

## **Make Your Business a Habit**

When your customers want a product or service you carry, is your store the first place they go?

People use habits and routines throughout much of their life. Habits and routines make life easier and free up the brain for other decision-making tasks. We operate much of our lives on autopilot.

“The autopilot mode can be of great benefit to you as a business owner,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. “Yet you need to nurture the customer to help them build a habit of thinking first of your store.”

“And not only do you need to develop that habit initially, but you cannot get lax,” he notes. “You must continue to strengthen the relationship through time.”

Customer habits are formed as consumers find your place of business, maybe just browsing the first time they enter, or perhaps some marketing effort drew them in. You want them, on that first visit, to view your store as friendly, service-oriented.

This means a smile, a friendly greeting and asking how you can help.

Building the habit can happen more quickly if, on that first visit, you get them to make a purchase, any purchase. Then you focus on having them buy something else each time they enter. The goal here is establishing the purchasing routine so you are not concerned that the purchases may have little profit for you. You want to establish repeat behavior.

“Yet realize that a purchase does not need to happen each time,” says (Insert name and title) of (Insert county). “You also want to establish your business as the place to go.”

So be prepared to search, order, offer suggestions and even mention another store that may have what the customers need. Also help them in using the product, even if it isn’t yours, and offer other tips. All of these efforts build up the perceived value of your business and the likelihood customers will come back routinely.

Building habits also can occur even when customers are not in the store. Let them know when new products they are interested in arrive. Small businesses have a big advantage because you know your customers, their needs and their wants.

Emails, cards and other communication also keep your name in front of customers. Let them know of the arrival of new products and services for them to try. Even wish them a happy birthday.

Another way to increase their perception of your business and build it as a habit is to have a conversation with them. If they say something positive about a past product or experience with your business, thank them. Even ask them if they would mind doing a short video or written

testimonial. They may feel uncomfortable, but having you ask helps them realize you appreciate their business.

If they make a suggestion, again thank them and, if you use it, tell them how and what difference it made.

“Finally, be known as the owner who listens,” says (Insert last name). “You maybe can’t change anything, but we all like to feel we have been heard.”

Habits are powerful. Habits are hard to break. Making your business a habit is a big step in your ongoing success.

For more information, contact your local Extension Service office at [insert phone number and email address]. Also visit NDSU’s small-business support website at [www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness) and sign up for the monthly newsletter. Or check out Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz](http://www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz) or Twitter at @gmuske. Another online resource is [www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship](http://www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship).

You also can get help from your local chamber of commerce, as well as the Small Business Administration and its related organizations, such as the Small Business Development Centers and SCORE.

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