

BUILDING CUSTOMER LOYALTY BY MAKING YOUR BUSINESS CONTAGIOUS

When I was a kid, we used to play a game called "made you look". You probably did too. The idea was to grab someone's attention and make them focus on something silly and then say, "Made you look".

As I got older, I realized that there are many "made you look" examples that we all experience. Go to the baggage carousel at any airport and you will see hundreds of travelers with a fixed gaze on the shoot that the luggage comes out of. Beware that once the luggage starts coming down, all eyes are on each bag that hits the belt and people actually elbow each other to get their "spot" along side the conveyor belt to grab that precious "black bag". Made you look!

Another one that amazes me is fireworks displays of any kind. People will stand in long lines of traffic to get a parking space and then walk miles to find the right place on the lawn to watch fireworks go off, where...IN A VERY BIG SKY!!! Made you look!!

Then there is a kid's school program. The Paparazzi has nothing on parents of a kid in a school play. Parents will arrive at school hours ahead of time...line up at the auditorium door and then practically push each other over to get that "right spot" to take videos or pictures of little Johnny. Ahh, made you look.

I call all of these examples, **creating a contagious focus**. Someone has something that you want and you will do whatever it takes to experience it or to physically get it.

Wouldn't you like to create a "contagious focus" around you and your business? Here are 4 areas on which to focus that will "make your customers look"!

1. Focus on making your customer look by multiplying your marketing efforts.

First, focus on your branding efforts. Your brand is not your logo or your products or services or your employees. Your brand is the soul of your business and the congruency of everything else that you do. Can you say what your business is in 30 seconds? Now try it again, but go deeper. You don't just offer financial planning; you help your customers sleep better at night! You don't just sell pools you sell outdoor fun. Next, do your employees and your customers know exactly what you do, so much so that they become your advertisers with feet? Lastly, are you using every channel of marketing to reach your customers? Too often business owners become comfortable using the same types of advertising, such as print advertising. Revisit the possibilities through media, internet, snail mail, postcards, ezines, blogging, phone calls and a combination of all of them. The old saying, "out of sight, out of mind" could not be truer in our world of communication overload. Your marketing must be so contagious that your customers can't avoid getting it.

2. Focus on making your customer look by giving outstanding customer service.

Shep Hykin, featured in the book, *The Big Moo* says, "We don't just want to be satisfied, we want to be blown away." Customers are more demanding, much busier and more media saturated than ever before. Satisfying them is an on-going challenge. I believe the worst thing about most customers is that they "don't stay sold". If you think they are loyal, think again. Customers vote with their feet and their wallet.

Delivering outstanding and consistent customer service through employees who have excellent communication and sales skills has to be the foundation of a good business. You may have just chuckled at that last sentence and said, "Well, if I had a magic wand that would be easy".

You might be right! The National Employer Skills Survey recently stated that 1/3 of job applicants are not fully skilled in handling customers or in communication skills. Then how do you get your employees to an acceptable level? You teach them. If you can't teach them, I suggest you hire someone to do the training.

I heard the president of Great Harvest Bread Company, Nido Qubein say, "People do not do wrong things because that is what they want to do, it is because it is a by-product of what they have seen or been taught to do." Revisit your training program and evaluate it based on the performance level and sales level of your current employees. Is there room for increased motivation or product education training? Do your employees need more "soft skills" training or new ideas for achieving multiple sales?

Increasing your training and performance requirements can lead to improved customer retention. Studies have recently shown that 5% increase customer retention can translate into 100% increase in profit. Customers expect a knowledgeable, efficient and friendly employee who doesn't take them for granted. If you want to make your customer look and return, you must have contagious outstanding customer service.

3. Focus on making your customer look by being remembered.

Another favorite quote of mine from *The Big Moo* (edited by Seth Godin); "We can no longer rely on the old solutions and the proven products and services that we've built our efforts around. Good enough just isn't cutting it anymore, because everything is good enough. Now more than ever you need to be remarkable."

What do you do in your business that is so different that people remember you for it? Here are some examples that might start you thinking. Kids know the sounds farm animals make, except for ducks, as teachers have said the kids know that ducks say, "Aflac". People don't talk about the winner of the Super Bowl on Monday morning; they talk about the commercials they remembered. Amazon, known for originally selling books is going to be selling groceries. Kroger, known for selling groceries is now going to be selling general merchandise as well. There are new movies coming out that look like the actors are comic book characters. Target is going to have Coldstone Creameries in a select number of stores. There is a winery in California that daily flies in French bread from France, sells it for \$9.00 a slice and sells out daily.

So what do you do or what can you do that is so different that can make your customer look and remember you for it?

4. Focus on making your customer look by offering an experience.

What is the "WOW" factor in your business? Better yet, what "Un-WOW" areas of your business do you need to address. Re-visit the total picture of your business. Focus on your physical location, your merchandising, your inventory and even your staff and if need be get rid of the "un-Wow's". What is holding your business back from creating the memorable experience that keeps your customers coming back?

I like to use Disneyworld as an example of the word "experience". I believe that the Disney brand is the word "fun". Everything they do centers around that word. It is repeatable, it has longevity, it is expected and it is delivered daily. On the business side, Disney is known for holding employees accountable for their "performance".

What is your WOW factor? What are the "un-Wow's" that are holding you back from delivering the experience that your customers talk about? By marketing outstanding customer service that is remembered as an experience, you'll have your customers taking a long look and find you wonderfully contagious.