



ideas & inspirations

FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

From KIWIHOST

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ideas

The old hardy question, "Do you criticise or knock your competition?" again comes up for debate. The last month has seen the Apple verses PC's challenge being placed squarely in our face.

It is easy to admire the clear crisp Apple TV advertising. They personify Mac as a clear modern product that is in touch with the new brave world, as opposed to PC's, which are tired and constantly needing support wrapped up in their cocoon of technical jargon.

The TV advertisements highlight Mac's strength with a sense of irreverent cynicism and a touch of smugness. In New Zealand we have only seen a small part of the campaign. Go into "You Tube" and look at what's happening in the USA and in particular the comments that include Steve Jobs and Bill Gates.

Not many organisations would take the risk of getting away with this approach. After all, spending marketing dollars to draw the consumer's attention to your opposition's technology is a risky business, unless you are very secure in your own ability and position. Whichever way you look at it, you are reminding your audience that they have options.

Whether this form of approach does more harm than good, only time will tell. But Mac have no doubt counted the possible cost of shooting themselves down with their own promotional budget. So if you are tempted to emulate the Apple Mac strategy – take care. They are breaking new ground and only time will prove whether their investment will pay off.

IN THIS ISSUE

- **KEY TO BUSINESS SUCCESS**
- **BUILDING A BUSINESS**
- **EARNING RESPECT**
- **GROWING YOUR BUSINESS ONE CUSTOMER AT A TIME**
- **BUSINESS BOOSTER IDEAS**
- **CUSTOMER SERVICE SKILLS**

inspirations

KEY TO BUSINESS SUCCESS

The key to business success today and building for tomorrow should be changing the way you think about your business. You need to shift your thinking from the creation of sales into the acquisition of loyal and long-term customers. Everything else you do is really an extension of this simple concept.

It's an easy concept to grasp, but takes commitment to master. Keep on reminding yourself about this idea. It will keep you from giving in to the temptation to place your own needs before the satisfaction of your customers or prospective customers.

It will ensure that the brand you have been busy building will become and stay far more attractive and profitable than if you had only been in the business of making sales.

So remember: Change from creating sales to acquiring loyal and long-term customers. ⁽¹⁾

WORDS OF WISDOM

We see our customers as invited guests to a party, and we are the hosts. It's our job everyday to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better.

Jeff Bezos

monday morning motivations

ideas & inspirations offers a weekly customer service success idea, delivered by Pod Cast. Each Monday start your week with a 90 seconds dynamic message that will inspire you to focus on one aspect of your customer service. It will get your mind stimulated to look for ways to implement real customer service improvements.

July Pod Casts:

- July 2 Educate Your Customers
- July 9 Build a Better Mousetrap
- July 16 Change Your Language
- July 23 Frustrated Customers Are People
- July 30 You Make a Difference

To listen go to our website www.kiwihost.co.nz and click on: Monday Morning Motivations.

BUILDING A BUSINESS

Building iTICKET into a sustainable business was an explosion created by the convergence of ideas. Five years ago a young man, who in his own words is “an IT geek” with a strong interest in theatre, realised that many amateur drama groups were failing to provide their audience customers and members with quality service when making theatre bookings.

The two large booking organisations were focused on large venues and had little interest in dealing with smaller suburban and provincial theatres. He sensed a need. He researched this and established what both audiences and theatres needed. He then created a seamless booking system for theatres, events and sports organisations. So iTICKET was born. It’s all about providing audiences with a booking service that is personal and meets the needs of the customer and small theatre groups.

I recently called iTICKET and was greeted by a friendly male operator. I stated my needs and his reply was, “Yes John, I can help you”. I had not given my name. We at Ideas & Inspirations were impressed. We visited iTICKET to discover how all this happened. We discovered that the creation of the company was rooted in the experience of one unhappy customer who saw a need. The system that iTICKET has developed and to which its operators have been trained to react provides the operator with a mass of information based on the telephone number from which the call originated.

The second component of iTICKET’s success is the training of call centre people to effectively use this information in building a relationship with the caller. The response was soft, non-intrusive and was focused on me and my needs. Operators are encouraged to listen for more than customer complaints; they are trained to listen for any signs of customer dissatisfaction which they then log. Each week the directors scan the logs and either phone or communicate with the customer. This simple, proactive and unsolicited response to potentially unhappy customers is a unique part of iTICKET’s success.

So what’s the moral of this success story? If you don’t like the service – get into business and provide what you believe the customer does want. A simple formula, applied with the right attitude, is an outstanding strategy for success.

EARNING RESPECT

Have you ever noticed that some people just seem to have the respect of everyone around them? People hang on their every word. They’re trusted implicitly. Everyone turns to them for advice. How does this happen? What have they done to create such an enviable reputation?

Respect in the workplace is something we all seek, yet many people use very counterproductive strategies to try and achieve it. Here are a few examples of how **not** to get the respect of the people around you:

1. Demand it. One of the fastest ways to lose respect from people is to tell them to respect you. Yes, by exercising position power or threatening formal action, you can force people to defer to you and treat you in a respectful manner; but people’s respect for you will virtually disappear.

2. Brag. Some people feel that the best way to get respect from others is to continually tell everyone about their accomplishments. While people might initially be impressed to hear about someone’s accomplishments, it won’t be long before they tire of the boasting and label him a braggart.

3. Overcompensate. Some people, in their effort to gain the respect of others, become overly critical. They demand perfection of the people around them, and will point out the smallest and most insignificant errors. In reality, we respect people who seek excellence. People who seek perfection for perfection sake, can become annoying. Ultimately, respect is something that can only be earned. This is true whether you want people to respect you for what you do, or for who you are. If you want respect from your staff or your customers there are two things you **have** to do:

1. Be good at what you do. When push comes to shove, if you want respect for what you do, you have to be good at what you do. Find a niche that you can “own,” then become an insatiable student. Attend every workshop, seminar and conference you can. Be a voracious reader. Find a mentor. Practice.

2. Be a ‘go-to’ person. Be the person that people turn to when they are looking for help. Be honest, walk your talk, and make a point to be interested about the people around you.

Two other important things: Be patient and be careful. Like a great tree, it can take many years for respect to grow, but only moments for it to be lost forever. ⁽²⁾

GROWING YOUR BUSINESS ONE CUSTOMER AT A TIME

The “people” aspect of a business is what it is all about. The rule is, “think of your customers as individuals”. Once we think that way, we realize our business is our customers, not our products or services.

Here are some simple steps that will keep your customers coming back:

1. There is no way that the quality of customer service can exceed the quality of the people who provide it. If you believe that you can build a business by paying low wages, providing few benefits and not training your staff, it will show. The business doesn't help the customers, your staff do.

2. Realise that your staff will treat your customer the way they are treated. Staff model their behaviour on management. Do you greet your staff enthusiastically each day; are you polite in your dealings with them? Consistent rude service by staff is a reflection of management's behaviour.

3. Do you know who your customers are? If you meet a regular customer, would you recognise them? Could you call them by name? We all like to feel important. Calling someone by name lets them know you value them as customers.

4. Do your customers know who you are? If they see you on the street, would they recognise you? Being visible is an asset.

5. Keep in touch. Include a thank-you note in a customer's package; send a birthday card; clip an article when you see their name or photo in print; write a congratulatory note when they get a promotion or have an addition to their family.

6. Are your customers greeted when they walk in the door, or within 30-40 seconds? Is it possible they could come in, look around, and go out without being acknowledged? This simple gesture is a matter of respect. It's saying “we appreciate your coming in”.

7. Do your staff know how to handle a complaint or an irate customer? Provide guidelines for what to say and do in every conceivable case. People at the frontline have a critical role in providing the customer's experience. Make sure they know what to do and say to make that customer's experience positive and pleasant.

8. If you want to know what your customers think of your business, ask them! Compose a “How're We Doing?” card and leave it at the exit or by the register, or include it with their next invoice. Keep it short and simple. Ask things like: what do they like; what don't they like; what would they change; what could you do better; about their latest experience. To ensure it is returned by the customer, have it pre-stamped. If the customer has given their name and address, be sure to acknowledge receipt of the card.

Remember that the real long term profitability isn't about winning customers, it's keeping customers. Each individual customer's perception of your business will determine whether they will come back. ⁽¹⁾

BUSINESS BOOSTER IDEAS

BE LIKE WALT—DO SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF

Detail matters. The best customer-centred leaders and managers are detail people. Because perfection is in the detail. “Walt was a perfectionist. One time he thought the sign in front of the Golden Horseshoe was crooked. We said ‘No, we measured it, it's level.’ But, to humour him, we checked it again. He was right. Walt had an eye for stuff like that. Things had to be done right.”

Jim Cora, Former Disneyland executive

CREATING AN EMOTIONAL TRUST BOND

The advent of creating deeper customer relationships provides financial leverage and longevity. The true formation of an emotional trust bond with your customers provides the highest degree of differentiation and evokes that most powerful marketing programme an organisation can have, word-of-mouth.

special
announcements

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CUSTOMER SERVICE SKILLS

Know this saying: “The customer is always right – even when they’re wrong!” But it’s not being right or wrong, it’s just that assumptions are different.

Look at this situation: The arrangement with the garage was to drop the car in for a WOF and pick it up after work. However, the customer has an urgent appointment and now needs the car prior to lunch time. They say to the mechanic “Can you get this done quickly?” The mechanic responds “No worries!” “If something needs doing I’ll give you a ring but it should be sweet.”

Customer ...	Mechanic ...
<i>1st Assumption:</i> Everything will be done in a couple of hours	<i>1st Assumption:</i> I can fit this in between my other work later in the morning.
No call from mechanic up to 11 am	
<i>2nd Assumption:</i> The car can be collected around 11.30	<i>Fact:</i> Mechanic has not yet started to check the car
The customer arrives at 11.40	<i>Fact:</i> The brakes need fixing before the car can be driven away. The mechanic is about to ring the customer.
<i>3rd Assumption:</i> I can pick it up now and make my appointment.	<i>2nd Assumption:</i> I am following what I agreed with the customer.
Sees the car!	Sees the customer!
<i>Perception:</i> The mechanic has let me down!	<i>Perception:</i> Now they’ve have popped in I can show them what the problem is.

You can imagine what is about to be said!

How to stop falling into the assumption trap with your customers?

- Check assumptions by asking open questions (questions that require more than a yes or a no) e.g. “How soon do you need it?” “What if I find something that will take time to fix?”
- Make sure you understand what the customer wants by summarising back your understanding e.g. “Even if something needs fixing, you need your car by 11.45 at the latest.”
- Ask the customer what their understanding is e.g. “So when are you expecting to pick up your car even if some work needs to be done?”

The Clue? NEVER ASSUME – without testing it out!

Frances Tweedy, Director, Capability Group

*An Irish comedian performing at the recent Auckland Comedy Festival recounted the following observation when comparing the strict gun laws in Ireland and New Zealand compared with those of the USA. He said, “I can’t help feeling that there is a direct relationship between the slack gun laws in America and the excellent customer service.”
Don’t you wish?*

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services**

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2. Belding, S. Earning Respect. Email: 5 Nov 06, Winning at Work Newsletter
3. Tahir, Liz. Growing Your Business One Customer at a Time. Retrieved 11 May 2007 from <http://www.businessknowhow.com/marketing/grow-customer.htm>