

Thanksgiving...everyday!

It's almost that time of year again when we pause to think about the meaning of "Thanksgiving." It's a time of reflection and appreciation. And, it is often a time when business owners think about telling their customers, "Thank you."

But, then the phone rings, someone walks through the door, and the good intentions of showing appreciation to clients is out the window for another year. You think about it for a few minutes in your overwhelmed state, and then rationalize, "Well, no harm done...I thanked them at the time of purchase, so I probably won't lose too many clients if I don't do that extra follow-up now...only I know of my plan to do a Thanksgiving campaign, and since I haven't had any complaints, they must be satisfied."

But, are they?

Whether your customers purchase something big or small, when was the last time you or an employee called the customer to ask if everything has met their expectations and to say thank you again. Ever send a "gift" out of the blue to remind them of your relationship (and build it more in the process)?

Now put your consumer hat on for a minute.

When was the last time a store or individual went the extra mile to express appreciation for your business? If you have been lucky enough to feel extra special in the eyes of a business, you undoubtedly remember that feeling.

Tell you something? In today's fast-paced world, we all get so caught up in the details of the day, we often forget or don't bother to take the time to follow-up with customers yet it is truly one of the least expensive investments of time and money you can make in the world of marketing.

Think about it. If so few businesses actually do follow-up or show appreciation, you will easily stand out from the crowd—earning an automatic competitive advantage in the minds of your clients...and the people they influence.

Sure your follow-up call may, in some cases, result in you hearing something negative (you think you've "opened a can of worms"), but aren't the repercussions of not discovering a dissatisfied customer worse than swallowing a little pride and fixing the problem? Just think of the positive word-of-mouth you will get when you convert an unhappy customer into a happy one because you cared enough to follow-up and follow-through.

In addition to good word-of-mouth, you minimize the risk of customers leaving you because they feel you are apathetic towards them, and you maximize the likelihood of repeat purchases and sustained loyalty (plus referrals).

The stats say that 60% of us stop doing business with a company because we feel unappreciated, not because we are dissatisfied. WOW!

Now take that stat to another level.

When appropriate, in addition to the follow-up call and/or thank you note, it is appropriate and very beneficial to you to send an occasional visual “thank you” to capitalize on the curiosity factor.

For example, send a plant or gift basket with a balloon attached to a client to thank him or her for referring a friend, but be sure to send the “gift” to that person’s work. By sending a gift to work, you achieve the “Ohh...who sent you that?” water-cooler chat which is just what you want; every time the client answer the co-workers question, it’s free and positive marketing for you.

All said and done, if you don’t follow-up on your sales to further cement a relationship with a client, someone else will be knocking at their door. With loyalty being a two-way street, if they feel no loyalty from you, don’t expect it back.

When I bought a car, I didn’t even receive a thank you note or call from the dealership...and that was a huge purchase. While I wouldn’t go out of my way to speak badly of the salesman or the dealership, they did nothing to make me want to speak positively of them either. I have no reason to recommend or go back. It is apparent that sales, to them, are transactional; to me, especially with a large-ticket purchase, such sales should be part of a relationship.

Relationship building is the key to long-term success through customer satisfaction. Combine that with the “appreciation” statistic sited above with the statistic that says it costs five times more to get a new customer than to keep one, and it only makes good business sense to let customers know you appreciate them and value their relationships with your company.

As you look at your 2011 marketing plan, don’t forget to plan a proactive customer relations program which recognizes that every interaction with your company is a chance to strengthen a relationship one customer at a time. Stay in their faces and build that rapport...or your competition will!

Carolyn Touhey, owner of SmartBiz Strategy, is an award-winning marketing consultant who also teaches marketing to entrepreneurs. She can be reached at 250-335-2342 or through www.SmartBizStrategy.com.