

Why customer retention should be job one

It's easy to lose customers and very hard to get them back. Once they are gone, chances are they won't be back.

The reality is that there are many people and companies doing what you do. There's always an alternative for customers who are unhappy for any reason. Too many companies seem to lose sight of this reality, and they do little to ensure that they keep the customers they have.

Here's how my heat/AC contractor failed to retain my business:

Back in November, my schedule changed and I was not going to be working out of my home office. In December, I generally get a home heating inspection with my heat/AC contractor. It helps to make sure all parts are working properly and that my heat will continue through the winter. This company is a family-run place where I have been a customer for three years.

Strike one: I got a reminder card from the company in late November. I called right away to schedule an appointment. They had no open slots until LATE December, one month away. Mind you, I had just gotten the card.

Strike two: I explained to the scheduler that I would not be home because of my situation and that I was hoping for a Saturday appointment. It turns out this company does not do inspections on Saturdays, only emergency work. Then I asked for an early weekday appointment. Again, the scheduler could not accommodate me. She told me that she could not find a technician in my area that would be available for their first appointment at 8:00 a.m.

Strike three: I informed the scheduler that I would be forced to switch companies if she didn't try to accommodate me

because I did not want to have a heat inspection later than December (remember, they were already scheduling late late December). No response and no attempt to rectify the situation.

And they are out: After some research, I called another highly rated heat/AC company that not only was scheduling earlier in December (meaning they have more technicians) but would also provide guaranteed 8:00 a.m. appointments. It cost \$20 more per annual contract than my previous company, but the ease of scheduling was worth it to me.

My first heat/AC contractor lost my business not because it wasn't good at it what it does but because it made no effort to accommodate me. They seemed to forget that there are other contractors out there.

Most heat/AC contractors do not market actively. Many have websites and most work on their ratings on places like Angie's List, but they mostly depend on word of mouth. This is why working to RETAIN customers should be a large part of their business model.

Customers that stay are a continuing source of income AND of referrals.

Again, the reality is that keeping customers should be job one: Losing customers is easy and getting them back is difficult. No amount of marketing will bring back a customer that has found a better alternative.

What are you doing to retain your customers or clients? I'd like to find out what specific actions you are taking and I will be sharing those in a future blog post.