

How well do you take care of customers?

What do sales, implementation, tech support, and customer retention all have in common? These are failed or failing business transactions without strong Customer Service, whether at the initiation of the transaction as in implementation and support, or post transaction when sales are completed and retention efforts follow. The advent of powerful new marketing channels such as social media have no doubt only heightened the devastating impact bad customer service can have on sales. A batch of bad reviews a retailer might receive, for example, is no longer a problematic situation viewed only by visitors to a single website, but a potential maelstrom on several fronts once it goes viral.

For retention sales, good customer service was always understood to be one of the foundational aspects, but now its critical importance has perhaps made it the single biggest factor in repeat sales. Most Fortune 500 companies operate on the rule of thumb that on average it is twice as hard acquiring new customers than keeping existing ones. You are 50-70% more likely to sell to existing customers than to new ones.

While the conventional notion that the customer is always right has survived quite a few decades, there is widespread recognition that true flexibility in serving customer demands and expectations is, in fact, a herculean task. Some customers believe that reps should be highly personable and friendly; others prefer customer service delivered intelligence-agency style with cold hard facts; and still there are those who look forward to receiving personalized emails, tweets, and recommendations. And yet, these are only three among the endless varieties of expectations held by existing and potential customers. If Big Data has taught us anything in the field of customer service, it is that no two human beings expect the same thing when dialing, chatting, or browsing for help. “Total customer experience” is indeed a blurring of many lines of previously completely separate processes.

Appropriately, customer service should mean providing a highly individuated service experience by first listening well, and then systematically outlining a working plan. In essence: To provide customer service differently to different people. A customer in a hurry needing quick answers should perceive the service agent reflecting the same sense of urgency, while an inquisitive customer trying to thoroughly understand a process should discover that the agent is in full problem-solving mode and not just dishing out stock replies.

It has been proven repeatedly that a strong commitment to customer service upfront will actually reduce service calls and save companies money in the long run, not to mention the loyal customer base generated almost as a side effect. Because there are always “urgent” projects clamoring for budget dollars—miniscule small business budgets being no exception—the service experience of customers is too often relegated a very distant second to sales. The companies that strive to balance matters better, by not forgetting the golden rule that existing customers are easier to keep than replace, stand to win big in the end.

Bill Saqib

Co-founder, McCord Solutions – January 22, 2015