

Business Tips



10 Rules For Great Customer Service

(NAPSA)—Think about the last time you had a negative buying experience. Did an e-commerce site fail to respond to your e-mail? Did a sales associate treat you as if he didn't really want to help you? Were you left on hold for a long time when you called a mail-order house?

Negative buying experiences are almost always linked to shoddy customer service. These days it's rare to find good customer support, even though most businesses claim that they put people first.

But customer service is making a revival because business managers are realizing good customer service is essential for all businesses, according to AllBusiness.com, one of the Web's leading business sites. AllBusiness.com provides small and growing businesses with valuable resources, including business guides, contracts and agreements, business directory listings, product comparisons and product discounts. AllBusiness.com also offers expert advice, such as the following 10 rules for excellent customer service:

1. Commit to quality service. Everyone in the company needs to be devoted to creating a positive experience for the customer. Always try to go above and beyond customer expectations.

2. Know your products. Conveying knowledge about products and services will help you win a customer's trust and confidence. Know your company's products, services and return policies inside out. Try to anticipate the types of questions customers will ask.

3. Know your customers. Try to



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learn everything you can about your customers so you can tailor your service approach to their needs and buying habits. Talk to people and listen to their complaints so you can get to the root of customer dissatisfaction.

4. Treat people with courtesy and respect. Remember that every contact with a customer—whether it's by e-mail, phone, written correspondence, or face-to-face meeting—leaves an impression. Use phrases like “sorry to keep you waiting,” and “it's been a pleasure helping you.”

5. Never argue with a customer. You know darn well that the customer isn't always right. But instead of focusing on what went wrong in a particular situation, concentrate on how to fix it. Research shows that seven out of 10 customers will do business with you again if you resolve a complaint in their favor.

6. Don't leave customers hanging. Repairs, callbacks and e-mails need to be handled with a sense of urgency. Customers want

immediate resolution, and if you can give it to them, you'll probably win their repeat business. Research shows that 95 percent of dissatisfied customers will do business with a company again if their complaint is resolved on the spot.

7. Always provide what you promise. Fail to do this and you'll lose credibility and customers. If you guarantee a quote within 24 hours, get the quote out in a day or less. If you can't make good on your promise, apologize to the customer and offer some type of compensation, such as a discount or free delivery.

8. Assume that customers are telling the truth. Even though it sometimes appears that customers are lying or giving you a hard time, always give them the benefit of the doubt.

9. Focus on making customers, not making sales. Salespeople, especially those who get paid on commission, sometimes focus on the volume instead of the quality of the sale. Remember that keeping a customer's business is more important than closing a sale. Research shows that it costs six times more to attract a new customer than it does to keep an existing one.

10. Make it easy to buy. The buying experience in your store, on your Web site or through your catalog should be as easy as possible. Eliminate unnecessary paperwork and forms, help people find what they need, explain how products work and do whatever you can to facilitate transactions.

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