

## Chapter 9: Manage Customer Relationships

### Know Your Customers

Almost everyone knows that eighty percent of business comes from just twenty percent of customers. It's easier to sell orders to people you already have relationships with. When you're consistently able to identify a person's needs and then satisfy them, you will sell orders faster. Distributors who keep solid client relationships in place are the ones who book the most orders. Creating loyal buyers is essential to long-term success. Forward-thinking distributors always look for new business, but they also realize they must spend time on nurturing existing accounts.

There are many different types of customers who will need you to work with their particular styles and tendencies. Listen for some key phrases and keep these suggestions in mind in order to deliver what your customers need:

#### **“Show me quality.”**

These buyers want everything they buy to be top-of-the-line, and they're willing to pay for that privilege. Distributors who frequently find these customers are always pocketing higher profits.

*What I do:* I make sure I am extremely well versed in product knowledge to handle quality-oriented customers. They know what they are looking for, and you must be able to find it for them consistently!

#### **“Think for me.”**

These prospects are open-minded and must be told what to buy. Be wary of some of them – you don't want your ideas farmed out to your competitors.

*What I do:* I make sure that the ideas I provide are to people who sincerely are interested and not just after a bid. Take steps to qualify their intentions beforehand.

#### **“I need it tomorrow.”**

For some customers, last-minute orders are the only ones they know how to place. If you are efficient and have the cast-iron stomach needed to handle last-minute demands, you can always find prospects looking for your services. The real advantage to conducting rush order business is that profits associated with these orders are high!

*What I do:* You must be very alert when handling these types of customers. If you are going to specialize in rush orders, then you must realize that they will either make or break you.

#### **“Counsel and entertain me.”**

Nothing creates consistent buyers more than forming close personal bonds with them. When someone considers you a friend, they will allow you to charge them

more, and they will place more orders with you. If you want to keep the competition away from your customers, building relationships based on trust will do the trick.

*What I do:* I know that forming friendships with clients is a necessity, but I do so cautiously. You must be careful when specializing in personal relationship selling. If you don't get close enough, it won't work; if you get too close, it can backfire.

### **Consistency Is Key**

There are many ways to make your services attractive to new customers, but the thing that always works is being reliable. Distributors who know how to perform are able to manage their relationships simply through their actions. There's no formal training in order to perform consistently; you either do it or you don't. To be known as someone who always performs, follow these key points:

**Spoil your customers.** Take care of them. Make regular mailings as well as personal calls on a set schedule. Instead of providing them with the same products they can get elsewhere, provide a variety of materials that no one else offers. Let everyone know that you are the go-to person when it comes to promotional products.

*What I do:* I bring customers things that have nothing to do with this industry. If I know a customer who likes history, I'll drop off historical books or magazines. If I know they like to travel, I mail copies of travel magazines.

**Develop reliable calling habits.** Always plan ahead. Make certain parts of the week special by calling on certain customers on specific days. Start days off by calling on the same customer on set mornings, then fill your day in with calls as you head back to your office.

*What I did:* For 12 years, I made it a point to visit my largest customer every Tuesday morning. By doing so, I was able to meet with my client, or if she was not available, I would leave pertinent information for her that would initiate the next sale. It became well known that I would be at this customer's office nearly every Tuesday morning. On many days when my customer was unavailable, there would be purchase orders left in my name at the front desk.

**Timing is paramount.** You must do everything you can to make sure that every order you sell is correct and shipped on time. The perfect time to obtain a new customer is to call on someone who has just been burned by a competitor.

*What I do:* On every one of my orders, I write the in-hands date on a large dry-erase board that hangs on my office wall. By keeping the shipping requirements visible for rush orders, I know when I must call suppliers to check on the status.

**Keep yourself current.** People get bored with the same things. No matter how long you have been calling on someone, always try new approaches in your presentations. Never bring the same ideas to someone twice, and update everything you're doing from time to time.

*What I do:* Every couple of years I change the look of my printed materials. By doing so, I make my customers think I'm always moving forward.

**Send virtual samples regularly.** Make the effort to create virtual samples frequently and send them to prospects and customers on a regular basis. They cost nothing to create, and it gives you another reason to let current and potential customers know they're important to you.

*What I do:* I have refined my sales approach to the point that after I have a relationship in place with clients, I am able close eighty percent of sales with them by emailing virtual samples.

The greatest benefit of employing proper relations management techniques is that you will create strong business relationships, which will increase the number of orders you receive. Veteran salespeople know that success is not achieved by selling one order at a time, but by selling large numbers of them to several loyal clients!

### **Create Lifetime Customers**

Salespeople become successful distributors by optimizing the return on every prospect they encounter and by knowing how to get new customers to place orders with them forever. You can create long-lasting buyers by following these guidelines:

**1. Never Sell on Price.**

Sellers who book orders based on price are never able to create longtime customers because they only are able to write orders. Big-time buyers will not hang with cheapies because somewhere down the line they won't be able to deliver what they promise.

**2. Appeal to the Masses.** There are many products suitable for all buyers, and you need to find them and determine how they meet the marketing goals of your customers. An example of one such item is Opper Fiber® cleaning cloths. They are used to clean glasses, phones and tablets.

**3. Be Personable.** Most orders are placed because the client likes the person they're buying from. Ask customers what they like and have them elaborate about their children, pets, where they travel and other personal details. It's easier to sell to someone who feels a personal connection with you. Plus, you'll gain insight into their personalities and be able to anticipate what they'll want to buy in the future.

4. **Never Make Excuses.** No matter what, some orders go bad. When this happens, never run from the problem. Instead, correct the mistake and make things right. Tell the customer the truth and ask them for forgiveness.
5. **Keep It New.** Always show clients new ideas instead of new products. By showing creative ways to package items and suggesting how to make them more attractive to target audiences, your clients will never want to deal with anyone else.
6. **Personalize.** Nothing creates customers faster than personalized samples. Most suppliers are happy to provide spec and virtual samples as long as you assure them that you will follow up after you present them.
7. **Keep a Schedule.** Employ a follow-up plan in which you make contact with clients at least every three weeks, because constant contact trains them to buy from you. Here are a few ways to do that:
  - Leave voicemails, mail samples or visit.
  - Include flyers of new products with invoices.
  - Send holiday cards. No matter what the holidays may be, use the dates as opportunities to contact customers.
8. **Rush It Along.** Become a rush order specialist and process quick orders efficiently. Pricing is not often an obstacle, since people who need products by certain dates are worried about delivery and not lower prices.
9. **Thank Customers.** After sending an invoice, tell buyers in your own words how much you appreciate their business. Handwritten notes are the most genuine way to thank people.
10. **Be Nice to Competitors.** It pays to be the bigger person, and it shows your competitors and potential clients alike that you're confident in your abilities.
11. **Be Reliable.** Show prospects and customers that you value them by always doing what you promise.

To reach the next level, you must take the steps required to develop faithful buyers. This is not something that happens overnight. It's a slow, consistent process that shows people you are sincere, reliable and creative. Those are the traits that repeat buyers are looking for!

### **Turn Prospects into Customers**

Successful distributors sell more orders because they know how to make clients focus on buying from them! The fastest ways to make that happen is to examine the methods you employ in getting customers to pay attention to you. You will increase sales by

mastering the skills that cause customers to forget about other things and concentrate only on your efforts. Below are some key points make that happen.

**Looker or buyer? Know the difference.** The ability to do this quickly is essential to maximizing the time you spend looking for new customers. When supposed prospects send you subtle messages that reveal they are not real buyers, you must recognize that fact right away. One indication that a prospect is not a serious buyer is a response like this: "I have a lot going on right now and I'll have to deal with this later. Call me in a couple of weeks." This is a prime example of a non-interested person who will probably never order in the future.

*Action Step:* When someone gives you the "I'm really busy" response, be polite and tell him or her that you understand and that if he or she ever needs anything to give you a call. Move on and invest your time in finding better prospects.

**Less is more.** Many customers buy from a distributor because they need help deciding what products they need to buy. For most customers, offering too many choices only confuses them. With this type of customer, less is always more, and it makes them focus on the business at hand.

*Action Step:* When anyone requests a large amount of samples after looking at catalogs, don't go overboard and order them all. Keep initial product samplings to two to three pieces during the first part of the sale. Tell prospects that you want to show them a few samples first to make sure you're going in the right direction before you order more.

**Control what you sell.** Make it a point to refrain from sending prospects to websites in search of products, including your own. You don't want to sell products that offer low commissions and cause you to make insufficient returns. It's far better for you to control product selections and to guide customers toward things you're knowledgeable about.

*Action Step:* Since you'll always have to do some business online, limit the number of product images you send at one time. In my business, I never include pricing with images until I know exactly what the customer wants. Once you know you have a serious buyer, you can send more detailed information.

**Getting the order.** When a client is ready to give you an order, obtain the sales commitment, gather as much pertinent info as you can and move them along in the process as quickly as possible. If you've asked the right questions along the way, you already will know the essentials, such as drop ship locations, quantities needed and the timing of delivery. The best way to keep unforeseen situations to a minimum is to ask questions during the selling process and to keep a mental and written checklist of the answers. This helps everyone stay focused and keeps things going smoothly.

*Action Step:* Before making presentations to new prospects, visit their website and learn as much as you can about them. By gathering information beforehand, such as the number of store locations, names of decision-makers, etc., you will be better prepared for your meeting, and the potential sales will go more smoothly.

**After the sale: creating future orders.** Sometimes the hardest part of a sale comes *after* the order is sold. To create future orders and show customers the value of the products you've sold, always encourage them to use the items for their intended purpose. If products are not dispensed in a timely manner, your customer will never know the true value of the items. Besides, the sooner they use up the product, the sooner they will buy again.

*Action Tip:* Ask customers if they would like you to help distribute their products at events. An extra person to help them out is usually appreciated, and it frees up their staff to do other tasks at the event. Helping customers with their promotions also makes your bond with them even stronger.