

# What's the Secret to Repeat Business?

By Diane Hughes

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When you think about ways to gain repeat business from your customers, you probably turn your thoughts to marketing efforts such as advertising, public relations and other means that will allow you to repeatedly be seen. However, without one particular element included in your plan, your efforts to entice customers to buy over and over will fail. Even autoresponders - the "king" of repeat exposure - can't produce the type of loyalty needed to ensure your customers continually send their dollars your way.

This missing link is often not even considered as part of a marketing plan - but it should be! What is the secret to repeat business? Exceptional customer service. Are you surprised? You really shouldn't be. Put yourself in "consumer mode" for the next minute or two and let's explore the power of a solid customer service program.

Think of the last time you purchased from a business and had a poor experience. What brought you to the business to begin with? Maybe low price. Perhaps it was that the company had a product/service you needed immediately. Even selection can play a role in attracting us to a business. But once you bought, what happened next?

When the product didn't live up to your standards or when the service didn't work as expected, did you get the response you needed? Did the company show concern for your position? Did they correct the mistake or issue a refund? If not, you - like most others - probably left vowing never to buy from them again.

What you experienced was a marketing plan that had no follow-through. They were able to entice you and draw you

in. They were successful in getting you to spend your money. However, when it came time for the plan to promote "backend sales", it failed. It had no follow-through and they lost the remainder of your business for life.

Here are several things to consider when creating a customer service program that will help to boost your marketing plan and your repeat business.

1. Weigh your options. Many small business owners panic at the sound of the word "refund". Don't! Think seriously about what you'll be losing. You could take a small loss of \$29.95 now (or whatever the cost of the product is) in exchange for future sales; or you can retain your \$29.95 and lose hundreds or thousands of dollars later in future business. If their complaints are handled to their satisfaction, the majority of consumers say they will buy from your company again.
2. Get personal. The number one complaint most consumers have is that businesses don't appear to care whether they buy from them or not. Get to know your customers. Send a thank you note or small gift when a purchase is made. Fire off a short "just checking in" email when the customer's purchases seem to slow down just to ensure all is OK. This extra effort will be noticed - and appreciated.
3. Follow through. If and when a problem with a customer does arise, be sure to follow through. Don't simply tell the customer that you'll ship a replacement product immediately. Call or email them a day or two later to be sure the new product arrived and is working as needed. This is a true way to WOW your customers and lock in future purchases.
4. Have a plan. Don't fall victim to "policy", but do have a flexible plan of action for when customers aren't 100% satisfied. Knowing what you plan to do will alleviate some of the shock and stress associated with handling unsatisfied customers. It will also allow you to present yourself in a helpful and friendly way when working to fix the problem.

A 1996 study performed by the U.S. White House Office of Consumer Affairs proved that, if you treat your customers with genuine caring and fairness, they will indeed reward you with their repeat business for years to come. That's something you just can't get from ads or autoresponders!

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Diane Hughes is an accomplished internet entrepreneur and editor of the popular ProBizTips Newsletter. You can learn

more about Diane and her success in helping many start a home business and make money from home by clicking below:

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