

## Expert advice on customer appreciation

As a new business, make sure to spend time thinking about ways you can differentiate yourself through personalized customer care. That kind of effort goes a long way as increased competition and information overload have made it more and more difficult for businesses to achieve brand differentiation – especially when you’re the new “kid on the block”.

### Satisfied customers can lead to better business results

Even though many customer-facing tactics are inexpensive and easy to implement, they are often overlooked. This is surprising when you consider that an exceptional customer experience makes good business sense. In fact, research suggests that it costs six to seven times as much to acquire new clients than to retain current ones.

That means the easiest way to grow a business is with existing customers. It stands to reason that if you already have loyal customers, why wouldn’t they choose your new product over that of a competitor?

In addition, satisfied customers are also your strongest marketers, since they are likely to recommend your business to peers. Focusing on customer care, therefore, is one way you can expand your customer base and potential markets.

It also makes good economic sense. Small business owners are stretched for resources especially when it comes to sustained marketing efforts. Very few can afford a major ad campaign. With word-of-mouth you are able to focus your efforts on targeted leads without the need for a major financial investment.

Keep in mind however that negative word-of-mouth can have an equal impact. That is why it’s essential that your employees understand how to keep your customers happy too. This begins by recruiting staff members who are extremely customer-service focused, training them to deliver on your promises, and rewarding them for excellent customer care.

### All systems go

It’s not just about your employees. You have to ensure that your systems and processes are operating smoothly and efficiently to avoid customer frustration. This is particularly important when it comes to your Web site.

People have short attention spans, particularly on the Internet where competition is fierce. It is essential that your Web site conveys a professional look and feel, since it is often the first point of contact that affects how a customer perceives your company. Even if you have captured their attention, your Web site also needs to be as user friendly as possible. Ultimately, nothing discourages a customer faster than a Web site that isn’t navigable.

If you don’t have access to technical and creative expertise for your Web site, you can engage in a one-on-one consultation with [Web site design and development services](#) from Bell.



## Get to know your clients

Even after you have recruited and trained your staff and fine tuned your system for customer success, never underestimate the importance of the personal touch. Take the time to know your clients and their needs. Record particulars such as their hobbies, birthdays and anniversaries, and reference this information before a meeting or phone conversation. Use a [BlackBerry®](#) device from Bell as an easy and effective way to help manage your contacts.

Gifts and incentives at holidays and birthdays can also make customers feel appreciated. Try introducing promotions on holidays that other businesses may ignore, such as Valentine's Day, in order to make your offer stand out.

You may also consider signing up for a news service, so that every time your client's company is mentioned in the news, or you find an article that pertains to their industry, you can send them a personalized note.

In addition, you can encourage word-of-mouth referrals by enabling your customers to network and hear positive testimonials. Organizing an event series featuring relevant speakers for example is a great way to inform customers of additional products or services you provide.

Simply put, the best way to adopt a customer-centric approach is to treat customers the way you'd like to be treated. Remember, people want to buy from people.

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