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5 Ways Your Field Service Operation Can Help Build Stronger Customer Connections



Key Takeaways

To strengthen your customer connections, leverage the technology in your field service management solution to:

1. Streamline customer interactions using a flexible customer portal
2. Solicit customer feedback (and make sure you're able to act on it)
3. Ensure that your goal of improving customer connections is reflected in your organization's metrics
4. Be sure to avoid tactics that backfire
5. No two customers are exactly alike, so offer them flexible options

Introduction

Building stronger connections with your customers is a top priority for many organizations. There are often several challenges you need to overcome to make this happen. For starters, stronger connections are a two-way street. If your customers aren't interested in or motivated by the idea of building a stronger connection with you, it's going to be tough to make it happen. So you'll want to make sure you're giving your customers good reasons to want to strengthen their connections with you. If they appreciate what you're doing for them, a stronger bond will emerge organically.

Another challenge is that it's often unclear just where in an organization the responsibility for building stronger customer connections resides. It may be something that nobody's responsible for. Or it may be a goal that everybody is expected to rally behind. The upshot of both of these scenarios is usually the same – it winds up becoming a lot like the weather, something that everybody talks about but nobody does anything about.

To help you move the needle on the goal of building stronger customer connections, we've identified five tactics that the field service operation can drive to achieve real results.

1. Leverage a Customer Portal to Streamline Interactions

Sometimes the strongest customer connection is the one that's practically nonexistent. Because let's face it – whatever service you're providing to your customers, there's a good chance the customer views your involvement in their life as a necessary evil, not as the highlight of their day.

For example, if you're in the business of getting people up and running with a new fiber-to-the-premises connection, they're just not going to be excited about the installation process. What they're excited about is jitter-free gaming or bufferless streaming or fast file transfers. In other words, they're excited about all the things that happen after you're done, not while you're there. Likewise, if you're a widget manufacturer, your customers care mostly about what they can do with your widgets rather than about your involvement in bringing widgets into their lives.

So don't take it personally. Instead, focus on providing your customers with what they want: A mechanism to streamline their interactions with their engagement with you.

One way to achieve this is with a customer portal that makes it easy for your customers to manage all the information about your involvement in their lives. From creating appointments to tracking the whereabouts of a technician en route to their premises, a customer portal provides exactly what they're looking for to get you into and out of their lives as expeditiously as possible. (And let's face it – many of your metrics are also based around the reality that you'd like to get into and out of their lives as quickly as you can as well.)

2. Proactively Invite Customer Feedback and Suggestions

You know how everybody's an expert, right? (Especially when it comes to how other people should do their jobs.) Well, whether your customers have good ideas or not-so-good ideas about how you could do your job better, they'll appreciate being asked for their feedback.

But simply asking people "How could we improve?" has a danger lurking behind it. What if they share some ideas for ways you could improve your workflows that would make things better for both you and for them – but you're unable to act on those suggestions? Not only that, suppose you're unable to offer a satisfactory reason for why you can't do what they're suggesting? That could easily turn your customer's minor problem into a major aggravation.

And in many field service operations, things that seem like they should be minor changes are often far more difficult to implement than they should be. Even the simplest change orders can have painfully long lead times, painfully high price tags, and painfully complex approval cycles just to make those small adjustments that would make your customers happier.

Fortunately, solutions like Zinier's environment for no-code customization make it easy to implement changes, and fresh ideas in real time. That means that suggestions for enhancements don't have to come with a warning label that "Even simple fixes may be farther away than they appear."

3. Build OKRs Around Stronger Customer Connections

Everybody's busy. Everybody has a to-do list that keeps growing faster than you can check things off. That's the whole reason for establishing specific OKRs (objectives and key results) for your team or your company. Having a well-defined goal helps everybody prioritize what needs to get done first (and which things can suffer from benign neglect).

So if you really want to strengthen customer connections, make sure that that goal is reflected in some of your OKRs or other high-priority metrics. For example, most customers are happier when their appointment windows are shorter. When a customer sees that you're shrinking your appointment windows to something smaller than they expected, that's going to pave the way for a stronger connection.

So if you've been providing your customers with 4-hour windows, set a target to reduce that to 3 hours. Already providing 2-hour windows? What would it take to reduce it to 1.5 hours? Whatever your current windows are, review your performance and ask yourself a few questions:

- Are we meeting our target?
- If we are, are we communicating that to our customers? Even just injecting a sentence into your customer portal to let them know that you have a 99% on-time track record would strengthen your customer relationship.
- If we're not, where are the weak links? If people are getting delayed in traffic, preventing them from getting to the appointment location as expected, can you improve the way you're incorporating traffic data into your workflows?

Whether it's tightening your appointment windows, reducing downtime, improving SLA compliance, or other goals, make sure that these goals are reflected in your OKRs so they don't get quietly pushed aside until "later."

4. Avoid Collateral Damage

In the process of strengthening your customer connections, make sure you're not doing damage to other important relationships – such as those with your workforce. A leading multinational coffeeshop chain (you know the one) has recently come under fire for crowdsourcing customer ratings that sometimes backfire and undermine worker morale. And in countless other industries – from restaurants to ride-sharing services to communications services – customer ratings (whether done by the company itself or by third parties, such as Yelp) may improve bonds with customers but can come at the cost of alienating your own workers.

Fortunately, robust field service management systems can be configured to gather meaningful data in an equitable manner. Performance metrics can be provided in a manner that's both meaningful and impartial.

5. Customize for Customers

Every customer is different. So don't be surprised if two different customers respond differently to identical circumstances.

For example, a company providing installation of new connections of fiber-to-the-premises systems may have made great progress in being able to reduce their appointment window to an impressive 30-minute period.

Many customers will react enthusiastically to this, and reminding them about it in your various touchpoints with them will help bolster their connection with you. On the other hand, some customers won't care – their schedules may be more flexible, for example. Likewise, some customers will appreciate receiving several reminders of an upcoming appointment, while others will be annoyed if they're being told something more than once.

The more you can quickly and easily customize workflows and configure (and reconfigure) the details of those workflows, the more likely it is that you'll be able to tailor your interactions with a specific customer to their preferences. Ideally, the characteristics of many aspects of those interactions will even be configurable directly by the customer.

Interested in a field service management solution that will help strengthen your connections with your customers? Contact us at hello@zinier.com or schedule a time to connect at zinier.com/schedule-demo

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Contact us

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