

Great Customer Service Begins With a Smile

The idea that providing good customer service is important to your business should come as no surprise. But can that be translated into dollars and cents?

“The value of customer service is hard to quantify because it is part of a store’s brand and reputation,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. “There are, though, some indications of what it can mean for a business. For example, four out of 10 individuals would return to a business that handled their complaint satisfactorily. And another two people might return.”

What that means is at least four individuals are continuing to buy your goods and services. A simple return then can be calculated by simply multiplying the average yearly sales per customer. This is a rough number, but you begin to get the value of your customer service efforts.

“Realistically, the return is probably much greater than this simple number,” says (Insert name and title) of (Insert county). “To begin with, customers who have received good service, be it a complaint resolution or just in general, tend to return to a store more often. And some research suggests they also increase the amount they buy.”

People who have received good service also tend to become ambassadors for the store. In conversation, people share their positive images of how they were treated as a customer. Over and over, this type of marketing has been one of the most effective tools you can have.

All of these examples mean an increase to your bottom line.

So where does good customer service start?

“The first steps to great customer service are easy to do, inexpensive, and generate an immediate positive image of the store,” says Muske. “Step one is a simple smile and a hello when someone walks in the door.”

Step two is just as easy and effective. Ask how you can help someone. Help the person find the section and item he or she wants. Suggest other items he or she may need or would support the item being purchased.

When customers leave, ask if they found what they were looking for, thank them for stopping and tell them to come back. If they purchased something, remind them to get in touch with you if they have any questions or problems. If they did not find what they were looking for, offer suggestions on where they might try. If you can’t get the business, you certainly would like to keep it in the community.

Here are some of the other components of good service:

- Respond promptly
- Resolve issues quickly

- Listen
- Keep your promises
- Give more than expected
- Help even if it does not have an immediate return for you
- Make sure you and all your employees offer this assistance

“Good service is as important to your business as the need to offer a product or service that meets the customer’s needs,” Muske says. “Spend time examining how your business looks to the customer and making improvements where needed.”

For more help, check with 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 and sign up for the monthly newsletter. Or check out Facebook at www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz or Twitter at @gmuske. Another online resource is www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship.

Joining groups such as your local chamber of commerce can be helpful. The Small Business Administration and its related organizations, such as the Small Business Development Centers and Service Corps of Retired Executives, also can be valuable resources.

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For more information, contact glenn.muske@ndsu.edu or call (701) 328-9718. You also can visit our website, www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness.