

6 SECRETS TO OFFERING EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE



INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of people are not experiencing great service.

Nearly a third of consumers believe that businesses are now paying less attention to providing good customer service. On top of that, just 7% of those polled say that customer service experiences they have with companies typically exceed their expectations.

Now think about how you could succeed and profit as a business if you not only continually offered good service to your customers, but also **frequently offered more than what they expected.**

So what do customers want? It's simple.

- They want easy access to service on their terms.
- They want evidence a business cares.
- They want first-time resolution when they ask for assistance.
- They **do not** want unpleasant surprises.

What do **YOU** need to do to give customers what they want?

The answers are on the following pages.



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IN THIS EBOOK WE WILL EXAMINE THE FOLLOWING TOPICS:



- The secrets to lining up your customer service with your brand.
- The best way to train employees.
- How to make employees feel good about giving great service.
- The significance of monitoring customer interactions.
- Which customer metrics you should pay attention to.
- The cheapest way to earn new customers.

1 ALIGN YOUR CUSTOMER SERVICE WITH YOUR BRAND

A business's brand goes far beyond its name or logo. The strength of a brand can sell potential customers on working with you, and inspire loyalty once they do. One of the best ways to develop a strong brand message is to offer quality customer service. In fact, good service has been found time and time again to trump advertising when it comes to impact on brand image. But first you must put the key building blocks in place.

Have a clear brand promise. A November 2012 study by the American Society of Quality, found that among the 600 companies examined, the single largest challenge was the setting of proper expectations. Take the time to clearly state what your brand is about. This includes what you are and aren't willing to do when it comes to customer service, so there is no confusion. Educate your customers so they can properly set their expectations for the kind of help and attention they are going to get if they have an issue.

Require everyone to follow the brand promise. Employees from top to bottom must walk the talk of the brand promise. Managers are responsible for enforcing this, but more importantly, of leading by example. You can't expect a cashier to follow certain customer service protocols, if their boss isn't willing to jump in and do the same.

Figure out what your values are. Small businesses need not create a grand mission statement like a larger organization might. But they can still put into a few words what their vision is. Ask what the value add of your service or product might be. Then write it down and use it as the foundation for the brand promise you and your employees want to deliver. You may choose words like "efficiency," "knowledgeable," "genuine," "innovative," or even, "real."

Formalize your customer service process, but allow for flexibility. Once your vision is in place, take the time to map out your customer service plan. Train your employees that there is one way of doing things, but also let them know that there will be situations where they can let go of the "process". Teach them to be consistent, but not have to a robotic response. Certain customer service issues will require flexible solutions, if they are going to be resolved properly.

Measure your customer service and ask for feedback. Find a way to track your customer service to ensure it backs your brand image. One of the best ways to do this is to ask for feedback. Most people won't tell you what you did wrong if there is not a safe way to complain. This especially applies to small businesses, because customers are more likely to know you personally. Once complaints are received and addressed, don't be afraid to pick up the phone and follow up.

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2 TRAIN YOUR FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES

Your employees are the channels from you to your customers. When it comes to offering great service, they can only use the hand they are dealt. This means if you don't equip them with the tools and guidance they need, they will fail, and your business will lose customers.

Set your employees up for success with these four steps:



Give them easy access to information.

This includes key aspects of the business, such as the status of an order, or the price and availability of a product.



Arm them with answers to common questions.

Employees should know how to describe the features of the products or services they are selling. They should also be trained to explain the rationale for business policies.



Back them up with products that deliver what was promised.

An easy example of this is coffee that is served hot, or soda that is served cold.



Make sure they are empowered to fix issues right away.

Studies have found that in more than 90% of incidents where employees are rude, it's because they are embarrassed that they don't know how to respond to a reasonable customer request.

3 IMPROVE EMPLOYEE MORALE

Happy employees do better work and offer better customer service. Unhappy employees do the opposite, including failing to go the extra mile to resolve customer issues. Staff members that are not content also tend to leave a business fast, nullifying any time and investment you've put into them. Once employees have been trained and given the tools to offer great service, follow up with support and positive feedback. It's time to get happy!

Schedule regular "victory sessions."

- Have everyone share their toughest customer service situation that week or month, and how they addressed it.
- Each individual gets pure recognition for what they did. This includes the "low performers" and not just the "Employee of the Month"-types.
- This empowers employees to solve customer issues on the spot.
- The meetings also create incentives for staff to go the extra mile, so they will have a positive result to share at the "victory session."
- Everyone in attendance gets an education on new ways to handle customer complaints.



Ask your employees what their three biggest frustrations are in giving customer service.

Take action on at least one of the issues. This will have a hugely positive impact when it comes to morale, because they will see that there is hope that those things will change. They are also more likely to share again in the future, before a problem develops.

If you get a customer complaint about an employee, don't immediately scold them.

First, ask why they said and did what they did. Let them know that you believe they are a good person, who wants to do a good job. Chances are they've been lacking certain tools or the empowerment to offer good service, and this gives you the opportunity to change that.

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4 MONITOR CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS

Now that your staff has been trained and empowered to give great service, it's time to follow the old adage and "inspect what you expect." This can be done in several ways. As a small business, although you can't be present for every transaction, make sure you get two or three data sources to verify you are getting a valid snapshot of what is taking place.



Here are several techniques to use for monitoring customer interactions:

Personal observation – whether you are in a store or office, pause and listen to your employee and customer conversations. Pay particular attention to how employees reply to comments.

Ask for feedback – when you come face-to-face with customers, look them in the eye and ask, "How are we doing?" This method is proven to increase customer communication by 30%.

Break down barriers with customers – solicit feedback by asking for it, on things like invoices and emails. You are likely to get the same amount of compliments as complaints, which allows you to celebrate great service, and correct problems you weren't aware of.

Provide manager's contact information – Passing on your email address and, if possible, cell phone number, sends a message to customers that you are here to help, and demonstrates to your staff what a priority great service is for you.

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5 PAY ATTENTION TO THE RIGHT CUSTOMER METRICS

Another important way to set your frontline employees up for offering great service is to take time to check-in with them on key customer metrics. Paying attention to the following nine points will help to dramatically shift your employees' time and focus. Instead of using their energy to put out customer service "fires," they can concentrate on preventative service that offers actual value. Use this exercise as a teaching tool after a real customer service issues takes place.

1. Empathy

Did the employee use a tone of voice and expression (for face-to-face interactions) that demonstrated they genuinely cared about the complaint?

2. Effective Listening

Did they show active listening, by paraphrasing back what the customer said to confirm the complaint was accurately understood?

3. Knowledge

Did they articulate what your business's policies are in regards to the incident?

4. Clarity

Did they back up the above point with a clear explanation as to why your business policies are in the customer's best interest?

5. Empowerment

Did the employee use the appropriate empowerment and flexibility to make the customer happy?

6. Preventive Education

Did the employee help the customer avoid a future problem by anticipating what they might need going forward?

7. Emotional Connection

If appropriate, was the employee able to establish an emotional connection with the customer?

8. Prevention

Could this customer issue have been prevented in the first place?

9. Customer Rating

From the customer's point of view, how would the employee rate the overall interaction?

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6 TREAT CUSTOMERS AS MEDIA REPS

The **most** effective and **least** expensive way to win new customers is word of mouth referrals from other happy customers. Yet this element is often overlooked by businesses of all sizes, because they aren't sure how to manage or measure such referrals.

You manage word of mouth by offering a great experience every time a customer comes in contact with your business.

You measure word of mouth with staff training and some common sense.

Ask these four questions of yourself and your manager(s) and then make sure the answers are shared with all frontline employees:

1. What percentage of new customers are a result of personal referrals?
2. What can we do to make all service transactions happily memorable for customers?
3. How much do we typically spend to win a new customer? This could include money spent on marketing, advertising, or other sales efforts.
4. How much would it cost to make all service transactions happily memorable for customers?

You may be surprised by the answers to the questions and how much you've been missing by not emphasizing word-of-mouth referrals as the number one way to earn new customers.



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CONCLUSION

The continued success of a small business ultimately comes down to making a profit. While taking into account the small segment of people who spend based only on discounts, the best way to earn the right to charge a premium price at your business is to offer great service.

Studies show that sensitivity to price doubles when a consumer has a complaint, and doubles again if they experience another problem.

But in the mind of a customer, exceptional service typically justifies expense, because they view what they're paying for as worth it.

It's also the best way to earn a "customer for life."

Remember:

- A strong brand image increases customer loyalty.
- Employees need to be empowered to offer great service.
- Increasing employee morale goes hand-in-hand with them going the extra mile for customers.
- "Inspect what you expect" and pay attention to customer interactions.
- Find ways to provide preventative service by tracking customer metrics.
- Happy customer referrals are the cheapest and most effective way to get new business.

**It's four to five times as costly to attract a new customer as to keep an old one.
Invest in what you have by offering great service!**



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