



KEEP CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS IN CHECK WITH A DYNAMIC WEB PRESENCE

Although there are exceptions to every rule, unhappy customers are generally not unhappy people. Most often, they are simply consumers disappointed by unmet expectations. Pile a little frustration on top of their disappointment, and you've got all the right ingredients for an angry customer.

While there are many ways to deal with angry customers, good customer service professionals know the best method is prevention. By keeping a disappointed customer from becoming angry, customer service professionals maintain a friendly environment conducive to problem solving.

One of the leading causes of customer frustration is a lack of "live," professional and knowledgeable help.

While extensive training and education is essential, maintaining manageable schedules and workload for customer service personnel—whether you have two employees or twenty—is even more important. That's because even the best customer service professional in the construction business isn't worth a hill of beans if he's too busy to dive into a challenging problem.

Embracing technology can go a long way toward helping your customer service personnel maintain a manageable level of inquiries. Everything from the Internet to customer service software can be tapped to increase the amount of time your personnel have to help customers solve their complex problems before they become crises.

Many customer service departments are overloaded because they are

charged with handling all customer inquiries—whether complex or not. The same person who answers questions about hours of operation is also scheduling appointments and fielding customer complaints.

This is where a dynamic, database-driven website can go a long way toward freeing customer service personnel for more in-depth customer assistance. An actively updated website has the power to become your receptionist, sales person and even your technician.

Relying on a database, rather than a person, for maintenance of website content is the smart way to go. A database—loaded with information from your experts and set to update either automatically or manually—can't take days off and won't get too busy to update the website (which can become a last priority for many businesses).

Directing your customers with simple questions to a complete information source that is available 24/7 is a sure way to decrease frequent, common and easy-to-address inquiries.

The process of deciding what information to put on your website is easy. Do an informal poll of your employees (both customer service and others) to determine the most common customer inquiries and the typical response given to those customers. The results will be the basis for your website content. Gathering this research may help you stumble upon other things that need to be addressed within your organization as well.

Go beyond the typical hours of operation and directions information. Consider including the following information on your website:

Costs

You don't need exact figures. Web visitors expect estimates and will inquire further for a more detailed bid. Give

them the direct contact information for the person who can provide more information.

Tips/Advice

If your customers have frequent, easy-to-fix problems, put the solutions on your site.

FAQ

This is the most efficient way to communicate the answers to your most common customer inquiries. Simply dump the results you received from your informal employee poll onto the site.

Personnel E-mail

Help your web visitors find and contact the appropriate person directly. Routing customers past your customer service department when appropriate, frees your customer service personnel for the more complex issues of the day.

Downloadable Photos

Customers like to see your past work. Show off your best and do it in a format that is reproducible so potential customers can print off photos of your work and show their friends and family. This is a great way to get your name circulating—just be sure that your company logo and phone number prints off with the photo.

Referrals

Place your customer reference list on your site. With their permission, include a link to their e-mail address so your potential customers can get in touch directly.

Keywords

Invest some time and money into getting a good keyword/search expert to consult on your website. There are many free methods web experts can recommend to make sure your website is easy to find.

Partners

If you provide products from manufacturers who will provide technical assistance, include a link to their contact information on your site so that customers can reach them directly.

Appointment Schedulers

If your budget allows, look into an online appointment scheduler. This online system ties into your office scheduling software and gives web visitors a listing of your upcoming availability. Once they choose from the list of dates and times, the database communicates with your software and automatically adds the appointment to your schedule. A phone call to confirm is always a good idea with systems such as this.

Freeing your trained personnel from the time-consuming day-to-day questions by providing answers on a 24/7 website will give your "tough" customers the added attention they need. By providing customers with the high-level, one-on-one responses they are looking for, your company will rise to the level of service that has become necessary in today's competitive marketplace.

As consumers become increasingly Internet-savvy, a website is often the first place they turn for answers and is many times preferable to making a separate phone call. Therefore, a website is no longer simply a nice addition to customer service; it's an essential business tool.

Keep in mind, a solid web presence will not only help your current customers, it will go a long way toward helping potential customers find and get to know you. ■

Steve Meschke, customer support manager at Mustang Manufacturing Co., Inc., has more than fifteen years of experience in customer service positions. He can be reached at smeschke@mustangmfg.com.



Carlson Takeoff

Finally, a job estimating program that will handle both site design and road construction estimates.

- Generate estimates, with reports, five to ten times faster than manual bids
- Direct import, and digitizing capabilities
- Output capabilities to survey equipment and 3D machine control streamline the office to field process

Key Features:

- Built on the AutoCAD® engine
- 2D to 3D conversion routines for linework and spot elevations
- Digitizing routines
- Calculates volumes and material quantities
- Cut/Fill Color Maps and labels
- Custom Reports with export to Excel
- 3D Drive Over Simulation
- Surfaces are modeled by triangulation
- Easy to use: automated routines with reduced prompting
- Trench networking routines
- Drillhole & Strata modeling

Carlson Autodesk
www.carlsonsw.com
Authorized Developer
Authorized Online Application Provider
Authorized OEM Partner

For sales information or to locate a reseller please call:
800-989-5028

CALL FOR A FREE DEMO DISK

enter 142 at cbfreeinfo.com for more info