

Treat Me Like An Old Bag! Please!

By Anne M. Obarski

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Anne M. Obarski
anne@merchandiseconcepts.com

Merchandise Concepts <http://www.merchandiseconcepts.com>

Have you ever had your luggage "lost" by an airline? Have you ever looked closely at the faces of the people who are reporting their "lost luggage" in one of those little rooms at the airport? It is truly a sad event. I have been extremely lucky in my travels that the airlines have lost my luggage only once, and it was on my return trip home. The suitcase was dropped off the next morning and I never really missed it. I do remember, however, that horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach as I watched that almost empty conveyor belt go around and around. I prayed that on its next trip around my suitcase would appear through those magic strings of vinyl, you know, the kind that look like the ones that brush your car as you go through a car wash. There are always those few items that are not claimed and they continue to make the same trip until someone finally claims them or the airport personnel retrieve them to a holding area.

I am reminded of the time Erma Bombeck got in one of those plastic bins and physically road on the conveyor belt at an airport to see exactly where your luggage went from the time they took it off the plane till you received it. It was so funny to see her in that bin with her legs dangling like a rag doll on the outside of the bin. "Hey Erma, you didn't see mine back there, did you?" You have to maintain some type of humor in this situation or you could easily wish to strangle someone. Experts tell you to carefully label your luggage with a bright, unusual tag so that you can identify it quickly. So many bags these days look alike. You know the typical black suitcase with a retractable handle and wheels and for the most part, are usually carried on the plane to specifically avoid being lost.

This whole process reminds me of a new commercial for an airline that says something like this, "Without proper handling, customers like bags, are easily lost."

That made me think! My plain black bag, as typical as it may be, is very important to me. There is not another one out there exactly like it. What it has inside is unique, even special to me. I would be heart broken if I lost that bag. Not because of the bag itself, that could be replaced. It's the items, no, the heart of the bag, that would be hard to replace. And so it is with customers.

Businesses should treat each customer like precious cargo and here are three tips to avoid losing them!

1. Special Handling! Each customer is special. They have taken time to either call you or come into your place of business. They could have gone elsewhere, but they didn't. They deserve the best treatment you can give them. Put on the "kid gloves" and give them the preferential treatment they deserve.

2. Don't assume! Too often businesses assume a lot about their customers. The customer is just browsing, their not going to buy, their too picky, they don't dress like they could afford to shop here, their wasting my time and so on. Never, ever assume your customer can do anything, except shop somewhere else!

3. Fragile! Handle with Care! Sam Walton once made a statement something like this; " The customer pays your salary, grants your vacation, pays for your house and your car, but can dismiss you if you displease them." Can you afford to lose even one customer?

Customers might look alike, and act alike, but they certainly don't want to be treated alike! I'm like that well-worn piece of luggage. I've been around the "carousel" a few times and I know what it feels like to be treated with care. I don't want to be a "lost" customer because you didn't realize how special I am to your business. So go ahead, Treat me like an old bag, please!

Anne M. Obarski is the "Eye on Retail Performance". She is an author, professional speaker, retail consultant, and Executive Director of Merchandise Concepts. Anne presents keynotes, seminars and workshops nationwide. She works with companies who are performance, profit and people focused and helps leaders see their businesses through their customers' eyes. Anne's mystery shoppers have secretly "snooped" over 2000 stores searching for excellence in customer service. Reach Anne at <http://www.merchandiseconcepts.com> or <mailto:anne@merchandiseconcepts.com>

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