

Keep Winning Those Customers That You've Already WON

By Tatiana Velitchkov

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Have these things ever happened to you?

You buy a cup of coffee from the neighborhood café, and as they hand you your receipt you get a calling card sized, attractively designed "loyalty record," promising that if you come back for 8 more cups anytime within the year you'll get your 10th cup for free.

A few days later you call for pizza, and the person on the phone announces: "Congratulations! This is your 5th order from our store in the past 6 months! You automatically get a Preferred Customer's Value Card with this delivery, FREE!" And when the card arrives you happily discover that you can now get a 10% discount on every succeeding order you place for the rest of the year.

The next day you go to your local supermarket for groceries. As the cashier rings up your purchases she asks if you already have a Privilege Card, and since you don't have one yet she encourages you to get one -- just keep today's receipt along with other receipts from their store (from previous and future purchases), and once the recorded amounts total up to \$500 or more, you get a "Privilege Card" that rewards you with discounts and product giveaways every time you return to their store.

Now, these 3 experiences might make you shake your head and say "déjà vu," but it isn't really as Twilight Zone as it seems.

Smart business people know that it costs more time & money to win over new customers than to keep old ones. And this is simply what these 3 experiences are all about: keeping

old customers loyal, therefore getting more profits from their repeat purchases in the long run.

And WE could certainly benefit from learning from these "loyalty development" strategies, even if we're doing business entirely online.

Be More Than A Bookmark

Most of the successful brick & mortar loyalty programs are often created out of necessity.

Chances are, several stores offering the same products suddenly decided to invade the same target market, and the "been doing business since our grandfather" stores quickly realized they now had to compete for the same customers who didn't use to think twice about buying from them.

This same phenomenon can never be more parallel than when running a store on the net: It takes customers practically the same amount of effort to visit ANY website in cyberspace (i.e. the same neighborhood), so you **MUST** give them a compelling reason to particularly visit **YOURS**.

You think it's enough to tell them to "bookmark" your site? Think again: Chances are, they've got another 2 megabytes' worth of bookmarks, too -- and they've never had the chance to visit most of them again.

4 Kinds of Loyalty Rewards

Now that you're looking into ways to keep winning the clients you've already won, here are the 4 kinds of "loyalty rewards" that other businesses have successfully used, both online and off:

1) Outright Discounts

Nothing convinces more people into buying something (or somewhere) than the thought that they'd be getting more for less.

So capitalize on this "I got a better bargain than everyone" mentality by giving loyal customers exclusive "bargain prices" for an entire year or more.

Give them a card (or a username & password) that they could use to get discounts on ALL succeeding purchases made for a

year -- then give them the option to renew their card privileges, either through more purchases or an outright renewal fee.

2) Points Equals Products

But if you're not too keen on having too many people getting too many products for marked-down prices, then consider setting aside a number of items as giveaways, which loyal customers can get after earning enough "points."

(Something those credit card companies are doing all the time!)

Just award a proportionate number of points for each purchase a client makes, then encourage them to earn more points so they can get this or that for free.

At its best it will encourage them to make more repeat purchases -- and help you get more marketing mileage when you brand those giveaway items as well.

3) Raffle Tickets For Purchases

This is quite similar to the "points for purchases routine," but instead of "points" they need to accumulate a total amount in purchases in exchange for a raffle ticket; usually the amount required is low enough to encourage people to get more than one ticket, but high enough to make the effort of printing tickets worthwhile for the store.

(Online, however, you don't need to have anything printed: Just create uniquely generated pages and/or assign raffle numbers for your clients to hold on to, and enter them into your draw!)

The prizes here have to be larger, too, ranging from electronic gadgets to vacation trips. These will depend entirely on how long you want the raffle period to go on, how many raffle tickets/numbers you are prepared to assign, and how much money you can actually spend on prizes.

And speaking of big prizes, it pays to recruit partners for a raffle, too. Not only could they help provide for prizes out of their own inventories; they could also help spread the word by distributing raffle tickets, themselves.

4) Club Membership

Finally, you can also choose to reward loyal clients by

creating an exclusive membership club just for them: a club with specific benefits, discounts, and privileges.

You can either host this club entirely online, or maybe schedule offline activities as well (so members could get the chance to actually meet each other).

Just be sure to make club membership advantages attractive enough for them to want to join -- and synergetic enough with your existing business focus so it will benefit YOU as well.

But Don't Forget the Bookmarks!

Although not entirely effective on their own, bookmarks can also increase your loyalty programs' success when coupled with the right rewards.

So keep on telling surfers to "bookmark your page," change your bookmark icon into a discount card, and alter your page titles to make them remember the benefits of returning to your store.

Given the right incentives, clients are usually smart enough to return to the same store over and over -- and WE should always be smart enough to appreciate their coming back.

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About the Author:

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