

PHILADELPHIA BUSINESS JOURNAL

VOLUME 25, NUMBER 13

MAY 12-18, 2006

Blue-chip customer service: A company's secret weapon



TACTICS

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For the life of me I can't understand why companies stand by and let this happen. Research shows that one of the primary reasons customers leave a company is because of poor service. It's a well-known fact that keeping existing customers is relatively cheap compared to the cost of attracting new ones.

I often find companies to be very shortsighted. For example, imagine a customer who spends \$100 a week at your store. Over five years, that's \$26,000. Now imagine losing that customer because he or she can't get an answer to a question or is treated rudely. To me, that just doesn't make sense.

American businesses should remember

What's your customer-service horror story? We all have one.

How about the retail clerk who spent a few minutes chatting on her cell phone before turning her attention to you. Or the repairman who never re-

turned your five calls. Or the desperate search for a live person while lost in an endless phone tree (hint: try pushing 0 right off the bat, it's often the quickest way to an actual person).

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that today's consumer is awash in choices. No longer is there just one supermarket in town or one bank. People can leave a business in a heartbeat and go right next door to the competition.

Companies need to think of customer service as a marketing issue. By definition, marketing is everything a company does to reach and keep customers. Therefore, any company that commits to making customer service the focal point of its marketing strategy has an opportunity to gain a competitive advantage. Companies that understand and deliver effective customer service will stand out in a customer's mind when compared to the poor service that is delivered by many organizations.

Take my company, BeneServ Corporate Benefit Services. I have built my entire business around customer service and it's growing by leaps and bounds. However, according to conventional practice in my industry, I do everything wrong. I provide extra benefit services I don't have to. I provide customer-service support for my clients. And I actively solicit input about how I can better serve my clients.

All of this is shocking to many of my new clients. Most people are so used to bad service, so used to being told no, that they don't expect anything extra.

If you want to see your business succeed do what I do. Have a real person answer the

phone. Hire happy, caring people with excellent attitudes. Create a good working environment — well treated employees treat customers well. Call customers by their first names. Return all phone calls the same

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day even if you don't have the answer to a question. Regularly thank customers for their business. Use e-mail as a last resort. Pick up the phone to talk to clients.

Great customer service can be a company's secret weapon. Customers don't expect it. They're surprised by it. They're pleased by it. And what more could a business ask for than pleased customers.

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