

Business Nuggets

Bite-size chunks of business expertise

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
SCIENCE PARK

Customer Focused

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Well yes, every organisation is, aren't they? Not quite. Apart from the major corporations who haven't mastered the art of dealing with huge volumes of consumer business without annoying many of them, there are many organisations who still see the client as the opportunity for smash and grab selling.

The more recent focus on social media makes this even more important - the old way of deciding what your customer wanted and then selling it to them come what may will not return - there has to be engagement. For engagement you have to be part of their group, not an outsider telling them what they want.

So why is it important?

One of the hardest areas to compete with is those organisations who have a real customer focus. It stops them going to the competition when the buying decision is 50:50 and if a new opportunity opens up it may get the buyer to ask them first.

It is all led by the most basic motivation – you deal with people that you find easy to deal with, easy to contact easy to deal with problems, and so on.

Poor customer focus sends an unhelpful message which is that you don't care enough about your customers to make it easy for them to communicate with you.

It offers some real advantages in customer retention which is even more important these days but also it gets your customers talking to you - who knows, that's the next new product that they are asking (or complaining) about.

There's another useful aspect to this. As you know you need to keep selling to your existing customers as well as the ones you want – not in the same way but the message needs to be sent. Improving this area is mostly cheap, quick and easily implemented.

Improving your customer focus is not that hard – try these ten tests for your own response to customer interaction.

1. Call yourself. Try to contact your company or yourself. This needs to be consistently easy.
2. Check your website - is it easy to find your contact details? Are they on every page?
3. If you have an answering service, is it robust? Most people don't mind using machines unless they obviously don't work.
4. How is the call quality on your mobile phone? An echoey room plus a poor phone is not really a conversation. Plus road research suggests that being on a mobile phone whilst driving is as dangerous as being over the drink drive limit. Using hands free doesn't help much.
5. Is your company stationery up to date and easy to use - even invoices need to be clear and explicit - they might be trying to find your number for some more business.
6. People still use business cards – are yours clear (typeface, address and contact details) up to date and distinctive. Do they describe your business?
7. Keep your own staff informed. When everybody has the same message it's so much easier to carry through a decision.

8. Be accessible – not 24/7 but there could be a time set aside or a reliable way of getting a message through.

9. If you have a choice between speaking directly or emailing - speak to them or go and see them. Most people seem to email angry and talk reasonably so for no other reason face to face works better.

10. If things have really gone wrong and everybody has those fortunately rare occasions where one error is compounded by further errors - did you say sorry? You don't have to go overboard but say it.

Show that it's important – a fish rots from the head down – if you don't practise being customer focused, others won't either.

The bad news is that this is a perpetual need – but leading by example goes a very long way towards making it self-sustaining.

The good news is that most organisations will be worse than you so if you can keep improving you get to be the organisation that others cannot compete with!

The Business Support team of the University of Warwick Science Park is staffed with 'Access to Markets' specialists who manage Techmark, a specialist technical marketing service.

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