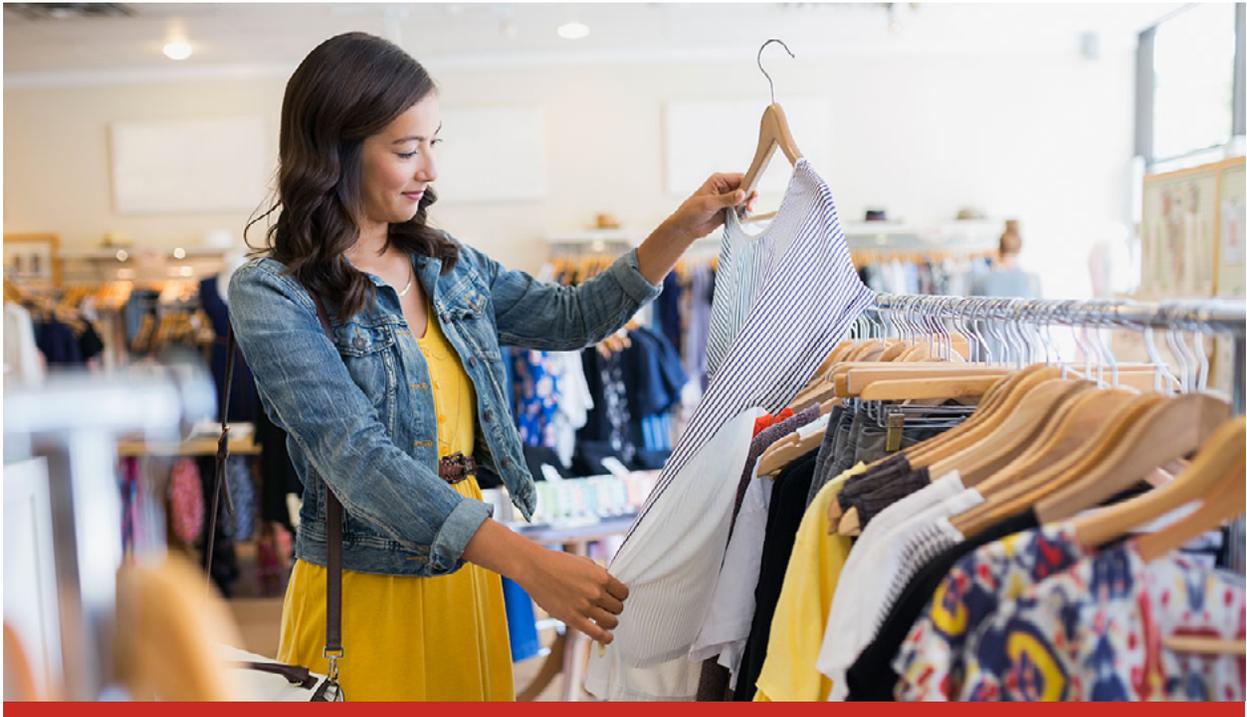


Retail planning: Keep your customers after the sale



Maintaining relationships with customers is one of the best things you can do for your business. You'll find it simpler and more profitable to retain a customer in the long run, so don't let your relationship slack after their first purchase. There are quick and easy methods of maintaining relationships with your customers, like connecting through social media.

But don't stop there. Make a plan to make your post-purchase follow-up successful. You'll want to be thoughtful about what you send so that your customers look forward to hearing from you. Here's how:

Sell the plan

Decide what you want to gain through post-purchase follow-up communications and who will be involved. Likely, you'll partner with your marketing person or team to build a relationship with customers and (ultimately) get them to buy more later. Don't get bogged down by the details, but make sure you have a good summary to highlight the key points and benefits of your plan. Make it enticing and easy to read, so others in your company can grasp it quickly and fully.

Get social

Once you've made it through order and shipping confirmations (if they're applicable), don't immediately jump to sending those generic promotional emails. This is your chance to solidify your brand in the customer's mind. Take time to thank customers for shopping and include links to social media accounts encouraging them to stay connected. Think of it like making a new friend: You might follow them on Instagram, but you wouldn't immediately start asking them to do favors for you. You can invite them to share their purchase on social media, tagging your business in the post, but don't force anything other than a way of connecting.

Have a conversation

As much as possible, personalize the emails you send. Personalization adds a human touch that makes customers feel valued and leads to higher open rates. It's OK to include products in emails, but don't alienate people by pushing your products or services on them. Good relationships have two-way conversations that make both parties feel understood. Try asking for feedback or inviting customers to share their stories on your social media pages. Talk to them like *people* you care about, not *strangers* you hope buy your product.

Be creative

Your approach doesn't have to be just social media or tailored emails. Try sending postcards in the mail with a thank you or event invite on it, or have business cards ready to go, so they have an option to reach out and start the conversation with you. The big takeaway here is that you don't have to follow

a straight path: Mix it up based on what's right for you and your customers. If you're a cosmetic store, send a free sample or cute sticker to customers. By not asking customers to do something for you, they will start to see your business as an ally — not a company that's only out for revenue.

Be creative

Dedicate some resources, or at least one person, that can make sure the post-purchase experience goes according to plan. Someone needs to own it and monitor it, so your business doesn't slip back into only sending automatic emails to a massive email list. Have this resource look at the responses to your communications to see what's been working. There's no one "right" way to connect, and no one "right" timetable for following-up.

By communicating post-purchase, you reassure customers they made the right choice, you build a relationship and you keep the door open for repeat business.