

BBB on Maintaining Customer Satisfaction

According to the latest BBB/Gallup Trust in Business Survey, one in five people surveyed specifically cited good customer service as a prerequisite for building their trust in a business. As a pioneer in dispute resolution, BBB is offering advice on how businesses can maintain high levels of trust through customer service and satisfaction programs.

"BBB has nearly 100 years of experience in the marketplace in helping consumers and businesses effectively resolve their disputes," said Steve Cox, BBB spokesperson. "BBB experience shows that providing good customer service directly contributes to positive word-of-mouth marketing – the holy grail of brand-building."

A dissatisfied customer is not a lost cause. According to a recent Harvard study, an unhappy customer can be turned into a repeat customer 80 percent of the time if the business takes action and provides effective customer service. For businesses with a staff of one or one thousand, BBB offers the following advice for keeping customers satisfied:

Customer service starts with a vision

The first step to providing good customer service is a mission statement or vision for the business that clearly states an institutional priority for providing excellent customer service. To emphasize that customer service is highly important to the company, some businesses include customer satisfaction as part of employee evaluations.

Make customer service representatives accessible

A recent survey by Vocal Laboratories found that, when asked which factors were most important in providing good customer service, 82 percent of respondents said "Make it easy for you to reach a live person (if necessary)" – the most popular response. Disgruntled customers need to know that their complaint is actually being heard and will only become angrier if they feel they are given the runaround or can't talk to an actual person.

Training, training, and more training

A well-trained, knowledgeable and courteous staff is a business' first line of defense against losing a customer. Businesses should establish regular training sessions where Customer Service Representatives (CSR) are updated on emerging products and services that the business provides. BBB also recommends that CSRs undergo formal training in dispute resolution – including how to handle irate customers.

Grant authority to staff to resolve disputes

The Vocal Laboratories survey also found that, when asked which factors made for bad customer service, 37 percent of respondents answered "The person you spoke to didn't have the authority to help you." Whoever in the company has responsibility for fielding complaints from customers needs the power and authority to resolve common problems without having to talk to a supervisor. This practice will speed the customer service, and customer satisfaction process.

Don't forget to follow up

Customers who voiced major concerns and problems still need to know that the company cares about them even after the issue has been resolved. A good way for

businesses to show customers that their satisfaction is a high priority is through simple outreach via notes, e-mails or phone calls.

Learn from common complaints

Learning from customer complaints is one of the best ways to find areas for improvement within a business. Management should continually monitor complaints for trends and recurring problems. Working to resolve the underlying issues leading to common complaints can have a major impact on the experience of many future customers.

For reliable advice and best practices on dozens of topics related to running a successful small business start with BBB at www.bbb.org.