

# 10 Rules for Great Customer Service

By Richard D. Harroch

Think about the last time you had a negative buying experience. An online store may have failed to respond to your email inquiry. Maybe a sales associate at your wireless store didn't know the key differences between an iPhone and a Blackberry. Or perhaps you were left on hold for an inordinate amount of time when you called a mail-order company's toll-free line.

Negative buying experiences are almost always linked to shoddy customer service. These days it is rare to find great customer support, even though I've found that most businesses claim they put customers first. But even with the increasing popularity of online shopping, customer service hasn't gone the way of the dodo. In fact, good customer service can be a differentiator between you and your competition. Heeding the following 10 basic rules will go a long way toward making your business a success.

- 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. Zappos does a great job of keeping the customer happy.
- 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. Make sure your employees are fully trained about your products.
- 3. Know your customers.** Try to learn everything you can about your customers so you can tailor your service approach to their needs and buying habits. Solicit feedback from customers. 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 by email, phone, written correspondence, or a face-to-face meeting — leaves an impression. Be courteous and use phrases like "sorry to keep you waiting," "thanks for your order," "you're welcome" and "it's been a pleasure helping you."
- 5. Never argue with a customer.** You know that the customer is not always right. But instead of focusing on what went wrong in a particular situation, concentrate on how to fix it. Most customers will do business with you again if you resolve a complaint in their favor.
- 6. Don't leave customers hanging.** Handle repairs, callbacks and emails with a sense of urgency. Customers want immediate resolution, and if you can give it to them, you will probably win their repeat business. Research shows that many 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 will 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. The majority of customers don't like to complain; in fact, they'll go out of their way to avoid it.
- 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.

You probably know more than you realize about customer service. The golden rule — do unto others as you would have them do unto you — is certainly applicable when it comes to treating customers like kings. It helps to identify times when you've been frustrated by another company's customer service and try not to make the same mistakes.

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