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Keeping Customers With Communication

By Claire Cunningham

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You work hard to attract new customers, right? Mailings, phone calls, ads, publicity. You have an annual marketing plan devoted to bringing in new customers.

What about the customers you already have? What are you doing for them? Of course, you're delivering a top quality product or service at a competitive price. But that's not enough.

Business wisdom says current customers are your best source for new sales. After all, these folks have already established a dialogue with you by buying from you. It's up to you to keep the conversation going.

Here are communications programs that work well with customers.

1)NEWSLETTERS - If you have expertise and information customers want and need, send it out in a newsletter. Remember, successful newsletters are published on a predictable schedule, provide useful information, and are quick-to-read and attractive.

2)TIP SHEETS - Not sure you have enough content to keep a newsletter going, but customers still need good information? Tip sheets on specific topics may be the answer for you. This lets you package and brand key information so your company becomes known as the expert. Make sure your employees know about these tip sheets and use them.

3)WEBSITE - Set up a special customer section of your website that's password protected. Fill the section with information customers need - newsletters, tip sheets, a way to post questions and get expert answers, downloadable forms, handbooks, documentation, etc. Not sure what to include? Poll some of your best customers.

Remembering to Listen: Making the Most of Communication

By Ron Sathoff

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A lot has been written about the communication aspects of marketing. Unfortunately, most of it has focused on the "sending" function — writing the perfect ad, creating the killer sales letter, or making a great sales pitch. We always seem to focus on what we are doing TO a customer, rather than what the customers might be saying to US.

We have to remember that all communication is two-directional. In order to truly be great communicators, we have to improve our skills when we are the receivers. In other words, we have to become great listeners as well as great speakers or writers. Fortunately, there are a few simple things we can do to help improve this aspect of our communication with our customers:

1) Treat all communication as important. From time to time (more often than I like) I have to deal with a salesperson who only seems to be listening for certain things — what I'm ordering, how much I'm going to pay, and when my money will arrive. After a salesperson like this gets what they want, they just tune you out. Luckily, these are usually the salespeople who don't last long.

Truly great salespeople, on the other hand, know that EVERYTHING that a customer has to say is important. In a lot of cases, especially with business opportunities, a customer is more interested in advice than they are in your product. If you take time to listen to their concerns and can provide them with insight (along with your offer), your customer will be much more satisfied than if you just delivered the "goods."

2) Pay attention to differences. Many times, it is easy to forget that every person is different. What you know is different than what your customer knows. You can listen much more effectively if you realize that the customer might be using different terms than you, or might even be seeing things from a completely different perspective.

This is where empathy comes in very handy. As you listen, try to empathize with your customer — put yourself into their shoes so that you can have a better understanding of their wants, needs, and fears.

3) Pay attention to feedback. To grow and survive, a company

needs to adapt. In order to adapt, it has to have sufficient information to know what is needed and what is obsolete. For most of us, the best source of this information is our customers. By listening to the feedback and concerns of our customers, we can get a better feel for what the market is looking for.

Communication is the cornerstone of customer service. To increase our customers' satisfaction, we must make sure that we listen to them as carefully as we would craft our advertising. Only by listening can we meet the needs of our clients and make the kind of reputation that leads to success.



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