Seven best practices for Providing the best customer service

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Through digital technology, customers have become much more proactive. They do their own research and control their customer journey. They have a voice—and they are adamant about making that voice heard.

Your customers’ voices are one of their most powerful assets in their relationship with your company. Their voices can sing your praises when everything goes well or get very loud when they are unhappy. Through social media and other channels, customers can connect directly with us and each other. They can make their opinions known, which is both great and concerning.

The benchmark for the best customer service has been raised.

You see, the age of the connected consumer has driven home one important point: Customers want to be treated like people. With modern technologies and tools
reshaping how customers and companies connect, the actual, working relationships between buyers and businesses are a reality for more than just mom-and-pop shops. Relationships are expected with every company, from startups to global enterprises. Interestingly, 66% of customers “would switch brands if they were to be treated like a number, rather than an individual.” Furthermore, 63% of customers expect tailored engagement based on past interactions.
To provide the best customer service, customer-centricity is key. Companies that put their relationships first benefit from exceptionally high customer loyalty, a positive reputation, and customers who act as passionate brand ambassadors.

Your customers expect service that is not only exceptional, but also consistent. To provide this level of support, follow the seven actions on this list of customer service best practices. No matter your business size or industry, these guidelines will lead to success.

1. Hire the right people, and treat them well.

Your employees are your brand’s diplomats. Through them, you form and maintain connections with the customers who keep you in business. Take the extra time during the hiring process to make sure new hires are the best customer service agents they can be. To attract this level of talent, your company must be competitive in terms of pay and benefits, with a clearly defined path of training and promotion. Furthermore, make the job fun and rewarding with genuine ways of showing appreciation for hard work. When you hire and retain exceptional service agents, exceptional customer service will follow.

2. Deftly manage customer expectations.

Customers tend to expect the world, but promising them the world may not be the best tactic: What happens when you make promises that your business is unable to keep? Instead, tell your customers exactly what they can expect from you, and then work hard to exceed those expectations. Customers see that your business is willing to go the extra mile, and you won’t have to worry about damage control for unfulfilled promises.

3. Nail your first impression.

When a customer has a positive (or negative) experience, they have a lot of power over your reputation and bottom line. They’ll often share stories about their experiences with companies, carefully choose which businesses they give their money and time to, and recommend products and services based on personal and subjective experiences. All of this can happen within minutes and can affect your relationship with consumers who have never even heard of you. Give your employees the support and incentive to astound both new and long-term customers; a customer relationship that starts off strong is much more likely to stay strong.
4. Collect as much data as you can—and use it.

The best customer service relies on information. As your employees interact with customers, they can gather important data by asking the right questions and ensuring the information is input correctly into your customer relationship management (CRM) platform. These questions not only help establish a productive dialogue between your business and your customers, but also give you the opportunity to accomplish two major tasks: (1) receive and implement valuable feedback, and (2) improve your ability to personalize your interactions. Furthermore, as consumer needs shift, the right questions, data, and analytics help you adapt to serve them better.

5. Personalize the relationship.

Your CRM tools are invaluable for helping your business personalize customer interactions. In addition to gathering, organizing, and analyzing data, CRM platforms give employees an easy way to track the preferences and history of every customer.

6. Be where your customers are.

Today’s consumers have many channels they can use to contact you, and one of the most obvious customer service best practice is to be available on the channels your customers want to use. For example, a funeral home may not need to use Instagram to connect with customers, and a theme park probably won’t find their target audience on LinkedIn. Do your research to find where your customers are and how they want to interact with you: phone calls, text messages, social media, live web chat, online forums, and a wide variety of other options.

7. Maintain your focus.

It’s easy to say that customers are the heart of your business. To truly be customer-centric, clearly define customer service standards for your company, and then ask everyone—from the CEO to the new hire—to stay focused on the customer. Keep the lines of communication open throughout the company and between employees and customers. Give your customers the tools and support they need to provide superior service, and reward them when they do. After all, your customers are the heart of your business, and staying focused on them is the best practice of all.

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