



TIPS FOR A SMALL BUSINESS: Winning Clients for Keeps!

By Jan M. Owens

What is it that distinguishes you from your competitors? Do you concentrate on selling but without a proper foundation for customer care? Are you focused on offering only the best quality products but with no concern for what happens after the sale?

If you've never stopped to think about it, you've been doing your business a disservice. Why? Because businesses that don't devote sufficient time and energy to satisfying their clients, soon find them moving one by one to a competitor.

Look at it this way. Your customers are willing to give you their hard-earned cash, but if you want to keep them from running to your competitor at the first offer, you need to make sure you have done everything you can to give them incomparable customer care at every level.

Give your customers the kind of service they can't find elsewhere, and they will more than likely stay put – feeling cared for and treated with respect.

So how do you do that? Knowing that your customers want full value for their money, what can you do to ensure that you've done all you could to lock in their loyalty?

First, by developing meaningful relationships. This doesn't mean being a "best buddy." It just means that you need a rock-solid policy of incomparable service. So, starting right now, decide how you plan to make it happen.

It's an old cliché, but very true. Most businesses do business with someone they know and trust. It may be that your clients have simply come to like and trust you, knowing that you will provide them the value they want and need. If so, then you've got a valuable client....one whom you should strive to satisfy.

That one particular client could even generate a new source of revenue for you by way of new business referrals. In fact, some companies thrive on word-of-mouth referrals and use no traditional means of advertising. A client who will recommend you or your product to their friends and associates is priceless! Make sure you do whatever it takes to keep that client satisfied.

So, are you building confidence with your clients? Here are a few ideas that will help not only in keeping your current clients but winning new ones as others come to know of your genuine customer care!

Stay Connected

Stay in touch with your clients!. There are several ways to do this. Email, of course, is

the fastest and simplest way to stay in touch but remember email etiquette! Make sure your email has a point and is not simply a waste of your customer's time. Just because you think that email sent to multiple recipients was worth sharing doesn't mean your customer will appreciate it. So here are a few ideas:

- Send greeting cards for birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays. Add a personal note meant just for them.
- If you see an article about something that might be of particular interest to them, clip it out and send it along with a handwritten note.
- Collect and share business cards about associates that you think would be of a benefit to your customer.
- Keep your client updated on new things happening in your business. You can do this through a personal note or by a newsletter. There are many online newsletter services that can keep you in touch with your clients for reasonable fees.
- Offering an informal workshop is another terrific way to keep your customers informed on what's happening in the industry.
- Send copies of news releases about your business. Be sure to attach a handwritten note.
- Send a gift that shows you know your client's likes or interests.

Ask How You're Doing

Your clients will appreciate being asked how you can improve your service. Ask for their candid responses. Things you might want to ask would include whether there is anything else you could offer that would be a benefit to them; whether there are any issues that need attention such as product quality, service time, hours of operation, location, and convenience.

Be sure to acknowledge receipt of each reply and be profuse in your thanks. Let them know their input is valuable to you. Then deal with every issue that needs attention. This is not to say that the customer is always right. In fact, the customer is often wrong. But you should make every effort to resolve all issues in a manner that is fair to both you and your customer.

Know Your Clients Personally

Developing meaningful relationships is important, so get to know your clients on a personal level. Find out about their family, interests, business goals, and other details. Wherever possible, make connections with people at every level of your customer's business, making notes about each one so you can remember to mention some of those details each time you meet.

Solidify Your Relationships

So, what are some of the ways to develop personal relationships?

- Know your clients' businesses, their goals, their public image; watch for opportunities to support them.
- Return the client's call as soon as practical, and never leave a call unanswered.
- Deal with a client's concerns immediately. Listen carefully and be prepared to offer a resolution.
- Refer business to your clients. Then, be sure to follow up to see if the connection was successful.
- Watch for opportunities that help your clients by saving money or providing a new revenue stream.

Show Your Appreciation

A simple "thank you" is sometimes enough, but with careful reflection, you can choose thoughtful ways to show your appreciation and make each client feel like a VIP.

- Invite a customer to meet you for a meal or drinks at a modestly priced restaurant with good food and a casual atmosphere.
- Ask a client to go with you to a business meeting or sports or social event. Then, be sure to introduce your client to your associates there for potential new business connections for them. Stay focused on your client when you are out together.

- Stay informed about trends in your client's industry. Be prepared to offer solutions to changes that may affect your client's business.
- Always keep your promises.

Win New Clients

Clients expect a lot, but if you pay careful attention to their needs, you'll not only keep them for a long time, but others will come so they, too, can enjoy your unique customer care! There's nothing quite so valuable as the confidence your clients show by sending you referrals! Be sure to recognize and thank them for this trust.

Your customers won't care about the thousands of dollars invested in your business and all its infrastructure. What they *will* care about is how they are treated by you and your employees. While these ideas are directed toward a personal relationship between you and your clients, it is also vital that you invest in training your employees in customer service. One thoughtless remark by an employee can do untold harm to your carefully cultivated business relationship.

Customer Care Training

For superior employee training in customer care at truly affordable prices, call toll free 352-360-5550. Also ask about programs with strategies to improve leadership and management skills.