

Top-Shelf Tip No. 25:

"I can't imagine a person becoming a success who doesn't give this game of life everything he's got."
Walter Cronkite

Seven Ways To Make Your Small Business Special

Small business is a significant component in the fabric of the economy—or at least it was in the past. Today, many small businesses have lost out to mega conglomerates and big-box stores. That's too bad because small businesses have a distinct advantage of being able to get close to their customers and understand what they really want. As a small-business owner, you must create a dialogue with your customer base, and ensure that your customers and clientele understand that you're looking out for their wants and needs to put your best foot forward for success.

But building a customer-driven small business can be a bit different from competing with the big companies, and it takes a lot of effort. Customers want to feel connected, they want to feel special, and they don't want to be just a number or another transaction. In this issue of *Promotional Consultant Today*, we share ways to make your customers feel S.P.E.C.I.A.L. over the big-box stores from author and speaker Kevin Coughlin.

S - Superior Service: You must put yourself in your customer's shoes. Experiment with each type of interaction that will occur between your company and the customer. A great starting point is to assess the quality of phone etiquette and your employees' ability to address your customers' questions. Evaluate your website and email responses.

P - Products: Evaluate your products and or services to see how they stand up against the competition. Take a hard look at the processes and procedures you can implement to make those products and/or services most appealing and cost effective to your customer base.

E - Education: This means training, training and more training with everyone from your sales people through your HR department; and perhaps most importantly, training for yourself. Many times as CEO or business owner, you are the last to recognize that you may need and benefit from training more than anyone else. Success starts at the top, and without positive business training you and your company will suffer along with your customers.

C - Consistency: Constantly evaluate and re-evaluate your processes and procedures to make sure they are simple, repeatable and trainable. Delivering consistent products and services are paramount to successful long-term success.

I - Ideal Customer Experience: You must look at and review to see if your customers are repeating purchases. Are they coming back to your company for additional products and services? If not, it's imperative that you ascertain why.

A - Approachable: Do your employees and customers have access to you? If not, why not? Determine how to create an environment that allows information to reach your leadership so team members and customers know that their concerns will be addressed and not overlooked.

L - Lighthearted: When it stops being fun for you, your team or your customers, you have started your company in a downward direction and action steps must be taken to change that culture. When your customers and team members have an enjoyable experience there is no better marketing plan available.

In the end, entrepreneurs have common traits. They are competitive, they like action and want to win. They are motivated, work hard, have an undeniable desire to succeed and make sacrifices to accomplish their goals. Find out what motivates you and what you really love about your business; pursue that passion with all your heart and you will receive much more than financial reward, including satisfaction that what you set out to do you have accomplished.

Source: Kevin Coughlin, DMD, MBA, MAGD is an accomplished dentist, author and speaker. With his unique and powerful message, Coughlin provides small businesses with actionable solutions when considering strategic change, as well as keys to compete in an expansive market.

Compiled by Cassandra Johnson