

"Gone are the days when big faceless corporates dictated customer expectations. Today, businesses dictated customer expectations. Today, businesses succeed by caring more and building a passionate tribe of advocates. Here, Amanda shows you how."

> Justin Dry, Co-Founder, Vinomofo. 2019 E-Commerce Company of the Year.



10 STEPS TO CREATING RAVING FANS FOR ANY BUSINESS

AMANDA STEVENS

2018 KEYNOTE SPEAKER OF THE YEAR



TURNING Customers INTO ADVOCATES

10 STEPS TO CREATING RAVING FANS FOR ANY BUSINESS

This book is dedicated to my inner circle of soul sisters who I consider family. You know who you are x



Get closer than ever to your customers. Get so close that you tell them what they need well before they realise it themselves.

STEVE JOBS



INTRODUCTION

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If every one of your customers referred you three new customers this year, what would that mean for your business? It could potentially more than TRIPLE it!

And that's exactly the kind of results that are possible when you have a system for turning your existing customers into advocates; a system for creating walking, unpaid advertisements for your business.

I've studied the science of consumer advocacy for more than a decade now and I believe I've 'cracked the code' on how to build a loyal fan base of people that tell all their friends about you and gladly help you grow your brand.

The 10 C's of CUSTOMER ADVOCACY is a model that can be applied in any business and in any industry, regardless of whether it's a product or a service-based business — large or small.

The principles apply equally to established business models as they do to start-ups and each of the ten steps are customisable, scalable and easily-implemented.

This book will hopefully spark some creative thinking about your business and get you excited about what's possible when you have raving fans that love you and speak about your business as passionately as you do. ENJOY!



Introduction



The key is to set realistic

customer expectations and

then exceed them - preferably

in unexpected and helpful

uays...

RICHARD BRANSON

ONE SUNNY AFTERNOON in early 2015, I popped into my local fruit and vegetable store. It was a Friday, and although I rarely shop there, (the produce is great but it's ridiculously expensive and the staff are quite abrupt), it was a matter of convenience and I needed to quickly grab three missing ingredients for a dinner party I was hosting that evening.

As the disinterested staff member forlornly asked "Hi, how are you today?" and tallied the cost for my tomatoes, bunch of basil and single eggplant, I searched my wallet for cash. All I could find was three dollars in coins. No notes.

"Nine dollars and seventy five cents" she sighed, without any eye contact and with all the enthusiasm of a limp lettuce.

As I handed over my credit card, anticipating a quick paywave tap and speedy departure, she pointed to a faded handwritten piece of cardboard sticky-taped to the front of the cash register and repeated the scribbled words (I guess in case I couldn't read):

"Ten dollar minimum on EFTPOS transactions," she said, nonchalantly.

I thought she must be joking.

"Seriously?! I'm 25 cents short."

"Rules are rules. Ten dollar minimum."

I was stunned, as was the lady waiting in line behind me, who started giggling at the idiocy of the situation.

"Short on sense, alright," she muttered as she shook her head and shot me a sympathetic glance.

I quickly looked around to find something I could add to my transaction to tip it over ten bucks. Everything within reach was five dollars or more and I didn't need any of it. As the pressure mounted to spend money on expensive stuff I didn't want just for the sake of a ridiculous rule, I felt the resentment and anger rise.

"Here," I said, "Charge my card for the extra 25 cents and I hope you enjoy it, because it's the last 25 cents I'll ever spend in this store."

I've since stayed firm on my boycott and, although I've not stepped foot in that store, I have often thought about their business and how much revenue they're potentially losing because of their appalling customer service and "Un-Customer-Centric' approach.

The fact is, although their produce is relatively expensive, I would be happy to pay a premium if their staff provided a friendly, positive and uplifting shopping experience. But they have fallen for the trap that many brands and businesses do: the assumption that a quality product or service is enough. Enough to rest on your laurels, and enough to relinquish any responsibility to deliver the most basic of customer service.

For the fruit and vege shop, I estimate that this attitude is costing them tens of thousands of dollars in lost revenue each year due to disgruntled customers that could easily be their loyal advocates.

There's an old saying in business: "You win customers one at a time, and you lose them three at a time." This is now outdated. In the age of social media, you can lose them a hundred, thousand - even a million - at a time.

With a few keystrokes, one disgruntled customer can bring a business to its knees by voicing their outrage and encouraging their friends and wider social circles to shun a business. Plenty of retailers and restaurants have learnt this the hard way when the story of a negative customer experience has not only gone viral, it's been picked up by the media.

You'll be pleased to know I didn't issue a press release to the local newspaper or launch a Facebook rant about my fruit shop experience, but I have relayed the story to several friends. And in a small community like Noosa, 'word-of-mouth' can be just as

damaging as 'word-of-mouse'.

In contrast, there is another local business I visit early each morning (at least, during the 30-40% of the time I'm actually home) that I'm a positive and vocal customer advocate for.

It's a cute corner coffee shop fashioned from a shipping container. It's buzzing with customers from 5am each morning, with a high-energy vibe, great music and friendly staff who are always chatty and show a genuine interest in their customers, most of whom they know by name. The owners, Micheal and Sasha are always present, working hard and talking to customers. Their passion for the business is evident, as they ensure the small cluster of tables are clear of dishes, customers have a selection of magazines and newspapers to read while they're waiting, and there is always a bowl of fresh water for customers' dogs. They manage to fit five staff in a pretty tight premises, but it works, and despite the line-up of customers during busy times, it also means that customers are always acknowledged quickly and served efficiently. It's a well-oiled machine and an uplifting experience for customers, who the owner can often be found introducing to each other — particularly those who he knows share a common business or leisure interest.

Micheal and Sasha have never advertised, mainly because they've never needed to. When they opened a few years ago, they were full soon after, as word spread like wildfire throughout Noosa. When there's a line-up of customers each morning soon after opening, it gets people talking.

Oh, and they make great coffee. I say that almost as an afterthought because it's not what makes their business special.

Truth be told, there are several places in town that make coffee just as good. Some of these coffee shops are even closer to my house. But I buy my coffee from Bullitt each morning because the staff remember my name and remember my coffee order. Other coffee shop owners and baristas are so caught up in what I call 'SCAS' – 'Superior Coffee Arrogance Syndrome' that you get a sense that you should feel privileged to be served by them. Sure, they're passionate about their product, but often at the expense of customer comfort.

TURNING CUSTOMERS INTO ADVOCATES

The coffee might be amazing, but the attitude it's served with gives it a bitter aftertaste.

Interestingly, while these coffee shops do a steady trade in the mornings, none of them have the 'customer community' buzz that Bullitt enjoys. It's a completely different vibe. Unlike most coffee shops, Bullitt customers aren't there simply to get coffee. They have a loyalty to the business and it's a positive part of their morning.

The moral of the story is that the customer experience is as much about the aspects peripheral to the core user experience (in this case, the taste and quality of the coffee). The sum total of the customer interactions that surround the product can be more powerful and influential in customer advocacy than the product itself.

In fact, even the most superior product or service in the world can't overcome a bad customer experience. On the other hand, a four star product or service can be perceived as five star if it's delivered with five star customer service.

Regardless of your industry, size and quality of your product or service, this book will outline a blueprint for building raving fans, unprecedented loyalty and a steady stream of referrals that has the power to grow your business exponentially. You'll learn how to create service-driven policies and procedures and attract team members that will win your business the most valuable revenue-boosting asset you could wish for: a reputation for superior service.

If you're involved in, or responsible for delivering on the customer experience inside an organisation, you'll learn how to deliver the kind of customer experiences that make you an indispensable asset to the organisation that employs you. You'll also discover that turning customers into advocates not only pays dividends for the organisation, it will have a positive impact on your career and earning potential.

WHY THE Customer Experience MATTERS

The shift from 'Word-of-Mouth' to 'Word-of-Mouse' is creating exponential growth opportunities for businesses of all sizes.



AS A CONFERENCE SPEAKER, I have access to some pretty accurate barometers on the perceived importance of the customer experience. I know that it's a more popular conference theme than it was five years ago. 'Customer centricity' and its various alliterations seem to be a strategic focus for organisations across nearly every industry. There is a distinct and renewed interest in the customer experience. Some of that interest is driven by a genuine understanding of the business and financial implications. But there are also other, more powerful technological and social forces at play, leaving many businesses without a choice.

C2B - THE NEW BALANCE OF POWER

Business models are no longer simply Business-to-Consumer (B2C) or Business-to-Business (B2B). The digital revolution has seen the balance of power swing firmly back to the customer, away from the corporates that have dictated the terms of trade and communication since the Industrial Revolution.

As consumers — and business customers for that matter — we now choose how, when (and often where) we buy a product or service. We no longer have to drive to the DVD store and comb the shelves in the hope of finding something we like (and that's available). We can access the content we want on demand from the comfort of our own home. Same with music, books and other digital content. The path to purchase is no longer driven by brands and their marketing messages; it's dictated by consumer interest and demand.

We are not only enjoying a greater level of choice of products, we're enjoying a greater level of choice in how we consume those products. The rise in the sharing economy and brands such as Airbnb and Uber are providing greater value to consumers and challenging the traditional model of supply and demand. In a world where we often rely solely on real-world customer reviews in making a purchase decision, the days of the big budget advertising campaigns as the sole influence on consumer perceptions are over.

Collaborative consumption has so far revolutionised two major industries, and we will continue to see these challenger models sweep across other sectors and shake the establishment. Consumer choice, and the transparent demonstration of the customer experience, is winning out over conventional corporate influence.

Once e-commerce arrived, the importance of the customer experience became apparent almost instantly. The web created an environment where consumers could make an instant judgment on their shopping experience. Switching brands no longer involved walking out of a store and heading to a competitor across town. With a few clicks, we can 'leave' a store and buy from a competitor that better services our needs.

Another dynamic impacting the customer experience is that today's consumer is more educated than ever. This has dramatically altered the retail sector in particular, where a growing number of consumers walk into a store knowing more about the product or service they're purchasing than the staff member serving them. Today's consumer is armed with knowledge, has a firm understanding of comparative value and, as a result, has higher expectations than ever before.

This means that the role of a retailer today is less about product and service education and more about customer engagement.

CUSTOMER ADVOCACY WORKS HARD. AND DELIVERS RESIDUAL IMPACT.

Let's consider the customer experience as a marketing activity for a moment. And let's compare it to another marketing activity – a billboard for example.

A billboard campaign of, say six weeks, may expose your brand message to a few hundred thousand people, depending on its location. That's a lot of attention. But how many of those people who eye-balled your message would be prompted to purchase your product or service in that time, or make an enquiry, particularly when you consider that your billboard was one of an estimated 22,000 mainstream marketing messages it's estimated the average consumer is exposed to - every day.

More importantly, how many of those consumers would even remember that billboard

a month after they saw it ... a year after they saw it?

Now, compared to the customer experience, imagine you created 50 solid customer advocates in that six week period your billboard was live. Now let's imagine each of those customers shared that experience with five of their friends, both online and offline in that six week period. That's 250 people who have had a direct, personal recommendation on your business.

Compare this to a few hundred thousand people who've glanced at your billboard ... which one would you choose if you had to? I know which one I'd prefer.

Not only would the 50 customer advocates deliver a greater engagement and financial return, they would incur far less of an investment than the billboard. And, their residual impact would continue long after the six-week period. Once you create a customer advocate, they keep working for you. Sometimes for life.

WORD-OF-MOUTH TO WORD-OF-MOUSE

From the moment it became possible for the general public to contribute to online content, consumers have had a voice and the ability to influence the purchase decisions of other consumers. When considering a product purchase from a retailer, we no longer have just the carefully crafted marketing messages from the corporation to rely on. Now we can read pages and pages of customer reviews, user experiences and social media feedback in forming an opinion prior to purchase. More than ever, it is the customer experiences of others that influence our decisions on where we spend our money.

In his thought provoking book, Who Cares Wins, author David Jones explains in simple terms how social media has empowered the consumer, "Today brands are defined by what consumers say to each other about them, not what a brand says to consumers."

The shift from 'word-of-mouth' to 'word-of-mouse' has amplified the impact of the customer experience and there's no going back.

PAYING DIVIDENDS

Delivering a great customer experience isn't just about your customers feeling good, and perhaps telling their friends and family about you at a dinner party, in the hope it will generate some buzz and new customers. The link between a better customer experience and increased revenues is undeniable — for most businesses, customer referral is the cheapest form of new business, and one that delivers the highest value customers.

But achieving high levels of customer advocacy doesn't just deliver in terms of referrals to your business. It enables you to take the focus off price and the pressure to be the cheapest in the market: a competitive platform that is unsustainable in any industry (as even the spectacular failure of the discount chain stores has recently demonstrated).

Gary Tucker, Senior Vice President for J.D. Power and Associates, a global marketing information firm that conducts independent research into customer experience, product quality and buyer behaviour says, "The data now clearly shows that people are willing to pay more for a better customer experience."

J.D. Power's customer experience research has shown a high correlation between customer experience and three vital types of customer behaviour:

- 1. Willingness to buy more
- 2. Reluctance to switch
- Likelihood to recommend

This perspective is supported by the results of a 2014 global study by American Express into Customer Service.

The 2014 Customer Service Barometer found that 74% of consumers said they had spent more with an organisation because they'd received excellent customer service.

How much more? An average of 14%, up from 9% in 2010.

Imagine the impact on your business of being able to charge a 14% premium on your

products and services, just through delivering an exceptional customer experience.

LOVE IS (SOMETIMES) ALL YOU NEED

In 2014, Jennifer and Jessi Singh took a huge gamble. Having operated four successful Indian eateries in Melbourne, they packed up their two young daughters and moved to New York to open Babu Ji, where the fickle Manhattan dining crowd are regularly lining up for over an hour for a table. On a weeknight.

Jennifer and Jessi, both in their late 30s, are putting a fresh, modern and healthy spin on food often thought of as greasy takeaway.

"From day one, there was always a line," says Jessi, whose playful twists on classic Indian dishes like curries and fried cheese have flavours just as bright as the fresh edible flowers and herbs with which he plates them.

While the innovative vibrancy of the food is certainly a drawcard, the couple attributes their success to one thing — word of mouth.

"At first, it was all East Village locals," says Jennifer, who's tallied more than 200 guests on their busiest nights in a space that seats just 55. "Then I remember the night someone said, 'Oh, I'm from Harlem.' People kept coming back with friends."

The restaurant takes limited reservations — for the USD\$60-per-person chef's table menu only. And if you want to avoid the long wait, come early — dinner is served from 5.30pm.

Many of Babu Ji's customers are converts to the cuisine.

"People thought Indian food was too spicy, too greasy, too oily or the ingredients aren't fresh," says Jessi, who was born in the Punjab state in northern India and wears many hats, from chef to general contractor.

He can often be seen popping out of the kitchen to join Jennifer in chatting with customers and explaining the dishes.

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"We battle this stigma of Indian food, no matter how many times we meet people," says Jennifer, who designed the open modern space. "Indian is such an interesting, complex, diverse cuisine. Yet there's not a lot on offer for dining of this level."

After signing their lease in March, it took the Singhs less than three months to get the restaurant up and running. And their key to creating such a raving fan base in less than a year?

"Under promise, over deliver. Do things differently and give your customers an experience worth talking about."

WHY THINGS AREN'T Improving

Customer satisfaction is worthless. Customer Loyalty is priceless.

Jeffery Gitomer

DESPITE WIDESPREAD UNDERSTANDING that the customer experience is critically important, the evidence suggests that the standards of service are falling, not improving. As consumers, we're left feeling disappointed and frustrated more than we have customer experiences that exceed our expectations to the point of elation.

The American Express report revealed that in 2014, just 5% of consumers believed that their customer service experiences in general exceed their expectations, down from 7% in 2010.

Products are too complex to use, we're overcharged, the fine print leaves us feeling cheated, customer service is often rude and unhelpful and we're slugged with sneaky extra surcharges that bear no resemblance to the concept of 'customer centricity'.

Examples of poor customer experiences are a daily occurrence for most of us. Genuinely and memorably brilliant ones are still incredibly rare, despite the renewed focus and attention in this area.

Why is this? If the research shows it's important, more people are talking about it and successful brands are demonstrating that a positive customer experience leads to tangible, measurable financial outcomes for an organisation, in the form of market share growth through advocacy and the ability to charge a price premium, why are customer service standards not improving?

DATA OVER DETAIL

It is often said that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. Australian-based photographer Peter Adams-Shawn has made a name for himself by capturing the reflections in wedding guests' eyes. He took his first "eyescape" in 2011, and has been taking them consistently since 2014.

His most powerful and mesmerising images feature the wedding guests in the reflection of the eyes of the bride or groom, or an emotional moment with the bride and her father in the eyes of the bride's mother. The reflection adds a powerful dimension to the image that even the most creative of photographers can't create through a single lens.

In the era of Big Data, where organisations have access to more customer analytics than ever, the challenge is not a lack of consumer insights; quite the opposite. The terabytes of data on every conceivable aspect of customer behaviour make distilling insights that are current, relevant and actionable an ongoing challenge.

Similarly, smaller businesses can run reports on every aspect of customer behavior, and while understanding these trends is important, it often won't show a picture of what's really going on.

The plethora of quantitative reporting certainly answers the question of 'what' for most businesses but they don't really understand the 'why'.

In a later chapter, we'll discuss the power of collaboration with your customers and how focusing your lens on the picture of your business, through your consumers' eyes, can give you insights and ideas that no amount of data analysis can deliver.

METRICS OVER MEASUREMENT

Vinomofo is an Australian online wine brand that has set an enviable pace for other online retailers to follow. Since its launch less than seven years ago, sales have grown to over \$70 million per annum.

With a soaring online business and every conceivable report on consumer behaviour at their fingertips, Vinomofo's management run their business from a dashboard of metrics that might perplex most business owners.

According to co-founder Justin Dry, business owners make the mistake of measuring the wrong things.

"Many business owners measure things that they think they should be measuring, but

they're reports that don't have a lot of depth or meaning," he says, admitting that it was a trap he fell into in the early days.

"Today we track more meaningful metrics such as customer happiness," Justin says, adding that there is a definitive link between that and financial return.

"We know that if our customers are happy and having a great experience with Vinomofo, sales are up, average dollar spend is up and our return on invested marketing dollar is healthy."

Focusing on the happiness of customers has simplified the dashboard of metrics and given the broader team a solid focus.

"If you have happy customers, everything else looks after itself," says Justin.

SETTLING FOR 'SATISFIED'

I'm amazed at how many businesses I interact with, where the core customer service objective of the organisation is 'customer satisfaction'.

In fact one of Australia's largest banks is currently striving for '100% customer satisfaction.' It's what's driving the entire organisation and the CEO's bonus is tied to it.

How disappointing. No organisation, large or small, should EVER be striving for 'satisfied customers'. Satisfied customers don't talk about their experiences. They don't refer their friends and family. They don't go out of their way to spend more money on their next interaction, and I would even argue that 'satisfied' customers of a brand don't even necessarily return.

By mere nature of the word 'satisfied', it implies that expectations were met. That's it. Not exceeded, not blown out of the water. Expectations being simply met is not the precursor to customer advocacy.

I recently stayed at a five-star hotel in Adelaide, in South Australia. As I was checking out, I was asked to fill out a guest feedback card. The short questionnaire asked me to rate my stay at the hotel from 1-10 on six different criteria: efficiency of the checkin process, friendliness of staff, cleanliness of my room, facilities, room amenities and restaurant experience.

The definition for the scale left me in head-shaking wonder why they even bothered with the questionnaire at all.

On the card, one out of ten was defined as 'extremely poor', while five out of ten was 'satisfactory' and ten out of ten was 'extremely satisfactory'.

A perfect score meant that guests are leaving the hotel feeling 'extremely satisfied?'

No person ever pipes up at a dinner party and says to their friends "Hey guys, you really must shop at ABC brand ... I went there today and had the most SATISFACTORY experience!"

As acclaimed customer service author Jeffery Gitomer says, "Customer satisfaction is worthless. Customer loyalty is priceless."

Even the most common and standardised customer service measurement tool falls short of really maximising the potential impact of customer advocacy.

The most common system globally for measuring customer satisfaction is the 'Net Promoter Score' (NPS), a tool that seeks to quantify how well a business is managing its relationship with customers.

The system is simple, yet powerful. It replies on categorizing customers based on their answers to the following questions:

'On a zero to ten scale, how likely is it that you would recommend (product / service / brand) to a friend or colleague?' Followed by,

'What is the primary reason for your score?'

Advocates of the NPS explain how it provides them with insights that are actionable, as well as an ongoing benchmark of performance across an organisation. Many organisations have not only been able to measure the value of their NPS, but tie NPS directly to revenue growth.

The problem with the NPS system I see is two-fold – while it delivers a system for encouraging organisations to be more customer-centric, it's relatively one-dimensional and doesn't provide the mechanism for improving the customer experience. Knowing your score and having a target is one thing, but how to get there is quite another.

That's the gap the strategies in this book will hopefully fill for you.

OVER AUTOMATION

Over the past decade, marketing automation has been a game changer for many businesses. In fact, advances in predictive digital marketing have made entirely new industries possible. According to Forbes, the online learning industry alone surpassed \$107 billion in 2015. The online weight loss and fitness industry is approaching similar size. Neither of these sectors existed a decade ago.

Through sophisticated automated and highly predictable digital marketing techniques, consumers are now able to be targeted, nurtured and sent highly personalised, customised offers based on behaviours and preferences.

Even small businesses can now access cost-effective marketing automation software to automate communications, filter sales opportunities, run membership programs and nurture prospective and existing customers through a complex and predictive set of messages and offers. Marketing programs can now be highly automated but appear to your customer to be highly personalised. Or do they?

Marketing automation — having auto-responders and timed email and other messages sent to individuals based on their previous behaviours and interactions with your brand — is incredible. But as much as I believe in the power of marketing automation, I also believe in the lazy marketer's ability to muck it up, royally.

Looking to marketing automation as the silver bullet that replaces all human and

spontaneous interactions is a mistake that many businesses — large and small — have learnt the hard way.

The key to leveraging marketing automation tools is leveraging its ability to scale one-to-one messages, and then combining that with personalised and customised interactions — a hybrid model we'll explore further in a later chapter.

For example, I use marketing automation software to run a membership-based online training program for the hair and beauty industry – a series of timed emails and videos, with sophisticated follow up autoresponders based on interaction (or non-interaction) with the video content.

This enables me to reach a virtually unlimited potential member base globally, but my team and I set aside time each week to personally call members to check in, answer any questions or address any challenges. These are conversations that would never take place via a sequence of automated emails.

Of course this strategy is not terribly scalable, and in many cases it wouldn't be feasible to have this type of personal contact with every single customer, but identifying your high net worth customers, and those that are predisposed to advocacy, is a good start.

This hybrid model of automated and human interaction, I believe, will be the holy grail of scaled customer advocacy in the future, and businesses that get this right will build a fan base exponentially.

BACK TO FRONT AND INSIDE OUT

Many years ago, I coined a phrase: 'The Danger of the Disconnect' after a particularly negative experience I'd had in a car showroom. Having been captivated by a slick and clever TV commercial and researched the car online, I was seriously impressed. The website was engaging, easy to navigate and answered any conceivable question about the car. I was starting to see myself driving this car and doing some rough sums on whether I could afford it. I couldn't really, but silently pledged to find a way to make it work. Next stop was my local dealership for a test drive. It was a brand new dealership, interior designed within an inch of its life. Stunning. I was treated like a VIP, served

a barista-brewed coffee and led to a white leather sofa to wait for a salesman who was free to take me on a test drive.

It was at that point that the excitement and positive anticipation of my new car had the brakes applied. The gentleman (and I use that term very loosely) who took me on the test drive was rude, condescending, slimy and sleazy.

As I marched out of the dealership feeling annoyed, despondent and disillusioned, it occurred to me that the disconnect between all the brand's marketing messages, offline and online, and the customer experience I'd just endured was more damaging to the brand than if I'd walked into the dealership without any expectation.

Many businesses approach the marketing process back-to-front: the priority of focus, effort and investment is on the brand, advertising messages and website — which result in a positive customer experience and raise expectations in the minds of customers. Then when it comes to the actual human experience, it often bears no resemblance to the interest, perception and expectation that's been created prior to that point. Customer service and the customer experience are treated as an afterthought, rather than an integral part of the sales and marketing process, often resulting in the upfront investment being predominantly wasted.

I've been fortunate to work with many business owners and marketers who understand the value of approaching the marketing process and customer experience with the end in mind. Before any marketing campaigns or messages are created, the front line staff are engaged, trained and empowered to deliver on the campaign promise and ensure customer expectations are met and, ideally, exceeded.



All of your customers are partners in your mission.

SHEP HYKEN

Many years ago I worked with Mark Bouris (host of the TV show 'The Apprentice') and his team at Wizard Home Loans. Wizard was a challenger brand in the Australian mortgage sector, which until then had been dominated by the big four banks.

Working with the Wizard team and distributed through a national franchised network of lending managers, we launched innovative products and initiatives that set industry standards at the time. One of those initiatives was Wizard Women, a program that was designed to educate women about real estate and property investment via a dedicated website and product options that provided greater flexibility for changing life circumstances, such as starting a family.

The campaign —which was highly successful and instrumental in growing Wizard to be the number one choice of non-bank lender for Australian women within 12 months — included a mainstream media campaign, national PR activity and integrated online campaign. But before any of that was launched, the mostly male sales team were given extensive training on how to bring the campaign to life from a customer experience perspective, including how to sell to women and maximise advocacy.

This 'back-to-front' approach to the campaign ensured that any expectations or positive customer perceptions created by the marketing and media messages weren't obliterated by a negative or disconnected customer experience.

The Wizard Women campaign was also a success because it included an 'inside-out' strategy. Anecdotal evidence told us that there was a need for a program like Wizard Women. Mounting research was indicating that women not only make the majority of decisions when it comes to a home loan provider, but that women (single women in particular) often feel overwhelmed and intimidated when it comes to the process of applying for a home loan.

Aside from ascertaining the market demand for a specific program targeted to women, we felt it was important to gather some insights from the source.

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Combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods, we surveyed 1000 Australian women and conducted focus groups across five states.

The survey gave us some powerful statistics that were used in the PR campaign to media (hint: journalists love statistics).

The focus group discussions enabled us to delve into these issues in more detail. If a survey gives you the 'what', a focus group enables you to ask 'why'.

Most importantly, the focus group discussions gave us some insights and verbatim responses that formed the key marketing messages for the campaign and website.

An honest insight from an actual customer is always going to deliver a more influential marketing message than a creative, clever catch cry devised by a creative director or copywriter, based on subjectivity and assumption.

To give your brand the best shot at building maximum customer advocacy, consider how you might adopt a 'back-to-front', 'inside-out' strategy.



Mark Bouris at the launch of the Pregnant Pause home loan feature, part of the Wizard Women initiative. Pregnant Pause enabled mortgage customers to put a hold on their repayments for up to six months during maternity or paternity leave.

LACK OF TRAINING

'David Jones invests in more staff for old-style service' read the front page Sydney Morning Herald headline in November 2015.

'David Jones is turning the clock back on customer service, investing in more fulltime staff and training sales assistants in the lost art of old-fashioned department store service,' the article continued.

It was a public relations masterstroke for Australia's oldest department stores. Or was it?

The backlash and ridicule on social media was almost instantaneous.

"Finally, David Jones admits that their service has been sh*t for years," said one. "This is PR spin ... Bet they won't actually do it," said another. "Lost art – the two most honest words in the press release," mocked another.

Regardless of the intention behind the initiative — genuine or purely for PR purposes — the admission from one of Australia's largest retailers that customer service was a 'lost art' and that they were announcing an investment in training staff and sales assistants says a lot about the modern retail environment.

When you consider the customer experience in Australia compared to a country like the United States, it's nothing short of embarrassing. Disinterested staff, lack of product knowledge and an environment that often leaves consumers feeling uncomfortable, disappointed and frustrated.

It's no wonder that over 60% of Australian shoppers say they get a better customer experience when they're online shopping than they do in-store.

Consider what that means for a moment: websites are giving consumers a better, more consistent experience than human beings.

TURNING CUSTOMERS INTO ADVOCATES

According to Roger Simpson, author of The Retail Solution, the problem is the lack of investment in training and development of staff.

"Business owners in Australia expect their staff to deliver exceptional experiences to their customers but invest very little in the way of training."

According to Simpson, the majority of retail businesses in Australia run their new staff through their steps of service and processes during a rushed induction process.

"Unless you discuss your procedures with staff on an ongoing basis, staff will slip and start cutting corners," says Simpson. "It's human nature to take the path of least resistance."

Simpson says that in order to be effective, customer service training for staff needs to include techniques that are immediately implementable and incorporate a follow up review process.

"People perform at the level two which they are allowed to perform," he says, "an ongoing review and training program is essential."

THE Customer Service MINDSET

One customer well taken care of could be more valuable than \$10,000 worth of advertising.

Jim Rohn

AS YOU'VE PROBABLY GATHERED by now, I get pretty excited about customer advocacy. In fact, I believe that for any business, the ability to turn its existing customers into walking advocates is the most exciting, untapped opportunity that exists. For many, it's a potential game changer. Customer advocacy can turn a declining business around. Fast. It can deliver a potent competitive advantage and it can lead to exponential market share growth.

Most business owners (particularly start-up entrepreneurs) are so focused on customer acquisition and obsessed with attracting new customers that they overlook the opportunity sitting right under their noses – maximising the dollar value of those customers by making them raving fans from day one. Their marketing budget and efforts are all geared to finding new customers (which of course is important when you're in start-up phase) but very little focus is placed on how to ensure the retention and optimisation of those customers. Customer service is seen as a separate function from marketing and, often, it's an afterthought.

The transformational power of customer advocacy starts with a very simple principle, and that is that 'customer service' is not a department. It's not a desk or a complaints hotline or section of a website.

Customer service is a responsibility of everyone in the organisation, from the CEO and management to the lowest ranking frontline employee of the company. It's an integral part of the sales and marketing process.

More importantly, customer service is everything you do. The customer experience is the sum total of all interactions a customer has with your business. It's the way your phone is answered. It's the fine print on a customer receipt. It's the cleanliness of the glass on the front door. It's the text message that's sent to customers to confirm their appointments.

TURNING CUSTOMERS INTO ADVOCATES

When you consider the customer journey as being an aggregate of the smallest of details, it potentially changes the way you view how to improve the customer experience. Becoming a brand or a business renowned for exceptional customer service doesn't come about with a one big swift 'we're all about the customer' initiative. It takes time, it often means a cultural shift and it is the sum of hundreds, sometimes thousands of little changes.

Turning customers into advocates calls for an evolution, not a revolution.

BEFORE 'HOW' BE CLEAR ON 71/ho

If women have a positive brand experience they're 5-10 times more likely than men to engage in positive, active word of mouth.



THREE OF MY PREVIOUS BOOKS, 'SheMarketing', 'PurseStrings' and 'Selling to Women' explored the power of the female consumer dollar. Not only are women earning more money than ever before, and controlling the majority of consumer purchase decisions (estimated to be 80%), it seems they control the share of voice when it comes to customer advocacy.

Research indicates that if women have a good customer experience, they're between five and 10 times more likely to engage in positive, active word of mouth. Of course the flipside is that if women have a negative customer experience, they can be 50 times more likely to share that experience!

Women tend to seek out the opinion of their 'inner circle' of friends before making a purchase decision, particularly if it's a complex or major purchase. They may even consult the inner circle several times before even engaging with your brand. This is exciting, because the implication for business is a multi-layered sales opportunity — turn your existing female customer into an advocate and you build a pathway to two or three new customers.

While the strategies in this book are outlined in a gender-neutral framework, it's worth being aware that in most cases, given the same experience and circumstances, your female customers are more likely to respond and more likely to engage in proactive customer advocacy behaviour.



The companies that work are the ones that people really care about.

MARK ZUCKERBURG

THE 10 C'S OF CREATING Advocacy

THE TEN-STEP CUSTOMER ADVOCACY MODEL - A PROVEN PROCESS FOR MAXIMISING THE DOLLAR VALUE OF YOUR EXISTING CUSTOMERS.

- **Customer Centricity** 1.
- 2. Curiosity
- Commonality 3.
- Concierge Effect 4.
- 5. Customisation

- 6. Celebration
- 7. Connection

9.

- 8. Communication
- Collaboration Creative Innovation 10.



THE CUSTOMER ADVOCACY MODEL outlined in the remainder of this book is a blueprint for turning customers into advocates.

It's designed to give you a simple to follow roadmap and easy to implement set of tools and strategies that you can pick and choose from depending on your business, industry and where you're currently at in terms of customer advocacy.

And while it is designed to be a step-by-step process with each strategy building on the last, you'll also find that it's modular so you can pick and choose from the ten strategies and customise the model to suit you.

Each section also has a summary of major points so you can scan through to find the points that resonate with you before diving in.

You'll see that there are notes, thought starters and exercises for you to complete throughout the ten strategy chapters so get comfortable, get your pen ready and let's get started.



We're entering a new era
of customer centricity where
customer advocacy is more than
customer is wow customer service
delivering wow customers as the most
its seeing customers as the most
integral part of your business.



Ask your customers to be part of the solution, rather than viewing them as the problem.

Allan Weiss

BETWEEN JANUARY AND NOVEMBER 2015, I took more than 200 domestic flights and, like most business travellers, I'm loyal to one particular airline. For me that airline is Virgin Australia, a brand that consistently demonstrates the power of a brand that is truly customer centric.

In May 2015 I was on a flight from Perth to Brisbane. The 'red-eye' flight, as it's known, is a brutal five and a half hour overnight flight that gets into Brisbane at 5:50am, which is actually 2:50am Perth time.

It was my fifth flight in three days and I was beyond tired. Halfway through the flight, adjusting my position trying to get comfortable, I felt my lower back twinge, followed by a shot of burning pain down my right leg. Within ten seconds the entire right side of my body was in a spasm and I was in serious pain.

The cabin manager walking past my row observed I was in discomfort and immediately came to my side. I explained what was happening and over the next two hours, he not only administered pain killers, water — and a shot of vodka at my desperate request — he also got me additional pillows and even brought me his personal Virgin overcoat, tucking me up like a baby in an attempt to get me comfortable. While the spasm and pain barely subsided, his genuine care and sympathy made it a little easier to endure.

This type of customer care won't be found in any customer service manual at Virgin Australia. It's an approach to customers that isn't procedural; it's proactive, empathetic and spontaneous. It comes from a mindset that puts the customer's needs above those of the organisation.

We're entering a new era of customer centricity. Where customer advocacy is more than delivering wow customer service. It's about an organisation being truly customer centric from the inside out. It's seeing customers as the most integral part of your business. It's demonstrating that you care and have a consistent and ongoing priority to delight your customers and deliver magic moments — however small and whenever

possible.

When it comes to refined service and a customer-centric approach, The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company sets the standard. With ceaseless attention to every luxurious detail, the Ritz-Carlton brand demonstrates an envious commitment to understanding the ever-evolving needs of its customers and empowers employees to create memorable experiences for its guests.

Not only does Ritz-Carlton management train their global workforce in service excellence, they entrust those staff members ('Ladies and Gentlemen' as they're referred to in Ritz-Carlton land) to go the extra mile to ensure guests are truly delighted.

The Ritz-Carlton has, for many years, given staff \$2,000 of discretion (per employee per guest) to be used to solve any customer complaint in the manner the employee feels is appropriate.

Many business owners and managers would ask 'How could so much creative and monetary freedom succeed? And succeed without bankrupting the business?'

It works because it changes how employees view customers—and how customers view employees. If an employee starts off defensive, rigid, or withholding, a customer tends to respond by escalating their demands. It's a classic vicious cycle. But when employees are able to start the interaction from an accepting, flexible, and generous position, customers naturally feel inclined to be reasonable in return. The cycle turns virtuous.

Indeed, Horst Schulze, who during his tenure as founding president of The Ritz-Carlton initiated this policy (in the 1980s, no less, when that \$2,000 would buy a ten night stay on the club level of a Ritz-Carlton), and his team verify that an employee has never had to resort to using all of that discretion. Still, knowing it is there has been a great builder of strength and responsibility for employees. It also ensures that The Ritz-Carlton's commitment to customer centricity is an integral part of the company culture and consistently demonstrated at every level of the organisation.

THE POWER OF PERSONIFICATION

For many business owners, convincing their staff to follow basic procedures is a

challenge, let alone empowering them to consider, serve and delight customers in proactive ways!

Inspiring your staff to take initiative and get excited about being part of a truly customer centric organisation starts with them understanding who their customer is and what they're all about.

If I sat your team in a room and asked them to describe your target customer to me, would I get lots of hands up or nervous blank stares?

Having a crystal clear picture of who your customers are and what they're all about is not just the responsibility and benefit of your organisation's marketing function — it's a conversation that should involve your entire team.

The best way to personify your ideal customer in a way that everyone will understand is to create a fictional character (or characters) that embody their traits, behaviours and qualities.

For example, after breaking down your customer base, you could find your key target audience is women 25-40 with young children.

Using this as a starting point, you can then start to build a character that embodies your ideal customer and brings her to life.

Now it's time to get to know your ideal customer as a person. Turn them into a character, give them a name and think about what makes them tick. Who are they? How do they spend their time? Who (and what) is influencing them? Take a hard look at their activities and interests. Do they share common opinions and attitudes? What do they value and do they share similar goals?

Now it's time to build out a broader picture about their relationship with your organisation. What specific benefit do they get from being your customer? What emotion do they feel or would like to feel when they transact with you? Why do they stay loyal to you? What would make them leave or switch brands?

Of course you can build out more than one of these profiles, depending on how broad

your target audience is. The power is in the personification and having a rich, characterdriven profile to share with your team. Even better, involve them in the process.

When someone experiences a negative or disappointing customer experience, it's usually because the person delivering that experience hasn't been given the tools to see things through the customer's eyes. Decisions relating to every aspect of the customer experience are based on very subjective assumptions, not what really matters to the customer.

Consider these (real-life) examples:

A 42-year old mother of young children walking into a fashion retailer to have some time out and buy some new clothes, only to be faced with loud pop music. The music choice suited the 24-year old sales assistant's tastes, not those of the target customer.

A customer calling an electrical retailer to enquire about a new television, only to hear a radio ad for a competitor's two day TV sale when he was put on hold. The decision to play the radio to customers on hold was a decision of convenience, not one driven by customer centricity (with unfortunate consequences).

A shopping centre escalator design fail, resulting in there being insufficient room for prams to turn at the bottom of each escalator. The design was determined on aesthetics and testing by engineers, rather than the needs of real customers — pushing trolleys and prams.

A suburban hardware store where customers are served beer by bikini models on Friday afternoons. With over 40% of hardware purchases made by women, they're potentially alienating a significant customer segment.

A telecommunications company offering a four hour window for internet installation to a small business. Small business owners are busy and need certainty, particularly if they need to work client appointments around a tradesman's visit.

TARGET CUSTOMER PROFILE

Work from home Wendy

AGE & STATUS: 30-45 years old with two small children.

EMPLOYMENT: Wendy is a 'Mumpreneur', using her prior experience in a corporate position for an IT company to build her own online business.

BALANCING ACT: Wendy is an exceptional multi-tasker. She's super organised and balances her young family, her business and her friendship circles.

EARLY ADOPTER: She's an early adopter of new technologies. She spends more than 50% of her waking hours on some sort of device.

HOUSE PROUD: While she doesn't always have the time for it, Wendy is house proud and loves to cook.

BRAND AND BUDGET CONCIOUS: Wendy likes to include in her favourite brands (Lorna Jane, Mimco, Country Road, Witchery) but she is also realistic that her needs in the family often come last so she seeks out value by shopping in stores like Target, Jeans West and K-Mart.

SOCIAL NETWORKER: Wendy uses social media to connect to the outside world. She's also a member of several female entrepreuner networks.

WENDY'S KEY PRIORITIES:



Un-wine-ding: Drinks 3-4 nights a week



Family first:
Prioritises
everyone else in
the family



Friendships: She lives for fortnightly girls nights out



Health: She tries to exercise 3-4 times a week

Whatever your business, having a 'personified profile' such as this one that you could share with your team would be a powerful tool in ensuring your customers are at the heart of what you do and that you're able to see things through the eyes of your customers.

IT'S AN ONGOING PROCESS

Involving or sharing your ideal customer avatar with your team is merely the first step towards Customer Centricity. Long term benefits come from the ongoing implementation and discussion around this process. Ensure you make time to have regular conversations with your staff about your customers, referring to the customer character, and brainstorm ideas for improving the customer experience.

Summary

- Put your customer at the heart of every business decision you make and make a habit of seeing your business through your customers' eyes.
- A brand being truly customer centric relies on everyone in the organisation. Staff should not only clearly understand your service credo; they should feel empowered to deliver on it in unique, spontaneous ways.
- Regular team training is essential to ensure your staff consistently deliver on your customer service standards. Ensure they are as passionate about your customers as you are.



Curiosity



Building customer advocacy can be likened to an old fashioned camera. Maintain your focus, zoom in on the positives, and develop from the negatives..

SIX MONTHS INTO my first 'proper' marketing job out of university, I was assigned to a national tour around Australia with American marketing guru Jay Abraham. During those ten days or so, I got some invaluable one-on-one time with Jay as we flew from city to city. During those flights he imparted some pearls of wisdom with me, most of which have stayed with me ever since.

According to Jay, the reason most sales efforts fail is that the salesperson spends too much time being 'interesting' rather than 'interested'.

"You can only ever be in one mode or the other," he explained, "When you're trying to be interesting, it's impossible to be interested."

I've since found this to be true of many situations: people at parties —those annoying people who try to be 'interesting' by rabbiting on and on about themselves barely taking a breath and not once being interested in anyone else — and even brands. Think about it: there are brands that are interesting and there are brands that are truly interested in their customers and what their customers think and feel. This is demonstrated in a number of ways.

OPEN CHANNELS OF FEEDBACK

The easiest, most powerful way to develop all your customer experience solutions is to talk to your customers about the problems.

Want to know what your customers are thinking? Ask them. It sounds obvious, but does your organisation offer multiple channels of feedback for your customers?

Do you proactively ask your customers about their experience and how it could be improved? Is your brand listening to your customers or talking to them? Are you interesting or interested?

In later chapters we'll explore the power of collaborating with your customers but here

are five simple tips for being 'interested':

- Ensure contact and feedback channels are clearly visible on your website.
- Let your customers know that feedback, positive and negative, is an integral part
 of your brand and that all feedback is valued and addressed.
- Proactively request feedback post-purchase. Encouraging feedback (and making
 it easy for customers to review and evaluate) your business not only shows that
 you care, but it demonstrates confidence and transparency.
- Provide multiple channels of feedback. Offer a freecall number, a one-click email form and links to multiple review sites relevant to your industry.
- Respond to all reviews and feedback, positive and negative. This is particularly
 important for online reviews. Even the most negative customer reviews can be
 perceived differently if management has responded constructively. Don't bury
 your head in the sand if you get negative feedback or a bad review; it will only
 magnify it.

LIGHTNING SPEED RESPONSE

There are few sectors that have become more competitive recently than the Australian domestic airline sector. Air travel in general has become far more customer-centric and airline brands are scrambling to secure consumer loyalty with improved service, enhanced onboard offerings and a pre and post customer experience that bears little resemblance to the bland 'lucky if the coffee is hot' offerings of a decade ago.

Virgin Australia has won the hearts of Australian leisure travellers, and more recently, the corporate market, with an offering that is flexible and a customer experience that is friendly, consistent and truly worthy of customer advocacy.

One of the simple secrets to their success is their responsiveness. Call their customer service helpline and they're likely to answer within three rings. Email them with a complaint and you're likely to get a callback within the hour.

Importantly, their communication channels are not only open and responsive, but they have personality. I recently tweeted @VirginAust after a particularly amazing customer experience on a flight 'I love Virgin, that is all.' Within seconds, the response came back '@marketingamanda The feeling is mutual.'

INVOLVE AND ENGAGE

Another simple way to demonstrate 'curiosity' is to involve your customers in marketing initiatives and changes in your business. Can't decide between two headline options or images for your new campaign? Ask your customers and have some fun with the polling. Make it a fun competition and offer prizes.

Collaborating with your customers is one of the easiest ways to increase advocacy and something we'll cover in a later chapter.

LISTEN, LEARN, ADJUST

Building customer advocacy can be likened to an old-fashioned camera. Maintain your focus, zoom in on the positives, and develop from the negatives.

When Betty Crocker introduced its first cake mix in 1947, the company was sure it would be an instant success. Instead of spending hours making a cake from scratch, housewives only had to rip the top off the Betty Crocker cake mix package, add water and bake. The research insight was that busy housewives were looking for time-saving devices and techniques. They were onto a winner.

But customers rejected the product. Management at Betty Crocker's parent company, General Mills, were perplexed. Why didn't busy housewives want to use the cake mix?

After conducting more research and testing, the answer became clear — the mix made cake-baking too simple. There was no 'pride of ownership' in the cakes baked with the mix. They tasted great, but they weren't 'homemade.' Part of the pleasure of presenting a homemade cake to your family was the knowledge that you'd done it yourself, and stirring mix and water together was clearly not enough.

The solution: General Mills modified the Betty Crocker cake mix recipe to require the addition of an egg. Sales of the cake mix soared.

Knowing your customers intimately and maintaining a sense of curiosity throughout the product development and marketing process is a necessity for connecting with customers and building customer advocacy. If General Mills had developed their product with a greater level of curiosity and greater involvement from their consumers, it might have saved them hundreds of thousands of dollars in a failed product launch.

YOU ARE NOT YOUR CUSTOMER. NEITHER IS YOUR WIFE OR SISTER.

Thinking what you know customers want is dangerous. Knowing what they want leads to customer experience improvements that matter.

In late 2014, I was just ten minutes into a two-hour research presentation at a major media company, delivering the findings of an extensive national survey and focus group research project.

The study was designed to identify key changes and trends in how the core target audience — women 25-50 years old — were consuming media. It was a major study — one the client had invested over \$100,000 in — and as a result, the majority of the senior management team had accepted the invitation to attend the presentation.

"That's not how my wife and her friends think," said one of the senior male managers dismissively, in response to one of the initial findings from the survey.

I glanced around the room to gauge the mood in the room before I responded.

"Tell me more about that," I said.

"Well I overhear their conversations regularly, and it's just not how they think," he said.

"That's because your wife and her friends aren't in our target audience!" piped up another manager. I was relieved that someone else in the room voiced the words that I was considering how to deliver tactfully.

Despite the findings of the research not delivering the best report card for the brand, it was objective research and the findings were what they were — there was no way to twist or sugar coat them to be easier for management to hear.

Being curious about what your customers think and feel and maintaining that curiosity

TURNING CUSTOMERS INTO ADVOCATES

takes bravery. Even when the answers are not what you want to hear, your customers think what they think and feel what they feel. Accepting that reality can sometimes be challenging, as it's a natural response to want to defend or justify our business and brand.

And while what our friends and family think is not unimportant, they will often not tell us what we want to hear — or more importantly — need to hear in order to make objective and customer-centric decisions about the brand.

Be curious but don't fall into the trap of being selectively curious.

Summary

- Put your customer at the heart of every business decision you make and make a habit of seeing your business through your customers' eyes.
- A brand being truly customer centric relies on everyone in the organisation. Staff should not only clearly understand your service credo; they should feel empowered to deliver on it in unique, spontaneous ways.
- Regular team training is essential to ensure your staff consistently deliver on your customer service standards. Ensure they are as passionate about your customers as you are.

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Commonality

People now, and in the future, will do business more and more with people, brands and businesses that they have something in common with.



LET'S FACE IT, at the heart of what we all do — whether it be a media rep or a mortgage broker, a real estate agent or a retailer — we're all in the problem solving business; we want to find the perfect solution for our customers.

The challenge is that sometimes, in our enthusiasm and commitment to finding a solution that perfectly suits the needs of a customer, we unwittingly place an unnecessary ceiling on the sales outcome. More importantly, we miss out on opportunities to build advocacy.

QUESTIONS ARE THE ANSWERS

I recently walked into the Apple Store in George Street, Sydney to enquire about some adapters I needed for my Macbook.

I was barely through the front door when I was almost pounced on by a staff member who was clearly very enthusiastic about serving me.

"Hi there, how are you today what can I help you with?!" He blurted out with the energy and over zealous enthusiasm of someone on a serious sugar high.

(Don't get me wrong, I'm all for an enthusiastic, high-energy customer experience, but this guy was seriously invading my personal space).

I started explaining which adapter I thought I was after and half way through my sentence, the Apple dude clicked his fingers like a wizard, turned on his heel and said 'I know exactly what you need!' as he marched over to a retail display on the other side of the store.

Assuming it was my cue to follow, I awkwardly shadowed him, struggling to keep up and navigate through the sea of customers occupying the store.

He arrived at the wall full of different adapters and connections, grabbed the packet and triumphantly slapped it in my hands.

"That's what you're after," he said, victoriously.

"Um, great, thanks," I offered.

I could tell from his grin that he was feeling quite pleased with himself that he was able to solve my query in 2.4 seconds flat. In my mind, I was actually having a negative customer experience because I felt interrupted and not listened to.

The interesting aspect of this story is that although what he gave me was the correct adapter, and resulted in a sale (positive result), there were two negative outcomes of this experience:

- 1. Although I purchased the product, the experience was tainted with a little resentment. I felt like he was more focused on being a smarty-pants than really listening to my needs. If he'd taken the time to listen, ask questions and then recommend the solution based on my answers and individual circumstances and needs, it would have altered my perception of the product and its value. Same solution, different customer outcome.
- 2. By zoning in on the solution so quickly, rather than taking a step back and asking more questions, he missed out on potential 'peripheral sales opportunities'. In any sales situation, particularly in a retail environment, there are always additional sales opportunities floating around in the periphery of the customer's stated need. Those needs only become apparent and turn into tangible sales opportunities through asking thoughtful and purposeful questions.

Of course, while the art of asking questions is an important and integral part of creating customer advocacy and maximising sales outcomes, you need to balance the needs of your customers with efficient and helpful service. No one likes to have their time wasted or to have to answer a series of interrogating questions for the sake of it, but often investing time in one or two thoughtful questions will produce a positive return for both you and your customer.

CAPTURING PERIPHERAL SALES

For someone who travels for around half the year, you'd think I would be an excellent traveller and a great packer. I'm a little embarrassed to admit that I'm not. I have yet to master the art of packing light and, ironically, always seem to forget something (usually something basic and necessary like shoes or my toothbrush).

So when I recently found myself at a hotel on the Gold Coast without shampoo and conditioner, I was frustrated to say the least. I'd just been for a run and couldn't bear to use the hotel shampoo and conditioner. So I found myself on an extended run down to a pharmacy in Surfers Paradise.

As I walked in and started searching for the haircare aisle, I was approached by a staff member.

"Hi, I'm Amber. What can I help you find today?" she said.

"Hi Amber. Do you have any travel-sized shampoo and conditioner sets?" I responded.

"We sure do ... let me show you where they are," she offered as she led me to the adjacent aisle.

"Are you on the Gold Coast for work or leisure?" she asked.

"I'm here for work, just for the day."

"Well I'm impressed you still found the time to exercise!" she laughed.

"Thanks. Just didn't have time to pack my hair products," I laughed.

"Oh don't worry," she said. "I always forget my shampoo and conditioner. I always forget my styling products too ... were you planning to blow-dry?"

With that one sentence and question, Amber had done two things — she had made me feel less forgetful by building a point of commonality, and she'd also identified a

peripheral sales opportunity by asking a thoughtful question.

Not only did I purchase the shampoo and conditioner, I took the hair serum also. At the point of purchase, Amber asked if I'd like to buy a cold bottle of water to drink on the way back to the hotel, which of course I accepted. Result: A four-product, \$18.50 sale rather than a two-product, \$12 sale. Interestingly, despite spending more than I'd planned or anticipated, I left that pharmacy having had a customer experience that was signficantly more positive than if I'd just been given the shampoo and conditioner I'd asked for,

Asking more questions provides the opportunity to connect with your customers by building commonality. People, now and in the future, will gravitate to — and stay loyal to — people, brands and businesses that we have something in common with.

A sense of commonality makes us feel safe - It's a basic human survival instinct and when we feel safe, we feel trust and rapport - the obvious pre-cursers to loyalty and advocacy.

Successful salespeople understand the power of commonality and leverage it in their sales process to truly connect with their prospects.

When we ask more questions, different questions and interesting questions, we get different and interesting answers and often an outcome that boosts the sale (and customer advocacy) significantly through the process of building commonality.

In any sales situation, there are peripheral sales opportunities floating around — needs that the customer themselves may not have yet identified. Ask more questions and capture more peripheral sales.

THE GEORGE WU EFFECT

"Describe your wedding to me in ten words," he said, pen poised excitedly. This was the first question couture wedding dress designer George Wu asked me at our very first meeting in mid 2015 and the moment I decided that George would design my dress.

George was the third designer I'd met with and it was his ability to ask questions that were

surprising, different and unique that convinced me that he approached each assignment not just as 'another dress' but a creation based on the individual personality, dreams and vision of each client.

The previous two designers had a stock-standard questionnaire that they went through with me robotically, with the first ten questions dedicated to the boring, functional stuff like the date, time and location of the wedding, number in the bridal party, dress style I had in mind, blah blah blah.

I didn't realise it until later that day, but the questions George asked me not only differentiated him from the outset, it put me into story-telling mode and gave George valuable insights into my vision, not only for the dress, but for the wedding as a whole. It positioned George not just as a designer, but a collaboration partner that was genuinely interested in the broader outcome.

It also gave him important information that he could then use to build commonality, through examples and stories of how he'd worked with other clients and his initial ideas in response to my brief.

On that day and throughout the resulting process (13 dress fittings in total) George continually asked questions —not only to check in and ensure I was happy with the progress — but to evolve the process of collaboration. He considered every conceivable detail in designing the dress and it resulted in a designer-client relationship that was built on complete trust, communication, fun and friendship.

In fact, the decision to work with George Wu turned out to be the best one — he designed a dress that exceeded every expectation and created a client advocate who sings his praises at every opportunity.

SOCIAL PROOF – HOW WE'RE INFLUENCED BY WHAT OTHERS SAY AND DO

When two or more people are looking up at the sky, do you do the same? If no one is buying a certain flavour of ice cream, do you stay clear of it too?

The force that influences you every day when it comes to decision making, from the

biggest decisions like where you want to live, down to the smaller every day choices like what to have for lunch, is called Social Proof.

Social proof, also known as informational social influence, is a psychological phenomenon where people assume the actions of others in an attempt to reflect correct behaviour for a given situation. This effect is prominent in ambiguous social situations where people are unable to determine the appropriate mode of behaviour, and is driven by the assumption that surrounding people possess more knowledge about the situation.

Basically, we're wired to conform and therefore demonstrate herd mentality to a certain degree at certain times. In a sales and marketing sense, we're influenced by the thoughts and actions of people we have something in common with.

In a fascinating environmental study published in The Washington Post, researchers examined the effectiveness of signs (yet again!) on persuading customers to use less energy in the summer by turning on fans instead of air conditioning. Before we get into the results and implications, check out the 4 types of signs they tested:

SIGN #1:	Informed the customer that they could be saving \$54/month on
	their utility bill.
SIGN #2:	Told customers that they could prevent the release of 262 pounds of
	greenhouse gasses every month.
SIGN #3:	Encouraged customers that saving energy was a socially responsible
	thing to do.
SIGN #4:	Let customers know that 77 percent of their neighbours were al
	ready actively using fans to save energy.

Which sign do you think was the most effective at getting people to use less energy? Surprise, it was sign #4 – the one that invoked the positive social proof. That means that in this instance, the positive social proof was more persuasive than saving money (sign #1), protecting the environment (sign #2), and making responsible choices (sign #3), all of which are positive behaviours, but none of which could stand up to the power of group influence.

SOCIAL PROOF WORKS BETTER WITH PICTURES AND EVEN BETTER WITH VIDEO

Testimonials are one of the most persuasive forms of social proof in marketing terms, but how can you make them more believable? (Just because a testimonial is true, doesn't mean people will believe it).

According to new research on increasing "truthiness," the best way is to put a face to the words. Pictures were found to increase trust among all participants, particularly if they could relate to them. Studies have found that when it comes to valuing the opinions of others, our brains place more weight on people we deem to be most like us.

Develop customer testimonials — written or in video. Ensure to find a customer that truly represents (in the best way) what your ideal customer looks like. Emphasize how your company solved their pains and headaches, and then other customers will be able to relate to them. That's the power of commonality.

Summary

- Solving your customers' problems quickly is not always serving them. Take the time to ask more questions and demonstrate that you're listening.
- The questions your customers are asked and the consequent conversations have a major impact on the sales outcome. Commonality drives average dollar sales by capturing peripheral sales opportunities.
- Testimonials and customer case studies are a powerful way to tap into the psychology of 'social proof' and visually demonstrate the brand advocacy of your existing customers.

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THE Concierge Effect



We see our customers as invited guests to a party, and invited guests to a party, and we are the hosts. Its our job to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better.

JEFF BEZOS

IN FEBRUARY 2015, I had a speaking engagement at the Emporium Hotel in Brisbane. It was the first time I'd been to the hotel, despite hearing positive feedback about it from friends and colleagues.

After the 90-minute drive down from my home in Noosa, I pulled into the driveway of the hotel, looking forward to getting to my room and chilling out for an hour before my presentation.

The hotel concierge opened the back of my car and took my small suitcase out. He then came to the drivers side of the car and opened the door.

"Welcome to The Emporium Miss Stevens, is this your first time with us?"

"Um, yes, it is." I said, a little perplexed.

"Well welcome to the hotel, my name is Charlie", he said. "I'll arrange for your bag to go straight to your room. Is there anything else I can help you with?"

"No, I'm all good, thanks."

"Great. By the way, what sort of dog have you got?" he asked.

Now I was really intrigued. "A beagle," I responded slowly.

"Oh how cute. My Aunt has a beagle. Pretty naughty. Is your beagle naughty?"

From there, we got into a five minute conversation about beagles and how naughty they are, how much they love food and how smart they are.

It wasn't until later that I realised how and why he knew I had a dog — he'd noticed the dog hair in the back of my SUV. Through the simple act of being observant, Charlie had built a connection with me that created customer advocacy in the first five minutes of my relationship with the hotel.

Less than a month later I happened to be back at the Emporium for another speaking engagement. I pulled into the driveway and Charlie happened to be on concierge again.

He opened my driver's door with a smile and said 'Welcome back to the hotel Miss Stevens. How's Bertie Beagle ... what's he chewed since we saw you last?"

While this story is a great example of the power of both curiosity and commonality, it's also a great example of what I call 'The Concierge Effect'. It relates to how a customer is 'welcomed' to a brand.

My late grandmother was never short on advice. One of her favourite sayings was "Start as you mean to continue," meaning that how you commence anything – whether it be a task, a relationship, a day or a conversation — often sets the tone for how it will continue.

The Concierge Effect is that warm fuzzy feeling you get when you walk into a five star hotel or luxury retail store. It's the door being opened for you, it's the 'welcome', it's the distinct sense of special treatment that makes you feel a VIP. It's that first five minutes that often sets the tone for how you feel — regardless of what happens after that.

Many years ago, Microsoft conducted an interesting experiment designed to explore the impact of the first fifteen seconds of a software experience.

With two groups in separate rooms, they set out to test a simple theory: if the start-up time of an application was faster, customers would have a much better impression of the overall experience (even if the application was the same in all other ways).

They tested two slightly different versions of the app with the two groups. Group one had a five-second launch time and the other had an artificially increased launch time of 15 seconds. The delay impacted ONLY the start-up of the app. The test went on for

30 minutes after the application launch. The user never had to open the app a second time. The rest of the app experience and tests were identical.

The results were incredible. People in the "delayed launch" group reported lockups and performance issues throughout the tasks they had to complete. They could be seen getting visibly frustrated. They had more difficulty completing the rest of the tests after the lengthier start-up time. They universally gave the slow-launching application poor scores (in comparison) for performance, usability, and general satisfaction for every part of the test. This was an application that was identical for 29 minutes and 45 seconds of the experiment ... and they hated it.

Similarly, the first five minutes of a brand interaction will significantly impact our perception of our overall customer experience. If that first five minutes is poor, it's very difficult to recover. Not impossible, but not easy.

MOOD MATTERS

On my last trip to Chicago — I lived there for a year in 2011 and return once a year to visit — I spent an afternoon browsing my favourite stores on Michigan Avenue indulging my inner retail researcher (OK, truth be told I was really just shopping).

I popped into Gap, a popular —and highly profitable — fashion retailer established in 1969.

I'd been browsing through some racks at the front of the store for about thirty seconds when a sales assistant appeared from nowhere and, in an exaggerated southern accent, said "W'aaaeeell, will ya look at ch'yooouu!"

I was obviously a little stunned, wondering if I had a coffee stain on my white shirt or my fly was undone.

"Oh honey, I don't know whaaaaat ch'you got goin' on, but y'all look faaaaaabulous!!!!"

I smiled, feeling my cheeks flush a little. Then I proceeded to spend thirty minutes and three hundred dollars in the store.

TURNING CUSTOMERS INTO ADVOCATES

Make your customers feel good about themselves — particularly in the first five minutes of the experience — and watch how good they feel about your product for the remainder of the relationship.

When I owned a day spa years ago, I put a simple standard procedure in place that had a significant impact on the customer experience and revenues.

The policy was that every therapist had to compliment every client on one thing every single time. It was not negotiable.

Do you think the cumulative effect of a few thousand clients feeling a little bit better about themselves made a difference when it came to the end of their treatment and they were presented retail products to purchase? Absolutely it did; our retail sales went from 12% to 28% of revenue in under 12 months. Was that solely due to clients being paid compliments? Of course not, but I believe it played a significant role.

Visit any successful retail brand in Australia — Lorna Jane is a great example — and you'll not only notice that the staff engage with consumers in a genuine and unique way, but they also strike up a conversation that creates opportunities for compliments. They're interested, they're curious, they build commonality and they compliment. It's 'The Concierge Effect' in play and it makes their customers feel special. A potent combination in any retail environment.

"The Concierge Effect' is a strategy that applies as much to service-based businesses as it does retailers.

I recently headed up a research project for a financial institution with their mortgage customers. The objective was to identify gaps in the customer experience and opportunities to do things better.

The customers were generally delighted with the brand and their experience; they were happy with the way their query and application were handled, they were pleased with their interest rate and how a recent interest rate change had been communicated. But they did have one common cause of disappointment and it was a surprise.

Their most common cause for disappointment (more than 55% of customers raised it

unprompted) was that they didn't ever receive a welcome pack or welcome letter at the commencement of their loan. They felt let down that they were never officially 'welcomed' to the brand. And when you consider the size and tenure of each customer's financial commitment, it made sense.

REMOVING BARRIERS

Rightly or wrongly, the first transaction a customer has with your brand will dramatically impact how quickly they return (if at all), how much they spend, and their resulting lifetime transactional value.

With that in mind, it's important to extend 'The Concierge Effect' to not only how your customers are welcomed to your brand, but how smoothly the transaction goes, and how barrier-free it is also. By 'barriers' I mean any potential bumps in the transaction (remember the 'ten dollar minimum' rule in the first story in this book?).

In recent years several global retailers have launched in Australia, seeking to benefit from an advantageous exchange rate and a buoyant Australian retail sector.

Brands like H&M, Zara, Victoria's Secret and most recently Sephora, have firmly claimed their stake in the market.

Sephora launched its first Australian store in Sydney in December 2014 with much fanfare and weeks of customers lining up for hours to shop there. I waited a few months for the hysteria and holiday trade to die down before I went along to see what all the fuss was about.

The customer experience was flawless and, as expected, staff members were helpful, friendly and knowledgeable. But it was three minor aspects of the experience —simple gestures from three separate staff members — that made it special and memorable.

One staff member, noticing I was holding three items and still browsing, appeared with a shopping basket and elegantly relieved me of the items and whisked them into the basket. "This will free you up to browse more comfortably," she said as she looped the handle over my forearm.

She not only made my shopping experience easier, she also subtly reinforced the benefit — that I could keep shopping.

Secondly, as I was trying out liquid foundations, a staff member offered to help me and show me some additional brands that I perhaps hadn't seen. She recommended a brand that was less expensive than the one I was looking at and better suited to my complexion. She then recommended a special brush that enables minimal application but maximum coverage. Great result for me and a peripheral sale for Sephora.

Finally, as I was waiting in line with about ten other customers, a team member strolled up the line offering to check out anyone who was paying by card. This proactive sales approach is not something I've ever seen any other Australian retailer offer. It was a great example of The Concierge Effect and demonstration of a brand that's committed to serve their customers and save them time.

ROLL OUT THE RED CARPET

Despite moving from Sydney to Noosa several years ago, I have remained loyal to my Sydney-based accountant — predominantly because he's an excellent accountant, but also because of the way he made me feel the first time I went to his office nearly a decade ago.

Peter heads up a small firm of five accountants on level 10 of a 15 story building in North Sydney. He has two spare visitor car parks in the building that he pays for to enable clients to park securely and without having to hope for a lucky on-street park.

After being told by Peter's receptionist when I made the appointment that there was a designated client park available for me, I followed her instructions and pressed the intercom button at the boom gate.

After she buzzed me in and directed me to the first lot of carpark bays, I immediately noticed the sign:

'VIP PARKING RESERVED FOR AMANDA STEVENS.'

It made a simple thing like a visitors park feel much more special.



Summary

- The first five minutes of a customer interaction sets an important tone for the remainder of the brand relationship and influences the perceived customer experience. Start as you mean to continue.
- Consider how you might 'welcome' your customers to your brand.
 How could you demonstrate The Concierge Effect?
- Paying compliments to your customers is a simple yet powerful strategy. Make people feel good about themselves and watch how good they feel about your brand.
- Removing barriers at the point of purchase is an important way to demonstrate 'The Concierge Effect'. Give each and every customer the VIP treatment.

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66% of consumers say that 'respecting my time' is one of their key determinants of a positive customer service experience.



Customisation

The more aspects of your sales, marketing and customer service processes you customise and tailor to the individual needs of your customers, the higher the perceived value of your product or service.

AS HUMAN BEINGS, control is fundamentally important to us. We want to do things in our own time and in our own way, and we take exception to those encounters that force us to jump through hoops. By contrast, we appreciate experiences that are flexible, accommodating and leave us in control.

In a consumer sense, the most common approach to giving customers a sense of control is to simply offer more choice over where and when they interact with the brand, and what they buy.

Offering consumers a choice not only offers them control, it also enables them to customise their experience, something that speaks to the basic need to feel a sense of individuality.

The real challenge is to establish how much choice is enough and what it is exactly that we should be offering the customer to choose. Here are some options to consider:

CONTROL OVER WHEN

Time is our most precious commodity. 'Busy-ness' — real or perceived — is dictating our daily decisions. Similarly, the internet has revolutionised the way we do business because it has allowed us to shop, bank and do pre-purchase research at a time that suits us best.

Controlling when we do things isn't about choice per se, it's about providing a greater level of convenience and transparency.

This could be in the form of extended trading options, as we've seen recently with banks offering after hours and Saturday opening hours. You might offer a live chat option on your website for after hours enquiries (a service that could be outsourced cost-effectively).

Giving customers control over their time is not just about giving them choice over when

they are able to interact with your business, it's about demonstrating that you respect their time and managing their expectations around time. Waiting for a technician at home to come between 9am and 2pm is inconvenient, but offering two one-hour windows options — 9am-10am and 2pm-3pm — for the customer to choose from transfers the power dynamic from the organisation to the consumer.

Communicating timeframes to customers is another opportunity to create expectations and exceed them. Our perception of the inconvenience of wait times or delays can be dramatically impacted by how it's communicated. If a customer delivery is delayed a week with no communication, frustration and irritation rise. If the delay had been preempted, communicated and addressed proactively — perhaps with an apology gift or surprise bonus — the perception of the delay would be altered and the experience would feel customised.

CONTROL OVER WHAT

Customisation can be injected into the seemingly most minor customer touch points, beyond offering product, colour and size options:

Rather than offering your customers a glass of water, you might offer them the option of still or sparkling.

You might offer a choice of mini-upgrade options to your services for your customers to choose from and customise their experience.

You can also customise promotional offers by offering a choice of reward or prize (the research shows a choice of three works best).

Personalising a thank you gift or card based on individual preferences tells your customer that you understand and appreciate them.

Many major brands have taken customisation to the heart of product design, with the likes of Nike and Apple enabling consumers to design their own customised versions of their product offerings.

It's a strategy that's even reached the mighty golden arches, where mass produced Fillet-

a-Fish burgers are being replaced with gourmet burgers made to order and delivered to your table by a friendly waitress on a wooden board.

The 'Create your Taste' initiative allows McDonalds customers to custombuild their burger from an interactive kiosk, with a choice of bun, ingredients and condiments. The change also means table-service, allowing customers to relax with a drink while their customised burger is prepared and brought to the table.

Providing choice and the power for customers to customise their brand experience is just one way that brands are adding a personal touch to their offering (even those that are mass-produced). The result is word-of-mouth, word-of-mouse and in McDonalds' case, a much needed positive PR story.

Some businesses have chosen customisation as the basis for their entire business model and as a result, created a unique position in the marketplace and a cult following.

THE DAILY EDITED

The Daily Edited is an Australian luxury fashion brand, specialising in monogrammable leather goods ranging from phone covers to bags, wallets and other accessories.

Founded by entrepreneurs Alyce Tran and Tania Liu, the business model is based purely on customisation - the ability to monogram your item with your initials or name. It's a simple model but it's worked. Growing initially through word-of-mouth and word-of-mouse, The Daily Edited has emassed close to 300,000 Instagram followers, has launched internationally and in 2018 had annual revenues of \$30 million.

BUILD-A-BEAR

As the name suggests, a visit to a Build-A-Bear store enables you to create and build a stuffed toy from start to finish, complete with custom designed outfits and a unique barcode. Of course you also get to name your bear, which comes with its own personal birth certificate.

I took my five-year-old niece to a Build-A-Bear store and came away impressed – the process was seamless, fun and rewarding. I know others who have rated it as an

exceptional customer experience. And we're not alone: since the business started in the US in 1997 they have sold over 80 million bears and have over 400 stores across the world. Clearly their staff think it's fun too. In 2012 Build-A-Bear appeared in Fortune's '100 best companies to work for' list for the fourth year in a row.

Customisation can also be achieved by personalising minor touch point your competitors automate in a non-personalised way.

The Adelphi is a luxury boutique hotel in Melbourne. They have developed a customer experience culture that belies the impersonal processes of their larger competitors. For example, rather than the standard automated

'Welcome STEVENS, Amanda' appearing on the TV when turned on, the welcome message is hand written on the mirror in a white felt pen:

'Welcome back to the Adelphi Amanda, enjoy your stay:)'.

OFFERING CUSTOMISATION THROUGH NO CHOICE AT ALL

'Omakase' is a Japanese word meaning 'I'll leave it to you'. It's a tradition offered in the finest Japanese restaurants that gives the chef creative freedom to choose what is served and deliver the customer a memorable dining experience.

Despite removing choice from the customer, Omakase offers a highly customised experience for the diner. It's the equivalent of walking into a fashion store and rather than choosing something off the rack, having the designer conceive and custom make something for you.

The process of Omakase obviously requires a high level of trust in the chef, with the element of surprise and anticipation adding to the experience.

Offering an Omakase option for customers might not work for every business, but it's an interesting take on customisation by taking choice away rather than adding to it.

CUSTOMISING EVEN THE MOST FUNCTIONAL ASPECTS OF YOUR BUSINESS

Imagine if you could create customer advocacy before a customer had even transacted with your business.

Harnessing the power of customisation doesn't just relate to your products and services. In fact, customisation is perhaps at its most impactful when its applied to the sales and marketing process.

In July 2013 my good friends Kelly and her husband Mick had a home automation and security system installed as part of a house renovation and extension.

After Google searching a few options, Kelly arranged for three companies to quote on the system — let's call them companies A, B and C. During the following week, companies A, B and C sent consultants to the house to ascertain exactly what they needed and provide a quotation.

All three consultants were friendly, professional, well presented and knowledgeable. They all spent just over an hour at the house, asking questions, inspecting the relevant parts of the house and taking measurements. What made the consultant from company 'C' stand out, however, was the type of questions he asked. Rather than just inquiring about what type of system was needed, where the security sensors should ideally be placed, and which appliances and switches needed to be automated, company C consultant asked more in-depth questions about the household; the family's routine and lifestyle and what their main priorities were and why — from security, to convenience, to energy saving.

A few days later, when the quotes arrived, the reason for the more thorough questioning became immediately evident.

While the quotes from companies A and B looked almost identical — a single page PDF with similar wording and a generic estimate of cost — company's C quote followed a very different approach.

It was a four-page document that was printed in colour and delivered by courier in a hand-addressed envelope.

The first page of the document had a picture of the house that Kelly and Mick live in with their children Bella (four) and Brodie (six) and was entitled 'A Day in the Life of the Thompson household'.

The quotation was outlined on the second and third pages, but in a format very different to the stock-standard itemised pricing with a total.

It was written as a story, commencing with:

6:00am: The Thompson family have slept soundly all night, enjoying the safety and protection of their state-of-the-art customised home security system. The garden watering and pool filtration systems have just been activated, utilising off peak water and electricity rates to maximise energy efficiency and save money.

6:15am: Bella and Brodie wake to soft comfort lighting in their rooms that illuminates dark winter mornings.

6:30am: Mick awakes, approximately 30-minutes earlier than Kelly. He tiptoes down to the hallway and before he approaches the kitchen, he can smell that the coffee grinder is preparing freshly ground coffee.

7:00pm: Kelly arises and as she steps into the ensuite bathroom the tiles are warm and cosy underfoot from the pre-set underfloor heating.

The story continued as an hour-by-hour description of what happens in the Thompson household and how the proposed automation and security system fitted in to enhance the family's lifestyle.

This highly customised approach achieved three things. Firstly, it communicated to Kelly and Mick that the consultant from company C had asked thoughtful, insightful questions and that he really cared.

Secondly, it looked and felt like a customised document and approach, rather than a templated quotation that hundreds of other previous

customers had received a version of.

Finally, it instilled massive amounts of trust in company C because it said that they listened and really took the time to understand the unique, individual needs of the Thompson family.

In case you haven't already guessed the outcome, Kelly and Mick went with company C who, interestingly, offered the most expensive option.

But possibly a more incredible part of this story is the fact that the quotation format was so impressive, Kelly was talking about it at a dinner party the following weekend. Company C — through the power of customisation — had created a customer advocate before the transaction had even taken place!

FROM LITTLE THINGS BIG THINGS GROW ... OR DIE.

It's important to keep in mind that being curious, asking thoughtful questions and seeking out the individual preferences of your customers, will often create a level of expectation around delivery.

A few years ago I was searching for a hotel in Melbourne to host a series of client seminars. After narrowing the short list down to three of the top five-star hotels, I decided to organise site visits for my assistant and I. We organised the meetings for a Friday and while Kristie was going to fly down from Sydney just for the day, I arranged for my husband to fly down and meet me later in the day, and for the two of us to stay in Melbourne for the weekend, as it was his birthday.

I booked to stay at one of the hotels we were visiting so Kristie scheduled it as the first site inspection of the day so we could leave luggage there.

We had a great meeting with the hotel functions manager who was super professional and enthusiastic about how the hotel could deliver on our event needs. She was particularly excited when she found out my husband and I were staying on for the weekend. She asked me if there was anything in particular that would make our stay at the hotel more enjoyable. I joked that I'm happy as long as I have chocolate within easy reach at all times. I told her that it was my husband's birthday and that he loved Peroni Leggera, a particular type of beer. "I'll make sure there is some chilling in your room

TURNING CUSTOMERS INTO ADVOCATES

when you check in later today," she said.

The rest of the meeting went well and the hotel function rooms were exactly what we needed. Even after visiting the other two hotels throughout the day, the first hotel remained our preferred choice for the events.

Kristie returned to Sydney and my husband and I stayed on for three nights, including his birthday on the Sunday.

Not only did we not see any chocolate or Peroni Leggera throughout our stay, there was no recognition of Brendan's birthday, despite seeing the functions manager again on the Monday as we were checking out.

We elected not to choose the hotel for our events, not because of the price or location — in fact, it was the best option of the three overall — but because they set an expectation and then didn't follow through and this made me nervous about hosting our events there. For the cost of some chocolate and a few bottles of beer, they missed out on more than \$30,000 in business.

Using individual preferences to personalise the service experience for your customers is paramount, but if you ask, make sure you deliver!

Summary

- 'Customerisation' Customising the customer experience is one of the easiest ways to increase the perceived value of your product or service.
- How can you give your customers a sense of control over their product or service choice? Allow them to customise their 'menu' of options to increase engagement and ultimately enhance their experience.
- A customised approach to the sales and marketing process or even your quoting system can help you achieve advocacy, even prior to the first transaction.
- Showing an interest in custom preferences of your clientele creates an expectation that the preference will be acted upon, so be sure to follow through.



Do what you do so well that they will want to see it again and bring their friends.

WALT DISNEY

Celebration



Whether you realise it or not, there are key milestones in the relationships you have with your customers. Recognise, reward and celebrate them and watch your referrals grow.

WHEN I TRAVEL TO MELBOURNE, I have a driver who collects me from the airport. Not because I'm fancy, but because I like travelling in a nice clean BMW for around the same price as a taxi; a taxi that I might have to queue for and that more often than not is dirty.

Yilmaz Sanli has been my driver in Melbourne for over a decade. When he started being my driver in 2003 he was just starting his business. He had recently immigrated to Australia from Turkey, and English was his second language. Over the years, Yilmaz and I have become good friends — I travel to Melbourne a few times a month on average — we always have a great chat about life and business, and I've watched him build a successful company through sheer hard work and tenacity. He's eager to talk about business and I'm always keen to help him with ideas to help grow his business. He takes my advice with enthusiasm and gratitude.

I travel to Melbourne 3-4 times a month on average and in late November 2013, I arrived in Melbourne for a speaking engagement — a fleeting six hour visit — en route to Adelaide later that evening.

Yilmaz met me at the baggage carousel as usual and wheeled my bag to the car across the road. As we walked and chatted, catching up on the Melbourne weather and each other's family updates as normal, he seemed to have an extra spring in his step.

We arrived at the car and, as usual, he opened the rear door for me while unlatching the boot for my bag in one seamless movement. As I slid into the back seat, I noticed that there was a bottle of Moet & Chandon champagne, along with a cupcake with a candle in it in the console of the back seat.

When Yilmaz hopped in the driver's seat I said, "Yilmaz, what's this?"

He turned and looked at me with a beaming smile.

"Amanda, you probably don't realise, but I worked out that this week,

TURNING CUSTOMERS INTO ADVOCATES

it's exactly ten years since I've been your driver. Happy Anniversary!"

I was gob smacked, and quietly proud. My driver remembered the anniversary of when I became a client, and was celebrating the milestone.

As impressed and proud as I was, the full impact of Yilmaz's initiative didn't really hit me until about a week later, when I found myself telling some friends about it at a dinner party.

Yilmaz is a great driver and offers a great service, and I refer business to him at every opportunity. But his recognition of our milestone had literally given me something to talk about at a dinner party. I had a reason to talk about him and his business, proactively.

As humans, we're wired for recognition. We love nothing more than being noticed, being celebrated and being appreciated.

MILESTONE MARKETING

In any business, there are key milestones with your customers. There are external milestones that relate to their life events — birthdays, weddings, divorces, starting a business for example. Then there are internal milestones — anniversaries, spend levels and number of visits.

Celebrating these milestones gives you a unique opportunity to cement the relationship you have with your customers and develop what I call 'dormant referral opportunities'.

Regardless of your industry, your business type and the size of your business, referral opportunities are sitting, dormant, in your customer base right now.

There are loyal customers who buy your product or service, love your brand and are loyal to your business but aren't your vocal advocates. Why? Because they don't have a specific, top-of-mind reason to talk about you at a dinner party.

If you analysed your customer base, segmented the top ten or twenty percent of your customers and sent them a thank you gift, it could possibly generate more word-of-mouth business than you've had in years. It would make your brand top-of-mind and

give your customers a reason to talk about you.

BE YOUR CUSTOMERS' NUMBER ONE ADVOCATE

What many business owners and salespeople don't understand is that they have a multitude of opportunities to create advocacy; they just often don't take advantage of them. They overlook the most obvious opportunities to celebrate their clients' wins and achievements and be their chief cheerleader.

I love my mortgage broker Pete. Not just because he gets me great interest rates — which he does. And not because he miraculously managed to overnight some mortgage documents to me while I was holidaying on a remote island in Fiji a few years ago (the original documents had gone missing) — which he did.

When I talk to friends and family about Pete, the story I recall is the hand-written card he sent me in 2013 after seeing a news article that I had been chosen as the supporting speaker for former US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, at the Global Leadership Summit. The card included a copy of the article and was signed 'You go girl!, Pete:)'

If you want your customers to be your advocates, start with being an advocate for them.

THE POWER OF THE 'JUST BECAUSE' MILESTONE

In May 2015, I spoke at a small business breakfast for the Banyule City Council in Melbourne, Australia.

Amongst the 200+ business owners in the audience that day was Nikki Ellis, the founder and Managing Director of Cinch Personal Training Studios — a business she had opened just two months prior.

At the conclusion of the event, Nikki bought several of my books and, after chatting briefly with her and experiencing her infectious enthusiasm and passion for business, I sensed it wouldn't be the last time we spoke.

Nikki had taken copious notes and was eager to get back to her business and implement some of the ideas she'd cooked up while listening to my presentation.

"I've had a light bulb moment, Amanda," she proclaimed excitedly. "Creating advocates for our business needs to be our primary focus."

Sure enough, five days later, I received this email from Nikki (reproduced with her permission):

Dear Amanda

I attended your presentation at the Banyule Business Networking Breakfast last Thursday – not even a week ago.

I've always thought I delivered pretty good customer service but since your talk I have gone into overdrive! Here is what I have done:

- A new client doing a trial with one of our trainers was surprised by me arriving at the end of her session to thank her sincerely for choosing us over all the other trainers in Melbourne and giving her a beautiful scented candle. There was also a handwritten note (She cried).
- Another new client works nearby I texted to check if it was OK, then popped in to see her with (another) scented candle. In front of her colleagues I told her how special it was she had chosen us and how much we were looking forward to training her. She hugged me! ...then one of her colleagues made a time to see us, and her boss told me to bring in business cards and flyers for their front desk!
- One of my clients had a cold, I drove to her house with a "Cinchy Cold Cure" pack and popped it in her letterbox— some olive leaf extract, fresh turmeric, fresh ginger with a little hand written note. (She couldn't believe it!).
- I started a tab at the local café all members get free coffee there for the next fortnight.
- Next week we start a deal with a local hairdresser My clients get \$10 blow dries all next Friday.
- I have been giving out free samples of protein powder, kind words and extra time with clients all week and the magic has worked!

Talk about taking action! Inspired by her early results, Nikki continued with her commitment to creating client advocacy. Five months later, I received a second email:

Hi Amanda

Well it is five months since I attended your talk at Ivanhoe Town Hall in Melbourne – and I have read and re-read your books several times! You continue to inspire me. One of the questions I ask myself each day is "How can I create magic for our clients and staff in my business today?" and it has paid off. Three months ago I was runner up in the Banyule Business Woman of the Year Awards and two weeks ago we (Cinch) were finalists in the Banyule BestBiz Awards – the only gym/PT studio to be in the finals! Given we only opened our doors in March I feel very positive with the culture we have created.

Your words have stayed with me all these months – our advertising to women is completely different to other gyms and I frequently hear that people have joined because of our ads in the local school newsletter. (I've attached one in case you are curious)

My latest fun thing to do is random acts of kindness – a bunch of flowers, a nice card etc, attached is always a "random act of kindness – pass it on card". But it does have our business name on it too of course! And it IS fun – because it feels fabulous.

Our little business that thought it could is growing beautifully and we are starting to look at much larger premises for our next move.

Amanda – thankyou sincerely. I remember your words every day, and I truly hope I have sent you a little magic today via this email. I'm sure that one day I will get to see you in person again and I'll come and say thank-you in real life.

TURNING CUSTOMERS INTO ADVOCATES

I rang Nikki for an update in early January 2016 and, true to her style, she was sitting on her floor with butchers paper when I called, pen poised to brainstorm more ideas for her business.

I was eager to hear more about her success and the specific bottom line results she'd seen from creating fans for her business. Her 'random acts of kindness' campaign, which involves her spending \$30 each week on a gift, flowers or other gesture for someone who needs it most — a client, a colleague or an acquaintance — had secured her eight new clients in less than six months. At an estimated per-customer lifetime value of \$10,000, that's \$80,000 in revenue, for a total investment of less than \$1,000. Prior to this initiative, Nikki's advertising efforts included full-page magazine ads — tens of thousands of dollars worth of media spend, for zero result. Needless to say she's cancelled her print ads in favour of her random acts of kindness campaign!

According to Nikki, she's also witnessed some unexpected, peripheral benefits from the campaign.

"The campaign has not only acquired new clients for the business, but it has fortified the relationship we have with the existing clients who have done the referring." Improved customer acquisition and customer retention — exponential impact.

Another powerful learning curve for Nikki has been that some of her best advocates are not necessarily her customers, or even her potential customers.

"One of the recipients of a random act of kindness was my 90-year old neighbour, who needed cheering up," she says. "It's unlikely she'll ever be a Cinch client, but that hasn't stopped her being our vocal brand advocate."

Nikki's random acts of kindness, through the power of cumulative effect, are having a profound and powerful impact on her business. She's also testament to the fact that creating advocates doesn't need to be complicated or difficult. In Nikki's case, it's been a cinch!

MOST IMPORTANTLY, CELEBRATE AND REWARD REFERRALS

When the source of a new customer is 'referral' — as opposed to 'advertising' or 'Google search' — it usually results in greater than average spend, less price sensitivity and often, an ideal customer. So how do we get more of them?

The answer lies in the simple fact that it's human nature to repeat behaviour we're rewarded for. Celebrating referrals in the form of a thank you gift, a reward or bonus is one of the easiest ways to increase referrals and new customers that come via word-of-mouth. It's a simple strategy – but it works.

Summary

- There are key milestones in the relationships you have with your customers. Acknowledge, reward and celebrate them to get your customers talking about you and cultivate dormant referral opportunities.
- Sometimes your greatest advocates will come from outside your customer base. Random acts of kindness can create additional brand ambassadors.
- Reward customers who refer people to your business. They feel confident in entrusting their friends and family to you and your brand. Recognise and reward!

Your customer doesn't care how much you know until they know how much your care.

Damon Richards



Connection

66% of consumers say that 'respecting my time' is one of their key determinants of a positive customer service experience.



HOW STICKY IS YOUR BRAND? I don't mean in the literal sense, but how engaging are the different touch points your customer has with your business?

Everything you do in business is what I call an 'MMM' – Mini Marketing Message. It's how your phone is answered, it's how your invoices are worded, it's your business card, it's your in-store signage, it's everything your customers see, feel and experience.

Your Mini Marketing Messages present an opportunity to build customer loyalty and advocacy by surprising and delighting.

Called your own business lately? Step into the shoes of a customer, smile and dial. Does the response and conversation inspire you or brighten your day? If not, it's time to change the script and train your front-line people to understand that they are the director of first impressions.

HOW FIVE SIMPLE WORDS LED ME TO SWITCH BANKS

There are fewer business arenas more competitive than retail banking. The last decade has seen most of the major banks scrambling to become more consumer-centric, helpful and innovative, in the face of challenger brands and credit unions that have grabbed market share with their friendly approach, can-do attitude, great customer service and all-round consumer-centric culture.

In response, the big banks have u-turned on cutting costs and closing branches. They're now re-launching their brands with celebrity ambassadors, innovative new retail fit-outs, and staff that sound more like a friendly next door neighbour than the grumpy teller of a few years ago, who you would have to awkwardly communicate with through the gap in the perspex.

Let's be frank, some of our banks are almost unrecognisable compared to ten years ago; they're all far more consumer-centric and competitive.

TURNING CUSTOMERS INTO ADVOCATES

Like many Australians, I 'spread the love' across a number of banks. I have business accounts with two different banks and mortgages spread across separate financial institutions also.

In July 2015 I visited my local St. George branch to sign some papers authorising my assistant Kristie to have access to a business account.

The staff member who greeted me was ultra friendly and was able to help me immediately. As she was explaining the form I needed to complete, I noticed something unique about her name badge.

Printed under her name — Gloria — were the words "I grew up in Fiji".

Coincidentally, I had returned from Fiji less than a week earlier. This sparked a fun, friendly conversation that lasted just over ten minutes. Gloria asked me where I grew up (Noosa) and we compared stories about growing up in an idyllic seaside environment.

The experience was refreshing, engaging and evolved into a conversation about my banking needs and how St. George could serve me better. I mentioned I had commenced a lending application with another bank for pre-approval on a mortgage.

"Let me see what I can do for you there," she said.

Twenty minutes later, I walked out of the bank with approval on the loan and an interest rate nearly a full percent lower than what the other bank had offered me.

Every touch point across your business — even something as simple as a name badge — is an opportunity to share facts about your business or your staff and, in doing so, create a talking point.

Here are some other ways to humanise your brand, offer opportunities for your customers to connect with your brand and increase your 'stickiness'.

Include a fun, unexpected fact in your email signature relevant to your business

 how you have your coffee, how many countries you've travelled to, who your business hero is, which sport you're most passionate about, which sporting team

you barrack for, how many siblings you have, the best advice you were ever given, or which charity you support.

- Install a herb garden in your store or office and invite customers to take some home with them when they visit.
- Give your customers a choice of three charities you're supporting and allow them to choose which charity their purchase will generate a contribution to.
- Paint a wall in chalk paint and invite your customers to share an inspirational
 quote, answer a question of the week, or play naughts and crosses with a staff
 member.

THE ULTIMATE TALKING POINT

Some businesses and people really go the extra mile when it comes to connecting with their customers.

On a recent trip to Thailand to speak at a conference, my husband and I decided to extend the trip for a few days and enjoy some sun, sand and diving.

We booked a half-day private reef dive for the following day. Our dive instructor was a fun, friendly and funny Canadian named Scott. He was chatty and outgoing but also obviously very knowledgeable. We felt immediately safe and in good hands.

On the boat trip out to the reef, I noticed his forearms and lower legs were covered in tattoos of fish, octopus, turtles, starfish, stingrays and sharks. It immediately told me he was passionate about the underwater world, but the magnitude and relevance of his body art only became fully apparent five minutes into our guided dive when he pointed to his left ankle animatedly. Confused for a moment, we soon realised he was using his tattoo to indicate the appearance of an octopus to our left. This visual sea creature game continued throughout the dive whenever he spotted something he wanted us to see. It was a unique, fun experience and one that we've talked about hundreds of times since.

This type of connection obviously requires a fair amount of commitment (okay, a crazy amount of commitment) and while I'm certainly not suggesting you resort to getting a tattoo to create a connection with your customers, it's food for thought!

MOTION THROUGH EMOTION

Whenever I'm conducting sales training for retail teams, I spend a lot of time on 'the notion of emotion' and the role it plays in the consumer decision process.

Having conversations with consumers about how your product or service makes them feel is a far more powerful sales technique than simply discussing whether they like it or it suits their needs. An emotional connection to a brand, business, product or service is a necessary foundation for advocacy; as consumers we're far more likely to talk about brands we love, rather than products and services we like.

This would play out in different scenarios as follows:

A fashion retailer: "That looks spectacular on you ... it fits perfectly!" would be more powerful as:

"It fits you like a glove ... but the most important question – how does it feel?"

A mortgage broker: "I'm pretty sure I'm able to get you an additional .25% interest rate discount." Would be more powerful as:

"I'm feeling confident that we can secure you an additional .25% saving, which will add up substantially over the lifetime of the loan. I'm sure that would make you happy ...?"

A real estate agent: "I know selling a home can be an emotional time so I'm going to put a process in place that will not only get you a great result, but will also ensure you feel supported throughout and limit any inconvenience."

THE ULTIMATE EMOTION-BASED SALES PROCESS

My eldest sister Belinda and her husband Kevin recently changed financial planners. They are moving into a stage of life that requires some succession planning for their business, as well as planning for retirement.

Their new financial planner, in the process of ascertaining their financial position, goals

and aspirations, was outlining several scenarios relevant to their life stage to determine how prepared they were for the unexpected.

In one of the more theatrical illustrations, he placed a thin black sheet over Kevin (with his permission and firstly clarifying that he didn't suffer from claustrophobia).

He then turned to Belinda and gave her the hypothetical situation that Kevin had passed away. What would she do? How would she feel and how would she cope?

The impact of this was obviously far more dramatic than a one-dimensional conversation about a 'what / if' scenario. It made it real, and it provided a powerful stage to discuss things on a more emotive level.

CREATING CONNECTION THROUGH COMMUNITY

An important part of leveraging customer advocacy is building a tribe; a community of raving fans who can connect, interact and share.

By providing these connection opportunities, you're tightening the fabric of advocacy, as the brand loyalty your customers feel is verified, validated and enhanced by other people who are just like them.

A brand community can take on various forms and channels beyond your social media pages. Consider establishing an online community, hold some live seminars or sponsor a relevant event and invite some of your best customers to come along. Where relevant, it could also include a charity element.

One Australian brand that has been incredibly successful at establishing an online community is exercise and lifestyle clothing brand Lorna Jane. Brand advocates for Lorna Jane have various opportunities to connect and be a part of the LJ community – through online forums, in-store initiatives, larger-scale events and clubs dedicated to sub interests such as cooking, beauty and yoga. Many would argue that the way that Lorna Jane has built such connection and advocacy, it's moved beyond a brand to a movement.

Connect your customers to each other and you strengthen the connection they have with your brand.

Summary

- Everything you do is a Mini Marketing Message. Even the most minor of consumer touch points can have a significant impact on customer engagement and loyalty.
- Consider how you could humanise your business and harness a sense of fun— by giving your customers greater insight into your team members and your brand story.
- Your customers are more likely to talk about how your brand makes them feel than the functional benefits of your product or service. Direct sales conversations towards emotion rather than just rational logic.
- Explore opportunities for your brand loyalists to connect, interact and share, both online and offline.



Communication

Retention is the name of the game in business. It's not how many customers you can attract, it's how many you can keep.

Gary Vaynerchuk

MANY BUSINESSES NEVER FULLY MAXIMISE the value of their existing customers, often because they simply fail to talk to them!

Implementing an ongoing 'lifecycle marketing' program and marketing proactively to your existing customers offers great rewards because of two simple marketing principles:

- You can often generate more revenue from an existing customer than a new customer.
- 2. The revenue you generate usually comes at a much lower investment cost (so you enjoy more profitable revenues).

With the advancement in automated marketing technology, keeping in touch with your existing customers to nurture and optimise their engagement — and spend — has never been easier or more cost-effective. By using the knowledge you have about your customers you can launch lifecycle marketing campaigns that pre-empt and deliver on their individual needs. Rather than blanket direct marketing with the title 'Dear Valued Customer', you can craft highly personalised offers that are personal, meaningful and relevant.

So what makes a lifecycle marketing program successful? How do you keep in touch with your existing customers and send these offers without coming across as all 'spammy'?

Here are four important considerations when developing and launching your lifecycle marketing program, to ensure it delivers the greatest possible outcome for you, and turns your one-time customers into loyal advocates rather than turning them off altogether.

1. ADD VALUE

First and foremost, your communications should be driven by the primary objective of delivering value to your customers. Not just in the form of discounts, specials and exclusive offers, but also in the form of 'unexpected value'. Consider bonus video content, an e-book, a special report, an event invitation, a complimentary online course or other content you generate that is relevant and valuable to your customers.

Deliver value regularly and the law of reciprocity will do the rest.

2. HAVE A REASON

Ensure your communications have a clear, specific reason and benefit to the customer. Sending a monthly newsletter? Don't send one just for the sake of it — be clear on the purpose of the communication and what, if any, action you'd like your customer to take. Respect your customers' time by offering purpose and meaning with your communications.

3. ADOPT A HYBRID MODEL

Businesses are generating unprecedented levels of customer intelligence — commonly referred to as 'big data'. In fact, many organisations are being challenged not by a lack of customer data, but too much of it. Large companies employ entire teams of analysists who spend their days evaluating the multitude of data streams and insights they have on customer behaviour, trying to make sense of it all and distill it into actionable ideas to improve the customer experience — not an easy task.

Ironically, with the focus on data analysis and how to leverage the ability to automate as much of the marketing function as possible, the result is often a loss of personalisation and impact. Consumers are increasingly immune to 'mass personalisation' techniques, and while it's sensible to automate aspects of the marketing function to achieve better scale and efficiencies, there is the ever-present danger of over-automation.

Balancing sophisticated and intelligent marketing automation tools with highly

personalised touches is an emerging hybrid model that I believe we will see more of. Five star hotels are now Googling guests before they check in so they can provide a bespoke customer experience peppered with extraordinary personal touches. Airlines, banks and telcos are investing heavily in training their front line staff to draw on customer profile information to anticipate and predict customer needs, surprise, delight and deliver magical moments that say "we know you, understand you and value you."

Leading US bank Wells Fargo Chairman and CEO John Stumpf has a daily ritual that is not-negotiable; personally phoning one employee and one customer unannounced to hear first hand how his bank is doing.

Speaking at the Fortune Global Forum in November 2015, Stumpf said his one-on-one phone calls fit with the bank's culture of "customer advocacy."

"It's all about the customer," he said.

Stumpf also adds that while speaking to just one customer and one employee a day doesn't sound like a lot, over time it gives him important insights on the performance of the brand and how the customer experience is tracking, without it being sugar coated.

"By the time things come to me, through five layers of management, even shoe polish tastes like ice cream," he says.

Adding a personalised, human touch to your communications could be as simple as personally writing to five customers each week. One hand-written thank you card can have an infinitely greater impact than a year of pre-scheduled email sequences.

So, by all means, fully exploit available automation tools, but don't completely replace the little touches with a mail merge.

4. IT'S A TWO-WAY STREET

Consider how you've communicated to your existing customers over the last 12 months. Has it been a conversation, or a one-way dialogue?

Communicating with your customers is not just about keeping in touch; it's an opportunity for you to engage, connect and gather important feedback.

Asking your customers to share their opinion on your product, service or customer experience is a great way to start a discussion about how you can serve them better. By proactively requesting a review, you can also be a 'traffic controller' of sorts for negative and positive feedback to mitigate negative reviews appearing online.

For example, you might email your customers soon after their first interaction with your business, giving them two options (note the subtle language of the two options) – click here to leave a review and help us spread the word! (direct link to relevant review site). Or click here if you have any concerns or feedback on how we could improve things so we can respond immediately (direct link to an email address).

This email means you're in control to a certain degree of the pathways of feedback. You're minimising the probability of negative feedback being public, but you're still ensuring you receive it offline so you can address it immediately.

The mere concept of proactively asking your customers for feedback may raise some hesitation or mild anxiety in you, and you wouldn't be alone. The reason many businesses don't ask their customers what they think is that they're scared to hear the answer.

RESPONDING TO NEGATIVE FEEDBACK OR REVIEWS

So you've asked your customer for feedback and it's not good. Hopefully they've followed your link and emailed you directly, but some people feel compelled to air their opinion in a public arena.

You're sitting at your desk and a notification pops up on your screen that a customer has critiqued you on a review site. You take a peek. It's bad. The customer is annoyed, dissatisfied and angry. What do you do?

More and more, consumers are relying on the opinions of others when making purchase decisions. According to Zendesk, customer service software platform, 88

percent of consumers have been influenced by an online customer service review when deciding what to buy.

Getting positive reviews on sites like TripAdvisor, Yelp, Google and LinkedIn is now not just about ensuring your customers are happy and positive about their experience, it's an increasingly important aspect of new customer acquisition.

And while no one wants to get negative reviews, they sometimes happen. Here are six ways to deal with them if they happen:

1. RESPOND PROMPTLY

Promptly responding to negative reviews shows the customer that you care and value their opinion. It may also be the catalyst that results in a person who had a bad experience with your business giving you a second chance.

2. TAKE THE ISSUE OFFLINE

Depending on the problem, rather than respond to an adverse review by leaving a public comment, it may be better to reply privately via email or phone. For example, Yelp gives business page owners the opportunity to do so via email. If you resolve the matter to the customer's satisfaction, leave a brief comment in the public timeline thanking them and expressing how delighted you are that a solution was found.

3. BE GRACIOUS, BE GRATEFUL

A negative review, particularly one that expresses a strong opinion, such as in the example below, may stimulate emotions that could lead to a sterner response than necessary. Your mindset and reaction is critical — view the complaint as a gift rather than a personal attack.

Take time to collect your thoughts and respond by saying something like, "Thank you for taking the time to share your feedback. I would value the opportunity to speak with you about your experience. Please contact me as soon as it's convenient."

If, after talking with the person, you find there is merit to his or her

comments, take proactive steps to remedy the situation.

4. FIX IT BY GOING THE EXTRA MILE

An unhappy customer is often one of your most vocal future advocates. Depending on how you compensate for the issue, you can create a situation where a customer is happier in the end than if they'd been given an initial experience that gave them no cause for complaint. Within reason, demonstrate to your angry customer that you acknowledge and validate their feelings and are willing to go to extraordinary lengths to resolve it. In most cases, your focus on a speedy and exceptional resolution will dilute their emotion.

5. DON'T STRIVE FOR FIVE STARS 100% OF THE TIME

Negative reviews can benefit your business. If every single review is gushing and positive with five stars, potential customers can become suspicious, feeling that the reviews are "manufactured" rather than being left by real customers. As paradoxical as it sounds, less than perfect or negative reviews can contribute to building trust, rather than diminishing it, particularly if the review is accompanied by a prompt, thoughtful response from the business.

6. SHARE REVIEWS WITH YOUR EMPLOYEES

Make sure everyone in your company is aware of reviews you've received, both positive and negative. Acknowledge, celebrate and reward the positive reviews; encourage transparent and constructive discussion around the negative ones. Not only will that help to ensure you prevent similar problems in the future, it builds a customer-centric mindset among employees.

Summary

- Lifecycle marketing allows you to nurture and extract value from your existing and past customers by meeting their ongoing and evolving needs.
- Beware of over-automation; a combination of pre-set communications and more bespoke, personal touches will have the greatest impact.
- Ensure your communication has value for your customer and encourages response and interaction.
- Welcome all customer feedback good and bad. Negative customer comments are an opportunity to improve your service, and a speedy response will minimise any damage to your brand.

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If you want to be faster, COMPETE. If you want to be better, COLLABORATE.



Collaboration



KEEP CALM

AND

COLLABORATE

DOES YOUR BUSINESS HAVE A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION? Are you engaging in regular conversations with your customers — and your staff — about your business? Are you seeking their perspective and benefiting from having 'co-parents' for your brand?

One common characteristic of brands famous for their customer experience — Disney, Zappos, Ritz-Carlton, Virgin, Apple — is their engagement of customers and employees in the customer experience process.

COLLABORATING WITH YOUR TEAM

Years ago when I owned a day spa, I overheard one of my staff say six words to a client that literally made me cringe. The six words were; "I haven't tried it myself, but ..."

While our retail product sales were increasing significantly as a result of a new staff training and incentive program I'd put in place, I realised I'd overlooked an obvious ingredient — ensuring the staff were customers and brand advocates. In fact I was expecting the staff to talk passionately about the skincare products to customers without any personal experience. Crazy, huh?

A culture of collaboration should start from the inside out. Wherever possible, your staff should be your greatest brand advocates. When they can see the business through the eyes of a customer, they will not only be more empathetic and considered in how they deal with other customers, they will be inspired to deliver exceptional service.

Aside from making your team members brand ambassadors, they can also be your innovation partners. In fact, involving your staff and charging them with conceiving new ways to up the ante on your customer service levels can be a brilliant ongoing team building exercise, particularly if it has some friendly rivalry and incentives tied in. Just remember, everyone is different and will be motivated differently.

CATCH YOUR STAFF OUT DOING THE RIGHT THING

For some people there's nothing more motivating than having their leader or manager catching them doing the right thing, or acknowledging great results.

Now you might think "Well my staff doing the right thing is really just them doing their job! Why should I have to recognise them!?" And that may be true, but a little bit of recognition goes a long way. Singling someone out and praising them when they deliver exceptional customer service will increase the chances of them doing it again.

As human beings, we're programmed to repeat behaviour that we're rewarded for, not just in a monetary sense, but also in an emotional sense. When you praise your staff and give them that well done pat on the back, a chemical reaction takes place in their brain. Dopamine, which is the happy hormone in the brain, increases. These levels can stay elevated for a few hours, so not only does recognition make your team member feel good, they'll more than likely bring a happy and enthusiastic demeanour to their interaction with the next customer.

PRAISE IS A GROUP EFFORT

You'll find that a little competition goes a long way and being acknowledged in front of their peers in a team meeting or get-together can be a real hot button for some people. Acknowledging and referencing someone's performance can not only make them feel recognised and valued, it will hopefully inspire the rest of your team to follow suit and step up to perform at that higher level.

EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE IS A GIFT

When it comes to staff rewards and incentives, most people think of cash bonuses. But often a thoughtful gift means more than a crisp fifty dollar note.

Giving a gift to a staff member to reward exceptional customer service often has a higher degree of emotion attached to it. It says you've thought about it, considered that person and bought something with them in mind. That will often have a greater impact than a cash bonus.

So even if you do have a cash-based incentive scheme, consider over-riding it with a physical reward in the form of a thoughtful gift. Tapping into the art of gift giving can inspire a level of motivation in your team that money sometimes can't buy.

COLLABORATE WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS

Many years ago when I headed up a marketing and research company, I oversaw Customer Advisory Boards for three of Australia's largest retailers. One of those brands was Best & Less.

Each month, I would meet with 10-12 Best & Less customers, a cross section of the community representative of the brand's customer base. This was more than an extended focus group — it was a six-month program with a set agenda and clear objectives and outcomes (after six months, a new panel was selected).

It was also more than a get together and a casual chat. The advisory board was consulted on a range of issues relevant to the brand and encompassing aspects such as marketing and promotions, the in-store experience, the customer loyalty program and customer service.

These Customer Advisory Board meetings not only offered an important view of the brand through the eyes of the customer, they provided a potent incubator of ideas and innovation.

In fact, what I recall most clearly from these sessions is how seriously the advisory board members took their role. They came to each meeting clearly having spent hours doing additional work and research outside their set homework. They would have pages of ideas; notes taken from mystery shopping with competitors and other proactive initiatives that were outside their brief. Their obvious sense of pride and ownership reflected their level of engagement and effort. As a result, they became passionate brand ambassadors.

Appointing an advisory board is one of the most simple, cost effective ways to collaborate with your customers and see your business from their perspective. They will not only give you honest answers and fresh ideas, they will value and appreciate that you asked their opinion in the first place.

Establishing an advisory board is a matter of five simple steps:

- 1. Recruit a panel of 10-12 customers or clients that are representative of your target audience (hint: diversity is key as it will give you a range of different opinions).
- 2. Source an objective facilitator who can lead and moderate the meetings (you will get much more honest insights).
- **3.** Have clear long-term objectives for the program, as well as a set agenda for each meeting.
- 4. Feed back results and outcomes to the group throughout the program. The group will be more motivated to develop new ideas and strategies if they can see that their thoughts and opinions are having an impact.
- Reward participants. Ensure they feel validated and valued. They will not only leave the program feeling like their opinions matter, they will be vocal brand advocates.

Of course, Customer Advisory Boards can be appointed on a larger scale using an online forum. While you will lose some of the personal interaction, this approach will give you a more quantitative result and more robust data on questions posed to the group. This approach might be useful when testing new product ideas or exploring website usability.

HOW THE SMALLEST THINGS CAN MAKE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE

Larry Tesler was Vice President of Shopping Experience at Amazon and notes an example of the value of customer input.

Amazon was running a super saver shipping program, but customers were having difficulty finding the information.

"Customers were hunting all of the page to find out whether the product qualified for the shipping discount — the message was less than an inch away from the price, but they didn't see it," he says.

Teslar and his team decided to test one tiny revision to one sentence. "We changed the

word 'and' to an ampersand." They ran tests with customers and the change worked — customers clearly saw the message and could go through to the checkout page seamlessly.

"Just because it doesn't make sense to you doesn't mean it won't make perfect sense to your customers," says Tesler.

Ask your customers what they think and what they want. Watch them interact with your business and listen to what they say.

COLLABORATE WITH YOUR BUSINESS PARTNERS

In an effort to get a holistic point of view on your business and gather ideas to build a world-class business based on customer advocacy, your suppliers, wholesalers, vendors and other business partners can also provide a valuable perspective.

Leading brands such as Ritz-Carlton make this part of their culture of listening. In addition to listening to and measuring the input of staff, guests and desired future customers, Ritz-Carlton hosts regular forums to secure the input of their key referral sources in the travel industry (including travel experts who book individual and corporate business with them), strategic partners (restaurateurs and other retail partners) and the investors and owners of buildings Ritz-Carlton manages.

In his book The New Gold Standard, author Joseph Michelli explores the impact of these forums, following in-depth interviews with several participants. Nancy Strong, Chief Executive Officer of Strong Travel Services, shares how Ritz-Carlton solicited her input: "I attended the very first Travel Industry Advisory Council many years ago in Atlanta. There were a number of travel agents who sat at that table along with many Ritz-Carlton general managers. Our group of travel professionals raised a number of issues, and I remember thinking: I hope the managers are taking notes." Apparently they were. Nancy continues, "Within three to six months every issue we brought up was addressed and handled. You can imagine how we, as travel agents, their partner clients, felt after that. I mean, you talk about a warm and fuzzy feeling toward a partner!"

In the end, all business is personal. Great leadership involves listening to the people in and around your business — the people who truly understand and have invested interest in making your business stronger.

COLLABORATE WITH COMPLEMENTARY BUSINESSES

One answer to bolstering your customer advocacy might exist with another brand seemingly unrelated to yours, in the form of a Joint Venture (JV) marketing campaign. It enables you to leverage the assets of another, non-competing brand to deliver high perceived value to your customers — at little or zero cost to you.

Joint Venture Marketing is a marketing strategy used by some of the world's most profitable companies. In fact, McDonalds and Disney easily hold the record for the longest running, most profitable joint venture marketing agreement in history. For years, the iconic McDonald's Happy Meal, a product purchased predominantly for children over a hundred million times a year globally, has been the JV vehicle for Disney's newly-released movies.

By partnering with McDonalds, Disney provides the toy figurines that add value to the Happy Meal and puts the current Disney blockbuster top of mind for their target audience.

So exactly what is Joint Venture Marketing? It's a marketing exercise where you tap into the customer list of another business, and vice versa. There are two ways you can structure a JV, and that is either a profit share or an agreed mutual benefit.

For example, a JV between a day spa and a hair salon might work like this: both might agree that each will endorse each other to their respective customer lists in the form of a special offer. No commission or profit share will be paid because they've received a mutual benefit. This is a two-way marketing exercise.

Another option could be a one-way campaign, where you negotiate a JV promotion with a business that has your ideal customer list by constructing an offer to be promoted to that database. You would pay a percentage of sales to the JV partner as a reward for access to their list.

Here are some other examples of Joint Venture Marketing campaigns:

- A real estate agent promotes their services to the members of a football club, offering
 a rebate to the club on each property sale (fundraising JV).
- A gift with purchase that you provide to your JV partner to gift to their VIP customers (gift promotion JV).
- A business consultant provides a free copy of their book to an accountant's clients (information-based JV).
- A special membership package offer available exclusively to your JV partner's customers (exclusive access JV).

As you can see, the format of your JV is limited only by your imagination. The key is striking up a mutually beneficial arrangement that enables you to either tap into a new database of customers and / or add value to your existing customers without it costing you what it's worth.

COLLABORATE WITH YOUR COMPETITION

Say what?! Collaborate with your opposition?! Yes, if it's in the best interests of the customer. Referring them to a competitor if you can't provide the product or service they're after, then doing your best to ensure they get what they want (even if it means losing the sale) will potentially turn a non-customer into an advocate. And if you're lucky, the law of reciprocity says that your competitors will do the same.

Remember, sometimes your greatest advocates will be people who aren't even your customers. Yet.

Summary

- A collaboration culture should start from the inside out. Making your staff your most important brand advocates will give them a powerful customer perspective and empower them to deliver sensational customer experiences.
- A customer advisory board is one of the most simple, cost-effective ways to get a 'sense check' on your brand, through the eyes of your customers. Think of it as an ongoing sounding board to test new product concepts, marketing concepts and ideas to improve the customer experience.
- Seek the opinions of your suppliers and other strategic partners. They see your business from a different angle and have a vital stake in the outcome of your business.
- Collaborating with complementary businesses in other words, brands that have a similar target customer gives you some exciting tools to build and develop customer loyalty, not to mention tap into potential new customers.

Motes...



CREATIVE Innovation



Mo company ever created an innovation. People innovate, not companies.

SETH GODIN

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED that some of the world's most successful companies got to where they are by taking a great idea from another company and improving on it? For example, Apple made history when it introduced the mouse to computer users in the early 1980s. The only problem was Apple didn't invent the mouse; Xerox engineers did. But it was Steve Jobs who saw the potential of the technology after visiting the Xerox Research Centre in the late 1970s. Back then it was a clunky three-button design that would cost in excess of \$300. Seeing the potential, Steve Jobs took the idea back to Apple's engineers, who adapted it to Apple's design, streamlined it to one button, reduced the manufacturing cost and proceeded to blow the minds of consumers — and revolutionise the world of personal computing at the time.

You can improve on your customer service in much the same way, by soaking up ideas from other brands, being on the lookout for exceptional customer experiences and being curious about the mechanics behind businesses that truly impress.

In December 2009, I was dining at the world-famous Tetsuya's Restaurant in Sydney. Tetsuya's is a culinary experience like no other; a ten-course degustation menu with matching wines. Japanese chef Tetsuya Wakuda is consistently cited as one of the greatest chefs of his time and Tetsuya's has featured on the Top 50 Restaurants of the world list several times over the last ten years — a list that's hard enough to make it to, but even harder to stay on. Even at \$330 a head plus wines, there's a 3-4 month waiting list for a reservation.

On this particular evening, my second visit to Tetsuya's, I was struck by the incredible timing at which each of the ten incredible dishes arrive at each table in a restaurant that seats 280 people. The intervals were precisely timed, each dish was flawless and it all happened effortlessly.

The inquisitive part of me took over and I couldn't help but ask our very attentive waiter how it all happened so smoothly.

"Would you like to see?" he said with a smile and a twinkle in his eye. With that, I

TURNING CUSTOMERS INTO ADVOCATES

was ushered into Tetsuya's kitchen, where I caught my inner foodie silently bowing in adoration.

For over ten minutes, I stood, mesmerised while over 60 chefs whizzed around in organised chaos. This was a pressure cooker of performance, where nothing less than perfection on a plate left the kitchen.

The most inspiring member of this culinary orchestra was the conductor; the guy standing at the whiteboard with two stopwatches. The whiteboard listed every table and a record of precisely where each table was in the 13 courses and, more amazingly, at what time each course left the kitchen.

That's right, the conductor had a handle on the degustation experience for every table in the restaurant—down to the second.

Just over a week later, I was reflecting on my experience in the hallowed Tetsuya's kitchen. At the time, I was running a marketing and advertising agency and we were having a challenge with our project management system due to a recent growth spurt.

Jobs in our creative studio were getting held up with bottlenecks and hold-ups as they bounced from different team members working on different aspects of the job. As a result of constantly changing and conflicting deadline priorities, the workflow was muddled.

Drawing inspiration from what I'd witnessed in Tetsuya's kitchen, I spent a day redesigning our workflow system that broke each job down into micro components. Mapping it out on a whiteboard that outlined each job in a modular way, it meant that each job had easily understood 'mini milestones' that could be shuffled around and quickly re-prioritised.

Everyone involved in any job could, with this new whiteboard system, get a quick macro view of where each job was at and how the allocated deadlines of micro-components of each job sat relative to each other.

It was the breakthrough we needed and within a few weeks our productivity was up by more than 20%. Soon after there was a clear and distinct profit improvement.

Despite what your grade four teacher may have told you, copying is not cheating. If you're directly ripping off a direct competitor's idea or unique product feature then that's not cool. But taking inspiration from what other leading brands are doing to serve their customers, and incorporating it into your process for innovation and customer service development is smart business.

Stepping outside your business or industry regularly to seek inspiration, from other businesses and different industries, can be the greatest source of new ideas and how to innovate your customer experience. What is it about the world's leading hotels, restaurants, concerts, stores, day spas, airlines and online shopping sites that result in a raving fan base for their brands, with levels of customer advocacy that deliver them exponential market share growth, year on year? Step into the shoes of a customer and go and experience these brands. You'd be amazed at what you can learn, adapt and incorporate from industries completely unrelated to your core business.

If that seems like a mammoth task, break it down to a level that seems achievable. Some business owners and senior managers I know incorporate this sort of research into their annual family holiday. Better still, delegate to some of your team. Involving them in the process of developing creative ways to better serve your customers will empower them, invigorate them and condition them to see things through the eyes of the customer. That in itself is powerful.

Summary

- Innovation is a cornerstone of creating a world-class, memorable experience for your customers. Make a list of brands and businesses that you love and study them; what can you learn from them and adapt for your brand?
- Ideas can come from anywhere. Be conscious and aware of the service experiences around you how can the creative ideas in other businesses inspire improvements to your business?
- Engage your staff in the creative innovation process. Encourage and empower them to analyse their experiences as a customer with other businesses and make open discussion and brainstorming part of your team culture.

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THE ELEVENTH 'C' Consistency

Long term CONSISTENCY trumps short term INTENSITY.

Bruce Lee

HOPEFULLY BY NOW you have some new insights, fresh perspectives and actionable ideas on how to transform your business or sales efforts by leveraging your greatest marketing asset. I hope you're excited!

The question is: where to start? You may feel a little overwhelmed about the possibilities and not sure how to go about implementing your ideas. Here's my advice: just start. List your ideas and pick a place to begin.

Most of the strategies in this book are scalable, so if you were starting with 'celebration' for example, you could start by sending five hand-written cards a week to customers. It doesn't sound like much, but through the power of 'cumulative consistency' even the smallest of actions can have a big impact over time. Just think of where your business could be if over 250 customers received a hand-written note from you over the course of twelve months. Implement one new idea or strategy like that every week and imagine where your business could be in a year's time.

Delivering service so superior that your customers talk about you at dinner parties is something that any business is capable of.

Regardless of whether you own a corner fish & chip shop, a chain of electronics stores, or head up the sales team for a global media company, the answer to creating a competitive advantage and growing your brand sustainably lies with your existing customers. Serve them well, nurture them, wow them and love them, and they will gladly become your walking, unpaid advertisements and deliver you a steady stream of wonderful new customers.

It's the most elegant, cost-effective way I've seen to grow a business. And it's fun!

About the Author



Amanda Stevens is a speaker, author and business consultant who is passionate about the customer experience and its ability to shift businesses from good to great.

Her unique ability to articulate what consumers want, and how brands can connect with them in unique and meaningful ways, has seen her address over 800 conferences in 14 countries.

She's currently one of the most in-demand speakers in Australia and is renowned for her articulate, engaging and entertaining style.

Amanda has a double degree in marketing and consumer psychology and a background in advertising, research and PR. She's consulted extensively throughout Australia, Asia and the United States to brands such as Lend Lease, Priceline, Cricket Australia, Southern Cross Austereo, UBS, Microsoft and Mirvac.

She has several keynote topics and workshop options and is able to tailor her presentation to the unique needs of each client and industry with a message that lasts well after the event.

In 2018 Amanda was named Keynote Speaker of the Year by the Professional Speakers Association of Australia.

When she's not speaking on stages all over the world, Amanda consults to brands, large and small, on how to adapt to changing consumers and technologies and how to build brand advocacy.

When she's home, Amanda lives in Noosa, Queensland with her son Oliver and her beagle Bertie.

Speaking Opportunities



If you're looking for a speaker to motivate and inspire your audience into action and leave them with ideas they talk about for months, and years, after your conference or event, look no further.

Amanda is available for keynotes and workshops that are highly customised for your industry, organisation and audience.

KEYNOTE TOPICS

All are high-energy presentations and can be customised in length from 30 to 90 minutes:

Turning Customers into Advocates: 10 Strategies for Building Raving Fans

Marketing to the Majority: How to Sell to the Consumer of Tomorrow

Retail Revival: Practical Strategies for Evolving in Changing Times

The Key to Really Connecting: How to Improve your Influence, Connection, Relationships and Impact on Others

WORKSHOP OPTIONS

Customised and interactive and can be mixed and matched as add-ons to keynotes:

The Experience Economy: Navigating the New Path to Brand Loyalty

Word-of-Mouse: Building Brand Advocates Click by Click

Same, Same but Different: Gender-Targeting your Sales & Marketing

Fifty Shades of Grey: The Emerging Baby Boomer Sales Opportunity

Visit www.amandastevens.com.au to see on-stage video footage of Amanda, read her blog, view her fee schedule and check availability.

Consulting Opportunities



Amanda is the founder of EPIC MARKETING GROUP, a business improvement and marketing consultancy that specialises in brand building, strategic planning and digital marketing.

EPIC offers a range of services and processes to assist organisations identify and maximise opportunities for growth.

From a one day brand building workshop to a more intensive three-day business audit and ongoing strategic consulting, Amanda and her team work with business owners from sectors as diverse as retail, real estate, manufacturing, mining, and home wares to hardware.

If you'd like to find out what your business is truly capable of, visit www.epicgroup.com.au

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To my clients and the people who give me the privilege of spending time and space with your audiences — thank you. I pledge to continue to do everything I can to live the principles of this book and deliver experiences worth talking about.

And finally, thank you for buying, borrowing or finding this book. My hope is that it serves as a conversation starter. So if you have any comments or feedback, I'd love to hear from you!

Amanda x

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