



Amplify Customer Loyalty

Q: As a small operation, I face competition of all kinds from shops all around me. What can I do to instill greater loyalty among my customers?

A. Loyalty is instilled in customers that feel – in addition to getting the products they want from your store– that they are consistently treated as though their business matters.

In the grocery industry, the biggest way you can show people they matter to you is to pay attention to what matters to them.

Following are three of the most effective and practical ways to instill greater loyalty among your customers.

1. Create a shopping environment that is friendly and helpful.

“Obviously”, you reply.

So why is it that most stores fail to provide a consistent, positive experience to shoppers? Especially when doing so will increase business?

In my experience, it’s because many, especially smaller stores, don’t take the time to implement the operational strategies required to achieve this.

For example, instead of merely telling staff what you expect of them, you’ll have far better results if you create detailed policies outlining the specific customer service-related steps your people are required to take to accommodate shoppers.

Give examples, such as:

- Employees always offer help to confused looking shoppers
- Employees always accompany shoppers to the location of the product they are searching for
- Employees quickly accommodate shoppers space when stocking shelves or doing inventory

Even if you only have one or two employees, providing formal training will ensure staff understand your expectations and take customer service seriously.

To encourage and motivate your employees in this capacity, take the time to make sure they know their efforts are appreciated. This doesn’t have to mean money, it might be as simple as a “thank you” and tickets to a show, but whatever you do, do it in front of their peers. Not only will it make them feel good to be appreciated in front of their peers, but it will send a message to your entire staff that around here, customer service really is important. And that, in turn, will shine through to the customers who keep coming back to you.

2. Let people know where products are coming from, before they ask.

Studies in both Canada and the US indicate that the consumer demand for organic groceries and “sustainable” products is steadily increasing. Shoppers are also increasingly concerned about their “carbon footprint” which means they want to know where their food comes from, and how it was produced.

It’s not surprising that people are starting to take a more proactive interest in what they are buying, given that “buyer beware” was a continuous news headline in 2007 (i.e. toxic snap peas, unlabeled, from China).

One significant way you can show consumers you care about the same issues they do, is to take the time to learn about the farming practices of your suppliers and clearly label your products with the information shoppers are looking for.

Now more than ever, stores that become a trusted source will see that the same shoppers keep coming back.

3. Don’t keep people waiting. We don’t have the time!

And finally, something you have likely noticed already, shoppers are becoming way less patient! People don’t want to wait for answers to their questions, directions to the products they are looking for, or information about items they are considering buying. They don’t want to shop in a store will delay them from getting what they need ASAP.

One practical way you can let your customers know that you value their time as much as they do is by equipping your staff with the responsibility and the authority to solve customer complaints and inquiries on demand.

Conversely, you're much more likely to lose customers if they have to wait, or if they get shuffled to management every time there is a problem or return.

Providing fast and convenient service, consistently, is a practical way to ensure you don't lose any customers to your competitors.

When it comes to customer loyalty, there really is no time like the present. If you make the effort to address the practical needs of your customers, such as those listed above, I guarantee you'll notice your shoppers returning to do business with you, again and again!

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