



HELPING YOU TAKE YOUR BUSINESS TO THE NEXT LEVEL



DISCUSSION PAPER #4

SERVICE EXCELLENCE

ADDING CLARITY AND VISION

Keeping Customers

Advertising to create product/service awareness and attract customers is a significant cost for most businesses. Equally important is to allocate some of the advertising budget to train your front-line employees in delivering quality customer service.

In today's competitive market, not only do you need to be sensitive to changes in your market but you also need to differentiate your company from your competitors.

Like every business today, your goal is to increase sales. However, while advertising may bring customers to your place of business, it is your company's ability to deliver exceptional customer service that will keep them coming back. The other side of the coin is that poor customer service will send them straight to competitor's place.

Exceptional Service is the Key

Of the four major factors that attract customers-location, price, product/service and customer service- some customers will always place a higher value on price. But trying to maintain customers on price alone may mean that you are missing one of the most important elements of customer retention-exceptional customer service from representatives who are knowledgeable about your products or service and who consistently provide courteous, high quality service.

When your representatives are able to meet your customer's expectations for service, the seeds of loyalty are planted and the next time they want a similar product or service, these customers will return. However, if you are not committing the time and money to training your representatives to deliver this level of service, you may be losing more sales to your competitors than you realize.

Product/Service Training

Your representatives' ability to provide exceptional service starts with their having a solid knowledge of the product/services you offer. All of your employees need to be fully aware of the specifications and other features of your products and services. And since this knowledge is a dynamic in the business, it is important to keep them up-to-date as products or services change to improve. Follow up sessions also serve to keep staff enthusiastic about the company's offerings.

Not only should staff be provided the requisite training programs and be encouraged to use the products or services you offer, they need to be informed about the competitor's products or services so they can offer credible comparisons.

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Product/Service Training (continued)

Representatives also need to know what your company is all about and what it stands for. When a Prospective customer walks through the door and asks about a product or service, the salesperson has an opportunity to demonstrate that the customer is purchasing not only the item but also the experience and reputation of your company.

Most business today offer a range of prices in each category to meet the needs of customers to make comparisons. Representatives should be able to point out the features of products/services at the various price points. In this way, they can provide the information that can help customer make the best purchase decision. Consider also that comparisons of the various offerings may help the customer conclude that the higher end item is the better choice.

Customer Service Training

Studies show that there is a direct correlation between exceptional customer service and a company's sales and profits. Conversely, poor service is the most cited reason for customers defecting to another company. Have you ever left a store without making a purchase simply because you could not catch the eye of a salesperson who was talking on the telephone or worse still, couldn't even find a salesperson?

Personal customer service includes things such as asking the customer if you can be of assistance, returning phone calls promptly, smiling and making eye contact, greeting a regular customer by name and over all treating each person that walks in the door as a valued customer regardless of the purchase. These are the things that keep your customers coming back.

Service is also the follow up after the transaction is completed. A phone call to ask customers if they were pleased with their purchase or the service communicates that your company is interested in their satisfaction. Consider also that this is your opportunity to confirm those areas in which your business does well as well hear about those areas that may need improvement.

Another aspect of service is the way your company deals with a customer's complaints and problems. The unhappy customer deserves the same respect and prompt attention as the satisfied customer. Consider also that bad news spreads fast. Here your staff should be trained to listen carefully and ask questions to ensure they fully understand the nature of the complaint so that the problem can be rectified as soon as possible.

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Exceptional Service Keeps Customers Coming Back

While companies spend thousands of dollars on marketing to get attention of potential new customers, sometimes they do so without committing sufficient resources to keep those customers once they walk through the door. Allocating some of that budget to educating your staff about products or services and the importance of quality customer service will help ensure a better return for your advertising dollars.

We Can Help

Sloan Group has experience assisting our clients to achieve service excellence. Please contact one of our Business Improvement Specialists for an initial consultation.

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