

The Battle For Customers by John Tschohl

Battling for customers is as old as mankind itself, and it's not going to let up anytime soon. Add to this the fast changing retail environment which today includes mobile, digital and social medias, and you realize that the changing environment has set up new challenges.

Consumers are absolutely driving the bus and they decide and determine which company/service they want to favor and use on a regular basis. It's your job to keep a constant eye on what your customers and prospects are looking for and to act and react accordingly.

Social media is an important factor in the way people receive news, learn about products, and communicate with the brands they trust. These powerful platforms are the new consumer watchdogs, giving customers an instant, influential and far-reaching voice. This form of media makes companies more transparent than ever before. If used wisely, mobile, digital and social media can be a powerful business weapon.

Your biggest weapon is customer service that goes above and beyond. If a problem arises, head it off by telling the customer up front how you are dealing with it; then fix it fast. Anticipate problems and provide service recovery. Resolving a customer problem quickly and satisfactorily can have more influence on repeat purchases than a customer who never had a problem in the first place.

Poor customer service can have a ripple effect that harms your business in many ways. The blemish of negative service reaches beyond a single customer or employee to include your full staff as well as existing and potential customers.

Limiting negative customer experiences through ongoing customer service training can help minimize the impact of isolated instances of poor service.

Your best tool is *customer service*. I have always believed and continue to be fiercely committed to customer service excellence. My goal is to provide individuals and companies with the tools for developing service champions. It is the way to create evangelical, loyal customers. By developing your customer service strategy you will contribute to the success and growth in all areas of your company.

Remember the basics:

Understand customer needs. Once you know that you are heading into a competitive landscape, gather as much info as you can about the people, economic conditions as well as the political scene. It would also help if you talk to someone who has been there. There is no substitute for firsthand knowledge. Engage with your customers. Listen to them, communicate, and show sincere interest. Seek customer feedback and use it to turn knowledge into profits.

Walk in your customer's shoes. You may be surprised that the main reason customers leave is perceived indifference. They don't think you care about them or that they matter to you. As consumers we all want to be treated with respect. We appreciate friendly, genuine human interaction and we like to feel special.

Go above and beyond their expectations. Think about what you can offer customers. Businesses can offer special service levels, free shipping on back orders, no minimums, buy-back offers, or free product samples. Provide extras such as newsletters with useful information; free Web training, invitations to events, and free webinars. The assurance of phone support, technical documentation, troubleshooting and product guarantees can make all the difference. Retaining customers requires focused attention on exceeding their expectations, showing them you care, and putting their needs first.

Provide more than everyone else. Trust me; it's the little things that matter.

- Every encounter with customers should be built around their time schedule, not yours.
- Every encounter with customers should be dealt with quickly and to their satisfaction.
- Every encounter with customers should be built around "live" people.

"It's solving a customer's problem or complaint and sending them out the door feeling like they have just done business with the greatest company on earth". - John Tschohl

Last but not the least, BELIEVE IN YOURSELF! You are a trained soldier on the battlefield for customers. Remember the basics, stick to them and you will become a champion. Have faith in yourself, your co-workers and management.

If you focus on Customer Service, like the top companies do every day, your competition is screwed. ***You won!***

John Tschohl is an international service strategist and speaker. He is founder and president of the Service Quality Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Described by Time and Entrepreneur magazines as a customer service guru, he has written several books on customer service. He just released the 10th Edition of Achieving Excellence Through Customer Service. The Service Quality Institute (<http://www.customer-service.com>) has developed more than 26 customer service training programs that have been distributed and presented throughout the world. John's monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge. He can also be reached on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.