Why Excellent Customer Service is the Lifeblood of Our Business

By Sarah Metcalfe, Customer Service Manager at SureFlap

Customer service is talked about a lot these days – everyone knows they should be trying to deliver excellent service, so why don’t companies always meet their customers’ expectations?

A recent study from NewVoiceMedia revealed that UK businesses are losing £12 billion each year through poor customer experiences. This statistic alone should be enough for anyone running a business to look again at how they can improve their customers’ experience.

In the pet industry we are linked to our customers not only by the things they buy, but also by emotions when treating and taking care of their family members. This means we have a much greater chance of being able to positively affect our clients’ lives through delivery of a great experience.

At SureFlap, customer service has been a focus from day one. We knew that creating a great product means nothing unless you back it up with great customer service. Our approach to this has contributed to our global growth, new products, and an increase in revenue of over 40 times since the business started. We also have some of the happiest customers around, and customer recommendations and our reputation are major factors when people are choosing to purchase our products and work with us.

Customer service makes financial sense

Good customer service is the lifeblood of any business and providing an experience that encourages happy customers and positive feedback to others will ensure both repeat custom and new business. Focusing on providing a great experience isn’t just the right thing to do, it makes financial sense for your business.

People who have one great experience are likely to continue to do business with you for two years. Conversely, 95% of people who have a bad experience will share it with others, and 54% of them will share it with more than five people. Plus, 91% of unhappy customers will not willingly do business with your organisation again.

In the days of online communities, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, one unhappy customer story going viral can easily reach millions of people.

Creating a happy workplace*
Imagine a workplace where people are energized and motivated by being in control of the work they do...Imagine they are trusted and given freedom, within clear guidelines, to decide how to achieve their results. Imagine they are able to get the life balance they want. Imagine they are valued according to the work that they do, rather than the number of hours they spend at their desk. Wouldn’t you want to work there?

– Henry Stewart, The Happy Manifesto

Let your staff do their jobs - it’s very easy to step in and change things as the boss or manager, because you believe your way is the best way.

We are lucky that in the pet industry, most people are working in jobs they love, and so are more likely to be happy in their line of work to start with. Empowering your staff to make or suggest changes and letting them do their jobs means they feel trusted and supported. This means they are more likely to have the confidence to come up with innovative solutions, and will always work in the best interest of your company. Your front-line staff should be paid well, they are the touch-point for each of your customers every time they come in, and one unhappy member of staff can cause a lot of problems in your store.

You can train skills into people, but it’s very difficult to change a personality to fit with what you want from your company. Hiring staff for culture fit within your workplace means you will always have someone who knows the way the business should run. Enabling your team to work at their best and making them feel good at work means a happier workplace, and happier customers.

Having great staff and allowing them to suggest and implement changes with the focus of improving your customers’ experience will only benefit your business. Your happy customers will tell their family, friends and their communities (online and in person).

Studies show that happy employees work harder, longer and are more profitable for your business. The costs of happy staff can not be underestimated. On average recruiting a new member of staff costs twice as much as keeping your current employees happy. In addition, companies that have engaged employees experience a growth rate that is 2.6% higher than those with disengaged employees.

The way you treat your employees is the way they will treat your customers

– Sir Richard Branson

Listening to your customers

Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning
Given the opportunity, your customers will tell you exactly what they want and expect from your business. Ensuring that you have the mechanism to listen, whether that is in person, by questionnaire, email, online or elsewhere, means that they can tell you when you are or aren’t doing a great job.

You can delight your customers by giving them some added benefits to visit you whether online or in person. This could be a place to get a cup of coffee, an in-store display of the newest helpful/innovative products or added benefit to your website or service provision. Every added incentive for your customers to interact with you gives you one more place to learn their needs and will build a deeper connection between you, your staff, and your customers.

It is important to put a process in place to review the feedback from your customers, and then make the changes you can see they want. This will ensure your customers are happy; and if they aren’t, you will be the first person to know.

When you get negative feedback from your customers, make sure you use this to improve your business. A client’s complaint is your way of being able to respond and fix their problem. When you have fixed their problem they are more likely to tell people about their positive experience than customers who never had a problem in the first place.

**Under-promise and over-deliver**

The biggest cause of unhappy customers is when the expectation of what you are delivering, and what they are receiving is different. Make time to explain exactly what they will receive, but don’t over-promise something just to keep them happy. Ensuring your customers know what services you are offering and then going above and beyond, will ensure that they are delighted.

**Key points**

- Create a happy workplace
- Make customer service a company-wide focus
- Listen to your customers
- Use technology
- Let your staff do their jobs
- Create a feedback loop, and use the feedback to improve
- Make it easy for your customers
- Go above and beyond (create a Wow factor)

The value of creating a company where great customer service is at the heart of everything you do can not be underestimated. Happy workplaces and happy employees automatically lead to better treatment of your customers. Ensure you listen to your customers, and make changes based on their suggestions; this will ensure that your community of customers grows, and you will have happy customers every time.

Sarah Metcalfe and Dr Nick Hill, founder of SureFlap, will be talking at Salesforce Tour London on 21 May 2015, in the Salesforce Small Business Breakout Session at 2pm. For more about how SureFlap brought customer service in-house with NewVoiceMedia’s ContactWorld for Service, integrated into Salesforce, watch the video here.
About Sarah

Sarah joined SureFlap five years ago, taking responsibility for the company’s customer service and guiding it through an extraordinary period of expansion and growth. She now leads a talented multi-lingual team who deliver outstanding customer service and happiness to all SureFlap customers around the world.

Sarah is passionate about happiness in the workplace, and she knows the positive impact this has on the customer experience. Through continuing to innovate and improve the customer journey, SureFlap now has an amazing Net Promoter Score of 96%.

Originally from British Columbia, Sarah brings a wealth of customer service experience from a background that includes charities, logistics and manufacturing. Inspired by the teachings of great customer service companies like Zappos and Happy Ltd, she wants to share her experience and the success of SureFlap with others.

1. Lee Resource Inc.

*All ideas for happy workplaces based on The Happy Manifesto, Henry Stewart*

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