

Connecting with Customers

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Customer loyalty is critical, especially in this down economy. Experts find that retention depends on several key factors; among them is how well the phone rep understands them and meets their expectations. When asked what phone reps should understand about them, here is what they said:

Understand their business:

First and foremost, reps should understand the customer's business, whether it is a big box company or a small individually owned shop. Reps should know exactly what the customer's company makes or sells. They should also know their customer's customers and their competitors.

Understand what the company is trying to accomplish:

Before proposing anything to them, phone reps need a clear understanding of the company's vision or the issue at hand. What exactly is the customer trying to accomplish or solve? Once customers get a sense you understand, they will be receptive to your recommendations.

Keep up-to-date:

The economy is tough on a lot of companies so it very important that reps stay current on their customer's latest initiatives. Acknowledging, for example, that the company is down-sizing, moving into the Asian market, under new management, or launching a new product line really demonstrates that you are following their business closely. Customers start to see you as having their best interests at heart.

Know them on a personal level:

It is a mistake to overlook the importance of getting to know your customers on a personal level. They like it when a rep remembers, for example, they are getting married, planning a vacation out of country or awaiting the birth of a first child. The personal connection makes them feel special.

Know your own product line:

Phone reps should, of course, know their own products. Customers want their questions an-

swered. Reps who are knowledgeable distinguish themselves. When reps don't know the answers, the customers become unimpressed. Unimpressed customers are never loyal.

Respond quickly:

Customers know and expect there will be problems. When there is an issue, quick resolution is a must. Being on hold for a long time isn't acceptable, nor is waiting several days to respond to their voice mail. Smart reps personally expedite a matter, and if they can't, they update their customers, even if it is to say they are still waiting.

Go the extra mile:

Customers know you have a lot of other customers. When you offer them something they didn't request or do something out of the ordinary, it makes a huge difference. They also like it when a rep makes an exception, such as accepting a product return after a deadline. It may not have taken much on the rep's part, but customers see the gesture as significant.

Customers want to de-stress their own work lives. If a phone rep meets their expectations and understands them, they will not want the hassle of seeking out a new vendor. By distinguishing yourself and being responsive, customers will stick with you even in tough times or when you have to raise your prices.

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. When you have to have impact, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our website, [www. ImpactCommunicationsInc.com](http://www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com).