

Five Ways Customer Service = Marketing (Whether You Believe It or Not)

Are you a non-believer when it comes to viewing customer service as an integral component of your marketing plan — one that can easily make or break its success?

Marketers typically take the 20,000-foot view when it comes to strategy. But even the most carefully crafted plan can fall flat on its face if the tactical execution isn't handled with equal commitment.

Take a look at these five eye-opening reasons to embrace the importance of service in marketing:

Marketing got them this far...but service can drive them away. Seems like Business 101, but are the public faces of your business — your receptionist, cashiers, sales help, service reps or call center staff — firmly on board with your mission statement and marketing goals?

Whether you want customers to feel comfortable or pampered, grateful or thrifty, be crystal clear with staff about the overarching goal of every customer contact. And don't skimp on the training, feedback, rewards and ongoing monitoring to help them send the right message...and recognize that they're accountable for its success.

Coddled customers become evangelists faster than the merely satisfied. How do customers feel when they conclude their

business with you? If you're settling for satisfied, that's no longer enough — especially in a crowded selling environment, where points of true differentiation can be hard to come by.

Take the day spa business, for example. With five locations across southern New Jersey and Pennsylvania, Toppers Spa Salon knows the competition is fierce. But they also recognize that simple things keep customers loyal — such as opening a new bottle of premium nail polish for every manicure and pedicure, then sending the customer home with that bottle and a nail file in a stylish little logo tote. That's probably a \$3 hit to the bottom line, but a priceless gesture when it comes to added value.

Unhappy customers have bigger mouths than happy ones. We've all heard the statistics: thrill a customer and they might tell one friend, but aggravate them even the slightest and they'll shout it to the world. And with the proliferation of sites like consumerist.com, pissedconsumer.com and many others, the shouting can be louder, more widespread and more damaging than ever before.

Your customer service policy should be viewed as an extension of your marketing plan. Are your policies on payment terms, returns, refunds, email opt-outs and satisfaction guarantees clearly posted and accessible to customers before they buy? Are

reps trained to look for win-win scenarios that won't get you skewered on someone's next blog posting? Do they have sufficient leeway to solve most issues without having to escalate them to a supervisor?

(cont'd on p. 3)

Dear Santa: Send Me Some Holiday Traffic, Will Ya?

Looking for a quick push to goose holiday sales in your retail or online outlet? It's not too late to implement some of retail's most time-tested holiday chestnuts for attracting more shopper traffic.

(cont'd on p. 4)

in this issue...

Page 2

*Three Questions About...SEO
Trendwatch: Digital Divide*

Page 3

News You Can Use



The Disappearing Art of the Media Conversation

Have that many people really been misquoted in the media? A disturbing new trend seems to be afoot, where potential interviewees insist on doing their Q&A in writing rather than having an old-fashioned conversation with a journalist.

Having been on both sides of the fence, this is a thorny problem. Nobody likes to be misquoted, but if writers rely solely on static responses they won't be in print very long. It's the natural progression of human dialogue — an unscripted, off-the-cuff response or unexpected conversational direction — that makes for interesting reading, not the picture-perfect "elevator pitch" stuff that you've polished ad nauseam.

Our vote? Save the canned answers for crisis management, and don't be afraid to have a dialogue once in a while. Sure, you can request a list of questions from the reporter in advance, but sharing the answers in a lively conversation rather than on paper will make for a positive, more memorable outcome nearly every time.



Trendwatch: Digital Divide

READY FOR YOUR CLOSE-UP? Worldwide, camera phones now outsell digital cameras and film cameras combined. A full 90% of all digital consumer photos this year will be snapped with camera phones. **Source:** Engadget

JUST BECAUSE I CAN DOESN'T MEAN I WILL. eMarketer predicts that the number of user-generated content viewers in the U.S. — including video, audio, photo sharing, blogs, wikis, podcasts and online bulletin boards — will hit 101 million by 2011. That's way up from the 2006 estimate of 69 million. But despite the proliferation of affordable a/v equipment and editing tools, actual content generators lag behind the voyeurs at just 91 million. Globally, the number of content creators will reach 238 million in 2011, up from 137 million in 2007, according to eMarketer. **Source:** Center for Media Research (mediapost.com)



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3 Questions About...SEO

This issue's interview with a subject matter expert revolves around search engine optimization. Chris Mulvaney is the brains behind CMDS, an award-winning marketing, website design and search engine optimization agency that helps businesses generate more qualified online leads. Reach him at (732) 706-5555 or visit cmdsonline.com.



Q1. Some company told me they could get my site listed on the first page of Google for only \$75. Is this true? Unfortunately, we hear this all the time, and it is absolutely false. Companies claim they can get you placement on search engines for a cheap price, but in fact it is impossible for anyone to guarantee search engine placement. You might be there for a minute or two, but even that's doubtful. Search engines like Google and Yahoo update their databases constantly, and with thousands of websites getting submitted daily, rankings shift all the time. SEO success depends on many factors, including persistence and trial and error. There's no one magic formula that works across the board.

Q2. How much should I budget to get to the top of the search engines? Rankings depend on a whole host of things — your industry, your competition, the keywords you target, and even the way your website was built. How many pages does it have? When were they last updated? Was the site programmed properly? Are elements like H1 and meta tags in place? Did you include keywords in your footer? Factors like these determine the level of investment required to boost your traffic. Like almost anything, the more you spend, the more you'll see in return. It's very easy to spend \$2,000 or more a month to get page one rankings.

Q3. Why doesn't my site show up on search engines? Much of this goes back to the question above — how your site was programmed, its content, page naming conventions, image alt tags and link title tags. Once the basics are in place and your site is optimized, you need to actively market it to gain the highest possible organic placement on major search engines. Basic marketing starts with identifying and analyzing keywords based on volume, relevance, your goals for the site and what the competition is doing. At the end of the day, it's all about ROI — using online marketing more effectively to drive a steady stream of qualified leads in your direction.

Want to be next month's SME? Send an email to compost@fahouryink.com with "Compost SME" in your subject line.

Customer Service & Marketing *(from p. 1)*

Designate someone to stay on top of the cyber buzz via tools like Google alerts or technorati.com, and be prepared to address any posted criticisms in a timely, non-defensive fashion.

Don't lose the lesson. Complaints, though often unpleasant, have tremendous value when viewed as a learning experience. A well-handled complaint can actually increase customer loyalty, because typically the only people who take the time to complain are regular users of your product or service. Soothe them effectively and chances are you'll have an evangelist for life.

“If we pause to think, we'll have cause to thank.”

Harvey Mackay

Listen objectively to complaints and you may uncover golden opportunities for more customer-centric service — from clarifying the language on a proposal to more intuitive online navigation or refining your product packaging for easier opening.

It's never “just” a transaction. Close to 60% of email marketing messages go unread, according to internal benchmark statistics from DoubleClick. So what are customers reading? Transactional emails, like those confirming a purchase. Are you leveraging the untapped marketing potential of these simple messages?

Just because they're automated, that doesn't mean they can be created and ignored. When was the last time you reviewed the content of your so-called transactional emails — newsletter sign-up confirmations, welcome emails, preference pages, opt-outs or refer-a-friend features?

Often, these communications are the first — and maybe the last — touchpoint for a new customer. Media Post's “Email Insider” points to a well-known electronics retailer that prominently featured outdated gaming technology on its preferences page, even though the next generation of equipment had been released months prior. Not exactly the shopper's go-to choice when it comes to gaming credibility.

One final thought...the next time you suffer through a bad service experience, turn it into an opportunity for learning. What would you do differently under the same circumstances? How could the business win you back? Then smile, knowing that next time you'll be ready to turn a customer's complaint into a marketing home run.

Tricks of the Trade: Tools & Ideas You Can Use

Branding start to finish

If you're sending an urgent package to a prospect, why settle for the shipper's generic overnight envelope when you can make an impression right from the start? Family-owned Major Printing Company created a custom-branded envelope (*below*) that really stands out from the crowd. Major's Joe Stampone says, “We wanted an envelope that would stand out on someone's desk. When you follow up, people always remember the envelope. It's a lot harder for them to say ‘I don't remember getting it.’” Four-color printing for the 10x13” size is roughly \$1.76/each when you print 1,000. **Source:** majorprinting.com



Leaving an impression

Think you know your customers like the back of your hand? If you're targeting hip 20-something club-goers, Handvertisingusa.com can help you leave a lasting impression. They'll help you turn your marketing message into the hand stamp that clubs and other entertainment venues use to ID paid patrons or those of legal drinking age. **Source:** springwise.com

Do you smell something?

Corporate mail carts in Washington, D.C., Chicago and Dallas are carrying a little something extra besides interoffice envelopes, overnight packages and letters these days. Kentucky Fried Chicken's first-ever “scent-focused” pilot program placed a \$2.99 Deal meal — complete with chicken, a side and a biscuit — on mail carts making pre-lunch deliveries throughout several companies' offices. **Source:** The Newark, NJ *Star-Ledger*

Are all the good ones really taken?

Domain names, that is. Brainstorm options at BustaName.com based on keywords and immediately see those that are available. **Source:** SpeakerNetNews.com

Wrap it up, I'll take it

At first glance, Lockheed Martin and Pringles would appear to have very little in common — except when it comes to non-traditional marketing investments. Both are clients of freecarmedia.com, which is quickly making a name for itself in the nascent art of consumer peer-to-peer campaigns. In a nutshell, the company identifies your target audience, then wraps the vehicles of its peer members with your ad message. These “consumer drivers” hit the road, delivering your message, distributing samples, and giving you a presence at community events. **Source:** *The New York Times*



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Is customer service killing your marketing? See inside...



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Dear Santa... (from p. 1)



Secret Santa, the word's out. In a spin on the classic bridal registry, let your customers set up a wish list for stymied gift buyers. Pearl retailer

Iridesse (a division of Tiffany) offers both on- and off-line options, while a local Main Street shop supplies its customers with pre-printed "Dear Santa" forms to complete, then mails copies to the customer's designated list.

Cater to the clueless. Offer special shopping nights to help hapless husbands or worried wives find just the right gift. Online, consider offering a checklist of your most popular sellers on your home page, or an interactive "personality test" that identifies gift possibilities in every price range based on the recipient's interests.

Charity begins at home. Set up a Toys for Tots drop-off box in your store, or let customers donate via cash or extra purchases online to generate goodwill. Get the word out via a press release, signage, home page links, and an email blast to customers. Be sure to supply post-event stats to your customers and the media on how many gifts were distributed, and the reactions of participants on both ends.

Oh, Christmas tree. Give shoppers the opportunity to help your shop support a local charity. Set up a tree and invite customers who reach a specific spending threshold to hang an ornament on it. Every ornament represents a donation your business makes to the charity. Don't have a physical store location? Decorate a virtual tree on your site's home page.

Color me profitable. Looking to tap the junior market...or their parents? Sponsor a seasonal coloring contest and display the entries for judging around your store or site. Offer prizes for various age groups, with discount coupons to all who enter. To boost visibility, consider asking your community newspaper or members of a local arts organization to act as contest co-sponsors or judges.

Whatever you do, be sure to capture contact information from your new visitors. That way, they'll be the first in line to participate in next year's holiday events!