

WHO DOES YOUR CUSTOMER THINK YOU ARE?

According to *Forbes Magazine*, Jeff Bezos is one of the world's most powerful people. Under Jeff Bezos, Amazon continues to push toward the next new thing despite sluggish economy. The online retailer is the second largest e-commerce company in the world and continues to strengthen its position globally. Amazon continues to grow and revenue is forecasted to hit \$90 billion this year, a 22% increase.

From the beginning, their motto has been to "be obsessed over customers". They maintain a dogged focus on improving the shopping experience. According to Bezos, "Word of mouth remains the most powerful customer acquisition tool we have, and we are grateful for the trust our customers have placed in us".

Ask your customers what they think. Getting perspective on how your customer sees you might give you a new view of your company. You cannot guarantee that you have guessed your customer's views correctly, and it is not worth losing customers through ignorance. Do all customers hold high views of your products or services on issues that are important to them?

Research has shown that there can be considerable inconsistency in customer perceptions of a service, across senior people and customer-facing functions. Even where customers consider that some people in a business give an excellent service, the service from other people may fall far short of meeting their expectations.

According to a survey conducted by Harris Interactive, 73% value friendly employees or customer service representatives, 55% value easy access to information and support and 36% stated personalized experiences. One amazing fact is 85% of respondents stated they would be willing to pay up to 25% MORE to ensure a superior customer experience. SO...the moral to the story is: the Great Experiences Get the Customer.

Keeping happy and profitable customers. Once you start thinking of your customers as a partner in your business, it is then only logical to start thinking like Jeff Bezos and constantly ask what your business should be doing to keep them coming back for repeat purchases. In many businesses repeat purchases produce as much as 90 percent of profit. You'd think that business owners and marketing experts would be lying awake at night dreaming up ways to encourage their customers to return.

Amazon grew 22% in 2013, an increase in revenue of \$13 billion and boasts record growth in 2014. Makes you wonder why very few firms are willing to copy Amazon's strategy. The company is guided by three principles: customer obsession rather than competitor focus, passion for invention, and long-term thinking. Everything at Amazon is built around the customer experience, service recovery, speed, technology and price. Part of their mission statement has always been "to focus relentlessly on their customers".

My research shows that a firm that builds their brand around the customer experience will increase its value by over 25% and will dramatically increase sales. Are you willing to be obsessed over the customer and become customer centric with everything you do?

It's critical that you know your customers, so that you can give them what they want. You must be proactive. You must research their needs and determine their opinions of your business so you can begin crafting customer experience improvement. Begin with these three simple steps:

1. **Ask.** If you really want to know what customers think, ask them. Each time you have contact with a customer, engage them in a conversation. Make it easy for your customers to share their opinions with you. Include an 800-phone number on sales receipts and invoices, and have that number answered by employees, not machines. Provide customers with an email address they can use to contact you and share their thoughts.
2. **Listen.** If you don't listen to what your customers are telling you, you might as well not ask for their opinions. Acknowledge what they are telling you and "thank" them for taking the time to do so.
3. **Act.** Assure them that you will act on what they have said.

If customer loyalty and perception is important to your business, you should probably ask your customers what they think from time to time... and behave according to their response. Do like Jeff does and have them leaving your store saying... "WOW". **RO**

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