

22 Ways To Make Customers Feel Valued

By
John Graham

The famed author Thomas Merton said we value people, not for whom they are but for their usefulness. This is the same mistake companies make with customers. They value them for their usefulness—for what they spend.

Customers see it differently—quite differently. As Gallup, Inc. researchers point out in commenting on the economy, “Consumers are spending money, but they’re more inclined to spend it only on businesses they feel good about.” Not businesses they may like or where they’re treated nicely. In other words, their money is going where they feel valued.

Most businesses do a fairly good job “pleasing” customers—getting orders right and delivering them on time, but that bar isn’t nearly high enough. Here are 22 ways to meet today’s major challenge of making customers feel valued:

1. *Never ask a customer to call back.* It’s rude and demeaning. Take their number and call them back or let them know who will be in touch with them.
2. *Never leave customers hanging.* Always close the loop by letting them know what to expect or what’s going to happen next. It relieves frustration, uncertainty, and unnecessary unhappiness.
3. *Always follow up right now.* Fast action is impressive; it says you care.
4. *Ask customers if they would like help in filling out forms.* This takes away the drudgery. Just the offer alone sends the message that you’re willing to take the time to be helpful.
5. *Make all messages, written and spoken, customer centric.* Start by never using “I” or “We.” They’re a turn off. Work at keeping the focus on the customer.
6. *Give customers a contact person.* There’s nothing worse than feeling abandoned and that’s what happens to customers when they can’t penetrate a corporate firewall. Having a personal connection relieves stress.
7. *Never let the size of the sale influence the way you treat a customer.* When making a large purchase, customers expect the “red carpet” to be rolled out. But when a customer gets the same attention making a small purchase, it creates a lasting positive impression, one that keeps them coming back.
8. *Never fail to acknowledge a customer even when you’re busy.* Failing to do so may be the unforgivable business sin. It diminishes the customer, is never forgotten, and damages the relationship.

9. *Never make excuses.* They're always a failed attempt to make yourself look good. They send a message to others that you're weak and deceitful, someone who can't be trusted.
10. *Always ask questions.* There is no substitute for getting another person to talk. Customers will be surprised and impressed because they're always afraid no one will listen.
11. *Give believable answers when you're asked questions.* Short answers satisfy customers, but always ask if what you said is clear.
12. *Never leave a customer wondering.* The test comes after the customer leaves or you get back to the office. That's when they get to thinking about what you said—and when the questions come to mind. Always encourage them to call, email, or text you.
13. *Be precise when you tell a customer you'll get back to them.* Let them know when they can expect to hear from you, and, if there's a change, keep them informed. It's a matter of trust.
14. *When there's a problem, take ownership.* Now the customer can relax and not worry about what might go wrong. They know someone will follow through for them.
15. *Surprise them with something unexpected.* It may be free shipping, upgraded delivery, a discount on their next purchase, a gift card, a discount, or an enhanced warranty.
16. *Acknowledge purchase anniversaries.* Shows your appreciation and keeps you top of mind. You might send a letter with a gift certificate or some other indication of your appreciation.
17. *Help people feel good about their purchase.* Reinforce its value: "This will be an enjoyable addition to your home," "You're going to have a lot of fun driving this car," "Your friends will enjoy coming to visit," or "You've made a terrific choice."
18. *Check-in with customers a week after making a purchase.* Make it a time to ask if they have questions and what they like best—and least—about their purchase. They'll appreciate your continued interest; that you haven't forgotten them.
19. *Use the one word that reassures customers.* When customers ask you to do something, say, "Sure." Then figure out what to do—and do it.
20. *Help customers avoid "buyer's remorse."* Customers always want to feel good about their purchases. Yet, feelings of uncertainty often set in and they doubt their decision. To help them avoid getting "cold feet," remind them why they made the purchase, what they liked about it and share third party testimonials to validate their decision.
21. *Always say "Thank you."* Every conversation is an opportunity to express appreciation, whether it's responding to a problem, greeting a new customer, hearing about a mistake, or getting an order.
22. *Stay in touch.* Getting customers is hard work; keeping them is even more demanding. Send periodic emails, but don't make them *ads!* "Buy, buy, buy" drives them away. Offer helpful information and be sure to ask their opinion of a product, service, or customer experience.

Most companies want to do the right thing by their customers. Yet, far too many fall short, believing that giving them a good deal or schmoozing them is all it takes. *It isn't.*

Actor and director Adam Arkin says it's hard to believe that the factor affecting the final outcome of a film is still news: "When people are treated well," he says, "and they're made to feel valued, they give 110 percent." That goes for customers, too.

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