

Business Owners can learn from a Disney Adventure

Last month, on a flight back from Florida, I overheard a woman talking about buying the Disney Pin Starter Set, apparently this is some type of lanyard that is worn around the neck and comes with pins. In explaining the purchase to her friend, she said that you are required to trade pins if someone asks you to. “What happens if you don’t want to trade a pin?” her friend said. “You just have to,” the woman replied. “It’s the rule.”

Thinking about this conversation, I pondered the power of Disney in building such staunch loyalty in its customers that they would be willing to buy into this. What lessons can small businesses learn from Disney? In looking at the Disney business model, it doesn’t take long to see that there are examples of their excellence in every corner. It starts before a visit with a free vacation DVD highlighting the experience, and continues after with email newsletters and mailings.

It is about what Jon Taffer of Bar Rescue said in a recent column — creating an experience that will make your customers want to return, and in the process, building intense customer loyalty. That said these are some of the top lessons for small business owners that I observed:

- Hire people with big smiles. It is rare to encounter a Disney employee who doesn’t seem genuinely happy that you are visiting. Customer service starts with a smile and ends with a smile. It makes customers feel appreciated and welcome.
- Get rid of all the trash. Appearance matters. Whether it is a website, a business location, or the way your employees dress, all should be attractive, clean and clutter-free.
- Consider the other “trash” that keeps your business from prospering, and clean that up, as well.
- If you’re good, people will wait in line for your product or service. People expect to wait in line at Disney, because the experience is worth the wait. How can you create something so unique and special that customers will consider it worth the wait?
- Apologize if you make a mistake. There is no blame shifting at Disney. When a ride or other experience fails, Disney responds with an apology. On two occasions, that meant free fast-passes handed out with big smiles. It also means that customers aren’t disappointed or angry.
- Unexpected experiences make a better experience. It’s the unexpected that adds to the overall experience. If your business promises free gift wrapping, add a bow or free shipping. Enclose something extra in a package. Have an unexpected demonstration or fashion show.
- Promote upcoming events or attractions. In building customer loyalty, give customers a reason to want to come back. Disney always has upcoming attractions to look forward to. Let customers know the exciting products, services or events that are coming soon.

At the conclusion of a Disney trip, you will hear most people on the airplane talking about the wonder of it all with plans to return. There is, as Disney terms it, a magic, and it’s something that can inspire your small business, too.