

# Increase Sales with Customer Service

By Melanie McIntosh

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We all think we are doing well with our own customer service. With so much information available on customer service, why is service still one of the biggest complaints by customers? What is the reality? Do customers expect more than is realistic? Is it simply that good service is taken for granted, but one incident of poor service is blown out of proportion?

Perhaps we blind to our own mistakes. Are we failing to look at our stores from the customers' perspective? Are we satisfied with service that is just 'good enough' because we have so many other concerns to attend to?

To gain insight into some of these questions, I decided to go shopping. I resolved to visit a variety of different retailers in my community to get a sense of the level of service customers receive. My field research has only just begun - in a couple of hours I managed to visit several retailers at a local mall. However, my I did receive a strong initial perception of the level of service.

Traffic seemed slow for a Wednesday afternoon, but was likely pretty average for this time of year. In general staff was lean and occupied with re-stocking and tidying chores. My impression was that none of the stores I visited would be considered to have 'bad' service, but in general the sales staff were a little aloof. They were visible, available to assist when necessary, and were competent when helping customers. Something was missing...

Most of the sales associates I saw lacked energy. They were quite willing to help anyone that looked like they were going to buy. They were not unfriendly, but no one appeared to be interested in actively selling, or providing more information than was specifically requested. In no case was I greeted within the first minute of entering a store.

With so many retailers providing similar products, stores need to differentiate themselves with customer service. Here are three ways we can make our stores stand out from the competition:

## 1. BE ENERGETIC

Our stores need to exude energy to attract customers. When traffic is slow we tend to slow down in our stores as well. There is less of a sense of urgency in our tasks, and the atmosphere seems a little laid back. This can be perceived by our customers as being less interested, or aloof. Rather than fall into this trap, we need to keep our energy level high. Customers will be more attracted to shop in a store where the atmosphere is dynamic and positive, than one that is dull and lifeless.

## 2. BE SELLING

Our sales associates need to be actively selling - not just processing transactions. We can't just depend on the merchandise to sell itself. Train & re-train your staff in the basics of selling: greeting, asking questions, offering product knowledge & benefits, making suggestions, closing the sale and thanking the customer. Practice turning those 'browsers' into 'buyers' now, and your staff will be well-prepared for the busy times.

## 3. BE PERSONAL

If we want to stay ahead of the game, we need to be actively interested in our customers. Encourage your staff to get to know customers personally by name, and to engage in friendly conversation. Developing genuine relationships with our customers will do more to encourage repeat business and loyalty than any advertising campaign or loyalty card.

Think about the level of service in your own store. Instead of asking yourself if your business offers 'good' or 'bad' service - no one wants to admit to providing 'bad' service - ask yourself if you could do more to use customer service as a tool to increase sales. Just one more sale each day can add up to great sales for a month!

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(c) Melanie McIntosh is the editor of Retail Tips newsletter and owner of Inspire Retail Solutions, a retail consulting business specializing in helping retailers develop inviting shopping environments.

If you have any feedback or customer service tips you'd like to share, please send them to: [feedback@inspire.bc.ca](mailto:feedback@inspire.bc.ca)

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