

4 ways to improve communications with your customers to create sustainable profits

By Justin Hitt

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If there were just one magic word you could say to your customers and double your profits, wouldn't probably use it every day. Fortunately, a word does exist, but it's not what you say, it's something you do – it's communications. Communications with your customers is so important; in fact, it could be the difference of being in business or going out of business. Unfortunately, 8 out of 10 businesses unknowingly drive off their customers with poor communications!

I am probably the best person to talk to you about communications in business, I made a mistake that cost me over \$250,000 dollars, crashed my business and almost put me on the streets. At the time, I did not see the problem, I blamed it all on the customers. They were not paying their bills, receivables were growing, but I just was not being paid. Now with hindsight and experiencing the humbling effects of poverty, I can tell you it was my entire problem – and the problem was poor communications.

As you read these tips, understand you just cannot use one and forget the rest, you need to implement each in every part of your business. I knew how to ask for business, but I never did the most important thing here in tip number one.

1. Ask the customer how everything is going with every part of your business

Your customer knows more about your company's problems than we would like to think. In my case, invoicing was slow and difficult to understand which generated questions never asked. All it would have taken is a little time to checkup on myself and listen, as easy to avoid as to make.

Starting with the customer you most recently have done business with, ask simply "Is there anything we could do better to serve you?" In most situations, (unless you have made a mistake) you do not want to ask if they have any problems, just where you can improve for them. If you start asking your customers to point out problems, they will most likely look for them – frankly, if they do point a problem out, thank them for it and correct it as soon as possible.

2. Ask your best customers for business

You have a valuable preexisting relationships with anyone who has purchased your product no matter how long ago. This investment in your organization gives your prime candidates to ask for

additional business. Calling these customers lets them know you are still thinking of them and are interested in continuing the relationships.

Assuming the customer had a positive experience with you in the past, they may purchase again, you could be taking them away from your competition. Now, do not be forceful, a polite call asking, "Jane, in 1992 you purchased (our product) do you have the need for (our product) today?" Do not just end the call there, find out how the customer is doing find out ways you can do business with them in the future. Be as helpful as possible to your existing customers.

3. Personally thank your top 10 customers face-to-face

Nothing beats a personal face-to-face 'thank you for your business' – this is something you can do anytime without any special provisions. This is even more important with your top customers, they invest a lot in your organization let them know personally. Meet with your top 10 customers regularly, it makes the business more personal and in turn makes you their #1 vendor for future transactions.

To implement this powerful strategy you can do anything from giving vacation or travel gifts, meeting a customer for lunch, or arranging a quick game of golf. The most important aspect is you take a few minutes to sincerely thank your customer with a firm handshake or pat on the back. This physical association with positive rewards will be remembered and help the customer feel more comfortable doing business with you in the future.

4. Send a personal thank you after every sale from the person closest to the customer (even if it's a front line hourly worker)

When was the last time someone sent you a personal note thanking you for being his or her customer, wasn't that note more meaningful coming from someone you already knew. Any company can mass mail template thank you notes, very few come from employees close to the customer. As in previous examples, a simple card or postcard from an employee present at the sale will improve customer loyalty.

A personal thank you delivered closely after the sale is a positive reinforcement to purchase again from your organization. It really does not matter how large the purchase was, we want to keep in mind the lifetime value of a customer. At the end of each day, encourage each sales representative to jot down a quick note to each individual who purchased that day. Send these items daily.

It is so simple and I missed it, perhaps it was because of the excitement of the Dot.com rush or my 20-something mind just need to be taught a lesson. Either way, by asking your customers how things are going, for more business, personally thanking people for buying, and a short thank you note, you can avoid what I had to go through.

These tips also work to strengthen relationships with your partners, vendors, and others you interact with outside of customers. Tackle one of these areas as soon as today, you will be astonished in what you find happens to both increased profits and substantial business improvements. Now get out there—do it!

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Business development and strategic relations consultant Justin Hitt shares more of his insight at <http://www.justinhitt.com/> Author of "101 Strategies for more Profitable Customers" and other documents available online.

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