

Use Your Knowledge Skills To Improve Customer Service

By Carole Nicolaidis

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We live in an increasingly service-oriented economy. A better phrase might be an "attention-oriented economy". No doubt you already understand the importance of serving your customers well in order to retain their repeat business and referrals. However, the key factor that seems to be misunderstood is applying the knowledge each of your employees has in order to develop relationships with your clients.

From building trust and rapport with clients to making yourself an expert at what you do, the power of knowledge can propel you ahead of your competition.

Below are a few areas in which managing your knowledge can help you improve customer service efforts:

- Create A Collective Database - By using simple software you can create a basic knowledge management program that revolves around the availability of customer information.

Have all the information about your customers in one place. Allow information such as conversations, likes and dislikes, birthdays, important dates, preferred shipping methods and any special considerations regarding the company. When you collect such information and store it for ready access you are equipping your employees to respond quickly and consistently to customer demands. Companies that use these kinds of knowledge management tools save thousands of dollars and at the same improve their customer service ratings.

Sun Microsystems, a multi million-dollar corporation in California, implemented such a program and estimated that their sales and marketing force saved millions of dollars in training new hires alone. Sales people had all the information they needed in order to provide for customers. Because each person within the organization participated in adding database information, a complete picture of the customer was obtained.

- Use The Database To Solve Customer Problems - Get into the routine of bringing up client information as soon as you establish contact. By having your customer's past history right in front of you, you will be in a better position to assist them.

By understanding the particulars of your customer's business you will be able to offer assistance

and recommend your organization's products/services. You might find your customer complaining of difficulties in a specific area and be able to suggest they try a new product your business is offering. By showing that you have the ability to access and use information dealing with past orders, an organizational profile or other helpful information, you are proving to your client that service comes first.

- Use The Database To Improve Your Processes - Create a special field and instruct each employee to input even the smallest complaint into the database. Once a month (or quarter) review the complaints to see how you might improve upon your own processes and policies in order to be more customer-friendly.

How many times have you called an organization and had to enter your account number or telephone number once the automated attendant answered? Then, after being greeted by a company representative, you were asked again for the same information you had already provided. This is an irritant for most people. By collecting information regarding the complaints of your customers, you will be able to overcome such inefficiencies.

According to the U.S. White House Office of Consumer Affairs, the most serious complaint regarding customer service is that corporations are perceived as being uncaring. This simple knowledge management effort will greatly increase the perception that you do value your clients.

The more you know about your customers and their needs, the better you will be able to serve them. You will be able to design products that will solve problems. You will be equipped to improve and adjust your services to be more customer-oriented. But most importantly, you will create an environment where each customer feels as if they are being shown preferential treatment.

Carole is President of Knowledge Innovation Group offering corporate and executive coaching & consulting in Knowledge Management and Leadership & Organizational Development. Visit www.kminnovation.com for more info & her FREE Ezine.

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