

Learn to Love Your Clients

Did you know that the people most likely to buy from you at any given time are your existing clients?

That makes perfect sense, after all they know you, they love you and they trust you. So in your haste to build your business make sure you don't ignore your biggest asset; your existing clients! So before you dash out to buy that advertisement and pull in new clients make sure you aren't annoying the ones you already have. We've all heard those promotions offering discounts and great deals to people who sign up or buy before a certain date ... they always get me screaming but what about me? I've been giving you money for years aren't I worth a little thank you? So if you are going to put together a promotion make sure there is something for your existing clients as well.

And while you are at it ... when it comes to client service, make sure you are not over promising and under delivering. If a client wants it by Tuesday we are often tempted to say yes rather than disappoint the customer. However, we run the risk of ruining our customer service reputation when we run late.

Regardless of how good our product or service we are branded with the fact that we couldn't meet a deadline. Missed deadlines mean conflict so you have to ask yourself "where do you want the conflict"? At the start of the sales process when it can be overcome or at the end when it leaves a bad taste in the client's mouth?

I usually recommend that you add a 50% contingency to all promises. If you think it will take two days tell the client three. Work your internal systems on two days and you will be able to delight the client by completing the job early. If there is an unexpected problem which means you won't be able to meet the promised deadline you should let the client know straight away. Human nature dictates that we look forward to receiving products or services. Our disappointment often leads to anger and disputes especially if we have travelled some distance, rearranged our schedule or spent a day at home waiting for something that never arrives! However, if we receive a phone call before the expected date apologising, explaining the problem and offering a new deadline we are more likely to forgive and forget. In fact, when you take the initiative to call, clients will often thank you for letting them know. When a client is in an urgent hurry and pressuring you to deliver early you need to explain why the job will take two days, two hours or a month. Detail the steps you need to take, delivery time on parts or production time that can't be altered. Make sure you promote the benefits of your product or service so the customer can see why it is important to wait. You may lose the occasional customer by being honest about deadlines but that is sometimes preferable to having an unhappy customer in the marketplace

And what about your actual sales process ... is that losing you customers?

Take a look at your sales process to see if it was developed for the business or the customer. Over time we may have developed a sales process that suits us but inconveniences the customer. My favourite example of this is car servicing. Most of us at some time have taken our car to a dealership to be serviced. This usually involves getting up early, driving to the dealership by 9am, organising someone to pick you up or hitching a lift with the dealership courtesy vehicle. We then leave our car at the dealership all day and repeat the drop off pick up process at the end of the day. I believe it takes around an hour and a half to service the standard family car, but for some reason the industry has trained us to leave our cars at the dealership all day which allows them to plan their work schedule. This is a great example of a system that has primary benefits for the dealer not the client.

Car hire falls into the same category. The one thing that people hiring a car have in common is the fact they don't have a car. But most car hire companies make no effort to offer a delivery or pick up service. When a sales process has been designed for the business not the customer there are usually opportunities to offer an alternative service. For instance one Sydney car dealership provides a pick-up and delivery service for clients. You drive your car to work as usual, leave your keys at reception where they are picked up by a mechanic who takes your car back to the dealership services your car, and delivers it back to the office with a written report. They've even taken care not to lose the human touch in the sales process. The following day the mechanic makes a courtesy call to see if you are happy with the service. The end result is a customer who didn't have to reorganise his or her busy day, a car that was only out of action for two hours and a mechanic who took the time to actually talk to the client. Perhaps it's time to review your sales and customer service process and develop Your Own Customer Service Plan. Divide it up into categories:

- The telephone
- Pre-sales service
- After-sales service
- Ongoing customer communication
- Complaints

Develop strategies for proactively coping with each phase and you will have even more clients who love you and trust you!