

Batteries Included: How To Edge Out the Competition

By: Patricia Webber

Ever drive a newly purchased car off the lot without a full gas tank? Of course not! Did you ever buy a bicycle from a store without air in the tires? Not recently! Ever buy a product run by batteries without batteries? You bet! It's hard to believe that products requiring batteries are still sold without the batteries included. Batteries not included is like sales without service!

A traditional maxim in business theory is the continuum that we attract, get and keep customers. In today's marketplace, a competitive strategy that works toward long-term survival integrates the sales and customer service processes. Sales is powered up by, service is charged up by, sales. Sales is service is sales. We can spend hundreds or thousands on advertising to attract our customers. We can have a gun-slinger sales team and get customers. And when we deliver at or better yet beyond expectations - batteries included and fully charged - then we can keep customers coming back for more.

So what mistakes as business owners and managers do we want to avoid in the system of sales service? And what batteries in sales service will give us the competitive edge today?

First, don't assume that you will hear from those customers who are not satisfied. Research done in 1986 showed that 96% of unhappy customers never complain - to you! Oh they tell their story, just not to you! Each unhappy customer tells his or her story to 9 others. So where's the hope? That one customer who brings a complaint to your attention is a golden nugget! A real opportunity to know where your sales service system needs tweaking. Your customers are your best consultants for identifying system problems. Be active in asking them to give you a report card through surveys, focus groups and one to one interviews.

Second, it's not over once the problem is solved. It's not even over when it's over! Implement some of the tools to measure continuous improvement. Consider tying sales recognition or compensation to customer retention. Become familiar with and use some of the quality tools available. Along with measuring sales or revenue increases, also measure areas like improvement in customer retention, decrease in customer complaints, increased referrals, prompter satisfaction to customer complaints. What gets measured gets done!

Next, staying stuck in bureaucratic, management styles is a mistake. Today's management requires leadership and that means move problem solving to the front lines. Today's consumers (who by the way, are you and I) don't want to hear, "I'm sorry, that's not my job. You'll have to talk with Customer Service or a Supervisor." Quality Leadership raised our awareness to a practical level that with external and internal customers everybody's job is customer service!

In addition, lack of congruency between departments kills service. Teamwork today is essential! When you mobilize cross-functional work groups to implement customer service improvement, you raise the bar of opportunity for collaboration and innovation. No one person, and no one department, can have the best answers to improving the way a sale is serviced. Improve your meeting effectiveness through role-playing, brainstorming, guided problem solving and case studies. Collective brain power can come up with ideas on almost any issue or problem.

Today, now, immediately, power up your organization's competitive position by charging your batteries. Identify your system problems, measure your continuous improvement, balance your managing with leading and use teamwork. The bottom line is, no batteries, no customers, no profit!