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How to Drive Customers Away

BY JOHN TSCHOHL

Attracting customers is relatively easy. Advertising that announces that you have quality products and good prices will do that — once. The problem is this: How do you keep those customers from leaving you?

Most businesses don't have a clue, so they continue to spend huge amounts of money to draw customers through their doors but do nothing to keep them coming back.

Let me give you an example of a company that drove my friend Jeannie away. She had been a loyal customer of a major department store for about two decades, but when Covid hit in 2020, she didn't shop at that store for a year.

That company sent her a letter — and she was shocked when she read it. The company said it had noticed her lack of purchases and told her that, if she didn't use that store's credit card within the next few weeks, it would deactivate it.

What did Jeannie do? She saved the store from having to take that step. She grabbed a pair of scissors, cut up the card, threw it away, and hasn't shopped at that store since. I wonder how many thousands of cus-

tomers received similar letters and did what Jeannie did.

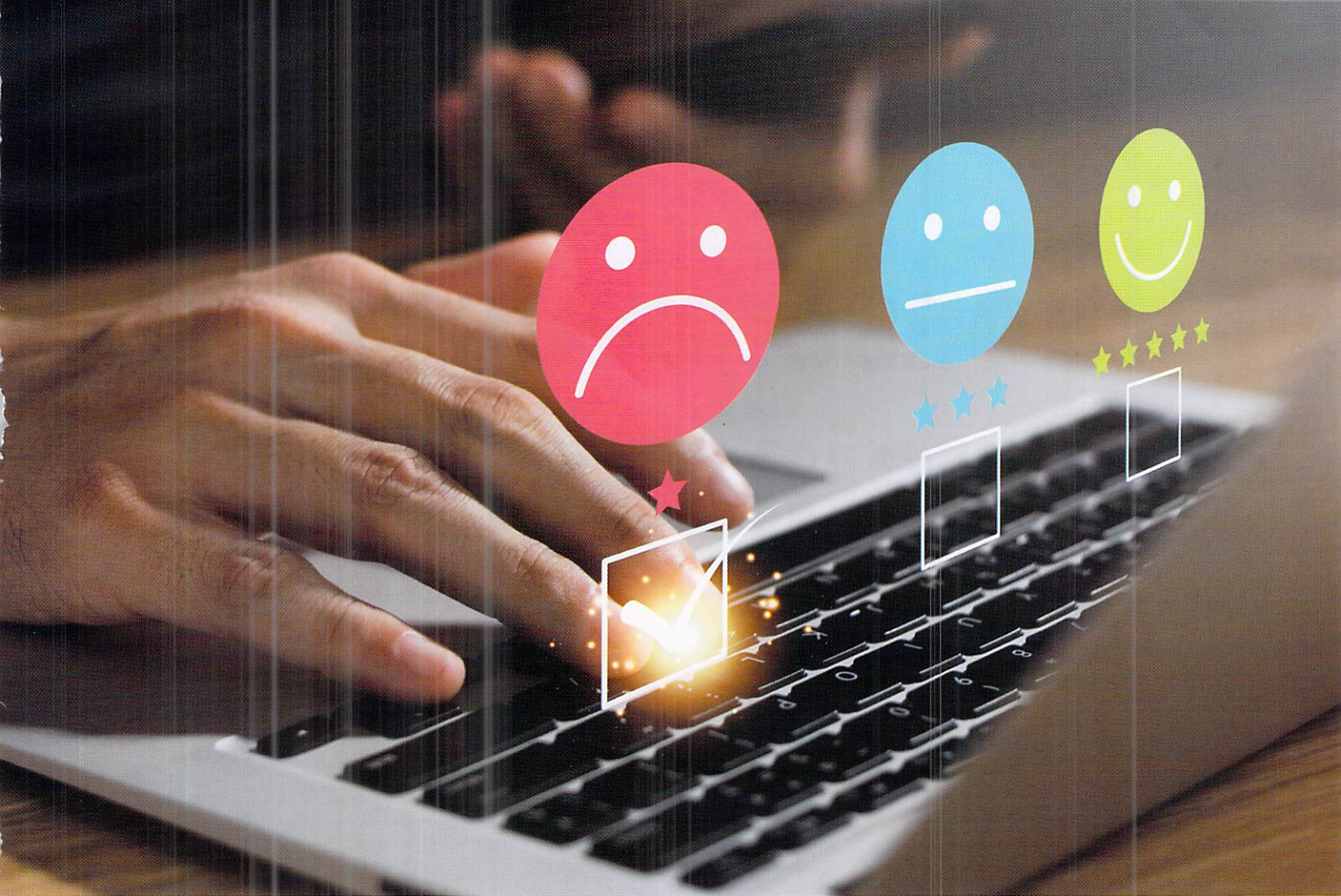
What in the world was that retailer thinking? Instead of doing what it did, it should have said, "We haven't seen you for a while. Here is a coupon for a 25 percent discount on your next purchase."

Here are some other ways you can drive customers away from you.

- Don't keep your promises. Tell a customer you will change his oil and put new tires on his car and that it will be ready in three hours. Then, don't contact him to say you've run into a problem and that his car won't be ready for five hours. What you should do in this case is contact the client as soon as you realize there was a problem, apologize, and deliver the car to the customer when you've completed the service.
- Don't respond quickly to customer calls and emails. This is a sure way to drive customers into the

hands of your competitors. As technology has increased the demand for speed, you must meet the challenge of providing it. That means having a live person answering the phone within one or two rings and immediately acknowledging emails. Customers today don't have the patience to wait for hours or days to have their questions answered or their complaints resolved.

- Don't empower your employees to make decisions. When your employees — especially your frontline employees who have the most contact with your customers — aren't empowered to serve your customers, your customers will become frustrated and will likely leave you. Replacing them will cost you much more in marketing and advertising than it would cost you to trust your employees to solve their problems and complaints.
- Don't provide customer service



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Customers today don't have the patience to wait for hours or days to have their questions answered or their complaints resolved.

training for your employees. Too many executives think employees are born with customer service skills. They are not! You must provide continuous training that will give them the tools they need to deal with customers and to handle any problems that might arise. When you train your employees, you will accomplish two things. You will keep your customers, and you will reduce employee turnover by greatly reducing the possibility that they will burn out and leave you.

No one wants to intentionally drive customers away, but if you don't recognize what you are doing that creates roadblocks to doing business with you — and take steps to remove them — your chances

of achieving success will take a nosedive.

MANA welcomes your comments on this article. Write to us at mana@manaonline.org.



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