

Loyal Clients Boost Revenue: 10 Tips for Improving Customer Satisfaction

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What does it take to cultivate loyal clients who are willing to hire your firm repeatedly? For guaranteed success, customer satisfaction principles need to be diligently carried out before, during, and after the service takes place.

Unfortunately, many service providers take the easy way out, chanting “the customer is first” mantra during the sales process. However, the client is soon forgotten after the deal closes. This “get the money” attitude alienates customers — further tarnishing the service industry with a poor reputation.

Instead, maneuver **your** business into the fast lane of customer satisfaction. Implement a proactive customer oriented strategy that launches your firm above the competition. In fact, you can make a difference starting today!

First, commit to making customer satisfaction a core competency of your business.

Once executed, customer satisfaction becomes a frame of mind fundamental to all of your business endeavors. Below are ten suggestions to help you get started:

1. Be Accessible

Can prospects and clients easily find information they need about your products and services?

In the spirit of time management, most organizations use technology to erect barriers to the outside world. However, such obstacles provide time-pressured clients an excuse to contact the competition.

How many hurdles does a client need to struggle through on your website or phone service to find useful information? Perform frequent usability testing to simplify accessibility — and reduce client frustration.

Are phone calls and email response times measured in your business? In the spirit of promptness, your firm should return all inquiries in under two hours.

Make doing business with your company simple and user-friendly — and your clients will tell others.

2. Professional Phone Etiquette

First impressions still matter in the electronic age.

How many times have you made calls to businesses represented by rude, distracted receptionists and secretaries? Many companies even fail to mention their name when answering the phone.

Always answer a call with your business name and a smile. Otherwise, your clients will do business with a service provider who is audio friendly.

Get an edge over the competition: train your staff how to answer the phone professionally — including yourself.

3. Meet and Beat Deadlines

Does your business consistently meet deadlines?

Even with PDA's, day-timers, and other schedule reminders, service providers still over-commit on projects. Needless to say, vendors who can't keep commitments give the service industry a bad name.

When confronted with an unrealistic deadline, find out the client's reason for the short notice. In most cases, managers add "padding" to their schedule to compensate for unknowns – like unreliable vendors. If schedule adjustments are non-negotiable, do whatever it takes to meet them. Another option is to add a "fast-turn" fee to compensate for tight deadlines.

Demonstrate that your business is unique. Whenever possible, exceed the deadline by 10-25%. As a result, your client will recognize the outstanding value of your service over the competition.

4. Pursue Integrity

Clients dream of doing business with vendors of integrity. Furthermore, the high-profile corruption of the dot.com meltdown will keep clients wary for years to come.

During this age of mistrust, you will need to earn a client's respect. Any hint of dishonesty and your client will bolt. Is your firm overstating its qualifications or puffing up its client list? Are you promoting a product or service that is unproven or of poor quality? Too many businesses are permeated with a mindset of doing and saying anything to win the deal.

Purge your business of such behavior. Perform a periodic "integrity review" of your communications material such as brochures, websites, and advertisements to ensure essential features/benefits are presented. Also, perform a post-mortem of all sales activities to ensure exemplary achievement of all commitments.

Dare to be different: pursue integrity throughout all of your business activities.

5. Pay Attention to Detail

Sloppy workmanship, buggy software, and miscommunications with the customer cost the service industry billions of dollars in sales.

Starting today, diligently record all project communications. Utilize the latest technology such as PDA's to record client meetings whenever possible. Then, follow up to verify that you understand the client's requirements.

In addition, poor grammar, stale marketing materials, and sloppy website design promote a careless image to your clients. Why should the client trust their business to a vendor who neglects the basics?

Pay attention to detail by polishing your project execution procedures, service offerings, and communication materials.

6. Be Flexible

Your services may be the best in town, but a prima donna attitude alienates clients.

Whenever possible, provide the client options, and always professionally communicate the consequences of adjustments. Customer oriented flexibility will win you points and forge into the client's mind that you are looking out for their best interests.

Always put the customer's needs ahead of yours. A flexible approach will reap big dividends in referrals and repeat business — guaranteed.

7. Be Proactive with Issues

Never allow a known problem to go unresolved.

Small issues trigger costly disasters months after project completion, especially in the IT, industrial, and communication service industries.

If you have any indication that your service might fall short after delivery, take massive action. Alert the customer immediately and present a solution. If no solutions exist, put a corrective plan of action in place with the customer's needs in mind.

Reasonable customers understand that it takes time to flush out bugs from complex processes. As long as you remedy the issue before it turns into a disaster, the client will trust in your reliability.

Executing a proactive strategy boosts your company's reputation.

8. Stay in Touch with Clients

Do you have a regular post-sales outreach plan in place?

Most sales teams “do whatever it takes” to close the deal such as unlimited support, wining and dining, and preaching hollow statements like “we are committed to your success”. However, after the purchase order closes, the support dwindles to zero.

Growing loyal clients requires a post-sales outreach plan for cultivating long-term relationships. There are many ways to achieve customer “touch time”. Although postcards are the traditional method, large mailings can be expensive. Regular opt-in electronic newsletters (E-zines) are a low-cost way to grow customer awareness. Occasional phone calls are also effective, but always respect the client’s time

Additionally, be sure to remember clients during holidays, birthdays, and corporate milestones. A set of tickets to the local ball game or a holiday play will ensure that the client thinks of you when the next project comes around.

Maintain a client outreach plan — especially after the sale is made.

9. Provide Free Add-on Services

Free add-ons improve the value proposition of your service.

Use add-ons to clinch deals whenever the customer seriously questions the value of your service. When quoting a project, always sell the value of the complete package. Make exemplary customer support part of the package.

Whenever possible, provide incremental services that the customer regards as mission critical. Select add-ons that consume only a small amount of your resources — but significantly improve value.

Improve the value proposition of your service to solidify long-term client satisfaction.

10. Always Guarantee Your Service Offering

Unlike product suppliers, the majority of service providers do not guarantee their work.

Guarantees demonstrate your commitment to delivering the best possible value and prove your confidence in executing to the client’s expectations.

Most service related guarantees are based upon predetermined results, performance, and customer satisfaction requirements. Another method is to structure guarantees around a complete service redo or revision plan.

Propel your business ahead of the crowd by guaranteeing your services.

Now is the Time to Execute Your Customer Satisfaction Plan

After implementing your plan, execute a bottom-up review of customer satisfaction every quarter, regardless of business conditions.

If you neglect customer satisfaction today, tomorrow you'll struggle to win clients back from the competition – on their terms.

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