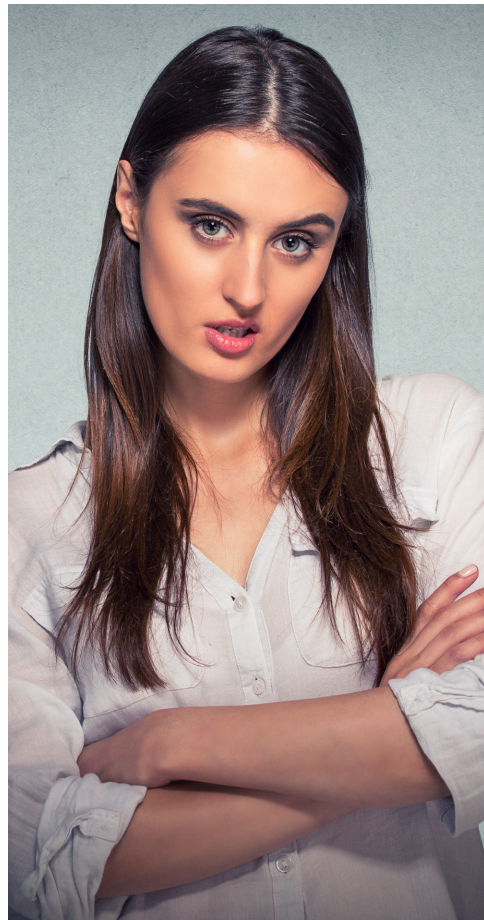




Customers & Clients Want Only One Thing from You

MOST OF THE PEOPLE WHO PAY FOR OUR PRODUCTS OR SERVICES HAVE A SINGLE BASIC EXPECTATION THAT CAN BE EXPRESSED IN SEVEN WORDS: "DO WHAT YOU SAY YOU WILL DO."



RULE NUMBER ONE: DO NOT ANNOY CLIENTS AND CUSTOMERS IF YOU WANT THEM TO CONTINUE WORKING WITH YOU.

for commodities, of course, where price is usually the deciding factor.

If you provide outstanding value, a customer may leave; but fail to provide outstanding value and a customer will leave. Communication is essential.

Giving It Away

EVEN OFFERING A FREE SERVICE ISN'T ENOUGH TO RETAIN CUSTOMERS IF YOU ANNOY THEM.

Here's an example: My websites are on a shared service operated by Bluehost. I can use the Bluehost mail server to send messages but each server is responsible for hundreds of websites and all outbound mail will display the same originating IP address. Antispam services examine IP addresses, so it takes only one bad actor among thousands to get the IP address blacklisted.

When that happens, some email systems will reject mail from that address. This happens enough that I decided some years ago to use a separate mail service.

Because I send few messages, I qualify for a free service offered by some bulk mailing services. I signed up for one and the process was flawless until one day I forwarded a message that contained a PayPal logo to a friend. The service incorrectly concluded that the message was fraudulent and they deactivated my account until I could

prove to them that the message was legitimate. The process took almost one week, so I learned not to forward messages that might contain logos frequently used in scams.

Everything continued to work well until Friday the 13th of October when I received a message that said *"it appears that your transactional account has been compromised. Our system interpreted some of the activity on your account as fraudulent, thus leading to the suspension of your account pending a manual review."* The message they identified as a scam was both legitimate and important. So that was the end of that business relationship even though I had been using it for free.

Price is not the deciding factor. Had the service sent my "questionable" message to their internal customer service team for review, it would have been clear immediately that the message was not a scam. Instead, they allowed the automated system to shut down the account for nearly a week.

What Clients Want

RETAINING CLIENTS DEPENDS ON DOING WHAT YOU SAID YOU WILL DO, BUT IT ALSO DEPENDS ON DOING IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME AND IT DEPENDS ON NOT DOING SOMETHING STUPID. HERE'S AN EXAMPLE OF SOMETHING STUPID:

I had a question about a store's operation and used the website's *Contact Us* function to ask. Although

Customer retention can be tricky. Some will leave no matter how good you are, how well your product meets a customer's needs, or how low your prices.

Price is demonstrably the least important consideration because price is not a feature. It's not a benefit. Surveys routinely show that price is not an issue when the customer sees value in the purchase. That's not true

the question didn't involve a serious problem, I did expect to receive an answer. The response finally came to my email inbox twenty-eight days later. It contained no information about my question.

ANY MESSAGE THAT BEGINS WITH THE WORDS "FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE" WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY DESCRIBE A POLICY THAT YOU WILL NOT VIEW AS BEING FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE.

So don't do that. If a client or customer asks a question, it's a relatively safe assumption that they would like a response—preferably one that addresses the actual question.

A message on an internet service provider's Facebook page described how the writer was planning to move to a new house and had sent an address change notice to the company.

A few days later, he had to call the ISP's customer service department when he couldn't log on. "You ordered the account shut down," they told him. How could anyone read an

address-change letter and interpret it as a request to cancel the account?

Organizations sometimes create procedures and policies for their own benefit, not that of clients and customers. Any message that begins

with the words "for your convenience" will almost certainly describe a policy that you will not view as being for your convenience.

Keeping Clients Happy

TODAY'S CUSTOMERS EXPECT MAXIMUM PERFORMANCE, EXTREME SERVICE, AND UNCOMMON VALUE.

When you add value over and above their expectations, you win. Put the customer first and you are much more likely to stay first yourself.

A friend called her bank to protest a \$35 credit card late-payment fee. Claiming that the fee was excessive and punitive, she said that it couldn't

possibly cost the bank \$35 when her check arrives one day late. But the bank said the charge was justified because of the cost of "dealing with all the people who call protesting the charges." Circular reasoning: See "Reasoning, circular."

A bank that I no longer do business with took two years to change my address, and did so only when I wrote to one of the VPs at the bank's main office to explain that I was concerned that the bank was having such trouble with basic record keeping. I never received a reply, but the address was finally fixed.

Customers and clients expect 100% accuracy. Airline pilots should land at the right airport. Surgeons should perform operations on the correct part of the body of the right patient. House painters should use the paint color the homeowners selected. Delivery services should take packages to the right address.

And so on.

We're all expected to do the job we're being paid to do accurately and on time. Is this asking too much? I think not. Ω

