

# Small business: Avoiding customer-service mistakes

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It takes only one bad customer-service experience to lose a customer.

A dropped call, a long wait time or even poor service - before you know it, the customer is doing business elsewhere.

While most companies don't intentionally set out to irk their customers, often that's what ends up happening, because businesses keep repeating the same mistakes, experts say.

"They fall into the trap where they think they're giving good service, but they end up designing processes for their own convenience rather than their customers," explains Dennis Snow, a former Walt Disney Co. executive and president of Snow & Associates, an Orlando, Fla.- based customer-service consulting and training firm.

To create an excellent customer experience you need to start seeing your business through your customers' eyes and avoid these top customer service mistakes:

**The All-About-Me Syndrome:** How many times do you find yourself frustrated by a company's unfriendly processes, asks Snow, author of "Lessons from the Mouse: A Guide for Applying Disney World's Secrets of Success to Your Organization, Your Career and Your Life" (DC Press; \$19.95). Companies must reanalyze every aspect of the customer experience - from delivery to wait time - and see how they can improve it.

**Not defining "desired customer experience":** You can't offer exceptional service without clearly defining what the customer experience is supposed to be, Snow says. World-class organizations know exactly what they represent in the mind of their customers and carefully orchestrate each part of the experience so that it consistently delivers on their brand promise, he notes.

**Untrained staff:** Companies don't spend nearly enough time training their staff on how to take care of customers, explains Randi Busse of Workforce Development Group, a customer service-retention expert in Amityville. There's always room for improvement, notes Mike Adwar of Adwar Video in Farmingdale, who recently enlisted Busse to help fine-tune the company's customer service techniques. This included improving the phone conversation, says Adwar, whose firm sells and services professional audiovisual-video



equipment. "We've seen a noticeable improvement and gotten positive feedback," he says.

**Taking customers for granted:** When was the last time you thanked your customers? A handwritten thank-you card or phone call can leave a lasting impression, Busse says.

**Not being current about customer needs:** Needs are constantly changing, explains customer-service speaker Joe Calloway, author of "Becoming a Category of One" (Wiley & Sons; \$19.95) and a partner in Engage Consulting Group in [Nashville](#), Tenn. Ask customers how their situation has changed and how you can serve them better, he suggests.

**Making customers wait for anything:** No one likes to wait, and the longer the wait, the more dissatisfied the customer will be, Calloway says. If you promise to get back to the person in a specified time frame, make good on your promise, he says.

**Arguing with a customer:** There are three ways not to respond to angry customers: with your own anger, by patronizing them or ignoring them, explains Linda Berke of Taylor Performance Solutions, a customer service-sales development specialist in Melville. Listen to them, let them vent, express your desire to help them and then ask questions to see how to solve their problem, she says.

**Not empowering employees:** First-point-of-contact resolution is important to customers, Berke says. "Employees should have the tools and techniques to at least meet customers' expectations," she notes.

## How well are you doing?

Want to see how well you're serving your customers? Just ask them these five questions:

Did you find everything you were looking for?

Do you feel satisfied

with the service you were given?

Is there anything else

I can help you with?

Is there anything we can do to serve you better?

Did I effectively answer

your questions?

Source: Linda

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