

LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLOOM

How Do You Rate?

How do you set yourself apart from your competition? If you are like 90 percent of the specialty retailers in this country, somewhere high on your list of differentiators is customer service. As I randomly looked at websites across the country, “excellent,” “unbeatable” and “unsurpassed” are some of the superlatives I found attached to “customer service,” “friendly staff” and “knowledgeable musicians.” And why not say so? If you don’t think you’re good, who else will?



Customers who are just browsing are treasure troves of information about your company’s performance

But, the true reality is that 21st century businesses can’t survive without an absolute commitment to and delivery of impeccable customer service. Customers expect and demand a stellar experience each and every time they interact with your staff. And if you are unable to deliver that, there are countless other choices where they can take their business. Great customer service is just part of the cost of entry for being in business today.

So, how are you doing at that? That undeniably simple question is harder to answer accurately than it seems. Those blinders you and your staff wear make guessing at the answer a completely undependable method of evaluation. So, you’re going to have to do some work to get to the real answer. How do I

know this? Because I thought my own company’s customer service was superb. But if it was so good, why am I now working elsewhere?

ASK YOUR CUSTOMERS

With that lesson learned, here’s what I would have done with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight.

For starters, you need to ask your customers how you’re doing. Do not mistake the occasional rave reviews you hear in your store for an accurate picture of your performance. Most people have an opinion, but don’t go out of their way to share it. So, you need to survey each and every customer that visits your business. For people who make a purchase, that can include a bag stuffer or a follow-up email. Keep it simple so that

they’ll actually answer. You need to find a way to limit your survey to just a few questions so that it takes no more than a minute or two to answer. And then always leave some extra space to invite “additional comments.”

Clearly not everyone who shops at your store will make a purchase. It’s no less important to get their feedback (actually, it’s probably more important). So, pay careful attention to people leaving your store empty-handed. Besides your heartfelt thanks for visiting, you need to hand them a “how did we do today” survey. Do the same thing on your website if they’re about to leave without making a purchase. The “just shoppers” are a treasure trove of information about your company’s performance.

Finally, you need to make part of your job having a solid understanding of what people are saying about you online. You need to regularly Google your company to search through reviews and online discussions about your performance. Take the information you discover, thank the author, and use it to make your company the very best it can be. **MI**

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