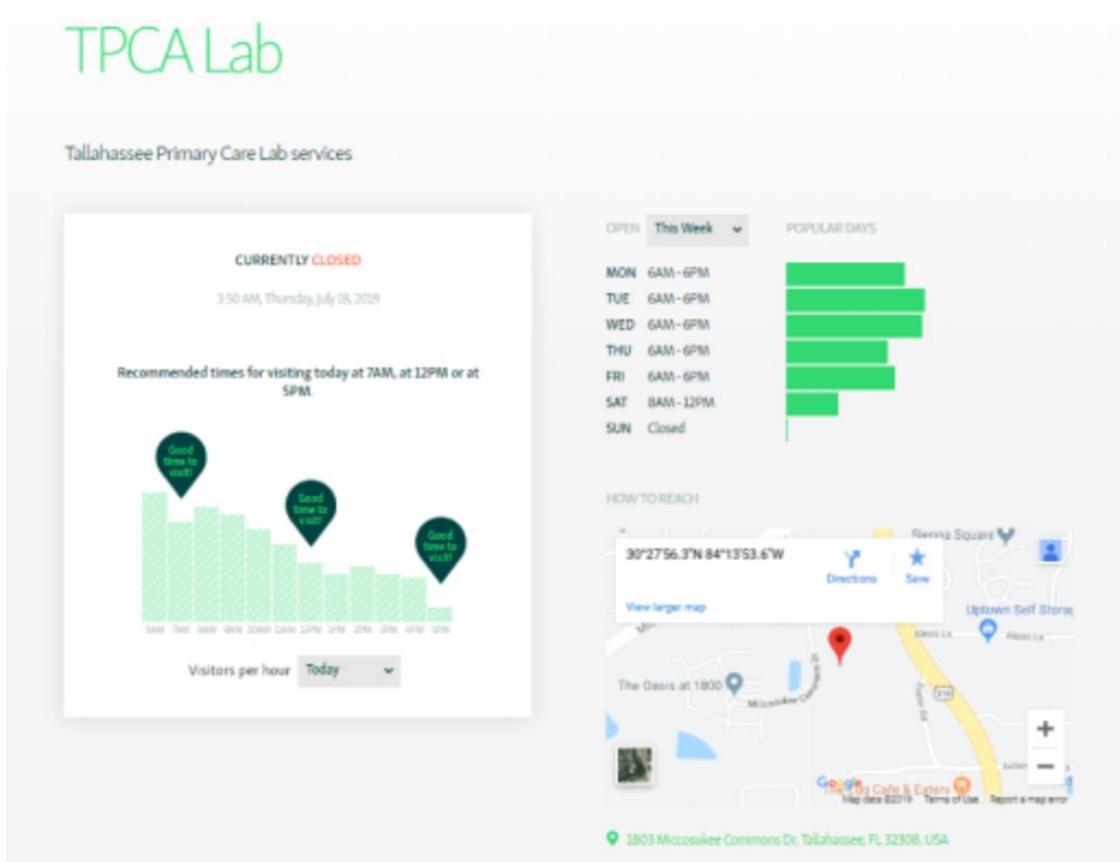
This is not always feasible, as people generally have few means to gauge how busy the location they're going to will be. If they're unlucky, the queues might be too long, forcing them to spend more time outside their home than necessary.

That's why we advise you to start using Visit Planner, which is a special webpage that helps provide your customers with crucial information:

- how many visitors you currently have
- the average waiting time at your location
- the recommended time to visit.

This way, people can tell at a glance whether right now is the ideal time for them to leave their home, or if they should wait it out.

The ability to check in remotely further reduces the risk of contagion, as customers no longer have to be physically present to sign into queues or check their estimated waiting time.



# Final thoughts

Queue management isn't something your business can afford to put on the back burner. Poor wait line management impacts consumer satisfaction, reduces productivity, negatively affects your brand reputation, and ultimately, loses you customers.

What separates a good company from a great company is how engaged it keeps its customers, right from the first moment they step inside the store.

Focusing on queue management costs money, but you should think of it as investing: into your customers, into their experiences, into your future.

Now that you've read it this far, it's up to you to apply everything you've learned from this book and start charting out your next bold steps into the realm of quality queuing experiences.

If you haven't already, check out our blog where we share tips, tricks and thoughts on queue management, customer service, employee engagement, and more.

# About Qminder

Qminder is a queue management software company that's been in the game for over nine years.

Just like you, we are thirsty for new knowledge. A good teacher keeps the learner's mindset, and we try to learn from as many sources as possible.

Over the years, we've partnered with some of the biggest market leaders and trend setters from all kinds of industries: from retail to healthcare, to even government offices.

Some of the shinier nuggets of wisdom that we have parted onto you in this book came from our clients. And hey, there's always room for a new client.

If you liked this book, we'd love to see you share it with your friends and colleagues:

[Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [LinkedIn](#)

Any questions? Contact [support@qminder.com](mailto:support@qminder.com)

# Qminder's other books



## Digitizing Queue Management in Healthcare

Qminder's first ebook delves deep into all things patient experience, from creating a pleasant queuing environment to the intricacies of HIPAA.

The book also features a success story by one of Qminder's more successful partners, Beacon OHSA.