



PARTNERS IN MARKETING

July 2010 – Top ten tips for exceptional customer service

We've all experienced it dozens of times. Advertisers spend millions of pounds creating a positive brand image in your mind only to have it wiped out completely when you have to gesture like a performing monkey to get the attention of a group of gossiping sales staff clustered in a corner. Or when a virtual voice drones "please choose from the following (interminable) options" down the phone line when you have a pressing problem to solve.

But let's look at your business. Do you know what your customers are thinking or saying about you? Should you care? Customers are your lifeblood. Did you know it costs between six and eight times more money to recruit a new customer than to keep an old one? Existing customers deliver a 12% higher profit margin and companies who hold on to them grow 9% faster than those that don't. A customer tells at least 10 people they know about their experience with your business (especially if the experience was bad). With the proliferation of email and social networking, those initial 10 people could mushroom into thousands, even hundreds of thousands – enough to make you a millionaire or break your company completely.

Good customers are like gold dust and it's vital your staff constantly nurture them. If your employees have already had customer service training, but customers are vanishing nevertheless, the following top ten tips could be the most valuable you'll ever read:

1. Treat your employees well. Disgruntled staff put customers off. Find out what is wrong and fix it.
2. Communicate, communicate, communicate. Employees need to be kept in the know so they feel like valued insiders. Talk to them often.
3. Help staff see themselves as business consultants, not just employees. Give them what it takes to make customer-facing decisions without having to call a supervisor.
4. Encourage employees to think of customers as potentially big, BIG spenders and treat them accordingly.
5. Welcome new ideas and reward innovation. No one knows your customers as well as employees who see them every day; encourage their suggestions.
6. Develop 360° thinking. Managers, juniors, directors– they all need praise from each other, especially reciprocal congratulations when they help resolve a customer's problem.
7. Exploit the power of suggestion. Ask everybody to study the competition. What are they doing better? Or worse? What ideas can you develop from the thoughts of frontline staff?
8. Seek out customer feedback and act on it. You don't need expensive surveys to tell you what customers are saying. Just assign one or more employees to look for positive and negative conversations on the internet – blogs or comments pages, for instance.
9. Make existing customers feel special. Offer them incentives, make every transaction pleasant, communicate openly and have a real person answer the phone, thanking the customer for their business.
10. Reward referrals from current customers. It could be a cash voucher, a bonus buy, a free product or service – whatever the monetary value, the real value will be inestimable in terms of business gained – and retained.



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We've seen that what customers say about you counts – big time. Word of mouth is not only the cheapest form of advertising, it's far and away the most accepted as sincere. This is why good customer service is the key to survival, for small businesses in particular. Start with the Golden Rule – treat all staff as you would like to be treated yourself, keep them informed and truly believe that they will do everything it takes to ensure your customers are happy and satisfied all the time. The dividends will pay handsomely.

