



Client Service

One strategy for success in your business is to provide valuable client service through effective client management. To successfully introduce consistent client service, you should examine your business' sales process from a client's perspective. You should monitor and manage each personal interaction, the physical surroundings and processes of your business activities to ensure your client service is meeting the changing needs and expectations of your clients.

Why Focus on Client Service?

The marketplace is becoming increasingly competitive, providing clients with more choices. Clients base their purchase decisions on the service they receive as well as price, quality and availability. By providing superior client service in today's business environment, you are on the road to maintaining a healthy client base.

Superior Client Service Is About Exceeding Client Expectations

Unfortunately, a bad client service experience is shared with around 10 other people, who are most likely to tell another ten people.

Superior client service is service that exceeds your client's expectations and will make your business stand out from your competitors. Satisfied clients may be motivated to return and buy the same products or services. Clients that are extremely impressed with your service are also likely to talk about your business to others.

Word-of-mouth advertising is the most effective form of advertising. It costs nothing, and it is very valuable as it details personal experiences and has a high credibility.

You should review your client service strategies and plan to impress your clients.

Know Your Clients' Needs

Your business is in existence primarily due to your clients. Therefore it is important that you understand their needs.

You may start to learn more about your clients by:

- Regularly asking your clients about the services of your business.
- Providing feedback forms for your clients to complete.

- Phoning or visiting your clients after the initial sale and asking if your product or service has met their needs.
- Welcoming any client complaints and managing these complaints to avoid negative word-of-mouth.
- Keeping a list of client complaints to identify any patterns and the cause of dissatisfaction.
- Learning what your competitors are doing and why their clients are satisfied.

Client feedback is most effective when:

- You hear both positive and negative experiences.
- You regularly obtain feedback.
- The feedback is focussed on what the client wants and doesn't want.

Remember that everyone in your business needs to understand your clients.

Identify Your Key Service Activities

Client service is an ongoing process. Your clients may contact you on several occasions and in various forms of communication. Each personal interaction conveys an opportunity to impress your clients and create a decisive impact on the client's perception of your business.

You should identify all your key service activities and note how you meet or exceed your clients' expectation at each stage.

Some key service activities in your business may include:

- Responding to phone calls.
- Providing product and service information.
- Taking client orders and discussing service requirements.
- Sending follow-up documentation (for example to confirm orders).
- Billing (invoicing) and managing payments.
- Visiting the client.

- Honouring warranties/guarantees and/or making repairs.
- Handling client complaints.
- Providing follow-up service (for example maintenance).
- Supplying complimentary products or services after the initial sale.

Provide a Superior Service that Results in Client Satisfaction

In order to provide superior client service, your business should demonstrate client focussed qualities.

Some key qualities that contribute to superior client service are:

- **Complete Client Experience** – Make sure that your clients' needs are met. You may offer to install your product or provide complimentary products/services that assist your clients.
- **Reliable Service** – Deliver your products and services on time and as requested. Your clients do not want excuses – they want your product/service.
- **Accountability** – You are responsible for providing high quality products and services. Make sure you honour guarantees/ warranties on your products.
- **Efficiency** – Deliver your product/service with minimum hassle for your clients.
- **Assurance** – Make sure you express courtesy and knowledge of your product. Clients must have confidence in you and be able to trust your word.
- **Attention to the Details** – Make sure you attend to details. Show that you care and that you are prepared to provide individual attention to every client.
- **Appearance**
Take a look at your shop front or office from the point of view of a new client. Does this reflect the qualities of your business?

Also, make sure that you keep in touch with your clients:

- Call your clients to check on their level of satisfaction with your service.
- Phone or email your clients to report on progress.
- Send to your clients notices of forthcoming events or extended services;
- Mail your clients thank you notes/cards.

Making Client Service Your Key Competitive Advantage

Managing a client service culture in your business will make it easier to keep a high standard of client service.

Include client service as a key competitive advantage in your business. For instance, you may:

- Incorporate your client focus strategies into your business and action plans.
- Develop a business vision/mission that reflects your client focus culture.
- Have the commitment from everyone in your business to share your vision.
- Encourage a client focus business culture in your day-to-day activities.
- Employ staff that are motivated to provide superior client service.
- Promote your vision on your letterhead, your business cards, your invoices, your packaging. Let your clients know your vision - you'll be surprised at how they respond.

For More Information:

Contact your local Business Advisory Service on 1300 650 058 to talk over business management issues or visit the Department of State and Regional Development's Small Business Website at www.smallbiz.nsw.gov.au.

Office of Fair Trading: To obtain a copy of 'The Client Service Guide', contact the Office of Fair Trading on 13 32 20 or visit their website at www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au.