



The Customer Doesn't Always Ring Twice: Making Seamless Changes to Keep Customers Loyal

By Patti Hathaway, CSP

Organizations today are undergoing massive changes. Changes that include reorganizations, re-engineering, downsizing, mergers, acquisitions, software and hardware changes, new management . . . and the list could go on and on. We are living in an age of incredible change and instability.

This rapidly changing workplace demands a new level of adaptability on the part of its workers. Old ways of doing things do not work in this changing world. Consider the simple yet profound impact that E-commerce has on business today -- it took the radio 38 years before it reached the "critical mass" of 50 million users. The computer took 16 years to reach 50 million users and the television took 13 years to reach critical mass. The Internet? It has taken 4 years for the Internet to reach 50 million users. If your business is trying to stand still, you will inevitably be overcome by your competition.

Gartner Research finds that E-commerce (EC) is significantly impacting industry restructuring. In the logistics, consumer product manufacturing, transportation, government services, and automotive industries EC will impact marketing, selling, and customer service. In home services, telecom, health care, retail grocery, book selling, office supplies, cards and gifts, retail dry goods, and recreation and leisure industries, EC will impact the structure of product offerings and how the services/products will be delivered. In the entertainment, banking, travel, advertising, electric utilities, publishing, gaming, and stock trading industries, Gartner predicts that EC will restructure the entire industry.

With change, often comes internal chaos and resistance. As a result, the customer may experience confusion and disruption in service and/or product delivery. The *Customer Focus* is on "How will this change(s) affect me? WIIFM (What's in it for me?)" and "Why are they making these changes?" The customer's *Overriding Concern* is "Will this simplify or complicate my life?" They will make decisions based on how well your organization answers these questions.

Following are some ***Customer Service Strategies*** to keep your customer coming back. It is important to recognize that customer satisfaction is NOT enough in today's competitive market.

We need to create customer loyalty. When you are going through change, (1) Help your customers understand the “why” behind the changes. Be clear as to “What’s in it for me?” for the customer. Share the benefits to the customer as to why you are making the changes.

(2) Make sure you are coordinating and collaborating with other department within your company. Be wary of overlaps and the potential competition that may develop between departments due to the organizational changes. It is very frustrating when two or more different departments all call the customer. The customer very quickly concludes that you really don’t know what you are doing.

(3) Obtain customer feedback on the change(s). Consider conducting focus groups or surveys of customers to gain their input on potential changes. Invite your key customers to be part of the change process. Ask your customers, “How can we better serve your needs as our customer?” If you ask for feedback, listen and be willing to consider the customer’s input. (4) Be proactive in your communication but recognize that many customers don’t read your marketing literature. Therefore, increase the various types of external communications you develop. Use newsletters, advertisements, and your website to inform of change.

How are you broadening your customers’ understanding and perspective about your change(s)? Customers don’t want to switch to another service/product provider unless they must. Make it easy for your customer to do business with you. Be the best in providing a system of procedures and policies and way of doing business that was designed with the customer in mind AND be the very best at providing a style of personal delivery that your competitors cannot match. Capture the heart of your customer by being clear as to how your changes benefit them and you can capture their loyalty.

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