



Are You Speaking Your Customers' Language?

No one would argue that competing for time and attention in today's business marketplace is a difficult proposition. However – as if this alone wasn't difficult enough – the company that truly understands the buying habits of current and prospective customers is the one that will most likely succeed in the long-term continuum.

Why? Knowing the reasons why customers purchase from your company is important for positioning your product or service for future sales. Moreover, the way in which this purchasing knowledge infiltrates other aspects of your business is key to customer recruitment, retention and business continuity.

Let's say, for example, that you retained a seemingly satisfied customer who comes to you for advice or perhaps a product, yet you have never bothered to take the time to figure out why s/he comes to you year after year instead of taking his or her business elsewhere. Did you ever think about asking? Perhaps you thought about it, but were afraid to stir calm waters.

This customer is intelligent, and knows he or she could look elsewhere for similar services, but as it turns out, s/he implicitly trusts your judgment and advice, and truly believes you have rendered good service time after time. What the customer may not know is that you also offer other services or products that could benefit him/her. While you think you may have effectively communicated your company's entire product or service offering to your customer, and these offerings appear all over your collateral materials and Web site, the customer, still, may never have received the message.

If you knew "trust" was the main reason the customer stayed, you could have cross-sold other products or services, and, in the process, tremendously improved your bottom line. Companies that understand the buying habits of customers can naturally – and easily – transition this knowledge into a more compelling selling proposition.

The bottom line is that you when you are speaking your customers' language, you will be on the same communication wavelength, and will be able to easily hear clues that reveal your customers' buying postures.

Look at this from another perspective: Why do you prefer to do business with one bank over another? Is it service, lower fees, location or something else? If bank executives knew why you chose their institution, they could provide more services or products that aligned with these reasons. In addition, bank employees who understand these preferences could be more knowledgeable or helpful in ways that are meaningful to their customers.

A good example of a company that is on its customers' frequency is Amazon.com. If you've ever ordered from the retail giant, you would know that each time you log in, the merchant offers you many choices for similar products you've bought in the past. If you are into fitness books, the newest fitness book is likely to be offered to you. Statistics show this is an effective way to "sell" or market to customers.

We've all heard Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a way to increase sales and manage customers, but is CRM really an effective tool for speaking the language, or is it just today's trend of the moment? Dataquest, a unit of market researcher Gartner, reports that CRM services market totaled \$22 billion in 2001, up 10.6 percent from the year before. Dataquest also expects that number to grow to \$25.3 billion this year and reach \$47 billion by 2006.

All the money spent on CRM doesn't translate into future sales if your employees don't understand why a customer makes the decision to buy. How do you effectively accomplish this, and to what lengths do you go to do it?

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Our mission is to provide information and strategies to business owners and managers for improvement in the effectiveness of its business management so that key objectives can be realized.

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Are You Speaking Your Customers' Language? (cont.)

One Midwest design and research firm used a process called "video ethnography," in which the firm videotaped customers while they were in the process of buying so they would get a clearer picture – literally – of the process. We certainly can't shine the spotlight on customers 24/7, but you might try the following techniques:

- **Don't assume that buying is universal and predictable.** Try to gather as much information about the buying or purchasing process as you can. Start from the time your customer decides to ask for a service or makes the decision to buy, and follow the sales process through to calling or contacting your company and making the purchase.
- **Think beyond what you offer or are currently offering.** Even though you might be selling a product, your customer may actually be buying for other reasons that have nothing to do with your product. Perhaps your straightforward business communication tips the scale in your favor. Or, maybe the customer buys from you because your guarantee is the best. If you think in terms of the purchase "decision," it is easier to translate buying habits into future sales.
- **Use multiple methods to gather information about your customers' buying habits.** Ask your employees to stay on the lookout for patterns in buying and record client or customer comments. Combine this information with customer surveys or other response mechanisms. You're sure to spot trends within this combined feedback. Strategically leverage this knowledge and you are on your way to dramatically impacting your bottom line.
- **Try to understand how people are using the product or service you sell.** Understanding why customers buy and what the customer's desired end result is can uncover opportunities or even new product or service markets. If you sell aloe vera plants as a medicinal product and your sales increase by 10 percent in just one month, you may find that something is behind this activity. On further inspection, you may learn that a popular glamour magazine touted aloe vera as the next wrinkle defense. All of a sudden, you have a new market that wants to buy your plants.

Training an employee's ear to carefully tune into the buying habits of your customers significantly increases your odds that the language you are speaking is music to your customers' ears. The bottom line is that customers find and loyally buy from those companies that make customer concerns and desires priority one. Remember, you aren't alone. Give us a call. We'll help you develop a plan of action that can increase future sales, customer retention and buyers' loyalty.