

Turn Negative Feedback Into a Positive Customer Experience

How to achieve higher customer retention by planning for and responding to feedback

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Let's face it, nobody bats 1,000 on customer satisfaction. You may have loyal customers and a lot of repeat business. You may have good or even glowing reviews online. Most customers probably leave your shop with a satisfied feeling about the experience. But once in a while, you are bound to have an unhappy customer, whether for reasons within or out of your control. The question is: what do you do about it?

The time to answer that question is before it happens. Do not be afraid of negative feedback, instead, anticipate it and have a plan to respond. Since social media is so prevalent and easily accessible, particularly online review platforms like Google Reviews and Yelp, dissatisfied customers will post their frustrations right after their experience. Therefore, you must dedicate a team member to monitor and respond to social media reviews. Plus, it goes without saying that a mobile responsive website is one of your most important and effective marketing tools.

When you see a negative review, respond immediately and don't be defensive. Apologize and explain that your goal is 100 percent customer satisfaction, offering to do whatever you can to remedy the problem. Depending on the complaint, it may be as simple as inviting the customer to return for a free service. Posting your reply directly on the site not only shows the customer you're accountable, but it also shows other readers that you really listen to and care about your customers.

The best defense is a strong offense. Often a bad review may have nothing to do with the service itself, but with other related factors—attitude, tone and energy of the greeter, interactions of team members, appearance and cleanliness of the shop and restroom. These are all factors within your control. Make sure your employees are properly trained in providing excellent customer service and that everyone is projecting the right professional image for your business. Cleanliness and sanitation standards (restroom, waiting room, your shop floor) must be executed with discipline. In short, the appearance of your image and everything employees do make an impression with customers.

Customers form an impression of your business based on every service-related experience and touch point. When they arrive, don't leave them waiting or wondering where they're supposed to park. When they return for their car, thank them by name for coming and ask them if they received excellent service.

Look at the experience from the customer's point of view. Getting an oil change is something they have to do, and most likely not what they prefer to do. They are spending money and time on a service they cannot see, and they may not appreciate its value. So, it is important to exceed customer expectations and get them out quickly—that's why they went to a fast lube in the first place. Perform an inspection and tell the customer if their car is in great shape or if you spotted any potential problems. At checkout, review the service with them so they understand what you did and what they're getting for their money. Let your customers know when they should expect their next oil change by placing a window cling on their windshield.

Anne Williams, owner of Roberts Havoline xpress lube® in Beaumont, Texas, explains that in the last year they added an additional service option for their customers by offering an oil change at their customer's home or work location.

"We realized from customer feedback that we could really enhance our service offering by going the extra mile for those customers who were unable to easily come to us for their oil change," Williams says. "Even though this service hasn't been used a lot, it is a nice added benefit."

Gathering feedback—positive or negative—is essential to your business and with your employees. You may know your strengths, but it is important to uncover areas that need additional improvement. Before customers leave, ask them if they have any questions or comments and, above all, if they are happy with the service. You might even send out a satisfaction survey by text or email, with a discount coupon as an incentive to respond. That way, if customers have a problem, then you're inviting them to bring it directly to your attention so that you can address the issue immediately. These simple steps will go a long way towards maintaining your customer's trust, loyalty, and repeat business.

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