Re-energize Your Sales

Making the sale, especially when your small business offers products and services to other businesses, demands more than being good at what you do. It also requires building professional relationships. To do that, you must earn your customers’ trust. It is proven repeatedly, that people buy from people they like and trust.

There’s no scientific formula for earning trust. It requires time, patience, and honest effort.

Here are some suggestions to help you lay a foundation of trust with your potential customers:

- **Engage in a conversation, not a sales pitch.**
  A hard-sell approach can make a bad first impression, so don’t come on too strong at networking events. Show interest in learning about your prospects’ businesses. Demonstrate curiosity—listen to them more than you talk about yourself. Ask questions and learn about their situations and challenges before jumping in with how wonderful your products and services are.

- **Be prepared.**
  No matter your reason for meeting with prospects or customers, always prepare in advance so you’re respecting their time and demonstrating that you care about meeting their needs.

- **Have their best interests in mind—always.**
  When proposing solutions to customers, make sure you’re directing them to those that are truly most beneficial to them. If you don’t have a solution at a price point a customer needs, be honest.

- **Keep your promises.**
  When you tell your customers you’ll do something for them, make sure you deliver on your promises. Finish what you start, follow up when you say you will, meet deadlines, and ensure that the solutions you’ve provided meet the expectations you’ve given your customers.
• Don’t disrespect your competition.
Badmouthing competitors will likely make you appear unprofessional and petty—and it probably won’t make your products and services seem any more attractive to prospective customers.

• Go the extra mile.
You can also earn trust by doing more than just fulfilling your business obligations to your clients. Whether emailing them a link to a blog post that touches on a topic you were discussing with them at your last meeting, writing recommendations of them on LinkedIn, or referring a potential customer to them, you can show you genuinely care about their success.

The common thread binding all the above trust-earning tips is putting the customer first. By approaching your interactions with an authentic effort to help rather than sell, you can build goodwill and gain the trust needed to make your business relationships a win-win.

A great resource for “putting the customer first” is the Marketing Sherpa Customer Satisfaction Research Study which surveyed more than 2,400 customers from the ages of 18 to 81 about brands they are satisfied or dissatisfied with. The study found customer-first marketing is a key differentiator between satisfied and unsatisfied customers.

Customer-first marketing means more than just sending personalized emails or segmenting your marketing offers to different demographics. It’s like an expanded approach to the old marketing saying, “Sell the benefits, not the features.”

In other words, instead of telling the customer what’s so great about your product or service, explain what’s in it for them. Here is what consumers in the survey say are the characteristics of a customer-first company:
1. I consistently have good experiences with it - 56 percent
2. It is easy to conduct business with the company whether online, in person or on the phone - 43 percent
3. It doesn’t always try to sell to me, but tries to provide value - 35 percent
4. Its marketing is not intrusive - 34 percent
5. It is respectful of my privacy - 33 percent
Unfortunately, just 23 percent of respondents said many or most companies use customer-first marketing. Here are the characteristics of companies that don’t put customers first, according to the survey:

1. The company does not put my needs and wants above its own business goals - 35 percent
2. The company doesn’t make me feel like I have a relationship with them - 34 percent
3. The company always tries to sell to me instead of providing value - 27 percent
4. It is not easy to conduct business with the company whether online, in person or on the phone - 26 percent
5. I’ve heard negative things about the company from people I know - 25 percent

The study conclude that customer-first marketing starts with putting yourself in the customer’s shoes and looking at the world from their perspective. They suggested some ways your business’s marketing can put customers first.

- Focus on providing value, not just making the sale.
- Educate the customers. Help them make the best decisions for them.
- Don’t be intrusive; be informative. Put your brand in front of prospects when they need answers or are looking for information. For example, your organic search result or paid search ad could pop up when they’re searching online for information.
- Listen to what customers are saying, whether online, on social media or in person, to get insights from those conversations.
- Go beyond providing a convenient experience to an enjoyable experience.

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