

Dear Subscriber,

Happy Holidays from the Southern Nevada Chapter of SCORE.

Keeping your customers should be a primary concern of your business. It is generally far less expensive to keep a customer than it is to find a new one. Especially now when spending is down, you need to retain the customers you have. While price, discounts and the like might get them to spend, they still need a reason to stay with you. Customer loyalty is built by more than price. This month's topic examines how to build loyal customers for both good and bad times.

Remember, **SCORE** is here to provide **free counseling** to both **start-ups** and **existing businesses**. I encourage you to continue to use SCORE as a partner to your business. To meet with an experienced counselor, call your local SCORE office.

If you know of anyone who could benefit from these newsletters, please forward a copy to them with our thanks.

Warmest regards,

Ross Lagattuta
Chairman, SCORE Chapter 243

Ask SCORE

Loyalty comes from making a commitment to your customers

The competitive nature of today's world may be intimidating to the small business owner and is being exacerbated by the sluggish economy. If a competitor cuts prices or offers other incentives, you may feel tempted to do the same thing in order to hold on to your customers, even if it puts the stability of your business at risk.

Though cost is important to customers today, it is but one component of a larger, more important attribute-value. If your business provides it through service, responsiveness, and going the "extra mile," your customers will respond with

loyalty, regardless of what your competition does.

Building loyalty through value is something small business owners have been good at for centuries because they are better able to cultivate relationships with their customers. They focus not just on selling to them, but also keeping them. That stability is more efficient and predictable for everyone involved.

Building loyalty is not a marketing matter, so don't look there for help. To foster customer loyalty, a small business needs a strategy that keeps patrons coming back. It starts with basics that are sometimes overlooked. Thanking customers for their business, for example, goes a long way. But try going beyond a few spoken words. Write some thank you notes and letters. Make them personal and sincere. Just let them know you appreciate their business.

Creating value will help boost loyalty. Ask customers if there is anything else you could be doing for them. Then, after they tell you, do it. When a customer leaves, you should consider it unacceptable. Find out why it happened and then work to prevent it from happening again.

Remember, too, that your customers' needs are always changing, and that they may find attributes or "extras" in other business that put your service elements at a disadvantage. Take ease of access, for example. Make sure all your touch points- your phones, Web site, store layout, etc.-operates with your customer's needs in mind. Visiting competitors' locations and sites may alert you to areas where you may be behind, and spark ideas for making a good service or process even better. If your customers like what they find at your business, they'll keep coming back for more.

For more assistance with customer loyalty or other business issues, contact the Southern Nevada Chapter of SCORE "Counselors to America's Small Business" at 1-702-388-6104 or visit our website www.scorelv.org.