

A Truly Memorable Shop

By Kitty Boyce

Word of mouth can be your best advertising.

How can you get even more out of the customers who regularly visit your shop? Put them to work as goodwill ambassadors. You don't even have to pay them! To get people to say good things about your store, you have to make their visit truly memorable. Just saying "Hi" when they enter and "thank you" when they check out isn't going to do it. You have to really "wow" them.

The first step is to make sure they know your store's name.

How can customers tell their friends about you if they can't even remember your name? And if they've been in a store that left a sour taste in their mouth, you certainly don't want to have them mistake the name of your store for the bad one. Make sure the name of your store is not only well signed on the outside of your building but that it is easily visible inside your store.

Display your store name—and logo if you have one—everywhere.

Put it on all signage, on the bags you pack their merchandise in, on your dressing room mirrors, above the dressing rooms, on employees name tags or shirts, and, most importantly, above your cashier center. How many times have customers asked where they are when they write a check?

Don't ignore the first impression people get on the telephone.

Call your business and do some mystery shopping. Is the phone answered in a way that would make a customer feel confident in your ability to serve them well? Employees should be trained to smile first, then answer in a friendly tone of voice, giving the name of the store and identifying themselves.

Look at the cleanliness of your store.

I've often heard you can tell a lot about a restaurant by how clean the bathrooms are. The same thing applies to a store. Make sure your bathroom is neat and clean. Nothing beats the smell of bleach to convey cleanliness in their minds. Your floors should be a source of pride for you. If customers see neat, clean floors they won't be afraid to take their shoes off to try things on in your dressing rooms.



Try not to become "store blind."

It is easy to not see things like those yellowed and tattered signs that need to be replaced. If you have trouble keeping a fresh eye on your store, ask a friend who doesn't come into your shop often to look around for you. One of the easiest and cheapest ways to make your store look fresh and new is paint. A quick coat over the old scratches on the walls or a nice new color is a way to really get people's attention.

Stay current.

Read fashion or decorating magazines and go shopping. What colors or styles are "in" this season? The mall is the best place to borrow display ideas. Offer your customers what they need before they need it. Stay tuned to casual remarks by your customers. Fed Ex developed one of their most profitable products this way. They kept hearing customers say, "I don't need it overnight. Could you make it the next day and charge me a little less?" Thus was born 2nd day delivery.



Be a solution business.

Customers come to you because they think you can solve problems for them and improve their lives. If you don't have what they want, send them where they can find it. Don't worry; they'll be back because you helped solve their problem.

Remember their names.

According to Dale Carnegie, "the sweetest sound in any language is the sound of your own name." When you remember a person's name, it tells them that you value and care about them. You pay someone a subtle and very effective compliment when you recall their name. If you have trouble with names, really concentrate and listen carefully when someone says their name. Repeat it back to them, making a pleasant comment about their name. It takes about twenty seconds for a name to set in your memory. A good rule of thumb is to say their name at the beginning of a conversation, once in the middle and again at the end. Association is a great way to learn names. Select an outstanding feature on the person's face and exaggerate it in your mind so that the name sticks with that picture in your mind. Look at their hair, ears, nose, head shape, and mouth for inspiration. As soon as you finish your conversation, write their name on a piece of paper for reinforcement.



Give your customers the personal touch.

One storeowner does unusual things for her customers depending on their special interests. She found out one of her customers loves coconut pie, so she buys a pie once in a while and calls to invite her over for some. Another customer loves dogs so she sends them dog toys. Carefully listening to your customers and developing a relationship from what you learn will help your store stand out in a crowded field.

To be a truly memorable shop, you need to offer exceptional value to your customers. Value can be service, price, quality, or other attributes. Know what your customers value. By listening and asking you can learn and turn it into your competitive advantage.

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