

Small-business Savvy: Use, Don't Abuse, Small-business Interest

By Glenn Muske, Rural and Agribusiness Enterprise Development Specialist
NDSU Extension Service

Customers like doing business with people they know. As a small-business owner, you can use that to your advantage.

Some advantages can include knowing your customers by name. You can learn what products and services they want. If customers have a problem, "talking to the boss" to get an immediate solution is easy for them. What's also easy is to ask them to be your ambassador, take pictures for your use and write a review.

But do not abuse the advantage. Today the consumer has certain expectations that all businesses need to meet. Being small should not be used as an excuse.

Some of the areas where being small is used as an excuse are:

- * Inability to compete, typically in terms of price - Price is just one way businesses can compete, and it is not the leading factor typically. Small businesses can be very competitive in many other ways.
- * Inability as the reason for lack of success or low revenue - Lots of small businesses grow and are successful by looking for the opportunities they have.
- * Not planning - Planning is a crucial step in being successful. Planning need not be developing an elaborate set of written documents. It is, however, going through a thoughtful process and jotting down key goals, objectives and time frames.
- * Competing for help - Small businesses can offer certain benefits that big businesses can't. Plus, small businesses often can be very competitive in terms of wages and salaries.
- * Not using technology - It really isn't a matter of whether you want to use it; technology is a part of today's society.
- * No marketing – Small businesses face lots of competition. You need to be visible to your customer base. Today that means being online as well as in traditional marketing methods. All businesses need a website. Beyond that, you need to be using the tools that your customer is using.
- * Poor customer relations – I hate to repeat myself, but don't take advantage of your customers. Being small does not mean you can ignore your customer, talk about your customer or not be totally professional in how you treat your customer. You know how you want to be treated. Treat your customer the same way.

Most small-business owners understand what they need to do in terms of customer relationships. What usually is the case is that we get lax in these long-term relationships and slowly let go of some of the things that once made our small business stand out. You can't let that happen. Never assume the customer will be back tomorrow.

Your customer base is your most valuable resource. Make sure to pay attention to it and encourage its growth. Its strength and growth is your business tomorrow.

For more help, visit our website, <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness>, and sign up for the monthly newsletter.

More information is available at your local Extension office, as well as at <http://powerofbusiness.net> and www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship.

The Small Business Administration and its related organizations, such as the Small Business Development Centers and Service Corps of Retired Executives, along with many other state agencies, also can be valuable resources.

###

NDSU Agriculture Communication

Source: Glenn Muske, (701) 328-9718, glenn.muske@ndsu.edu

Editor: Ellen Crawford, (701) 231-5391, ellen.crawford@ndsu.edu