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BUSINESS STRATEGY & GROWTH

Keeping Customers Loyal

By Leyla Hussein • 18 June 2019

A client we had worked with for months signed off the project, shook hands, and disappeared. Perfectly happy, nothing wrong. Just done. Eight weeks later I called him, not to sell anything, only to ask how the business was going. That single call, with no pitch attached, did more for the relationship than any campaign I could have sent him. That, to me, is what loyalty actually looks like.

How do you keep customers loyal? Plenty of companies wrestle with it, for all sorts of reasons. Building a strategy that works takes real trial and error and a great deal of time, because every company is different. [A strategy that works in one market](#) may fall flat in the next, and if you operate across several markets at once, finding the right answer can be genuinely maddening.

What can help

The good news is that in an age this rich with tools, there are plenty of ways to save yourself time. Most of you know email campaigns are one of the best ways to drive repeat purchases, and paired with a discount or a tailored offer they can really pull a customer back. That works well for retailers and business-to-consumer companies. Offering a service is harder, and if you are a business-to-business company it is harder still.

When you are B2B and selling services, your clients are usually investing in your team for the long haul. It is not a quick buy, and it is not something they can take home and inspect. You have to genuinely impress before anyone signs, and there is a lot of groundwork at the start just to meet expectations. Then comes the frustrating bit: a client might only need your service a handful of times in their entire lifecycle. So how on earth do you encourage repeat business?

I am afraid it is not as tidy as here is a piece of software that fixes everything. It is something you have to shape for your own offering and your own market. The single most useful thing I can tell you is to stay in direct contact with your customer. It does not need to be constant. One call every eight weeks or so is plenty. You will have delivered a service over an agreed period and built a real relationship along the way, and the work ending does not mean that relationship has to end with it. On these calls you do not sell. You ask how the business is doing, what they made of your service, how you might have done it better, and you let a bit of the personal in too.

The point of it

This may never produce a repeat sale, and as I said, your customer may simply have no current need for you. What it does do is act as a steady, friendly reminder that you care about their business and will give them a little time each month without ever reaching for the pitch. One caution: do not do this if you never built a real relationship in the first place, because the call will land as hollow. Every company should offer warm, genuine service before, during and long after the contract. Always.

For B2C, be more frequent with indirect promotion, since your market is broad and your exposure is shorter. Use social media and email, offer special deals and tailored experiences, and outdo your competitors on the details. A word of warning though: many companies believe blasting out masses of emails works. It does not. Sending the right number works, and that is usually about half what most companies choose. In one survey by Technology Advice, nearly half of subscribers, 48.5 percent, flagged emails as spam simply because they arrived too often. For B2B, a campaign is far more likely to earn you referrals than repeat orders. Stay familiar and stay useful, and not only will your past clients think well of you, so will the companies they talk to, and that is where the real referral business comes from.