

# Customer Service Is King

By Michael Ambrosio

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Do you know the one thing that can make or break your business faster than anything else?

If you said Customer Service - give yourself a prize.

For the past 15 years, my job has been customer service oriented. Let me tell you that it's the number one thing on your customers mind.

Customers know whether or not they can trust you simply by the way you service them, and usually on the small issues. Let's face it, handling big problems for your customers will always make you try harder. After all, if it's a big problem you know full well that they'll be watching closely.

But it's those tiny little every day service issues that can jump up and bite you if you're not careful. Those are the ones we tend to pay less attention to, which subsequently fall through the cracks.

Another tell-tale of the kind of service you provide is what you do when something DOES fall through the cracks. How do you handle it? Do you try to hide it? Are you up front with your customers?

There are some basic "rules", if you will, when it comes to handling mistakes or mis-steps.

1- Always be honest. Remember that if you are exposed as a liar, chances are you'll lose your customer along with your reputation.

2- Offer a concession of some kind right on the spot. This is important. It has been proven that customers are very likely to stay with your services if you compensate them satisfactorily for your mistakes. What it costs you

to do this pales in comparison to losing their business altogether.

3- Follow up. After you have worked through your mistake with your customer, make sure you follow up to make sure they are happy. It's important you give them that "warm, fuzzy feeling" about your company.

In my years as a customer service rep., I have built many relationships both on a business level AND a personal level. This is essential as well. Let's face it - if you had to choose between a service rep that is all business and one who takes the time to get to know you, (assuming that they are equal in all other aspects) who would you call?

Your customers should know you by name. They should know some personal tidbits of information about you, like whether you're married, how many kids, etc. And you should know some about them as well.

In my business, I know a little something about all of my customer contacts.

- John and his wife just had their second child.
- Val has just defeated cancer.
- Raj is under a lot of pressure from his bosses.
- Jim and his wife are having serious problems.

I lend them my ear when it's needed. I give them sympathy or a pat on the back or encouragement - whatever they need. They know they can TRUST me.

Does your business card have your home or cell number on it? It should. This tells your customer that you're always available. No need to worry about late night calls - I have found that any calls that I have received on my private numbers were few and far between, and always valid emergencies. Just the fact that you give it to your customers tells them that you care about their needs.

On all of my websites, you will find my phone number and address. Good customer service applies to your on-line business just as much as any off-line business. In fact, I have heard time and again customers say that they don't do business with someone on line unless their contact information - preferably with a phone number - is posted on their site.

Here's another axiom about customers that you should remember:

It's easier to GET a customer than it is to KEEP one.

Any customer that's in the market for your type of service is as likely to hire your company as anyone's. After all, it's really a matter of having a better sales presentation, better prices - or

whatever strikes that customer on that day.

So, wonderful - you're now in the door. You have your shot. This is when your new customer REALLY gets to know you - and your quality of service. The stuff you can't "sales pitch" away.

Never EVER take your current customer base for granted. Do that and watch how fast the door slams in your face.

You may remember some years back a television commercial that was (I believe) for an Airline. The boss was talking to his staff about customer relations because they had just lost one of their oldest clients. So he gave all of his staff plane tickets to pay personal, face-to-face visits to ALL of their customers.

While that commercial provides a good lesson about customer service it should also be a reminder to you to keep the lines of communication between you and your customers open.

Personal visits to your clients should be on-going. Never stay away long enough to give them a chance to look elsewhere for the service they need. They need to feel that you're connected with them.

In 15 years of servicing customers, I have never lost one. Not once.

And - this is probably the biggest business benefit to all of this - they recommend my services before they recommend anyone else. I have gotten more new customers through recommendations from my satisfied customers (friends) than from ANY form of paid advertisement.

And in the end, isn't that what it's all about?

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