

How to Attract and Retain Customers Workshop

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American travelers spent \$8 billion in Iowa last year, \$33.47 million of which was spent in Clayton County.

Creating a good first impression lies with frontline staff. They have the power to change how customers feel.

There are two key components of customer service: a community-wide approach and a business/attraction approach.

Community-wide

Getting visitors/customers in your door:

How does your business look from the window of a car? Is it obvious that you're open? Do you have curb appeal? How are your window displays?

Create a "visual hook" to appeal to people. This could be plants/flowers, seasonal decor, or a sandwich board/chalkboard with a clever phrase that might change each day.

Offices downtown should create displays as much as traditional retailers. This helps the overall look/appeal of the downtown and shows that the offices care about how the retailers fare and are community minded.

Vacant storefronts are everyone's problem. Team up with local artists or school art classes to set up displays in vacant windows, promote local events or local history in vacant windows.

Good curb appeal generates 70% of first time sales.

Visitors want dining, retail, events, and lodging. If visitors spend the night, on average, they will spend 3x more in your community than if they hadn't stayed.

Get visitors to know and use your community's assets.

- Visitor Ambassador Program helps frontline employees become your best community salespeople to visitors. A successful program must have someone who creates and grooms the program (Chamber or volunteer committee). The most successful programs have one contact person who businesses and attractions may contact if they wish to be included in the program, need materials or training, or have news to share to other ambassadors, such as new/expanded services or location. Ambassadors are the front line employees and volunteers who visitors to your community are most likely to meet, such as convenience store clerks, hotel staff, restaurant food servers, attraction employees or volunteers, and retailers. **(Contact the Chamber if you would like to get involved in a program like this.)**
- Equip ambassadors with a fact sheet of community's history and frequently asked questions. Teach them how to give directions (with the map upside down to them). Offer familiarization (FAM) tours of local businesses and attractions. Provide printed suggestion sheets of restaurants (addresses, hours, menu basics), things to do (attractions, events, interesting stops), lodging (include addresses, phone numbers, websites), and customized maps - community maps for ambassadors to provide directions and visitors can take with them. Include street names and community landmarks. All businesses should use the same map.
- Reward ambassadors for their salesmanship. Possibilities include:
 - Recognition in local media

- Smart businesses have a secret weapon - they offer ambassador specials, which encourage ambassadors to come to you, experience your products and services, and tell others knowledgeably about you from a personal perspective.
- Mystery visitor award program
- Ambassador email list - reward ambassadors by letting them be the first to know about new community businesses and events.
- Exclusivity events, such as only ambassadors get to participate in FAM tours.
- Personal recommendations are the #1 marketing tool in the world.
- Provide refresher courses for ambassadors as needed.

Business/Attraction

Why is customer service so important?

- Acquiring a new customer costs 6-7x more than retaining an existing customer.
- 90% of US consumers say they'd pay more to ensure a superior customer experience
- Happy customers tell 9 friends about their experience, unhappy customers tell 16

Five Steps of Excellent Customer Service

1). Make it your own - how do you add value to your product or service?

- Define and create your customer service experience/culture. What three words do you want your customers to say about their experience with you? Example: a bank might choose the words "trustworthy," "secure," "convenient." An art gallery might choose "creative," "stimulating," "unusual."
- Select employees/volunteers who can provide your experience . Hire/recruit people who can carry out the behaviors necessary for your customers to experience this service.
- Train employee/volunteer behavior to ensure your experience.
- Be accountable. Coach behaviors necessary to provide this experience. Recognize and reward those who carry out these behaviors well.

2) Make it personal

- Developing personal relationships with customers lessens future problems. Customers are more likely to forgive issues if you have built a personal relationship with them.
- Greet your customers by name if possible.
- Remember SALES: Smile, Appropriate greeting, Listen, Eye contact, Say thank you.

3) Make it efficient

- Provide quick and accurate transactions
- Staff should know answers to frequently asked questions
- Empower staff to handle customer needs themselves
- Apologize if a customer has to wait, even if it's only for a few minutes

4) Make it satisfying

- Keep customers up to date on new products, sales, and events through social media, newsletters, email, or mail.
- Make sure staff know your policies and can explain them accurately.
- Nurture customer relationships. Create client files to keep notes on your clients - clients are impressed if you can show that you remember a detail that they shared.

- Reward customers with loyalty programs, discounts, surprise gifts.

5) Make it memorable - stand out from your competition.

- Customers seek experiences and remember how you made them feel.
- Entertainment (singing waiters)
- Esthetic (art, accent lighting, decor)
- Escapist (customers can pretend they're someone else or somewhere else - murder mystery dinner, ethnic dining)
- Educational (workshops, classes)

Handling Complaints

Unhappy customers are a great source of learning

When a complaint is brought forth:

1. Listen carefully
2. Restate the problem to confirm you heard correctly
3. Apologize
4. Acknowledge how the customer is feeling (frustrated, disappointed, etc.)
5. Explain the action you will take to correct the problem. Empower your employees to act immediately.
6. Thank your customer for bringing the problem to your attention.

Businesses must respond to negative online reviews. Keep your responses brief and positive, and don't let a bad review crush your sense of humor.



How well do I exemplify superior customer service?

Rate the following questions to evaluate the level of service you provide to your customers and how you represent the travel and tourism industry. Be honest with yourself - this will help you to objectively assess your strengths and where you may need to improve.

Use the following numbers to evaluate each question:

0 - Rarely; 1 - Sometimes; 2 - Frequently; 3 - Most of the time

_____ Do I have a good working knowledge of the surrounding area, including addresses, directions, and current events that may be occurring during my visitors' stay?

_____ Do I volunteer information about tourist attractions and special events in the community?

_____ Do I demonstrate pride in my community when speaking with a customer?

_____ Do I keep maps, telephone numbers, and a calendar of events handy at my worksite?

_____ When I have a conversation with a customer, do I give him or her my complete attention and avoid doing other activities, such as working on the computer, looking at my cell phone, having a side conversation with a co-worker, or writing a note or message?

_____ Do I make eye contact with a customer to show that I am paying attention?

_____ When speaking to a customer over the phone, do I make an effort to change the pitch and tone of my voice to let the customer know I am listening and am interested?

_____ Do I convey friendliness and eagerness to help through my facial expressions and body language?

_____ When I cannot provide my customer with exactly what he or she wants, do I suggest options and alternatives?

_____ When a customer is bringing a complaint, do I remain calm and understanding - even if I think he or she is wrong?

_____ Do I see customer complaints as an opportunity to improve instead of a problem that is taking up valuable time?

Scoring your questionnaire

Total your ratings on the questions and see how you placed.

25-36 points: Superior

13-24 points: Good

0-12 points: Attention needed

Superior

Congratulations! You are a professional at providing service. You make an excellent contribution to the travel and tourism industry and to our local business community.

Good

You understand the basics of good customer service and understand your part in the travel and tourism industry, but you are not performing consistently. We have good days and bad days. Remember that you always have personal control over your behavior and the attitude you project. Make a point of practicing the items where you scored lower every time with a customer - especially when you do not feel like it!

Attention Needed

Scoring at this level does not necessarily mean that you do not care about your job and your customers. It may be that:

- You are a newcomer to the service industry and are still learning the ropes on dealing with the public. You may be new to the community and may need to learn more about what your area has to offer.
- You are an established service professional but may have become a little rusty on some of the basics you once practiced.
- This may not be the right job or industry for you. Some people do not enjoy dealing with customers or helping others resolve problems; they may work better by themselves.