

Down to Business

By Bob Ryan



EXCELLING AT CUSTOMER SERVICE

How to Keep the BIG Promise

Customers, whether they pay a little or a lot, are going to expect great service from your security company. Let's face it: The expectation of superior customer service is created during the sales process. Most clients' expectations are formed during this introductory phase of their relationship with your company. How does this occur? Well, quite simply, because the sales rep promises it. Nearly all sales reps can offer a competitive price. When it comes to the system itself, the best equipment and design features are available to virtually all companies equally. As a result, the true value proposition for the buyer is the promise of a first-rate customer service relationship. The big promise of customer service closed the sale. So, you've got a customer. Now what?

Get an early win. Understand that your customer has high expectations and be prepared to meet these early in the relationship. The first proving ground is the most important — the installation of the system and commissioning of service. This is the opportunity to validate your customer's decision to choose your company. If you hit a home run with the installation, you'll likely establish enough good-will to get you through the first few years of the relationship. It'll even earn you the forgiveness you'll need later if you make a mistake. So the payoff for careful planning and execution is significant.

- Focus on the basics.
- Schedule the installation when promised.
- Show up on time.
- Ensure quality craftsmanship.
- Make sure your technician adequately trains your customer on the system

and the service. This includes making sure your customer understands how to effectively communicate with your company and how to get what they need from you moving forward. Never rush this part as this begins the transition to the next phase of the customer relationship.

Keep up the relationship. Establishing continuity of care puts every employee in a position to provide timely customer service to every customer at any given point in time. The primary tool your team members will need is convenient and universal access to all vital information about your customers. When the phone rings, your ability to access relevant customer data to quickly address the need of the day without transferring the call will instill tremendous confidence with your customer.

Have you ever called a credit card company to resolve an issue only to be transferred around and forced to explain the same situation to multiple people on multiple occasions? Well, you don't want that to be your customer's experience with your company. All client communication and service events should be documented in your company's customer relationship management (CRM) system. This practice will ensure a seamless transition from one service event to the next regardless of which employee interacts with the customer. A relentless policy enforcement of documenting all client communication

will provide for continuity of customer care now and for the future.

Plan on screwing up. All companies make mistakes, even the best ones. Openly accept this fact and you'll be better prepared to make amends with your customers when you do. The difference between exceptional service companies and the marginal ones are what they do when things go wrong. The golden rule applies here. What customer experience would

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you want? Empower front line employees to do the right thing without making customers endlessly suffer to achieve a fair resolution. Sometimes all it takes is a goodwill credit or complimentary service call to turn around a disgruntled customer. Other times, they will want to escalate their case to senior management. Let them — and get it over with. The longer a customer is in pain, the greater the chance they will cancel. Remember that early win? This is the time to cash in.

Customer service is not a department. Finally, if you plan on building a customer service department, don't! As my esteemed colleague has taught me, if you create a customer service department, then everybody will think those are the only employees responsible for satisfying your customers. Every department exists to service every customer.

Build your culture around these basic concepts and you'll rest easier knowing you've put every employee and every customer in a position to win.

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