



The Three Cs of Customer Loyalty *Creativity, Courtesy & Common Sense*

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Despite all the books with catchy titles, fancy consultant methodologies, and so-called "customer management solutions" - there's no magic answer to customer loyalty. You've got to build it by combining a little creativity with a lot of common courtesy and common sense (both of which are often all too uncommon.) It doesn't matter if you're high-tech, low-tech or no-tech - you're selling to people. And, people buy from people they know and like - not logos.

So, how can you build loyalty?

Don't Hide. There's a local gift shop, Sco-Jo's, with stock similar to other stores. So why do I go out of my way to buy from them? The owners, Scott and Jo-Ann, don't hide behind the counter. They come out and greet their customers.

This applies in the virtual marketplace as well. Sure - spam is a pain, viruses are dangerous and you've got to filter. But don't get carried away. C'mon, it doesn't take *that* long even if you receive hundreds a day. I just get a second cup of coffee during the five minutes it takes my virus and spam programs to work, then I double check the spam folder before deletion. Total time spent: about 10 minutes. Think - the next email you block or delete without looking could be from a mega sales opportunity. Isn't that worth 10 minutes of your day?

Put a phone number on your web site, make it easy to find, and then *answer* the phone. Return your calls. You never know - the caller could live next door to the CEO of your top sales prospect...or write a newspaper column. Sure, we all flunk this courtesy point occasionally, due to voice mail glitches, time crunches or memory lapse. But think how *you* feel when people ignore *you*.

Ask "How" Ask "*How* can I help?" versus "*Can* I help you?" That "how" shows your interest and almost *forces* the customer to give you information. That's information you can use to make a sale. Both Scott and Jo-Ann work hard at this "how." Jo-Ann once spent twenty minutes helping me pick out a small birthday gift; the total sale was a whopping \$12. I don't spend big bucks, but it all adds up *and* I recommend the shop to friends - just as your customers will tell people about you.

Add the Extra Touch. You don't have to give away the farm. Just do something a little different. Add a creative touch here or there. Sco-Jo's shopping bags are plain brown, but they wrap your purchase in colored tissue and tie the handles with a bow and a flourish. People love to feel special and it really doesn't take much to create that feeling. A bit of ribbon or a handwritten thank-you note in the snail mail can make all the difference to someone's day.



Here's another "little" touch: Clean restrooms. This applies even if it's *not* a restaurant. I go out of my way to drive to Albuquerque Kwik-Lube for my oil changes. They have courteous, smiling staff, a lovely waiting room facility (with a gorgeous mountain view), *current* magazines...*and* a sparkling restroom, with beautiful tile and nice touches like flowers. It speaks to pride and attention to detail.

Take A Step Back and A Hard Look. Be your own customer. Does the store staff talk to each other instead of the customer? How long do people wait when they've got an appointment? Before you install a phone system that makes it virtually impossible to quickly reach anyone - think how *you* feel when you call such a number. Sure, you "save" money on support but what's the *real* cost? How many customers will you lose forever when they give up, hang up - and call your competition? Place an order - does it arrive on time and in good condition? Pretend you're a first-time visitor to your web site. How long does it take to come up? Can you find information with just a click or two? Do all the links work? And so on. An objective look is often painful but necessary *and* can also help you identify new opportunities.

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