

The Customer is number one!

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By Daryl Clark

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The title of this article seems like a cliché, "The Customer is number one"! Who doesn't know this already? Many businesses and business people know this to be true but how many really practice this philosophy? More importantly, how many Internet companies really practice this?

In the brick and mortar world, there are numerous examples of service excellent. One of the most famous, is the customer who claimed he had bought a tire from Nordstrom and insisted on returning it. Nordstrom doesn't sell tires but they accepted the return anyway! This is a true story, although a little extreme for most companies.

Let's take a look at Internet businesses vs. traditional brick and mortar businesses. How do they stack up in terms of customer service and putting the needs of the customer first? Ask yourself these two questions:

How many Internet businesses do you highly recommend to your friends because you received excellent customer service?

How many traditional brick and mortar businesses do your recommend to your friends because you received excellent customer service?

If you are like most of us, the list of Internet businesses you recommend is a lot shorter than the list of traditional retailers you recommend. Why does this tend to be true? The main reason is, you receive personalization when you shop at a traditional business, which you don't receive from most Internet businesses.

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At a traditional business, the employees greet you, they qualify your needs and they promptly close the sale. Is this possible to do with an Internet business? Listed below are a few ways to personalize the shopping experience at your web site, so you can practice "Making the customer number one"!

1. Make sure your phone number, address and office hours are posted in a highly visible spot on your home page.

Many Internet companies do not want to handle inbound phone messages. If you are one of those companies, change your philosophy NOW or get out of business. The phone number is there for your customers. Do not create barriers for your customers to do business with you! Make sure doing

business with you is as simple and easy as possible. List your address, even if you don't ship products from your physical address. Customers are more comfortable knowing that you have one!

2. Provide concise and relevant F.A.Q.'s (Frequently Asked Questions).

If you have good F.A.Q.'s, you will reduce the amount of inbound phone calls and you will be showing your customers you are concerned about their questions. If you don't have F.A.Q.'s, you really need to get them up on your site as quickly as possible.

3. Post your response time to inquiries in your customer service section and stick to it.

Most Internet consumers feel that their inquiries will go unanswered or they will have to wait days to hear back from Internet businesses. Post on your site that you will return e-mails within 24 hours. That means having someone check the status of questions on weekends too! If you get in the habit of responding to inquiries within 24 hours, you will be exceeding your customers expectations 99% of the time.

4. Confirm receipt of all orders received.

How many times have you ordered something from an Internet company and after your transaction was completed, you DID NOT receive confirmation of your order? If you are like me, it has happened way too many times! Make sure your customers receive confirmation their order is being processed. Send them confirmation through an automated system or manually.

5. Follow up on important customer issues with a PHONE CALL!

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That's right! If a customer places an overnight order and you find out you are out of stock of the item, do you e-mail the customer and wait for their response? No you don't! You call the customer and offer a solution to their problem. Most people don't mind getting phone calls from companies when the company is addressing their concerns. In fact, in most cases you will build a tremendous amount of goodwill and they will provide you with more referrals than you can imagine.

6. Provide a tracking number and the link to the tracking system of the company you use to ship your orders. Many companies have automated tracking systems tied into UPS and FEDEX. If you are a small company without automated tracking, you can provide the URL for tracking the shipment (example) <http://www.fedex.com/us/> and the tracking number. This gives the customer piece of mind and reduces the likelihood that you will receive an inquiry from your customer regarding the status of their order.

Follow these six steps and you will prove to your customers that they are number one!

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Make Sure You Get The Customer Perspective

By Erwin Steneker

Businesses that fail, often forget to seek out the customer perspective. I have talked to some folks at businesses that were less than successful, and when asked if they actively seek out customer comments, the answer invariably is no. Why don't they do that? Why not get the customer perspective?

Oftentimes, the company is overconfident, and thinks they know what customers want. This myth, because that's what it is, can be upheld as long as the customer is not involved. However, the customer has a strong vote in the buying process, and in the end it will become crystal clear how the customer feels! At that point, of course, it's too late to do anything about it.

Another reason for not asking the customer is fear. From the customer perspective you might not be doing so well as you thought you were. For insecure persons that may come as a blow! In order to protect themselves, some folks just don't want to hear it and simply don't ask. On the other hand, they could be missing out on a whole lot of uplifting comments.

Get real! Would you rather get the customer's votes in your wallet, or in your mailbox?

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The sooner you know how the customer feels about your business, the sooner you can start to correct any shortcomings that may emerge. But you have to act. There is no use in hiding the remarks you don't like. This doesn't change the reality. Put your customer in the centre of your business and let the rest follow in tune.

This can only improve your bottom line.

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Handling Customer Complaints
Who is your 'Best Customer'?
Get Your Customers to Say "YES"
Using Technology to Manage Customer Loyalty

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