

## Listening to your Customer is Key to Customer Retention

In today's current economy it is more important than ever that we keep our customers and keep them more than satisfied. It makes good business sense in more ways than one but in plain dollars and cents, we all know that it is easier and less expensive to retain a customer than to obtain a new one. So what does it take to retain your customers and keep them loyal. It isn't rocket science but it takes dedication. Listen to them and respond to their needs. It is inexpensive and easy to listen especially compared to the cost of guessing what your customer wants.

The building block for marketing is knowing your customer. Listening to the customer - understanding not only who and what they are, but even more valuable, is knowing how they make decisions, what is important to them, what do they want and need, what are their goals, dreams and fears. If you listen, they will tell you. Listening to your customer is a constant because the customer, the market and the competition are continually changing. If you aren't listening you're guessing. Guessing what your customer wants is more about luck and basing your strategy on luck is not a good strategy.

### Four Ways to Listen to Your Customer

#### 1. Listen in on customer care calls

Everyone in marketing or an influencer of marketing (ie. Operations, management) should listen to customer care calls and listen. Just as important to listening to calls is listening to customer care agents and your sales people. They are on the front line with the customers and are a wealth of information and insight.

#### 2. Call Your Customers

Pick up the phone and call a customer. Introduce yourself, thank them for their business and ask if they are happy with the company. Pick a variety of customers – top customers, those you wish to grow, customers who have not purchased/used your product or service in the last 6 months, etc. Ask why they do/don't like your product/service, ask how you can make the experience better, what else would they like you to offer etc. The important thing is listening to the customer which will you create a relationship. Make the call. Just take a half an hour a week and see what you discover.

#### 3. Conduct An Online Survey

E-mail and online survey tools such as Survey Monkey and Zoomerang have made it easier than ever to get the pulse of your customers. Again, pick sub sets of your customer base. Send a quick survey of 5 or 6 questions that you would like feedback. Provide multiple choice answers to make it easy and simple for the recipients. Keep track of who you are sending the surveys to so that you are not sending a survey to a customer more than once every six months.

#### 4. Use the Internet

Google or Twitter your company or product to see what is being said about your business. By doing this or setting up an alert with key words pertaining to your brands and company you will gain insight into who is following you, what web sites and blogs are writing opinions about your company. Some hits may be one time complaints or compliments. Take note of them but what you are really looking for is a trend or pattern of comments over time.

Patricia Klavora

Marketing 360

marketing\_360@sbcglobal.net

440-729-3773

www.marketing360group.com

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