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Find Out How Customers Feel About You

By Ron Sathoff and Kevin Nunley

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Most of us run our businesses by gut feeling more than we like to admit. We can tell a product or service is popular from the sales figures, but we have to go on intuition to tell you WHY it is selling well.

At the same time, another service might not move at all. No one wants it even though logic would say the service should be a hot seller.

Wouldn't it be great to know exactly why and how customers feel about your business? Find out with a simple survey.

We don't say simple just to make it easy on you. Simple surveys work much better than long, complicated ones. Customers, who are always in a hurry, won't mind answering five questions, but they certainly won't take the time to fill out a 50 question form.

Start your survey with a heartfelt statement about how each customer's views and opinions are important. "Please tell us what you think so we can serve you better!"

This gives customers a reason to fill out your survey and feel good about it. It also encourages them to dig down deep and answer honestly.

Start with a few yes/no questions:

Are you planning to buy again in the next six months?

Is this your first visit to our web site?

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Multiple choice questions are good, too:

You want a car that is (a) economical (b) sporty (c) able to hold lots of kids and cargo (d) other (Please explain) Note: Make sure that you provide an "other" category -- customers will often think of things that you never even considered!

You may also want to know just how strongly people feel about something. Find out with a scale like this:

Having a car that gets great gas mileage is (1) not important, (2) somewhat important, (3) very important, (4) a must-have.

Don't miss out on giving people an open question. This is one they can answer any way they like. Give several lines of space to explain their thoughts:

Please tell us ways we can improve our product:

Open-ended questions like this are a great way to get new ideas. Customers will often tell you about improvements, problems, or innovations you and your staff would never think of. It is also a good way to uncover new products or services you can offer.

Put your survey on your web site (quizbox.com and bravenet.com have free forms you can use.) Offer a free product, ebook, or discount for filling out the form.

You can also print your survey on half sheets of paper and put them on your counter or reception desk. Include them in invoices and mailed orders.

Surveys are a terrific way to get a better understanding of how customers feel about you and WHY they feel that way. But we are not completely away from gut feeling yet. Simple surveys like these are not scientific. You can't say for certain 25% of your customers hate your new product. For best results, take survey findings with a grain of salt. Remember -- these kinds of surveys are intended to give you IDEAS, not hard statistics. Combine what you learn from them with what you know from studying your sales figures and talking with customers and employees.

Loyal Customers Take Commitment

By Patricia Twitchell

In today's competitive world of retail, many stores are implementing external marketing programs

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designed to attract new business. Unfortunately, the cost can be very high with little return on investment. What is often lost in the mix is the fact that it can be much more cost effective to have a loyal customer base that returns again and again rather than constantly seeking the next new customer. Not that there is anything wrong with new customers, but if that is your primary focus you may be missing a great opportunity with your existing clients. When you put attention on your current customers and they feel appreciated they tend to be more loyal. Loyal customers are often willing to spend more and tell others about the experience they have with you.

In the ten years I have owned and operated Just Bears and Stuff, a specialty gift shop located in Myrtle Creek, Oregon, I have learned a great deal about customer service.

Even though some of it was from books, tapes and articles such as you are reading right now, much of my insight came from my customers.

Not only have I managed to stay in business, I have a very high percentage of repeat customers. I don't say this to impress anyone, but to impress upon you how important great - not just good - but great customer service is.

Here are some of the primary aspects of customer service that has allowed me to not only survive, but thrive in business for the last decade.

1.The customer has to feel like they are getting something special. Remember their name and use it often. Get to know something about them. The more special they feel the more they will want to return to see you. Guaranteed.

2.Be willing to go the extra mile. By going the extra mile they do feel they are the most special person to us. Something we offer is beautiful gift-wrapping at no extra charge. From the time I was a child I loved to wrap gifts. Now I have the opportunity to do this on a daily basis. This is an added value I provide. What added value can you add to let your customers know you are going the extra mile?

3.Never make a customer feel as if what they are asking for is ridiculous. Although there may be occasion that what they are asking for is more than you can do, it is in the way you let them know this that determines the feeling they get from the experience.

4.Be knowledgeable about your product or service and industry. When my customers look to me to make suggestions they feel a sense of security in knowing that I know my product line extremely well. I pride myself in helping my customers select just the right gift for whomever they are choosing it for.

5.Realize you are dealing with real people with real needs. Regardless of the business you are in, people make the choice to do business with you. If they feel like their needs are being met, they tend to

return again and again. Interestingly, there are some customers I have never met face-to-face. Many find me on the Internet. I have customers all over the world and each one is so special to me and they know it. You can have a great relationship with your customers face-to-face or over the phone.

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6. Make the experience pleasant. When my customers feel that the experience was so pleasant more times than not they will return for their next gift giving needs. Again, whether it is over the phone or face-to-face I want my customers to know how important they are to me. And I will do whatever is humanly possible to let them know this.

As you think about your experiences with customer service, what is it that makes the experience so special? And do people feel your level of service is the best it can be? You will find that by building a loyal customer base you will be able to thrive in your business for years to come.

Patricia Twitchell is the proprietor of Just Bears and Stuff, a unique gift shop located in Myrtle Creek, Oregon. Nestled in the scenic mountains, it is a favorite place to visit for people from all over the country. Receive "Beary Special Moments" a free online teddy bear facts and tips e-zine by visiting

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