

Are Your Customers

Collecting



Illustration by Matt Mastrud for The Partner Channel

Dust?

 Michelle Glennie

What is a customer? According to Webster's Dictionary, a customer is defined as one that purchases a commodity or service. When I think of this definition, I realize it's truly how most companies treat their customers. When a sale is complete, our prospects become our customers and are entered into our enterprise resource planning (ERP), customer relationship management (CRM), or point-of-sale (POS) system as "customers". Depending upon the product or service that you sell, you may have some interaction with new customers for the first few days, weeks, or months. Your customer service team may have in-depth knowledge about these customers during the initial phase of the relationship, but how much do you continue to learn about your customers after they get past the initial sale? Are they "collecting dust" in your database while you continue to work on new business? If so, you may be missing a lot of opportunity.

Remember: it took valuable time and considerable effort to market and sell to obtain your customers. Now it is time to dust off your customer database, get to know your customers, and bring life to the valuable resources that you have. The next question you might have is, "Okay, I hear you, but where do I start?" Ask yourself the following questions, and you will quickly have some action items to get you started.

What value do you bring to your customers?

- » Do you teach them how to improve their business or life with your product through continuous communication?
- » Do you offer special training, customer

appreciation events, user groups, or awards to acknowledge them?

- » Are there coupons or resources available to only them as a unique benefit for being a customer?

Sit down and make a list of what your company offers its customers. You might find that you have a lot of benefits or just a few, or you may even come up with a few new benefits. Once you have this list, the next step is to make sure your customers are aware of the benefits and opportunities you offer. Get these benefits listed on your website, within a monthly newsletter, and on social media networks like LinkedIn and Facebook.

EXAMPLE: In your next customer newsletter, you could add an offer that says, "Not only do we provide the products you already know and love, but starting next week, we're going to give three free hours of training (a \$500 value!) to each purchase made by September 30, 2011."

When was the last time someone on your team spoke with your customers?

- » Do you have a process created that schedules regular contact with the customer after the initial sale?
- » Do you use your ERP or CRM system to document the date when someone actually speaks with a customer? Is the call outcome documented?
- » Have you surveyed your customers to see if you are meeting their needs?

Having a calendar and process in place will help your team to increase the communication that your company has with any given customer. A communication plan should not just be for customer service issues; it should include a check-in to see how

everything is going for a customer (plus, if the customer is happy, it's a great time to ask for a testimonial). Be proactive, not reactive. Keep in mind that it is important to communicate in ways other than just e-mail or direct mail. While onsite visits are not always an option for all customers, a good old-fashioned telephone call can bring to life the human connection a customer has with your company.

EXAMPLE: Short, easy surveys are one way to develop new business opportunities. If you sell services, ask your customers three to five questions about new services you could offer that would enhance what they're already receiving. Just be sure to include multiple choice answers since most customers will not complete an essay form.

What successes have your customers experienced?

- » Have your customers been able to achieve a personal or business goal because of your product or service?
- » Have their businesses had substantial growth?
- » Have your customers received an award?
- » Do you have Google Alerts set up on your customers' businesses so that you're notified when they are in the news?

Everyone loves to share a success story, but you may be missing these brilliant successes if you do not understand what is happening in your customers' world. Customer success stories allow you to not only showcase how you have been able to influence their successes, but they also showcase that you understand how you can make an

impact in future customers' lives and businesses as well.

EXAMPLE: Use the free tool Google Alerts to track news, company acquisitions, and personnel changes at your top customers. Drop them a note of congratulations when appropriate, or let them know you can assist with training or other needs when they hire new people.

Have Happy Customers?

Apply for a Customer Service Award:

Customer Service Awards:
www.serviceinstitute.com
www.stevieawards.com
www.businessweek.com

US Chamber Award:
www.uschamber.com

Why do we want to have happy customers? No brainer on this one, right?

- » **References** – Do you have good references, testimonials, and case studies from your customers? As you get to know your client base, create a list of customers that you could feature in a case study, get a quote from to include on your website or brochure, or list as a reference that prospects can call.
- » **Referrals** – Do your clients tell other people about your product or service? Customers can be your biggest advocates. How many times have you asked a friend or co-worker for a referral for a doctor, feedback on software programs, or advice on where to go to lunch? People love to talk about good experiences they have had and will speak louder than any marketing brochure you could create. Now, don't get me wrong, that's not to say that you don't need to have marketing literature, but word-of-mouth marketing can have a great impact on your business.
- » **Continued Business** – Are there other business opportunities with existing customers that you do not know about?

Happy and satisfied customers want to purchase more from you. Quite often they may not know about other products or services that you offer. Education on your offerings will often lead to additional purchases, not to mention another way for your customers to talk about what you have to offer to other prospects.

The overall benefits of knowing your customers and having happy customers are probably even more than you have considered. With strong customer relationships, you can affect your future business and your prospects' future businesses and/or lives while leaving a lasting impression that will keep your customers talking about you. Now what are you waiting for? Get out your feather duster! 🌀

Michelle Glennie and the team at The Partner Marketing Group are "dusters extraordinaire"! They specialize in working with new and existing customers to ensure client satisfaction is always high. Check out the products and services designed for technology Partners at www.ThePartnerMarketingGroup.com. You can contact The Partner Marketing Group at Info@thepartnermarketinggroup.com.

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