

Is Customer Experience Making or Breaking Your Business?

“Marketing will bring people to you just once. The ONLY thing that brings them back is the product.”

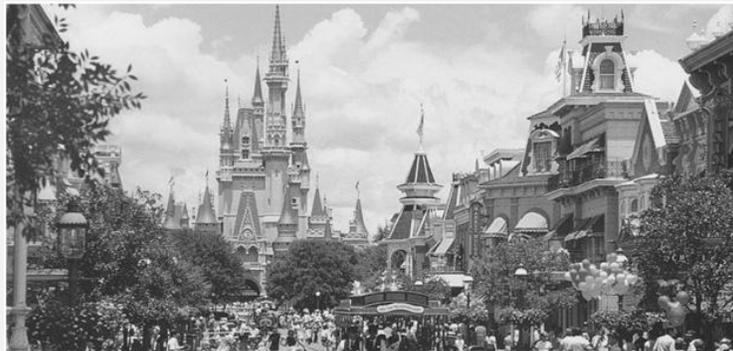
I heard a well-known marketing expert make this statement during a presentation earlier this year. The statement is so simple, yet it resonated with me. We often get so absorbed in selling our product that we sometimes forget about making sure we are delivering a great product. This isn't to say that marketing and advertising are not important, but the sustainable, long term success of your business is ultimately reliant on what you do after the marketing.

Your product is not just the goods or services you offer, it is also all the interactions customers have with your business, and the perceptions those interactions create. In other words, it is the **“Customer Experience”** you provide. Once your business has landed on a consumer's radar, taking them from interested consumer to loyal customer is no accident. It's because you have provided them with a great customer experience that not only keeps them coming back, but also sharing their experience with others.

That being said, the marketplace is competitive and your competition is happy to take your customers, if you decide to rest on your (customer experience) laurels. In fact, 89% of consumers began doing business with a competitor following a poor customer experience (Source: [Orade](#)). Don't give your competition the opportunity to surpass you. Make sure you are consistently putting your best (customer experience) foot forward. Here are some tips to help you maintain your competitive edge and build on your customer experience.

PRE-PURCHASE – Make a Killer First Impression

I know this seems obvious, but we have all had a bad first impression of a business. We have all given up on a confusing website, or passed on a tired-looking boutique, or been frustrated by an unknowledgeable employee. First impressions have a significant and lasting effect. Here are some ways to win over new customers with a killer first impression:



- **Invest in a great and easy-to-use website** – This is a must for any business. Not only does lacking a website make your business difficult to find, but it can also be a red flag for many consumers. A website acts as your 24 hour virtual storefront. If it looks unprofessional, lacks basic information, or is difficult to use, it will give new customers the

wrong first impression.

- **Present a great “feeling” store/office/shop**– Your business may provide a quality product, but if your store/office/shop doesn’t demonstrate that same level of quality, it can leave customers with a bad impression of your business. Physical environment has a big impact on how a customer feels about your business. Make sure the way your business looks, sounds and smells aligns with and enhances your offerings.

DURING PURCHASE - Make it Easy to do Business

Consumers place a high value on convenience, service, expertise, and integrity. If you can provide that better than your competition, you have a significant competitive advantage. Here are some things to consider:

- **Prioritize customer convenience** – Customers are always looking for convenience. Are traditional 9 to 5 hours most convenient for your customers? It’s an interesting question. Does your business provide appointment bookings or do you customers simply drop-in? What is most convenient for them? Many businesses are adjusting their operating hours to make it more convenient for their customers. If you are not doing that, are you giving your customers a reason to do business elsewhere?
- **Save your customers time** - Customers not only love saving time, they will pay a premium for it. How can you save them time? By showing them on your website if a product is in-stock? Can they order online? Can you offer delivery? In-store pick up? Think about all the ways you can save your customers time.
- **Build customer trust** – Nothing ruins an experience faster for a customer than feeling like they were misled, misinformed or even deceived. Misleading or deceitful practices can be devastating for a business. Companies like Volkswagen, who were found to have misled consumers, not only have to pay out settlements, but their brand image and consumer trust may never recover. Providing information and advice that is always in their best interest of your customer is a great way to build life-long loyal patrons. Looking for inspiration, take a look at [Canada’s Most Trusted Brands in 2017](#).

POST PURCHASE - Don’t Forget Your Customers After the Sale

Customer experience after the purchase is often undervalued. Earning a returning customer’s business is often less costly and less time intensive than acquiring a new one. Here are some things to keep in mind long after the sale:

- **Offer clear and easy refund or exchange policies** – What is one of the top reasons people love to shop at Costco? They have a simple no-questions-asked return policy. It gives their customers the confidence of knowing they can always return a product that doesn’t meet their expectations.
- **Listen and respond to customer feedback** – 96% of unhappy customers don’t complain (Source: [1st Financial Training](#)). If you receive customer feedback, good or bad, consider yourself fortunate. Customer feedback is incredibly valuable. If no one tells you that you’re doing something poorly, how will you ever know to correct it or improve on it? It is also an opportunity to turn an upset customer into a returning customer, or better yet, a loyal customer who shares their story of how you made it right.
- **Turn unhappy customers into a brand ambassadors** – It’s bound to happen. You will have customers that are unhappy with your goods or services. How you deal with those situations and how you make those customers feel is critical to the long term success of your company. 92% of consumer said they would be willing to go back to company after a bad experience if they: (1) received an apology from a supervisor/head office, (2) were offered a discount, and (3) were offered proof of improved customer service. (Source: [Rightnow](#)).

Hopefully these ideas will encourage you to build on and improve your customer experience. Looking for more help growing your business? Contact Fort Saskatchewan Economic Development at ecdev@fortask.ca.

