TECHNOLOGY AND **A PERSONAL TOUCH**

Study Apple and Amazon and copy what they do

I believe the best application of technology for businesses is to help improve the customer experience – to make it easier for your customers to do business with you. Yet ninety-eight percent of companies continue to do the opposite. They use technology to avoid human contact, and in the process they frustrate their existing customer base and turn off those who'd otherwise like to do business with them. When you apply technology with a personal touch – that's when you have a winning combination.

While most young people would rather use technology than interact with an employee over the phone or in person, I'd guess most older folks prefer communicating face to face. It's why combining technology with personal communication helps you attract customers of all ages.

No companies do this better than Apple and Amazon, and it's why they're the world's most successful companies. They both deliver on their promises, unlike Discover, which paid a whopping $14 million for a Super Bowl commercial that invited customers to call the company and immediately connect with a live person. The problem is, it simply isn't true. The company advertised something that doesn't exist when doing business with Discover.

If I have an issue with my iPhone or Mac, I can head over to the nearest Apple Store or contact an employee online or by phone. If I choose to talk to an Apple representative, I'm assured that I won't have to make an appointment, get dressed, and drive to the store, because I can simply dial Apple at (800) 694-7466.

When I call, I'm confident that I won't be given the runaround, or have to wait to be transferred from one employee to another. I simply explain my problem, and while I'm on the phone the Apple rep accesses the equipment that has the issue and resolves it, generally within 10-15 minutes.

How does exceptional customer service impact Apple's sales and profits? It sends them soaring to dizzying heights. In the last fiscal year, Apple had net income of $97 billion on sales of $383.3 billion.

Amazon is another prime example of a company that does everything right. It uses technology to serve its millions of customers, and it combines the tech with personal service. An example: A friend of mine logged on to the Amazon site recently and found an item she liked and put it in her cart. Amazon immediately recognized her interest and let her know that customers frequently returned the item. The alert saved her the wasted time it would take to order, wait for, and return the item.

When customers click "save for later" for an item they're interested in, Amazon lets them know if the item has had a price reduction. When customers make a purchase, Amazon immediately acknowledges it and provides a delivery date. On the day of delivery, Amazon sends them a link to a map that shows how many stops away the delivery truck is.

When Amazon customers have questions, they can get an immediate response through the website or by calling an 800 number. Amazon's technology and customer service both go above and beyond.

Most CEOs want hard numbers before they make decisions that could affect their bottom line. When it comes to improving their customer service, all they need to do is glance at Amazon's numbers. Last year, Amazon's sales grew 12 percent to $764.8 billion, an increase of $60.8 billion in revenues.

Those figures aren't just good for Amazon, they're good news for investors. In May 2003, I invested $1,000 in Amazon. By February 11, 2024, that investment had grown to $111,648. Amazon's investment in technology, combined with its commitment to providing the best possible customer service, has produced startling results for the company and its customers and investors. It has also reaped unbelievable rewards for the founder, Jeff Bezos, who's now worth $192 billion.

Apple and Amazon use technology at every level to smooth the point of entry for their customers and quickly connect them with the items and service they need. They understand their customers' needs, know what the customers want, and design systems to meet and exceed their expectations.

Apple and Amazon are two of the most valuable companies on the planet. We'd do well to study how they operate and copy what they're doing. It's a fast-track strategy that will put your company on the escalator to new heights.

Visit www.customer-service.com for more information on John Tschohl and the Service Quality Institute. RO

John Tschohl is the founder and president of Service Quality Institute, a global leader in customer service. He is considered one of the world's foremost authorities on all aspects of customer service, and is the author of several books including Moving Up: A Step-by-Step Guide to Creating Your Success. *His monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no cost at www.customer-service.com.*