

Small-business Savvy: Customer Service is More Than a Post-transaction Activity

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If your idea of customer service is something that begins after a transaction, you are focused on the wrong side of the equation.

Great customer service begins before a person ever becomes a customer.

Up-front customer service can help you not only make a sale; it will help the customer have a better experience and minimize any fallout if an issue with your product or service should arise.

Up-front customer service involves developing a relationship with your audience built on trust and respect. This trust and respect comes from your business story, your interactions with the audience and from your assistance in helping them consider various options that might meet their needs.

Developing such trust also comes from people's perception of your involvement in the community.

Up-front customer service can be encouraged by your employee training. Spending extra time to help your employees learn how to get a customer engaged in conversation about his/her need goes a long way toward a satisfied customer.

Up-front customer service is helping customers even if their need is not a part of your business offerings. A great example of such service can be found in the classic Christmas movie, "Miracle on 34th Street," when Santa offers customers places where they can buy a hard-to-find toy or even places they can buy something cheaper than what it's selling for at his store.

Customer service is listening, but it goes beyond that to asking probing questions to ensure you understand.

Many customer service programs focus on helping customers in the use and operation of something they purchased in your store. It often includes a component of how to interact with a customer who is having a problem with something he/she purchased. You focus on correcting the situation.

While up-front customer service can't ensure these problems don't happen, when they do, your customer brings the issue to you with a different mindset. You already established trust, so some of the tension already is gone.

Good customer service is good business. Good up-front customer service can set you apart. Make it your goal.

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 <http://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.

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NDSU Agriculture Communication

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