



The Cornerstone of Business Success: Building Your Repeat and Referral Business

by Patti Hathaway, Business Advisor & Author

The number one strategy in getting repeat and referral business is to **Be the Best Value**. Too often organizations spend their time on marketing and sales instead of becoming the best product or service in the marketplace. Customers talk to each other, therefore, it is critical to become the best value so that the basis is built for repeat and referral business. Customer service research shows time and again that it is far cheaper to keep a current customer than gain a new one.

Two things are essential in building your business: (1) You must have a product or service that fills a need, (2) You must build rapport with potential customers so you can find out what their need is and fill it.

Ask for Business. Ask intelligently and you shall receive. Consider asking your customers:

- < How can we build on our success?
- < What can we do to earn the right to do more business with you?

Ask for a letter of recommendation that you can use in your marketing to other customers. Request a referral letter to other potential customers that could use your product or service.

Have Regular Contact. Many organizations have customized return cards asking for customer feedback after a sale or service call. A newsletter with "expert free advice" and the latest hot trends/products in your industry or business would be appreciated by most customers. Include a return card or e-mail address so the customer can indicate their desire for more information on your product or service.

Communicate a Customer Service Attitude. If your organization uses voice mail, encourage employees to personalize their message regarding where they are for that week and when the caller can expect a return call. It shows you put yourself in the customer's shoes and you recognize the importance of their call.

Ask for Feedback. When a customer goes with a competitor, don't hesitate to call and ask for feedback so you can learn from that situation. With current customers, you may want to ask why they buy from you. Why do they buy from others? When your customers tell you they are satisfied with your product and/or service, thank them and ask "If there was one little thing we could do to satisfy you even more, what would that be?"

If you want to expand into a new market with your product or service, consider conducting formal/informal research utilizing potential customers. Provide the participants in your research a discount coupon for your service/product or some other incentive for participating. When potential customers see you going out of your way to get input on a new product or service, they may consider your organization the next time a need arises.

Publish the results of your research in a trade journal or local business newspaper - it makes you "the expert" and provides your organization with free exposure. Publicity of this kind is invaluable and cannot be bought with advertising dollars.

The bottom line is this -- what are you doing, so people think of your organization when they need a product or service that you can offer?

*For a 16 page booklet of **107 Tips for Developing Customer Loyalty** go to Patti's website at: www.thechangeagent.com. Patti Hathaway, CSP, The CHANGE AGENT, is one of fewer than 7% women worldwide to have earned the Certified Speaking Professional designation from the National Speakers Association for her proven presentation skills. She is a Business Advisor and the author of 6 books that have been translated into 5 languages and have sold over 100,000 copies. Patti solves your people challenges by providing highly customized solutions to meet your needs. Contact Patti at 1-800-339-0973 or at her web site: www.thechangeagent.com for information on her speaking and consulting services or to receive her free e-mail newsletter/blog.*