

Make Good First Impression in Your Small Business

People form impressions in the first couple of minutes after entering a new place. Have you ever considered what your business says to them?

“Businesses offer many types of nonverbal communication, just like people do,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. “It makes no difference if it is a physical place or an online location. Customers look for these same key elements in your online store, too.”

Small-business owners spend a great deal of time working on their product or service. They also spend time and money marketing. Yet for all of that focus on knowing the audience’s need, knowing who the audience is and learning how to approach that audience, business owners sometimes miss thinking about the customer’s first impression.

Realizing that several parts may be melded together to form that first impression is important.

Items such as the outside entrance, signs and even the parking situation form part of the first impression. And, of course, people will look at how neat and clean the place is, including windows, floors and shelves. This review goes from the front entrance all the way to any public waiting rooms and even the restrooms.

First-timers also tune in to how they are greeted and if someone offers to assist them. If assisted, they want someone who knows the products and services offered and doesn’t just repeat a memorized sales line. The fact that people are expecting a pleasant personality from staff should go without saying.

While in the store, customers also go through some type of scan of the breadth and depth of products and services offered. In addition to analyzing staff friendliness and helpfulness, people look for signs and other aids that provide information they would find useful in making a purchase.

“To get a sense of what people may think about your business, get some people to review your place of business,” says (Insert name and title) of (Insert county). “You also can ask new people coming in the door to take a short survey on maybe one or two of these items.

“Make their visit a win-win situation,” continued (Insert last name). “For their thoughts and time, offer them a gift certificate that they can use immediately.”

How your business looks reflects the brand you are trying to build. Make sure that it is customer-friendly and encourages people to make it their place of choice.

For help, 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 and sign up for the monthly newsletter. Or check out Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz> or Twitter at @gmuske.

Other resources include <http://powerofbusiness.net> and www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship. The Small Business Administration and its related organizations, such as the Small Business Development Centers and SCORE, 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.