

Seven Ways to Make Your Customers Love You

These days, every customer counts.

So why then do companies lose them? Between moving away or passing away and switching to a competitor -- the excuses are many for why customers may jump ship. But the No. 1 reason why customers bail is the feeling of indifference toward a product or service.

To counter this ambivalence, it's key to make sure your customers feel and perceive that they're wanted and want to stay where they're appreciated. But to make customers love you, you'll have to work even harder. Here are seven ways to win the devotion that makes for loyal customers:

1. **Never assume.** You may think you know what customers want. But what if you're wrong? The main reason such a high percentage of new businesses fail is because those companies are trying to create demand where there isn't any, or they're built around untested or unproven ideas that are hard pressed to attract even a small sampling of customers.
Don't make the same mistake. Test and start small, and build your product, service or value proposition around the wants, needs and desires of your target customer. Not only will you get a better understanding of customer needs, you'll be able to identify innovative ways to solve their problems and exceed their expectations.
2. **Always deliver.** To win customers back, you need to deliver on time, every time. If a problem arises, inform your customer right away. Explain how you're going to deal with it. Then follow up again -- and again -- to ensure positive results. This also goes for your invoices and any correspondence. You might even create a system to ensure that each task gets completed correctly and is always delivered in a timely fashion.
3. **Personalize loyalty programs.** In order to ensure you have a winning loyalty program, you must plan, design and execute it in a systemized way. Plus, you need to show the value of it and continually demonstrate that value to your team. An example of a really big company that does this on a personalized level is Caesars Entertainment, which has mastered the art of customer loyalty programs on a massive scale to drive profit.
For instance, Caesars knows, down to the penny, just how much its top customers are likely to spend at any of its properties, and what types of activities individual customers prefer when they stay -- be it gaming, dining or taking in a show. This knowledge allows the company to issue customized offers that may be more appealing to Caesars' best patrons.
4. **Train your staff.** Here's where scripting comes in. Use periodic training sessions to help give your team the skills that are necessary to boost your company's reputation, trust, empathy, flexibility and verbal communication proficiency. This is vital because each customer contact with your team is an opportunity to build your reputation -- or destroy it.
5. **Say "Thank You."** Sounds obvious, but consider this: When was the last time you received a thank-you note from a company you do business with? Or any notice, other than when a payment is due? This simple strategy can really make an impact and says a lot about your company and the value you place on customers.
6. **Stay connected.** While the frequency may vary, every customer should receive an off-line "touch" at least once per quarter and, with an email or e-newsletter, even more often. For instance, once a week with an "opt-in" message may do the trick. Over time, you can develop a relationship with your customers, especially if your "touches" are information or educationally-oriented and are designed to add value to their experience with you, rather than just as a mechanism for pushing products or services.
7. **Play favorites.** New customers are critical to growth, but you must ensure that current or long-standing customers get VIP treatment as well. Nothing is worse for loyal customers than to see products or services they bought at full price discounted to entice new customers. You can turn this around by offering exclusive loyalty programs, deals or specials geared specifically to your best and most loyal customers.