

Becoming A Solution To Your Customers Problems

By Chuck And Sue DeFiore

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Those of us in home based and small businesses are in effect selling our product. So becoming an effective salesperson is very important. Remember, however, that selling is not the only thing you do. Don't forget to use your time wisely.

What you want to do to help you move forward is to:

Plan and prioritize. If the majority of your day is spent with your customers, you will need some down time. You need to have time to look at the trends in your business. By this I mean go over your customer records, see where patterns are, what changes you need to make and then set up a plan to implement those changes. If you spend a little time at the end of each day going over what transpired during the day and set up your plan and schedule for the next day, you will be much better prepared for the next day and the subsequent days.

At the beginning of each week, take a look at where you want your business to be and make plans on how to get there. If something you are doing isn't working, make changes. However, then you need to give those changes time to work. If they don't work, change them again. Most important is that you spend the time each week to figure out what your business needs are and what your needs are, till you come up with what works best for you, your business and your customers.

As many of our long time readers know, I am a big proponent of To Do lists. Make up a daily to do list, a weekly and a monthly. Remember to consider your goals when making up your To Do list. Where do you want your business to be in five years, ten years? When you ask yourself these questions, you focus on the direction you want your business to take and the income you want to make.

Remember, after you have determined what your goals are, then take your goals and figure out the steps you need to take to get to that particular goal. Do this with each of your goals. Since we are concentrating on sales in this article, ask yourself: Do I need a new product? Do I need to look for other ways to sell my products? If I make these changes will I need additional funds? If I need funds should I get a partner or find an investor? If I increase my business will I need to hire someone? Once you have answered these questions, then take the steps you have come up with and put them on your To Do list.

It is very important that you have a calendar and that you set deadlines. Your calendar can be paper or electronic. The most important thing is that you use it. Put all your goals, the steps needed to get to your goals, and deadlines to meet those steps in your calendar. Remember, if you use your

calendar wisely it will help you accomplish what you need to and help you to get things done efficiently and on time.

To show you how your calendar can work for you, let's set up a marketing campaign. First, you want to schedule deadlines for everything that needs to be done before you can even start the campaign.

First set a deadline of September 4 to re-price all your current products. By the 12th of September contact the media you will be using for rate information along with their readership information, and what their ad copy requirements are. In our example the media would be newspapers and magazines. However, you can also do the same for television, billboard, etc. By the end of September (the 30th) make up your ad budget for the year. You will want to determine how much it will cost you on a monthly basis, so you can have an accurate determination of your monthly expenses. By the middle of October (let's say the 15th) set a deadline for your ad copy and any art so that you can meet their deadline. Let's say in our example it is the 1st of the month. So that would be November 1st.

The above example illustrates how to take a large project and break it down into smaller projects and to set deadlines for them so that you can get the whole project done.

As any successful business owner will tell you, of paramount importance is to keep in touch with customers. You can call your regular customers often, perhaps every six weeks or every month. Or if calling is not feasible in your business, keep in contact by sending post cards, flyers, or a special announcement. Be sure to keep track of when you last talked with each individual, or were in contact with them. Also, if possible, make some comment that personalizes the call, or written contact. For example, ask about new developments in their business or mention the spouse or children by name. Know your customer. Make your customer feel important.

A great way to keep in touch with your customer is after you've made a sale, send a thank you note. If your business warrants it, if your customer will probably run out of supplies in three months, send a reminder note.

As we all know catalogs are great, however, they are very costly to mail. Rather than send a catalog why not just send a postcard to your customers announcing the new items you have added to your catalog. If they use a particular product, mention that on the post card. The holiday is a great time of year to contact customers. If your business warrants it, a birthday card is a nice touch. For example, my insurance company sends me a birthday card every year, along with a calendar.

Some other ways to stay in touch is to send them an article about your business or a catalog sheet (these usually focus on one or a couple of items) or start a newsletter and send it to your customers on a quarterly basis or more often if warranted.

Another excellent way to keep in touch with your customer is to become a resource for your customers. Remember, many times when you make a sale, you provide a solution to a problem. Lease purchasing is a solution for those who need to move their home quickly. A repair service is a solution for wear and tear that comes with time. Tax preparers provide a solution to those that dread tax time and all the paperwork involved. Newsletters are a great way to become a resource. You could have a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) article on a particular product you sell. Make your customer aware that you can provide them with solutions for a certain type of problem. If your customer has a problem that you can't solve refer them to another expert. If you are not sure of something when your customer asks, don't bluff your way through it. Tell your customer that you will get back to them with an answer.

One of the most important things is to deliver what you promise. If you say something will go out on a specific day, be sure it does. If you say you will get back to them with certain information, be sure you do so. Never let your customer down.

When your customers and others think of you, you want to be thought of as a problem solver. Someone who is reliable, organized, and cares. If you do all of the above you can accomplish this and customers will call you, and more importantly, refer others to you.

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