

In Your Company They Trust

Build customer loyalty through trust-building strategies

by Mike Jones, President, GTS

Customer loyalty is an invaluable commodity in difficult economic times. Customers aren't willing to take a chance with their scant budgets on companies about whose products and services they're uncertain.

To become a glass services shop that keeps a loyal clientele even while those customers are tightening their belts, you need to put time and energy into building and maintaining trust.

Build Trust through Referrals and Recommendations

The customers most likely to trust the quality of your company are those referred to you by other satisfied customers.

You can encourage more of those referrals through a few strategic moves:

- Give added value to your current loyal customers. While customers who already like your glass shop will always give a recommendation when someone asks for it, they're unlikely to pipe up on their own if the subject hasn't already been raised.

By giving them a little more than they expect – following up on a customer service question, throwing in a sale item with a big purchase, or simply giving a little extra attention to a regular problem – you increase the likelihood that they'll mention that great experience to others.

- Put a customer review section on your website. It's less likely that your potential new customers will be able to talk to a friend or colleague to get a referral for your shop. That means you need to get those reviews from satisfied customers onto your site so that brand-new ones with no relation to your current ones can see what others have to say.

The other great benefit to having a customer review section is that your customers can see how quickly and effectively you respond to problems. Sometimes negative reviews that turn positive after a little extra attention are even more beneficial than raves.

- Don't neglect testimonials. Testimonials are slightly different from customer reviews, since testimonials are purely positive and are often edited for the best impact. They are usually taken with a grain of salt for that reason, but having great testimonials from happy customers can show that the vast majority of your customers like and trust your shop.

If you don't have testimonials, seek them out from customers who were particularly pleased with your services. Just send them a brief email explaining that you're adding a testimonials section (or updating your current one) and asking if they could take a few minutes to write a few sentences about their experience.

Start a Blog to Build Credibility

Customers trust those service providers they believe to be experts in a particular field.

As a glass services shop, one of the ways you can build credibility as an expert is to start a blog detailing the best ways to go about certain projects, reviews of products that you've found especially effective, or offer news about developments in the industry that can affect your customers.

- Be warned: a blog isn't the place to pitch your own services and goods. You can add a brief line at the end of each post stating that you provide these services and products with a link to the appropriate page of your website, but promoting your own business in the body of the posts will actually diminish your credibility, not enhance it.

- Customers want to know they can trust you for honest, well-researched information. If every post promotes your company, customers aren't likely to trust that kind of self-centered, biased information.

- Straightforward, honest information will build your credibility and make it more likely customers will buy from you, regardless of whether you mentioned your company on the blog or not. Customers are always looking for the expert to tell them what to do. When they find that expert, and he also happens to sell the product

they're looking for, they've just found that honest dealer they sought.

Protect Your Reputation

When customers are looking for any excuse not to spend their rapidly dwindling budgets, you need to make sure you don't give them one.

- If you've earned a reputation over the years for fast customer service, this is a bad time to let an email wait for three days before that customer gets a response. If you've earned a reputation for stellar quality, it's a bad time to take on a product you know is inferior to the quality you've always offered.
- When you're looking for new ways to enhance your reputation, it's easy to pay too much attention to new strategies and not enough attention to the old strategies that have already made you popular among your current customer base.
- You definitely need to step up your game and add strategies, but not at the expense of the tried-and-true company methods that have already made you a trusted company.
- Ask your customers about the qualities they most value about your company. When you're incorporating new strategies, make sure none of those qualities suffer. Those are the qualities that earned you loyal customers in the first place, and they'll continue to serve you well as you add new virtues to your repertoire.
- You need to monitor and respond to what your customer is saying on other websites. Check to see how you are being reviewed and ranked on sites like Google and Yahoo. This will allow you another opportunity to quickly and effectively respond to problems.

This is your opportunity to turn a negative into a positive.