Customer Loyalty: **Delight Them with Your Product, Amaze Them with Your Solutions**

How to take customers from satisfied to loyal and grow your business

Whether you are selling business-to-consumer (B2C) or business-to-business (B2B), retaining customers for your product or service should get as much attention as winning over new ones. According to HubSpot.com, it is your delighted customers who will refer new business to you. Securing new business through existing clientele is, in fact, more cost effective than always searching for new prospects. Campaigns to win new customers require about five times (sometimes even 20 times, depending on the industry) the investment than those to build loyalty.

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Don't assume loyalty

In most cases, even in B2B, it is not that difficult for customers to switch to new sources. Moreover, when they do switch, they are apt to share their story with others, especially if they switched because they were dissatisfied. A dissatisfied customer spreads the word faster than a satisfied one.

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For many customers, however, it is easier to remain with their existing suppliers than to make a change; just don't confuse this inertia with loyalty. Even if something doesn't go dramatically wrong, a competitor with an attractive pitch can overcome this inertia once the honeymoon phase comes to an end.

Satisfied vs. loyal

In B2C especially, competitors with coupons, loyalty discounts, "points" programs and other tactics to attract new customers vie on a daily – if not hourly – basis to overcome the inertia of customers and win them over to their side. This is a tactic you most likely are employing, as well, if you are B2C. Plenty of loyalty-and-reward systems out there can help you expand your customer database. By rewarding customers for staying "loyal," you give them a good reason to come back every single time, and in return you get reports, customer data and analytics. In B2B, these loyalty platforms may not be as feasible, or as effective, but it doesn't matter. Loyalty cards that build points toward special pricing, QR codes for scanning by smartphones, tokens that can be traded for discounts and the like are a good idea, but they don't get to the heart of what drives customer loyalty.

If a product or service meets specification consistently, customers are satisfied with the buy. To get from satisfied to loyal, however, there is a stretch; you need to do more. Full-blown loyalty is driven by small

things that can be difficult to measure. These small things build up, for good or for bad.

Focus on the user

Actual loyalty is driven by relationships that you build between your team and the customer. Even in B2B, when sourcing is often driven by approved-supplier lists, purchase orders, and long-term budget and capital planning, there is still a person behind every decision to buy – a person in a visible position in the organization who has a stake in the outcome of the buy. It might be a CEO, CFO, CIO or a purchasing manager, but someone in your customer's organization is concerned that every user experiences the value of the product or service.

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Bear in mind that whether you are B2C or B2B, you are ultimately selling individual-to-individual. You need to demonstrate that you understand your customers as individuals, and then make yourself indispensable to those individuals. It is difficult to fire somebody you like, especially when you not only like them but you like the job they are doing for you.

How to build the one-to-one relationship

There is always a period after a customer buys when the relationship is in a honeymoon phase – when the customer is excited about their

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decision and the benefits they expect to see. Use that momentum to ensure they actually use your product or service, and use it in the way that will make them the most successful. Active use that drives results is the first step to making your company a fixture in their organization.

Tools are available to measure individual user activity and the enthusiasm behind it. For example, the [Net Promoter Score](#) measures people's responses and their likelihood to recommend a product or service on a scale of 1 to 10. There are many other tools, as well. Whichever tools you use, measuring is a basic tenet of all good marketing campaigns. The traditional areas of measurement, in addition to customer satisfaction, include attrition rates, revenue targets, up- or cross-selling, the number of customer saves and the number of customer programs completed.

However, measuring is just the start. To build a relationship, you must go beyond the transaction. You must communicate with the people you sell to. If you survey your customers, if you ask for their feedback, if you use loyalty programs to collect data from them, you are making a commitment. After a customer invests time giving you information that enables you to measure his or her satisfaction, to complete the commitment, you need to share the results of your measuring with your customer.

Sell solutions, not features

In today's markets, customers are struggling with complexity on a near daily basis. Your B2B customers may be dealing with constant regulation changes; your B2C customers are dealing with more personal issues. All are trying to find a solution to a problem, and each time they show a potential interest in a product or service, they are thinking about a pain of some kind or a problem they are having, and they are looking to make their lives easier. The more you can offer your company's product or service as a utility that minimizes their pain, the more delighted your customers will be.

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To do this, share what you know. Use blogs, white papers, webinars and face-to-face or telephone conversations – or, if possible, a combination of all of the above – to reflect back to your customer what you have learned about their problem, and how your product or service provides the exact solution they need. The organization that constantly measures customer experience but does not share its findings with customers is doing only half the job, and the half it is *not* doing is the part that risks leaving loyalty on the table.

When you tell your customer how much you have learned about their challenges and what you know you can do to solve them, you set

yourself up as more than a seller of features. You become a trusted adviser: "Here is data that shows how individuals in your exact situation have benefited from this exact solution. Based on this data, we have built our product and services specifically to provide you with these benefits, too."

Ultimately, you must have a product or service that provides a unique and amazing experience to your customers. Acquire top talent to manage the development of your product and service offerings. Recruit front-line employees who serve as the helpful and intelligent face of your business to customers. Remember, however, the strong correlation between customer loyalty and how likely an individual is to recommend your organization. These recommendations are rooted in the customer's perception of you as the only one they trust to understand and solve their problems. Then you will measure your growth not just in revenue and market share, but also in terms of increasing the number of problems you are solving for your loyal customers.

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