

TAKE THE PROACTIVE APPROACH TO SERVICE—AND BUILD YOUR PROFITS

Is everyone in your organization customer driven and high performing? Is everyone working on all 8 cylinders and providing the most positive experience possible? Every organization and every employee is in customer service. From the boardroom to the warehouse, there is no exception... customer service is everyone's job.

For many businesses, their approach to customer service is to respond to the problems as they arise. This reactive method might satisfy the customer, but it won't surprise or delight them. Instead, imagine if you could solve problems before customers had to call you. Or even better, if you could address issues before they even became aware of them. This proactive approach to support is not only possible, it's profitable.

The adjective proactive can describe a person who gets things done. If you are proactive, you make things happen, instead of waiting for them to happen to you. If you are proactive, you are ready before something happens. The opposite is being reactive, or waiting for things to unfold before responding. Think about the winter cold season. A proactive person washes his hands and takes vitamins; a reactive person gets sick and takes cold medicine.

A STEP AHEAD OF THE GAME

Jeff Bezos of Amazon said, "One advantage—perhaps a somewhat subtle one—of a customer-driven focus is that it aids a certain type of proactivity. When we are at our best, we don't wait for external pressures. We are internally driven to improve our services, adding benefits and features, before we have to. We lower prices and increase value for customers before we have to. We invent before we have to. These investments are motivated by customer focus rather than by reaction to competition.

We build automated systems that look for occasions when we've provided a customer experience that isn't up to our standards, and those systems then proactively refund customers. When you pre-order something from Amazon, we guarantee you the lowest price offered by us between your order time and the end of the day of the release date. Doing it proactively is more expensive for us, but it also surprises, delights and earns trust." He stated in his letter to the shareowners, "We don't celebrate a 10% increase in the stock price like we celebrate excellent customer experience."

Proactive business owners like Jeff Bezos have a significant competitive advantage. They are flexible, adaptable and focused on

continually improving their customer service, productivity, efficiency and workplace environments. Proactive organizations are a step ahead of the game. Rather than wait for circumstances to dictate their actions, they change long before risks materialize.

INSTEAD OF PUTTING OUT THE FIRE AFTER IT OCCURS, DO SOMETHING AHEAD OF TIME TO PREVENT IT

Here are actions you can take to start wowing your customers with a successful proactive customer service strategy.

- **Ask customers for feedback.** Customer service is finding out what your customer wants and giving it to them. And there's no better way than to ask them. Businesses that regularly check in with customers can easily identify areas of weakness and correct them before customers become unhappy.
- **Announce mistakes before customers find out.** It's always better for customers to hear about a problem directly from you instead of realizing the product or service doesn't do what they need it to, when they need it. If your company identifies a problem, you can build customer trust and avoid damaging PR by taking the following actions:
 - Alert customers to the issue and offer an apology
 - Offer a discount on a future purchase, or provide a refund if the action you take to fix the problem doesn't satisfy their needs
 - Tell them what you're doing to figure out a solution and to make sure the problem doesn't happen again
 - Make sure they know who to contact if they have further questions or feedback.
- **Reward customer loyalty with discounts and offers.** Loyalty programs build goodwill by demonstrating a company's desire to reward a customer to thank them for their business.

How do you surprise, delight and earn the trust of your customers? Take care of your customers and don't give the competition a chance at them.

RO

John Tschohl—described by Time and Entrepreneur magazines as a customer service guru and service strategist—presents strategic keynote speeches to companies worldwide. He is the author of "Empowerment, A Way of Life."

Contact: John@servicequality.com or www.customer-service.com

