



Ten Secrets for Creating Loyal Customers

Laying a solid foundation for business success

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What does it take to cultivate loyal clients who are willing to repeatedly buy from you? For guaranteed success, customer satisfaction principles need to be diligently carried out before, during, and after the business transaction takes place.

Unfortunately, many small businesses take the easy way out, chanting “the customer is first” mantra during the sales process. However, they quickly forget the customer after the deal closes. This “get the money” attitude alienates customers—tarnishing small business owners with a poor reputation.

You can maneuver your business into the fast lane of customer satisfaction. Take charge by implementing a proactive customer oriented strategy, one that will launch your business above the competition.

Make 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 secrets to help you get started.

Secret 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 customers will tell others.

Secret 2: Use Professional Phone Etiquette

First impressions still matter in the electronic age, and are now more important than ever. With everyone glued to their computers and smartphones, we’ve lost touch with simple relationship building skills.

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 by training your staff how to answer the phone professionally—including yourself.

Secret 3: Always Meet and Beat Deadlines

Does your business consistently meet deadlines?

Even with all our electronic schedule reminders, businesses and consultants still overcommit on projects. The main reason we'll do and say anything to win the deal. Overcommit now, apologize later.

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.

Secret 4: Pursue Integrity

Clients dream of doing business with vendors of integrity.

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 filled 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.

Secret 5: Pay Attention to Detail

Sloppy workmanship, buggy products, and miscommunications with the customer cost the small businesses billions of dollars in sales.

Starting today, diligently record all project communications. Use digital recorders to capture client meetings whenever possible (with the customer's permission, of course). 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. Remember, ***the devil is in the details.***

Secret 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 product or 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 first.

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.

Secret 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 customers 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 newsletters 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 customer thinks of you when the next project comes around.

Maintain a client outreach plan—especially after you've already made the sale.

Secret 9: Provide Free Add-on Services

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

Use add-ons to clinch deals whenever the customer seriously questions the value of your solution. 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 customer satisfaction, which leads loyalty.

Secret 10: Always Guarantee Your Service Offering

While the majority of businesses guarantee their work, few actually follow through.

Always demonstrate your commitment to delivering the best possible value and prove your confidence in executing to the client's expectations. And, just as important, back up your guarantee with real results.

Most service related guarantees are based upon predetermined 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 that you will back up with results.

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.