

Customer Service Tips for Small Businesses

In today's global economy, customers are looking for hassle-free, convenient, pleasant shopping. Gone are the days when the customer overlooked poor service because the price was discounted. There are too many options available to shoppers which can be found on the Internet. Finding ways to exceed the customers' expectations is a key success factors for small businesses.

Have you ever carefully analyzed a print ad or web site from a successful competitor? Like many successful ads, they feature testimonials by satisfied customers. But you need to read the ad carefully. Why are their customers so satisfied? They're talking about the service, not the product. They say things such as, "They came to deliver my couch or refrigerator just when they said they would." And "I was so impressed when I saw the men taking extra care not to damage my new product or dirty my house."

Smart business owners, knows that good customer service is important to their business' potential customers. Entrepreneurs also know that there are a lot of other companies that sell similar products to theirs. But the way a company delivers the products they sell provides an illustration of the following customer service tips:

1) Provide customer service that distinguishes your business from your competitors.

The best product in the world is just going to stay on the shelves and get dusty if you don't support it with customer service that makes your product "better" than the identical product offered by the competition.

One of the most effective advertising programs is the power of word-of-mouth. Good customer service not only makes your customer want to come back and do more business with your company; it also encourages your customer to recommend your business to his or her friends.

2) Solicit and use testimonials from your satisfied customers.

Authentic testimonials from actual satisfied customers can be very powerful sales tools. But most customers, no matter how satisfied, won't think to volunteer their endorsement. So ask them - and then use their testimonials to encourage others to try your products or services. You should make it easy for them to provide a written testimonial; you may need to give them a simple template for a written testimonial letter.

3) Deliver on your customer service promises.

Customers love it when businesses actually deliver when they said they would. For your business, it might be showing up to do an estimate when you said you would, or dealing with a complaint expeditiously. If you cannot deliver on your promise, then do not make a promise in the first place. Customer service that falls through on the follow through is no customer service at all.

4) Make it easy for your customers to buy your product or service.

You don't have to go to the local bookstore to buy a book (although you can if you want to). You can just as easily purchase books can shop online if you prefer. Couple that availability with the capability of 24 hour a day, any day of the week telephone shopping, and you've got unbeatable customer convenience.

5) Establish clear return and refund policies that provide customer satisfaction.

When you shop at a store like Nordstrom's or Sears, you know that you can return what you've purchased with absolutely no questions asked for a full refund. This aspect of their customer service earned them tremendous customer loyalty, and set them apart from the competition. You can also use this approach to attract and retain more customers.

6) Develop a dependable supply chain and/or delivery system.

An often overlooked aspect of good customer service is having a cost efficient delivery system. Successful businesses use their delivery infrastructure as a competitive advantage and valuable customer service tool. These companies can deliver the goods to their customers in a timely and low cost manner.

Currently, many firms are struggling with how to deliver products that are sold on their web site. Too many e-commerce web sites treat delivery logistics as an afterthought; they seem to want to put the glossy catalog online and "see how it goes" before bothering to develop the backend. These are companies that offer customer disservice instead of customer service! Unlike many e-commerce web sites trying to sell online, smart businesses spent a great deal of time and thought about putting together their backend before they went online.

Small businesses can pick up a lot of customer service tips from other successful businesses both large and small. To begin work on your customer service program, put yourself in your customer's place. How easy is it for him or her to find out about and purchase your products or services? What policies do you have in place to deal with his or her problems in a way that will satisfy the customer? And how is your customer service "better" than the customer service provided by your competitors? Improving your customer service can also improve your business' bottom line and that is the bottom line!