

## **Tips for Excellent Customer Service**

Happy customers are key to the success of your company. The repeat business they provide, and the positive word-of-mouth to family and friends, are invaluable. Nevertheless, good customer service is often neglected. Here are a few key steps to make sure your customers stays loyal to your service and product.

### **Be Polite and Friendly**

Manners are an extremely effective tool in maintaining good customer relations. Your customers need to feel valued. Should they contact you with a grievance, allow them to provide feedback in full, and let them know their complaint or issue will be considered. Never lose your temper. Summarise what they have said and break down into points what needs to happen now. Clarify any actions they should take, and what your next steps will be.

### **Tell the Truth**

Only offer what you can provide. Should a customer make a complaint about your product or service, they will not be pleased with additional over-promises: for instance, only offer to issue a replacement if you know for certain one is available.

### **Deal with Customer Complaints at the First Opportunity**

Do not pass the customer from colleague to colleague. Wherever possible, the problem should be dealt with by one person. If the problem is not immediately solvable, say so, apologise, and provide a reasonable timeframe for contacting them again.

### **Stay Up to Date**

Keep your knowledge of the business, products, prices, terms and conditions up to date. If the employee answering a customer's queries is ill informed, the customer is both inconvenienced and unimpressed. Conversely, beware of using jargon even if your product knowledge allows it; you will frustrate the customer.

## **Improve Your Products and Services**

Customer feedback provides the best indicator of how to develop your service or product. If, for instance, there are frequent customer calls regarding your website functionality, this is a clear sign that this area needs improvement.

## **Be accessible**

Research how your customers prefer to contact you, and make contact as easy as possible. In the case of email, make sure that there are clear links on your website and that messages are responded to efficiently. If phone is the most appropriate means of contact, include the telephone number in all direct correspondence with the customer.

## **Addressing customer complaints**

When a customer expresses a grievance, you can still strengthen your relationship with them – provided you handle the problem to their satisfaction.

To err is human, and it is likely that customers will sometimes raise grievances regarding your product or services. While you should take every measure to minimise problems before they occur, your response to complaints that *do* arise is vitally important to customer perceptions of your company.

## **The benefits of good customer service**

- Repeat business
- Customers will stay loyal, and spread the word among friends and colleagues.
- Feedback
- If you have an accessible, approachable Customer Service facility, customers will readily tell you what your current strengths are and where you can make improvements.

### **When is customer service important?**

- When the product is expensive. Often, customers will expect a higher level of customer service for a luxury product than a cheap one.
- When there is little differentiation between competitors. Customer service can be a key influence on purchasing decisions if your products are similar to the competition in price and positioning.
- When customer expectations are high. Where possible aim to exceed their expectations. These are however context dependent. For instance, a delivery service might delight and please their customer by delivering a product on time when their competitors are usually late.

### **Addressing customer complaints**

When a customer expresses a grievance, you still have an excellent chance of strengthening your relationship with them – provided you handle the problem to their satisfaction.

1. Acknowledge and record their feedback. Make sure the customer is aware this has been done.
2. If the problem cannot be resolved straight away, explain that you need to investigate further and you will be in touch on a specified date. Give the customer a named contact.
3. Investigate how the error occurred and correct as appropriate. Respond to the circumstances fairly without rashly allocating blame. Be reasonable with your staff, as well as the customer.
4. Alert the customer that the problem has been resolved.
5. If possible, offer a refund or vouchers as compensation.

6. After a fixed period, contact the customer again to confirm they were satisfied with the complaints procedure.

Efficiency, responsiveness and co-operation are essential to good customer care. By incorporating these qualities within your customer complaints procedure, you can repair and even enhance customer relations.