

11 Easy Customer Service Improvements

You know the old saying: “One happy customer will tell one friend. One unhappy customer will tell 10 friends.” This concept has been quoted (and misquoted) many times over. There’s validity to this statement—especially with the surge in social networking. Hundreds, even thousands, of friends, fans and followers could *instantly* know when your customer is unhappy. In fact, they can even share their experience on Facebook and Twitter before they leave your store.

Poor customer service is often the number one reason people switch service and product providers. Most people will not switch companies just to save a small amount of money. What garners loyalty is quality service.

Here are 11 easy ways to improve your customer service and your reputation:

1. **Model desired behavior with your employees:** Well-respected and appreciated employees are more likely to treat your customers the same way.
2. **Be polite on the phone:** Make sure your phones are answered by a live person with a cheerful and un-rushed greeting. When you place someone on hold, use “please” and “thank you.” Common courtesy goes a long way when customers are used to large companies that use automated attendants.
3. **Eliminate repetition:** Train your receptionist to relay the facts of a client’s issue to the next employee with whom the client will be speaking. This prevents the customer from having to repeat themselves, and it shows them that each employee is listening and invested in his or her satisfaction.
4. **Under-promise and over-deliver:** If you commit to sending a repairman or contract by a particular time, be early and provide more than was expected. If you can only offer the customer a four-hour delivery window, be willing to call when you are 30 minutes away from your arrival time.
5. **Accept that not all action leads to a sale:** Develop a company culture around being helpful, patient and building relationships. By ensuring that all visitors are treated with courtesy, buyers will buy, and lookers will come back as buyers.
6. **Give that little extra:** Offer to haul away the broken appliance or worn furniture when you make a delivery. Provide a car rental discount when your client leaves the car for service. Instead of telling the customer in which aisle to find the product, lead the way.
7. **Make it personal:** Nothing says VIP like being addressed by your name when you walk into a store. Teach your service desk personnel to pay attention to the customer’s name while checking them out.
8. **Explain why:** What is streamlined and efficient to you may not be understood and appreciated by your customer. A simple proactive explanation can eliminate frustration and retain a customer.

9. **Be aware of ‘unseen’ behavior:** It has been said that the true measure of your character is what you do when no one is looking. Does your staff talk negatively about other customers or the company within earshot of the waiting area? Do the employees sneak cell phone calls when the manager walks away but the customer is still browsing? Customers hear this and tell their friends—good or bad.
10. **Know how to apologize:** Teach your staff the art of a genuine apology. Sincerity is critical when it comes to solving problems and showing clients that you value their business. When you have to make a client wait either in person or on the phone, begin your greeting with “I appreciate your patience” or “My apologies for the delay.” Ignoring the issue will only make the client feel as though his or her business is not valued.
11. **Empower your employees:** Give your employees the authority and responsibility to rectify common situations immediately. This ensures the customer leaves happy rather than unhappy and waiting for a manager to call them. They may be with your competitor when they take the call.

Remarkable customer service takes dedication and consistency. With a little bit of effort, your business can reap the benefits of a great reputation and increased customer loyalty.