



Building Customer Relationships

Customer Relations Management (CRM). Another management buzz phrase or something every consumer-based business should be working on?

Whether it is Mass Marketing or Direct Marketing, Total Quality Management or Six Sigma. Just-In-Time or CRM. The dogma of the consultant is change and so it is with some scepticism that business owners consider the concept of relation building with their customers.

However, CRM has been widely talked about for over a decade and shows no signs of abating. The oft-quoted statistic is that it is 5-10 times more expensive to get a new customer than it is to get an existing customer to return. A sobering thought for many who are 'new customer' focused.

Can you really build a relationship with your customers? Could you even make them 'loyal' to you? The answer is, of course, a resounding yes and it's been happening for as long as there was commerce. In the 'good old days' a client might only have a few hundred customers and as the customers regularly frequented the store the owner would learn more about their needs and requirements and build up a good rapport with them. As that relationship flourished the business owner would learn more about the requirements of the customer and the customer would support the business through spreading the word.

As capitalism continued to thrive and communities grew faster and become ever more transient it quickly became impossible to know every customer by sight. Self service, innovative displays, ever more choice and lower prices all

became the order of the day. However, there are only so many cents you can shave off the dollar, only so many product ranges you can carry. Competitors will always be on your shoulder trying to steal the edge.

And so we come back to customer relations. The opportunity to distinguish yourself in the eyes of the consumer through your ability to build a relationship with them.

But if you have thousands, hundreds of thousands or even millions of customers, how do you begin to build a relationship with them all?

All relationships are based around one core premise. Communication. If you think of the success or failure of any relationship in your past, communication would be key to it. If there is no communication the relationship fails.

Communication within the context of CRM means more than just communicating **at** your customer. It means putting in place the systems, processes and mindsets to be able to communicate **with** your customer. Making it as easy as possible for your customer to tell you when you are doing things right, when you are doing them wrong and what they would like to see in the future.

Beginning all marketing with this concept of 'dialogue' in mind will take you a long way toward building sustainable and beneficial relationships with your customers. Most businesses we talk to find the whole prospect of doing CRM too daunting and so choose to do nothing. That means the opportunity is perfect for your company to steal the advantage over your competitors and begin building those relationships. It





can be as simple as a thank you card to all your customers.

Is CRM just a management buzz phrase or can you make it a reality in your business?

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