

Online Customer Service is an Activity, not a Department

By George McKenzie

Online Customer Service is an Activity, not a Department

George McKenzie
george@get-free-publicity.com

The Academy Of Marketing And Advertising <http://www.get-free-publicity.com>

"Well, this is certainly different."

I shouldn't have been surprised when my new customer said it, but his words still got me shaking my head in wonder.

The customer had just bought my new ebook, but he was having trouble downloading it. So he sent an email asking for help.

Instead of emailing him back, I went to his website, got his phone number, and called him directly.

"You're a rare bird" he continued. "Someone who does business on the internet but doesn't mind picking up the phone."

Wow. Has personal contact and service gone the way of the 286?

In my days as a TV anchor, I learned early that nothing impresses a viewer more than getting a personal phone call from someone they invite into their home via their TV set.

But the same holds true for anyone who's willing to put money in your pocket by buying whatever you're selling.

Customer service is not a euphemism for the complaint department. Customer service is everything you do to care for your customer from the very first contact throughout your entire relationship with them. Since your goal is a permanent relationship, client care is ongoing.

Begin with a customer-friendly website--one that is easy to read, simple to navigate, convenient to order, and effortless to contact you. Customers are much less interested in viewing a flashy presentation than in getting the information they want.

Make your service friendly and personal. Use your client's name whenever possible. Even in automated email

responses, you can insert the customer's first name in the subject line and the body of the message to personalize the message.

Make certain that the person answering the phone or responding to email receives proper training. The customer's first contact with your company is critical in creating a positive image as the first impression. If you are a sole practitioner, take off all your many hats except customer service and focus totally on your interaction with a customer.

The cost of making a minor concession to keep the customer happy is much less than the cost of angering or irritating a customer. When you fail to solve the problem, you risk losing that customer's business as well as the business of everyone he tells about your poor service. You must deal with the customer's perception, which may differ from reality.

Do what you say you're going to, and train your employees to do the same. If there is a delay in shipping a product or if you can't keep a commitment, contact the customer immediately to let him know.

Don't wait for problems to develop or customers to complain. Give your customers a chance to tell you how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with your service. Polls are your website are effective and uncomplicated ways for your customers to give you feedback.

If a customer is unhappy, he really wants someone to listen to him and respond to his concerns. On the phone, listen to his complaint with genuine concern. In email, acknowledge his message and empathize with his dissatisfaction before discussing a resolution to the problem.

Ask a dissatisfied customer how he would like the problem resolved. He may surprise you by asking for less than you're willing to give. If he does make an unreasonable demand, he will be more willing to negotiate if you consider his request and respond reasonably.

A dissatisfied customer usually tells everyone he knows; a satisfied customer occasionally tells others. A customer who has had a problem with your company that was resolved beyond his expectations will spread the word about what great service he received from your company.

Set your business apart by going beyond what the customer expects. Put your customer first, and your company will be his first choice.

Customer service, client care--whatever name you call it, the better you do it, the more loyal a clientele you'll build and

the more successful you will be.

George McKenzie is the author of "Going Public: 10 Ways To Use The Mass Media For Free Advertising, Internet Marketing And Website Promotion. <http://www.get-free-publicity.com>

He has almost thirty years experience in radio and TV. Subscribe to his free ezine, "Get Free Publicity," by sending a blank email to <mailto:george2-12375@sendtheinfo.com>

[Get-Articles.com : 1000's of reprintable business and internet marketing-related articles.](#)

[Submit your article for reprint.](#)