



ADDING ADDITIONAL, SOUGHT AFTER SERVICES

From the large to the small. My own gardener Mark recently did my garden and noticed some leaves in the gutters and my lemon tree, which was badly in need of pruning. When I came out to pay him, I noticed firstly that he had done his usual first-rate job, but also that he had cleaned the gutters and pruned the tree. He smiled warmly and said, "My pleasure Dan, no charge." Bottom line, he is my gardener for life.

Exactly how do you make your customers feel this way? This type of value-adding customer service is available to all small business in particular. No budget needed, only a desire to serve.

OFFERING CUSTOMERS GREATER FLEXIBILITY AND CONVENIENCE

The key to this point is that you need to better understand how you can make it easier for your market to deal with you, with key implications for your trading hours, location, staff training and availability, and effective use of the internet.

PEACE OF MIND GUARANTEES

Most customers have a high level of risk aversion; therefore you need to incorporate features that remove the worry. Mont Blanc pens offer lifetime guarantees for example. They are not cheap, but continue to sell well. Why? Because people know that they are covered should anything ever go wrong. How safe do your customers feel about your products or doing business with you? How can you make them feel safer?

LOYALTY PROGRAMS WITH REWARDS THAT ARE GENUINELY SOUGHT AFTER

Perhaps more than any other, this is an aspect of customer service that is the most under-utilised. The potential to form joint ventures and be able to apply creative solutions here is unlimited. In the end, people want more than just frequent flyer points. How do you reward your key customers for their ongoing loyalty?

By creatively adapting customer service elements, such as those discussed here, any business has the potential to occupy that most revered market space – the customer service

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leader. This includes the perennial need of being treated with respect, dignity and professionalism.

At the end of the day, it's no good dwelling on the fact that there may still be some difficult times ahead. Some businesses may in fact not survive, while many others will not only survive, but thrive in this same period.

Perhaps these businesses will have one simple common denominator that distinguishes them from other less successful businesses and that is unwavering and extraordinary customer service. Customer service that will prove to be a much-needed panacea. **M**