

# It's all about the relationships

What is it that causes us to stick loyally beside one brand when we are faced with a multitude of choices from the second our eyes open each morning?

Aside from the obvious answers, such as brand recognition and repertoire, product consistency, even personal history (for example, my devotion to Heinz ketchup), there must be something else that turns a likable brand into a lovable brand.

In this series of articles, we will explore one of the most important but often overlooked differentiators: customer experience.

As business owners and employees, the ultimate brand ambassadors, our goal is to create a positive customer experience across all touchpoints.

By doing this, the connection with our customer becomes more than a transaction — it grows into a relationship.

## Creating your brand experience

Generating loyal customers may not happen overnight, but don't despair; you have the power to create an experience that will set your business and your brand apart from the rest. The best part is, a memorable customer experience doesn't demand a big budget!

Let's take a look at five simple ways that you can start building your customer experience today:

**1. Know your customers and know them well.** Understanding who your customer is will be key to developing an experience that caters to their needs. As new products and services emerge and trends change rapidly, keeping up with customer needs as they evolve will help foster a positive experience.

Personalization is another important



— and free — tool for creating memorable interactions. Learn your customers' names. Take notice of subjects or products that your customers care about, and if you don't know, ask! Follow up with customers personally after they interact with your business. Even the smallest gestures will make a big difference and show that you care!



**2. Treat each touchpoint as an opportunity to connect.** Customer experience starts long before any personal interaction happens. It only takes a couple of clicks and customers have access to competitors, product information and reviews.

Before they even shake your hand, people may already have an experience with your brand. Each and every touchpoint with your customer is extremely important, because it contributes to

your overall customer experience.

Take your website, for example. Is it easy to navigate? Is it informational? Is it influential? If it's your customers' first impression, will it keep them coming back, or frustrate them and send them in another direction? Think of the other touchpoints you can influence before a customer walks through your door. Each touchpoint is a chance to establish a connection, and to grow a connection into a relationship.

**3. Communicate, engage, listen, repeat.** One advantage as a small business is that there is more opportunity to connect with customers on a personal level. This closeness affords opportunities to create real experiences that go beyond a brand or a business name.

When given the opportunity for

one-on-one interaction with a customer, what are some easy ways that you can engage in that interaction and turn it into a positive experience? One way is to keep your customers informed, whether it's about new products and services, or business happenings relevant to them. Another is to advise your customers on what products or solutions will supplement their needs, rather than focusing on selling a product alone.

Be an active listener!

Make sure your customers know that you are hear-

ing their needs and working hard to build their confidence in your ability to address their needs. Sometimes all you need to do is ask and listen to demonstrate you care and value the customer!

**4. Show some support.** You can show support for your customers in a variety of ways, but there is incredible opportunity when handling customer service scenarios.

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addressing their needs. Resolve issues patiently, keeping your interactions positive. Be responsive and solution oriented. Take the extra time to ensure your customer is satisfied. If you show support for them, they will show support for you!

**5. Consistency matters.** Since generating loyalty may not happen overnight, providing a consistent experience will be an important factor in retaining your customers. Think of each interaction as a chance to create a lasting impression that will continue to establish an experience people love.

Can you name an experience with a brand or product that made a lasting impression through consistency? If you can, chances are you've told other people about them. Recognize that each interaction is an investment with a future payoff. Your customers who can speak of consistent, personal experiences will be your biggest advocates.

**Taking the opportunity**

Creating a distinctive customer experience is one of the most valuable and critical marketing tactics today. The road to establishing your own positive customer experiences isn't as difficult as you may think. These five simple focus points offer endless opportunities for making small changes that will impact how customers connect with your business and view your brand.

The beginning of this process starts with you! Take ownership of it. You can create a positive, consistent experience and maintain that connection with your customers. This will ultimately build the relationships that result in loyalty to you and your brand. Make it a priority to build an experience that your customers can't help but love! ☺

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