

## SPEED SELLS

When it comes to customer service, speed is critical. Yet business owners often overlook its importance when considering how to attract and retain new customers and increase sales. Too often, they get caught up in devising catchy slogans and increasing their advertising spend, instead of zeroing in on what really counts to their customers.

Speed matters – for several reasons. We're living in an age of technology, when the time it takes to complete tasks has been greatly reduced, so there's an expectation that the companies we do business with will serve us quickly and efficiently. We expect speed.

We need look no farther than Amazon to understand how speed can drive our business to great success. Within a few seconds of placing an order, Amazon sends you a confirmation and a delivery date. On the delivery date, Amazon lets you know how many stops the driver must make before your package will arrive. And when the box lands on your porch, Amazon lets you know with an email.

Amazon's commitment to speed doesn't end there. If you decide to return your purchase, you can go to Amazon's website and click a few buttons to receive a QR return code, and within seconds of dropping off the item at one of thousands of Amazon kiosks, you'll be notified that your purchase amount has been refunded.

I see three internal roadblocks that keep us from using speed as a competitive edge. The first is the mindset of employees who procrastinate. The second is employees who lack the empowerment to respond quickly and efficiently to customer requests and complaints. And even if they're empowered to make a decision, they'll often hesitate because they don't want to run the risk of being reprimanded or fired. So what do they do? They seek approval from their bosses for the steps they want to take. And your company's reputation for speedy, responsive service dies before it can get started.

Another speed bump is policies and procedures. When we put a damper on our employees' eagerness to serve customers speedily

and efficiently, the customers will simply go somewhere else.

A friend of mine purchased a \$200 bathroom vanity top from Menard's, then never used it. Two years later, while shopping at Menard's, she noticed that the store was still carrying the same vanity top, so she stopped by the customer service desk and told the employee that she still had the vanity in its original box, and she had the receipt. She asked if she could return it, and without a moment's hesitation the employee said that she could. There was no need to bring the request to the manager or check company policy – the employee handled the situation, and Menard's won a customer for life.

Your business hours impact speed. If my drain is clogged, or my car needs service, do I want to wait a week to have the problem solved? No, I want it done today! Too often, companies don't set their hours with their customers' needs in mind. I recently spoke in Moscow, Russia. To help its citizens receive speedy service, Moscow's multi-functional centers are open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week.

Speed counts a lot to your customers. If you want to capitalize on the opportunity to gain a competitive advantage with speedy service, you must remove all of the obstacles. You must stress speed to your employees and empower them to solve problems and make decisions right away. Of course, you shouldn't sacrifice quality to gain speed, because your customers will expect the speed and quality to go hand in hand. Put another way, if you want to attract and retain new customers, speed will help greatly. The more efficiently and speedily you serve your customers, the faster your sales will soar.

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