Synovate survey shows grappling with gratuities is tipping consumers over the edge

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11 July 2007 - HONG KONG â€" Forty five percent of consumers globally often feel pressured to leave a tip when they don't want to and close to one third have difficulty determining the appropriate amount of tip to leave at a restaurant according to a recent survey by global market research company Synovate.

In a bid to glean a global perspective on appropriate tipping practices, Synovate surveyed over 6,800 respondents in 10 nations to determine how different cultures tip, who they tip, and just what tips consumers over the edge when it comes to rewarding for good service.

Synovate Director Travel and Tourism, Sheri Lambert, said Synovate's survey shows that tipping is a source of unwarranted pressure, uncertainty and discomfort for consumers all around the world.

"Feeling an obligation to leave a gratuity is one of the most common complaints cited by consumers in relation to tipping, with 45% of respondents sometimes feeling pressured to leave a tip when they don't want to and 36% being embarrassed if they don't leave a tip due to bad service but feel one is expected," she said.

â€œKnowing how much to tip also causes confusion, with almost one third of all consumers surveyed (29%) having difficulty determining the amount of tip to leave, and an additional 30% believing that it is better for restaurants to automatically add a service charge to a bill.

"To further add to the uncertainty, tipping practices are reliant upon a consumers' locality, with 60% of those who do regularly provide a tip usually changing their behaviour to suit local habits when abroad," she added.

Well-known for their accommodating nature, consumers from the United Kingdom (77%) are the most likely to change their tipping behaviour according to local custom when they are overseas, followed by respondents from Hong Kong (74%) and Canada (72%).

Brazilians (58%), Americans (47%) and Serbians (45%) were the least likely to change the way they tip when travelling.

How much should you tip?
The inevitable question heard at the end of many restaurant meals was asked of consumers across the globe, with the most common answer from 31% of all respondents being between 10 and 15 percent of the bill.

The Synovate global tipping survey showed that 15% of consumers will usually leave less than 10 percent of the bill, 14% will leave between 15 to 20 percent of the bill, while the largest group of all (36%) don't base the amount of their tip on the final bill.

Unsurprisingly, Americans are the world's largest tippers, with 53% of respondents from the USA believing that a tip of between 15 and 20 percent of the bill is an appropriate amount to leave at the end of a meal, while Russians were the least generous, leaving less than 10 percent of a bill on average.

Synovate Executive Director Customer Insights, Mike Sherman, said although most consumers do tend to tip, lower income levels and pre-existing service charges in some countries meant numerous consumers were not able to tip or did not view tipping as a necessity.

"Tipping for good service is a cultural norm accepted in most of the countries surveyed. However, in some places where tipping is not so prevalent, including Indonesia, Serbia and Brazil, low income levels restrict consumers' behaviour, with non-tipping respondents naming low income as the main reason for not regularly providing a gratuity," he said.

"In contrast, the majority of consumers who did not provide a tip in some of the wealthier countries, such as France and Hong Kong, named the fact that a service charge was included as the main reason they did not normally leave a gratuity."

Who do you tip?
Consumers are most likely to tip the world's waiters (86%), hairdressers (58%) and taxi drivers (52%) for their assistance, while casino dealers (8%), hotel doormen (14%) and coat check staff (22%) are the least likely to be rewarded.

Other service providers named by consumers as likely to receive a tip for their service include bartenders (46%), hotel

bellhops (43%) and the handyman (33%).

Restaurant wait staff were the first pick across all countries surveyed except Indonesia, where the local handyman is the person most likely to be tipped. Handymen also fared well in Serbia and Brazil, where 75% and 62% of respondents respectively said they would reward such workers with a tip for their service.

Synovate's global tipping study surveyed 6,827 consumers across Brazil, Canada, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Russia, Serbia, France, Spain, the UK and the United States in April 2007 and was conducted using Synovateâ€™s Global Omnibus.

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