

5 ways to extend the customer experience after a sale



Small businesses often focus their marketing on making a sale. But a purchase transaction is just the beginning of a continuous journey for the customer, in which communication never stops — and neither do the sales.

Selling to new customers is always wonderful, but the real key for business owners is to maintain a relationship with those customers beyond the initial purchase. This communication can be delicate. If a customer enjoys your continual service after a sale, they're more likely to come back. But you also don't want to bombard them with so many messages that they get annoyed.

Here are five methods small business owners should use to keep relationships with customers going after they make a purchase:

1. Email marketing

When done correctly, email marketing after a sale is a win-win proposition. The customer should feel like they're getting some sort of value, and business owners are able to build an email contact list full of potential returning customers.

There are four main types of post-purchase emails businesses can use. Try a mix of these to keep your business in customers' minds, and also to show them that you value their insights and opinions:

- **Thank you:** A thank-you is a simple gesture that demonstrates you truly appreciate the customer's business.
- **Survey invitation:** A quick follow-up survey allows customers to provide feedback, which helps you build a positive customer experience. Consider offering a small reward or incentive for those who fill out the survey.
- **Special offer:** There are many ways to offer special deals using email. If you're a pizza shop that takes online sales, you may send an email to first-time online customers for \$3 off their next purchase, for instance. Small gestures like this can encourage customers to patronize your business again.
- **Review requests:** A post-sale email is a good time to ask customers to review you online, whether it's on your website, Facebook page or a third-party review site such as Yelp. Positive reviews of your business not only offer credibility, but they reassure potential customers and help boost your rankings in search engines.

2. Business website

Your website is an excellent way for potential customers to get to know your business before they make a purchase, of course, but it's also a great tool for keeping them engaged after that initial sale. The key here is to give customers a compelling reason to return to your website. Here are some ways how:

- For businesses that deliver food or goods, the most obvious way to get customers back to your site is an online ordering function.
- Service-oriented businesses can allow customers to book return appointments or make follow-up reservations online.

- Keep a steady flow of web traffic by employing fresh and unique content related to the industry you're in. For example, if you sell health foods or supplements, you might create a blog that includes short posts focused on healthy lifestyles. Or if you're a sports bar, you might post features about sports and food, such as a look back at local sports legends or the best foods to eat during the World Cup.

Think of your business website as a two-pronged approach: It needs all of the vital information necessary to entice new customers to give you a try, and it also needs a reason for those customers to return after a purchase is made.

3. Social media

Social media is an outstanding way to communicate with customers after they've made a purchase. Platforms including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn all have their own strengths, so be sure your posts are catered to whichever platform you use. Here are some tips:

- In general, your social media profiles are more often about maintaining relationships with customers and building your brand than making a direct or immediate sale. Sure, there may be times when you use social media to promote a specific product or sale, but treat social media as a way to keep your business in front of customers and at the top of their minds — so they think of you when they are ready to make a purchase.
- You should certainly post a fair amount of original content on social media, but also be sure to share content you think is relevant to your customers, whether a retweet on Twitter or a share on Facebook. If you run a boutique pet shop, for example, this may mean sharing a video on Halloween ideas for your pets. Or if you own a comic book or hobby store, you may retweet items on the coolest events taking place at Comic-Con.

4. Your logo

Your business logo is something you should make use of throughout the customer experience, including after a sale. In fact, your logo should be present in just about every form of communication you have with customers, including:

- Business cards
- Envelopes, stationery and letterhead
- Email messages
- Print marketing products such as brochures and postcards
- Social media profiles
- Website and landing pages
- Promotional products like pens and buttons
- Hats, T-shirts and other apparel
- Billboards and other advertising

The more you get your business logo in front of customers, the more they will associate it with the quality products or services you offer.

5. Online reviews

We have all browsed through customer reviews when looking to make a purchase, and your customers do the same. This is why it's crucial to encourage customers to post reviews of their experience on your website, Facebook page, or a platform like Google or Yelp. In a perfect world, your business will receive 100 percent positive reviews, but, in reality, that is rarely the case. Inevitably, a dissatisfied customer will use online reviews to air a grievance or share their disappointment. While negative reviews may feel disheartening at first, they are actually an excellent opportunity to show off your customer service skills.

How to deal with negative feedback

- Quickly respond to the negative review, and try to go above and beyond to make up for the customer's feeling slighted. This will improve your relationship with that individual customer and also show others that you go out of your way to make customers happy.
- If a negative review threatens to escalate into a war of words between your business and the customer, take it offline to a private channel (such as direct messages or the telephone) instead of going back and forth in a public forum for other customers to see.

Making a sale is great, but making a repeat sale is even better. This is why

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the post-purchase experience is so important. Returning customers are the lifeblood that support so many small businesses, and there is more money to be made by catering to those who have already bought something from you.

Consider a multi-layered approach using two or more of the methods above to increase your chances of turning first-time buyers into long-term customers.