

Taking Care of Customers Better than Amazon: Can It Be Done?

By: Anne Pounds

Every customer who has ever shopped Amazon is pretty quick to agree. It can be a perfect experience, from the one-button ordering to the amazon-ly quick shipping. Boom! It's at your front door! Yet you, as a business owner, would like to compete. What to do?

As a business owner myself who cut her teeth on direct sales of consumer products at the wholesale and retail level, I had the responsibility of learning how to do it right through trial and error and reading, and then teaching our growing organization who, like us, had not come from a sales background. We serviced our customers by going right to their homes to introduce new products and services. I learned to be highly proactive, responsive and persistent in a way that created repeat business and new customers. Often I learned by doing it wrong, for sure!

We strove toward a goal called MPC—More Product per Customer. Rather than just more and more customers, we wanted to take care of a fewer number of customers very well. So we found customers who liked what we had and we took care of them ... we poured on the service and made sure they were given plenty of opportunities to try our new products.

What is that indefinable “something” that makes people open their wallets joyfully and come back for more? It’s that great guy behind the counter at the Meat House the other day bringing over a sumptuous breakfast delivered with a great big smile and a little joke about “no leftovers.” It’s the feeling I get when I go into Costco and someone very graciously gives me a sample and tells me her favorite ways to enjoy the product. It’s the owner of Brandywine Prime coming over to make sure we are enjoying our meal (and also quietly making sure we are treated well by the wait staff).

It’s the carpet installer guy Henry from Airbase Carpet showing up on time and ready to go—and when his partner installer doesn’t show or call, he goes on and does the entire job by himself, no complaints, not missing a beat. And it’s the Airbase salesman Bob rolling out endless rolls of carpet for me to walk barefooted on. Now I do it every morning in my home because he cared enough.

I remember walking into our favorite delicatessen in Media years ago, “Mrs. _____’s.” I loved everything about it; and when I walked in every time, I would say “hello, _____, how are you today?” In 20 years, he never once used my name. It didn’t even occur to him to ask. He could have doubled my loyalty (and my endless PR on his behalf) and probably my purchasing dollars if he had only done that one simple little thing which I did for him: recognized him as a fellow human being.

The people we visit are looking for business owners like you. They WANT to have a wonderful experience, and we’ve told them they will, because we picked you out of the crowd. Be sure your team knows about Welcome Neighbor’s program, and that they make that new homeowner who comes in with a card feel quite special. Ask the new homeowner what THEIR name is, and where they moved from. Shake hands and welcome them! I believe you and your team can make it a better experience than having a future Amazon drone drop a package on the doorstep. Let’s work together to create perfect experiences for our Welcome Neighbor recipients!