

Do you appreciate your customers?

I am sure you appreciate your customers (or supporters), especially when they pay you (or donate) for the goods/services you offer. But do your customers know you appreciate them? How are you communicating appreciation?

If you are trying to establish or maintain a long term relationship with your customers or supporters, you must demonstrate AND COMMUNICATE that you appreciate their business/donations, and that you are not taking the relationship for granted.



How can you do this? There are several ways.

Reward their loyalty

Big box stores, airlines, credit cards and any number of other service/good purveyors provide discounts/points/bonuses for frequent customers. Giving customers a discount or something else of value gives them a reason to continue to work with you, and lets you reward their support.

Thank them

It depends on the size of your business, but thanking customers can be done with a simple hand written card, an email, a pre-printed postcard, or even through a personalized email marketing campaign.

Accommodate them

My kitchen sink was leaking, so I contacted my go-to plumber. I sent him an email explaining the situation and asking when he could come to deal with it. He could only fit me in the following week. I wrote him back and said that I would be looking for someone who could come sooner. His response was this:

Wow, that sucks but ok

Really? It sucks that I have to look for someone else? You know what sucks? Having your kitchen sink leak. Imagine if instead he wrote this:

“Totally understand. You need to get the sink fixed ASAP. If you can’t find anyone, let me know.”

As it turns out, I found someone to come that day! And fix the leak for a lot less than my soon to be ex plumber, who clearly is taking my business for granted.

Notice them

I’ve been going to a yoga studio for the better part of the last year but around Thanksgiving, I went out of town and had

a couple other obligations. Since I had not been in the studio for several weeks, the studio manager sent me an email with the subject line “Just checking in.” It said this:

Has it been a few weeks since you’ve been to yoga? Just remember you carry your yoga practice with you wherever you go. In the meantime, here is a 7 minute practice you can do right now in your chair. Don’t stay away too long. ☐

This included the instructions for the seven minute practice referenced.

It all requires keeping track

All these require you tracking your customers/donors. For the yoga studio, this is probably part of the Mindbody software they use. For smaller organizations it may be as simple as a Excel spreadsheet. For bigger businesses, there are many types of customer management (CRM) software available. For nonprofits, there are specific donor databases.

Make them feel that you appreciate them

We all like to feel appreciated. And organizations of all types need to be sure to communicate their appreciation.

If you don’t get it, you don’t get it.

The *Washington Post* runs an advertising campaign with the slogan “if you don’t get it, you don’t get it.” And on Monday,

I did not get my print copy of the *Post*. I called the re-delivery number and left a message. Five hours later, I had not yet received a replacement copy so I called again, and left another message, asking for a call back. Then I went to the online complaints, and left two messages—one about the missed delivery and one about another delivery issue I had during my end-of-year vacation.

I didn't get it

I heard nothing from the *Post*. Not one word. No call back and no redelivered paper. No apology. No credit. No nothing.

Subscriptions matter

The *Washington Post* has seen an increase in digital subscribers and a decrease in print subscribers. This isn't surprising since most people seem to prefer to read their news online. However, in terms of advertising sales, which is what pays the bills at the *Post* and most every other newspaper, circulation numbers are what sets advertising rates. Fewer print subscribers means smaller circulation numbers, which means lower advertising rates. Obviously, the less the *Post* charges Macy's and the various other advertisers, the less revenue it generates.

Disregard is disrespect

So subscriptions matter. And yet the *Post* continues to treat its subscribers with, if not outright disdain, complete disregard. Prices are increased every few months, credits are no longer given even though the print subscription charges for delivery costs, and customer service has been outsourced to Asia, where the agents barely speak English and don't know K Street from Pennsylvania Avenue.

The *Washington Post* would prefer if you never called them, so they've created an online account/customer service portal. Except it sucks. Every time you want to do something, you

have to sign in, and then somehow, you are signed out of your digital subscription. And not everything works. I tried to change my vacation hold dates, and was not able to. I had to call an unhelpful customer service agent.

When I got home from vacation, I discovered that of the six days I was gone, four days of newspapers were delivered. My vacation stop was not honored. I complained online and nothing. Again, no apology, no credit, no acknowledgment of a mix-up.

Here's the bottom line: The Washington Post can advertise for new subscribers all it wants, but until it fixes its broken customer service, it will continue to lose print subscribers (and by extension advertising revenue).

Customer service matters more than marketing in retaining customers. Marketing is about acquisition and customer service is about retention. If you acquire customers just to lose them because of poor service, you are wasting money marketing and you are threatening your bottom line.