

Customer Service: The Biggest Loser



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Each year, U.S. companies lose an estimated \$83 billion in sales they could have earned.

Think it was because customers were dissatisfied with faulty products or services? Or maybe customers craved change and were wooed by better offers? Or do you think those clients were searching for lower prices?

I'm sorry to say none of the above reasons are correct. Unfortunately, \$83 billion is lost annually because customers defected as a direct result of poor customer experiences. In fact, a research study by Genesys, a customer service management software company, says nearly two-thirds of consumers end business relationships solely because of the way they were treated. While 61 percent of those customers do end up with a competitor, 39 percent of them are completely lost or abandoned.

Knowing how much money has been left on the table as a result of something as simple as good service is a tough pill to swallow. When you think about every level of service in your company, from the person who answers the phone to salespeople to managers to the frontlines of employees performing services at customers' homes, there are so many areas where the fragile service shell can crack.

Luckily, the Genesys study revealed the five top areas where service tends to fall short. Improving these areas could make a world of difference in your service this season.

1. Customers don't like to repeat themselves. Customers want to feel valued. None of us like being unheard, particularly when we're trying to offer someone our business. Listen to your customers and get to know them. Record the data for future reference. Develop processes that recognize each customer's value and history. And don't treat clients as if you're meeting them for the first time each time they call or each time you visit their properties. Kate Leggett, Forrester research analyst, says it best:

“Customers dream about personalized, contextual, proactive customer service experiences. They want each interaction to add value and build upon prior ones so they don’t have to repeat themselves and restart the discovery process.”

2. Customers don’t like automated self-service. Today, customers spend an average of more than 9.5 minutes trying to reach a human via phone, according to Genesys. They have other communication options, yet when consumers were asked to list their preferred interaction channels, their first choice was phone. Does your phone too frequently go to voicemail or an automated self-service menu when customers call? Do you have a live, friendly, knowledgeable person answering your phone and directing people to the proper contacts?

3. Customers don’t like waiting too long for service. When customers call or email, how long do you make them wait before you respond? Then, how long do you make them wait before you show up to their home? Customers don’t wait more than 28 seconds on hold via phone when dealing with the top 10 companies with the shortest average hold times, Disney and Nordstrom among them. Customers don’t wait more than five hours for an email response from the top 10 companies with the shortest average email response time, Kohl’s and Coldwater Creek among them. That’s what customers are used to. What are your average hold times?



4. Customers don’t like when you don’t know your business. In the Genesys study, consumers said competent service representatives played the largest role in their most satisfying customer experiences. Customers want to feel comfortable with and confident in the person they’ve hired to work on their properties. Train and educate your people and then let their knowledge shine.

5. Customers don’t like when they can’t use different communication channels to reach you. Maybe you have a great phone system and friendly people answering the phone and routing callers to the appropriate sources. But what happens when customers email you? Can customers text you? What do you do when customers send letters? What do you do when customers ask questions on Facebook or Twitter? Today, customers are using multiple communication channels in their daily lives, and they want to be able to use these channels in dealing with their landscape contractors as well. Have a process your people follow and track for each communication channel so you aren’t missing sales opportunities.

Ultimately, all five of these areas center around one thing: communication. All customer service channels are critical interaction points for building business brands and sales. Chris Kenny of ING Direct USA says a business owner should think of every call as “an opportunity to build the brand, be neutral to the brand, or destroy the brand.” Many companies can lose sight of this big picture, however, and get caught focusing on internal operations that can actually undermine customer experience, adds Elizabeth Glagowski with 1 to 1 Media.

“Companies need to consider the customer point-of-view at every point in

their interactions,” Glagowski says, “from how long it takes to answer a call to how quickly issues are resolved.”

Only then will you know whether you’re maximizing every sales opportunity or leaving too much money on the table.