

How To Keep Your Customers Coming Back

As a small business owner, former retailer and marketing coach, I'm amazed how many small business owners fail to take advantage of their most important asset, their customer list. Most of the small business owners I meet are constantly searching for ways to expand their customer base when its been proven time and time again that you can make more money from your present clients than constantly looking for new business. So, I devised some secrets to begin the process of retaining good customers and generating greater profits from them.

Secret #1: GET TO KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS

Small Businesses today are finding that in order to survive super discount competitors and huge conglomerate advertising blitzes they must go back to the relationship building of the good old days. In cities and towns of yesteryear, the shopkeeper knew his customers by name and the type of merchandise they needed and made certain he had it in stock. This kind of relationship coupled with personalized customer service and a genuine empathy with customers, is what keeps them coming back to you instead of your competitors.

Secret #2: GATHER CUSTOMER INFORMATION

To build relationships with customers and to retain them, you must gather information, which is valuable to you. For example, age (ages of relatives), size of home, color and style preferences, date of last purchase, amount of purchase, brand preferences, important dates (birthdays, anniversaries). Depending on your specialty, you know what's important to you.

Secret #3: SERVE THE CUSTOMER

Waiting on customers courteously is just the beginning of good customer service. First, find out what the customer expects from you. Make sure your salespeople praise every customer, show an interest and establish rapport. Get in the habit of corresponding with your customers. Send them notes, cards, articles and clippings that interest them. Send them thank you notes and cards telling them about private specials and trunk showings. Mail out a newsletter explaining what's new in your company.

Secret #4: REWARD THE CUSTOMER

Michael L'Boeuf, Ph.D., author of *How to Win Customers and Keep them for Life* says his "Greatest Business Secret in the World" is: THE REWARDED CUSTOMER BUYS, MULTIPLIES AND COMES BACK."

By segmenting customers into groups, you can treat customers individually, based on their buying habits and the information you've gathered. New customers need to know that you value them as a NEW customer and that you actually care if they shop with you again. Send them a thank you note after their first purchase.

Secret #5: USE WHAT YOU KNOW TO GET NEW CUSTOMERS

Once you've built a list of customers, their preferences, demographics and transactional data, you'll be able to use this important information to find new customers with similar characteristics. Start a Referral program by rewarding customers who refer their friends and relatives. Obtain a list of new movers to your area with similar age and income parameters to your present customers. Use testimonials from satisfied customers to attract new customers by mail. Obtain a mailing list of targeted prospects that match your customer profile.

The information you need to become more successful is right in your own backyard, your customer records. Dig in and harvest an acre of diamonds.

Allan Katz is The Loyalty Coach whose mission is to coach retail, service and small businesses how to get all the customers they need and keep them coming back. retention. He can be reached at 901-359-8299 or visit his web site at www.loyaltycoach.com.