



**CUSTOMER
SERVICE:
SMALL BUSINESS,
BIG
ADVANTAGE**



79% OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE A BAD CUSTOMER SERVICE EXPERIENCE TELL OTHERS.



Whether you run a B2B or B2C company, one group determines whether your business succeeds or fails: your customers. How well is your customer service measuring up to their expectations?

Small businesses actually have a big advantage when it comes to customer service. As the business owner, you can develop personal relationships with customers in a way giant corporations can never hope to match.

Seven in 10 Americans in a [recent Gallup poll](#) report having “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in small businesses – more than triple the 21 percent who have confidence in big businesses. Why do people trust small businesses more? The number-one reason is that they’re accountable to their customers.

But just because you have a small business advantage doesn’t mean you can take it easy. Maintaining quality customer service is a 24/7/365 job. Just how important is customer service? Consider these statistics:

- [Poor customer service](#) costs U.S. businesses \$62 billion a year.
- 82 percent of people have [stopped doing business](#) with a company because of poor customer service.
- 79 percent of people who have a [bad customer service](#) experience tell others about it.
- 85 percent of people would pay up to 25 percent more for [exceptional customer service](#).
- 55 percent of people will [recommend a brand](#) to others because of outstanding customer service.

Good customer service helps you retain customers, get new customers and make more money. But in order to deliver it, you first need to know what your customers expect from your business.



WHAT DO CUSTOMERS EXPECT FROM YOUR CUSTOMER SERVICE?

Customers' standards for what constitutes good customer service are on the rise. Here are 5 things your customers expect from your business.

1 OMNICHANNEL SERVICE

Once upon a time, customers had to pick up a phone to contact a company with a question or problem. Today, however, your customers want multiple ways to connect with your business. They expect to choose how they reach out to you – and that means offering customer support by phone, social media, email, text messaging and live chat. Older customers may prefer phone calls, while younger ones would probably rather text you (in fact, [half of all consumers](#) would rather handle all customer service interactions by text, chat or messaging.)

2 SELF-SERVICE

Did you know [71 percent of consumers](#) want to be able to solve most customer service problems on their own? Maintaining updated frequently asked questions (FAQs) on your business website can help customers serve themselves when they want to. (This is also a good way to ensure customers can get help even after-hours when live customer service isn't available.) For more complex products or services, you can create a knowledge base where customers can ask questions and share answers.

3 CONSISTENCY

No matter how customers contact you, they expect your customer service to be consistent from channel to channel. If your customers have to type in information, then repeat the same information to a live person on the phone and repeat it again when they get transferred, they'll get frustrated.

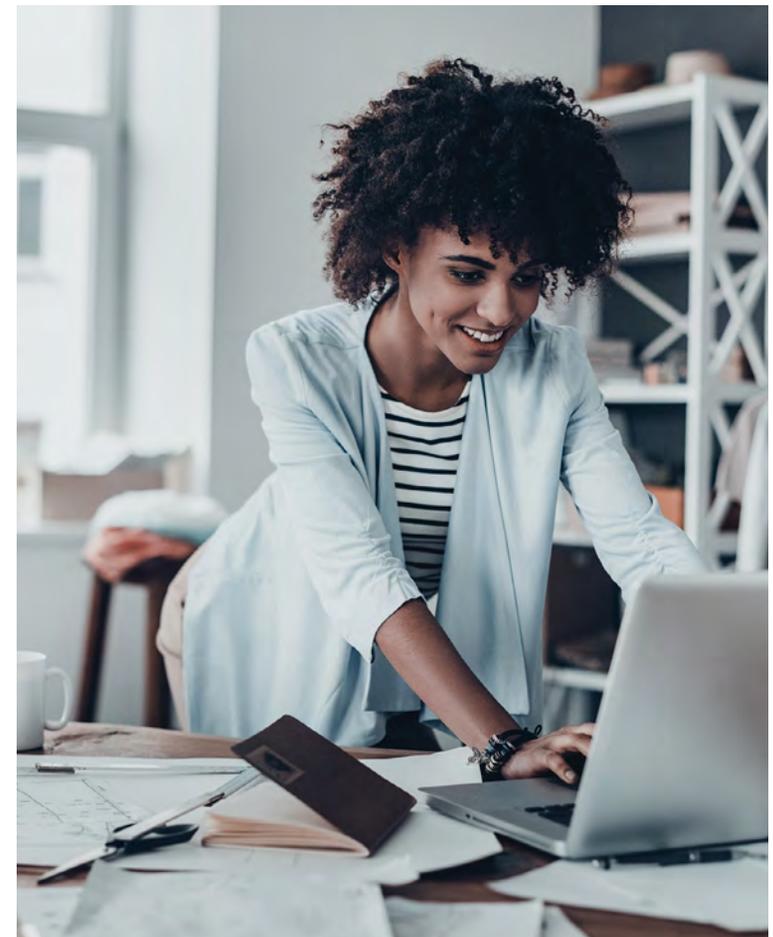
Your customers also demand consistent customer service from day-to-day and location to location. Whether you have one location or several, develop standardized customer service practices and systems for your employees to follow. That way, your customers can count on getting the same quality of service every time they do business with you.

4 RESPONSIVENESS

When customers have questions for a business, they expect answers—fast. But far too often, they don't get answers at all. One study found that 41 percent of companies don't respond to [customer service emails](#), and nine in 10 don't acknowledge receiving them. It's simple to set up an automated email responder that acknowledges emails sent to your customer service department and tells the sender when to expect a reply.

5 PERSONALIZATION

Almost [three-fourths of consumers](#) (73 percent) want to do business with retailers that use their personal information to deliver a more customized shopping experience. More than 70 percent [expect personalization](#) from online businesses. Take time to get to know your customers, whether by talking to them in person or gathering data on their buying habits using point-of-sale systems, loyalty programs and CRM apps. Then leverage that knowledge to make personal recommendations or suggest tailored solutions.





71%

OF CONSUMERS
WANT A SELF-
SERVICE OPTION
FOR CUSTOMER
SERVICE.

3 STEPS TO GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE

How can you consistently deliver the kind of customer service your clients expect? It's easy if you follow these three steps.

1 FOCUS ON PEOPLE.

If you own a business, you're in the people business. Amazing customer service begins with paying attention to your people. Devote time to hiring the right team — look for employees with strong people skills and positive attitudes.

Provide ongoing training and development to help your employees stay on top of customer service and industry trends. Customers can find plenty of information about your products and services online. When they come to you for customer service, they want expertise they can't get from a computer. Educate your employees about your products and services so they can provide the right solutions and suggestions.

Invest in your employees by providing competitive pay, good benefits and room for advancement. If you treat your employees well, they'll treat your customers the same way.

2 GET FEEDBACK FROM CUSTOMERS.

Do your customers enjoy doing business with you? Many small business owners can't answer this question because they've never asked their customers. Getting regular feedback from your customers is essential to meeting their customer service expectations. After all, how can you give customers what they want if you don't ask them what they want?

Start right now by contacting your five best customers and asking them why they do business with you. What do they like about your customer service, and what could you do better?

Then develop a plan for gathering customer feedback on an ongoing basis. This can include:

- Talking to customers informally
- Listening to what customers are saying about your business on social media
- Reading your business's online ratings and reviews from customers
- Conducting customer surveys

Two useful customer satisfaction metrics, CSAT (Customer Satisfaction) and NPS (Net Promoter Score), can help measure your customer service performance.

CSAT measures satisfaction with a particular product or service and is generally transaction-based. For example, a pool cleaning business might email a survey to a customer after a technician visits to measure customer satisfaction with that specific visit.

- Keep your CSAT surveys short and focused—10 questions is a good maximum.
- Use rankings of 1 to 10 or “yes/no/not applicable” choices.
- Include an open-ended question asking “Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?”
- Ask customers if you may contact them to discuss the survey results. This way, you can get more details from unhappy customers and resolve the issue.



NPS doesn't measure satisfaction with a single product or event; it measures a customer's overall satisfaction with your business. The NPS survey consists of one question: "How likely are you to recommend our company to someone you know?" with a rating of 0 to 10 where zero = *not at all likely* and 10 = *extremely likely*.

- Customers who score you 0-6 are considered **Detractors**. Rather than recommending your company, they're more likely to discourage people from doing business with you.
- Customers who score you 7 or 8 are considered **Passives**. They are satisfied, but not very enthusiastic.
- Customers who score you 9 or 10 are considered **Promoters**. They are very likely to recommend you to others.

Subtract the percentage of Detractors from the percentage of Promoters to get your NPS score. Compare it to [NPS benchmarks for your industry](#), and keep trying to boost your score.

3 TAP INTO TECHNOLOGY.

Combine your personal touch with technology tools, and you'll be well-positioned to compete with bigger companies. The following tech tools can help you provide fast, personalized, multichannel customer service.

Help desk apps offer features such as ticket management to track customer queries; multichannel support to manage customer queries across email, chat, phone and social media; automation features such as autoresponders and templates to speed service; and self-service options.

[Freshdesk](#), [Help Scout](#) and [Zendesk](#) are popular help desk apps for small businesses.

Social media management apps can alert you to conversations about your business on social media so you can respond quickly. [Awario](#), [Hootsuite](#) and [Sprout Social](#) are three to consider.

Customer survey tools let you create online surveys using templates and share them with customers via email, social media or your website. Investigate [PollDaddy](#), [SurveyMonkey](#) or [Zoho](#).

BEYOND CUSTOMER SERVICE: THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Customer service is just one part of a larger element in business success: customer experience (CX). What's the difference between customer service and customer experience? While customer service refers to situations where customers are looking for customer support, [Harvard Business Review](#) defines customer experience as the sum of all the interactions a customer has with a business. Every "touchpoint," or interaction with the business, from first learning about the company to making a purchase and using the product or service, contributes to the customer experience.

[One study](#) predicts that by 2020, customer experience will be more important than price or product quality in purchasing decisions. No wonder 72 percent of businesses in a [recent survey](#) say improving the customer experience is their top priority.

As customer experience becomes a key differentiator for businesses of all sizes, consistently good customer service gives your business a firm foundation on which to build. ●

