

What is Customer Service?

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In these days of competitive markets, the business that excels at customer service is the one that will not only maintain their position, but grow. You could answer the question "What is Customer service" by saying that it is about "exceeding" the expectations of the client, not just "satisfying" them. This is not just about the product or service that you are selling; it's about looking after the people buying them from you too.

Having a great product must be the first step. Everybody likes quality, even more if it is competitively priced with other similar products. If you make the product yourself, see what you can do to enhance how it performs, what it's made from, how it compares with others. If you can make the product the best there is within the price range, customers will not only buy from you, but they will recommend others to buy from you too.

So, you have a great product and your client base is growing - how is your pre and after sales service doing? Not many people think about how they sell the product, but it is still literally serving the customer. How many of us have put the phone down on someone who has been given the unenviable task of cold calling clients to try and sell goods?

Cold calling and pressure sales are two areas that have managed to give selling a bad name, particularly if they are persistent, repetitive and quite obviously so desperate to make a sale that they become aggressive. This is most definitely not what is customer service. Most of us would prefer to do our own market research when looking to buy something and the Internet has made it all so much easier. If you want to build your client base, having a website is now essential rather than an optional extra. Customers can look at the product, find out more about it and then contact you if they are interested. If they register with your site, you are able to build a list of potential customers too, to contact them again at a later date.

It might seem, from what is written above, that there is no place for person to person selling any more. Quite the opposite is the case, from the research I have done, it would appear that most customers would welcome speaking to someone who is knowledgeable about the product (that's the important bit!) and is able to resolve any problems quickly. Call centres in India might be cheaper to run than local ones, but do the operators understand what the product is, do they even want to?

With the best will in the world, things can go wrong. For example, there could be a faulty batch manufactured, or if you are offering a service someone fails to turn up to an appointment. Complaints start coming in and you can either stick your head in the sand and ignore it or you can admit the mistake and try and rectify the situation to everyone's satisfaction. Good customer service will always take the second route. Why? Because by dealing with a problem quickly and efficiently, that customer goes away happy and

will tell his friends what a good organisation you are. Ignoring problems or just not resolving them quickly and satisfactorily really annoys customers and they won't recommend you to others. According to one survey, 68% of customers will leave a supplier if they encounter an attitude of indifference.

A personal example now. My car broke down not too far from a local garage. I rang them up and, without hesitation, they stated that they would go and collect my car and repair it. They called me later in the day to tell me how much it would cost and did I want them to repair it (Gold star no. 1). They said they would waive the cost of collecting the car as it was not too far from the garage (Gold star no. 2). They repaired the car and made sure that everything else was okay too - at no extra expense (Gold star no. 3). A week after the repair, they phoned me to ask whether everything was still okay and was there anything else they could do for me (Gold star no. 4, 5, 6 and 7!). I was extremely satisfied with the service and have bought cars from them since and recommended the garage to friends too. To me this is the answer to "what is customer service?". There is no better advertisement for a supplier of either goods or services than great customer service.