



6 tips for providing top-class shopper support in-store

Customer service is one of the biggest drivers of sales and loyalty in retail, yet plenty of merchants continue to underestimate just how powerful it can be. Head to the mall and you'll see that many companies still fall short when it comes to serving and delighting consumers. Don't let your business be one of them.

Strive to provide superb customer support and make sure that you and everyone else in your team are willing to go above and beyond for shoppers.

To help you accomplish this, we've done some research on the customer service practices of some of the world's top retailers. Check them out below and see if you can incorporate them into your business:

1. Start by hiring the right people

We've said it before, and we'll say it again: when it comes to recruiting for customer service roles, you're better off hiring for attitude and training for skill. Some of the world's best companies recognise this.

Action steps: When hiring associates, consider focusing on their attitude first. Skills and experience are important but

know that as long as someone is trainable and has a natural service-based disposition, they will perform better than a skilled employee who doesn't have the right attitude.

2. Be smart about how you delegate customer service tasks

Your associates won't be able to serve customers properly if they're too busy doing admin work or restocking shelves. If it makes sense for your business, change the way you delegate tasks in-store. For example, instead of training everyone to do a multitude of tasks, consider letting people specialise in specific jobs (i.e., serving customers, fixing merchandise, etc.)

Action steps: Are your employees juggling multiple jobs or do they specialise in certain tasks? If it's the former, try testing task delegation practices. You may find that when you have employees whose sole job is to assist shoppers, your customer service metrics (and sales) will improve.

3. Encourage empathy

A dose of empathy can instantly take your customer service practices to new

heights. Because here's the thing: in many cases, customers just want to feel that they are being heard, acknowledged, and understood. In other words, they want to feel that you know what they're going through. Yes, it's important that you fix whatever issues they're having, but empathy is almost always the first thing they need from a customer service rep.

Action steps: Encourage empathy in your employees. Train them to put themselves in the shoes of your customers and doing so develops compassion and ultimately leads to better customer service.

4. Make sure that everyone – from front-line employees to executives – receives customer service training

This lesson is brought to us by Amazon, which is not only doing phenomenally well in sales and innovation, but is also killing it in customer service. The e-commerce giant is always on Prosper's list of Customer Service Champions, thanks to its customer-centric practices.

Action steps: Evaluate the customer centricity of your company. Is every member of your team in touch with the needs of shoppers? Would they benefit from additional training or regular reminders to be empathic towards customers?

5. Empower employees to keep customers happy

One of the ways that the e-tailer accomplishes this is by empowering reps to use their judgement and just keep customers happy.

Action steps: If you haven't done so yet, encourage your staff to be helpful rather than salesy. See to it that they make each customer's happiness a priority, and empower them to use their judgement when it comes to serving shoppers.

6. Be proactive in approaching customers

Encourage your associates to move from behind the counter and onto the sales floor where they can interact with shoppers.

Action steps: Promote proactive customer in your store. Don't wait until someone asks for your or your associates' help; go out there and actively look for customers to assist. bizcommunity.co.za

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