

TIP OF THE MONTH – CUSTOMER SERVICE THAT WORKS

Somebody on the radio the other day was singing “little things mean a lot” and this is very true in business, as in life. It’s the little things that add up to make an exceptional experience for your customers. There are a few ideas that may enhance the “customer experience” listed below. What has this to do with accounting? You grow the beans, we help you count them. Better customer service = more beans for us to count!

The ‘gift’

Very often you can add a little extra something to the products or services you offer. It could be a standard item such as a pen (our clients never tire of these!) or something more imaginative. My current favourite is complementary flip-flops for Summer. A few years ago I struggled to get to a hotel for a business visit to Bristol and ended up in a somewhat down-at-heel hotel. When I was checking out the desk clerk gave me a bottle of water “for your journey” ... you don’t get that at the Hilton! These little additions add impact to your delivery and rarely cost a lot to implement. Think of what you can add to your customer’s experience so that they see you as more generous and caring than other people they could deal with.



Speed



Customers value their time, and adding speed to your service will be appreciated. When customers call in or email you for a service question, how quickly do you respond?

You could set time goals for response to customer issues and questions. You might choose one minute, four hours, 5 rings, or one day for response time, depending on your business. Make sure customer emails are answered first, and have someone monitoring the phone during business hours (virtual PAs can really improve a small business image).

Don’t mistake haste for speed, however: a calm and complete response should be delivered quickly, but never hurriedly.

Acknowledge and Apologise

Sometimes things go wrong, and an apology to the customer is in order. In most cases, customers simply want to be heard, so your listening skills are your best asset, and anyone who has ever stood on a rail platform wondering what is going on knows how true this is. As an entrepreneur, the buck stops with you. Even though it might not have been your fault, it’s sometimes a good idea to simply apologise in the sincerest way possible. You need to fix it or get it fixed, and remember that this is a marketing opportunity if you handle it properly, so give the refund, take the loss, and let the customer win.

Positive Communications

How you word things can make all the difference. For example, “That item is out of stock and won’t be in for six weeks” should be “We will have that item in stock in six weeks.”

The first sentence has two negatives (out of stock and won’t), while the second sentence is positive. How about “Allan isn’t in this afternoon, can somebody else help or shall I have him call you in the morning?” This is a service mind-set thing as well as a communication issue. Think about how you can word your communications so that there are more positive words and fewer negative words when speaking with customers – and then deliver.



Your Full Attention



As indicated above, although you want to respond to customer issues with speed, while you are working with the customer do take time to slow down and really engage with the person. Our world is so fast, and some companies even reward multi-tasking, but no customer appreciates interruptions when being helped.

When you are with a customer, even on a phone call, be with the customer. Avoid interruptions and distractions, and give them your full attention. It’s the most powerful thing on this list. Treat them

as a real person, not just another figure, and the customer will notice.

This isn’t “awesome” service that will “blow your customers away”, this is looking after your income stream the way you would expect to be looked after, and about being proud of the service you offer. I know of no better way to generate more beans.

