

What Are YOU Doing to Keep Your Customers?

By Angela Wu

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Not too long ago I ran a survey on my site asking visitors what their main complaints were about shopping for or finding information online.

An overwhelming number of people said: customer service.

It appears that many online businesses are not doing a particularly good job of replying to inquiries in a timely manner.

Questions about the product, customer requests for help, constructive suggestions ... they all go unanswered. I'm not implying that every single email requires a response - but legitimate inquiries certainly deserve one. They give you the opportunity to display your product's benefits and convert a visitor into a customer.

Making sales is always great ... but building long-term relationships with your customers is even better. Happy customers are much more likely refer others to you. It's free advertising at it's best! Wouldn't you be more inclined to purchase something recommended to you by someone you trust?

Customer service takes practice and experience. Here are a few tips to get you started ...

• Learn how to use your email software effectively. Use filters, signatures, stationery, and address books to automatically file and answer some of your email. This in itself can save you a significant amount of time, and it helps you to prioritize. Try to provide your customers with the fast, helpful service they expect.

• Automate responses where appropriate. For example, use

an autoresponder to distribute free reports or download links. This is far preferable to forcing your customer to wait several days for a manual email from you. Automation is a good choice for anything that does not require a personalized response. It frees up your time (time that can be better spent elsewhere) and it gives your customer instant service.

• Create or find bonuses that you can give away to your customers. Bundle them with a subscription to your newsletter, a product purchase, or even offer them as a 'surprise gift'.

• Show appreciation. For example, offer repeat customers a 'loyalty discount'.

• Remember that words can easily be misinterpreted in an email. Choose carefully.

• *Listen*. Encourage your visitors to write to you with suggestions. Criticism may not be the nicest thing to hear, but it can give you insight into areas of your business that may need improvement. Give your customers what they want and they'll be more likely to return.

The success of a business depends in large part on the satisfaction of its clients. Not only can happy customers refer others to you, but they are much more likely to return for future purchases. A little extra attention can go a long ways. Isn't it worth it?

Angela is the editor of Online Business Basics, an exclusive newsletter for eBusiness beginners. OBB features ongoing tutorials on how to build a profitable Internet business on a shoestring budget. You don't need a million-dollar budget to be successful! Find out how you too can join the thousands quietly earning a living online:
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