

HOW TO MANAGE CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

Do you often have the thought that your business would operate so much better without customers and all their demands? They want this, that and the other – all of which interrupts your day! But customer expectations are what drives your business and keeps them coming back.

Do you know what your customers are expecting of you? If not, how can you find out? What will understanding their expectations do for your business? In this article we are going to look at expectations and how it's important for you and your business to know what they are.

What Do They Expect?

Not many businesses endeavour to find out what their customers want! Owners assume they know. Big mistake! If you want to grow your business, find out what your customers expect of you. How can you do this? Ask them! Why not have an 'Expectations Week'. Tell your staff that this week's goal is to ask customers what they expect of the business. Set a target of approaching a certain number of customers a day and just ask, "If I was to ask you what your top 3 expectations of doing business with us are, what would they be?"

Alternatively you could put out an Expectations Book and ask customers to write down their comments. This way, they will not be embarrassed and perhaps may be more frank!

If you operate your business remotely, why not do an e-mail survey? Consider offering a prize to encourage responses.

Great Expectations

What is your customer likely to come up with as expectations of doing business with you? Here are some possible answers:

- Fast and efficient service
- Competitive price
- Quality products
- Sufficient stock to meet demand
- Trained staff
- Being treated politely and with respect
- The phone being promptly answered
- E-mails responded to within a reasonable timescale
- Promises being kept
- A clear complaints procedure
- Clean and well maintained premises

Depending on your business, the list could go on! But you have the idea. No doubt you could add many more.

Review and Take Action

Armed with your list of expectations, your next step is to review them and see which ones you are currently meeting. Remember, you may think you are meeting a certain expectation but this is an opportunity for a quick reality check to ensure it's really happening.

The list you're left with are the expectations which you are not currently delivering on. Looking at each of them in turn, ask yourself whether, even with the best will in the world, you could meet that expectation. You may have an over exuberant customer who just expects too much! If you realistically can't meet it, delete it.

You will then be left with a number of core expectations, which you could meet with some thought and action. Sit down with a pen and paper and put in place an Action Plan on what needs to be done to achieve what your customer expects of you. Get your staff together and all commit to putting the outcomes into action.

You've Listened!

Having gone to the trouble of asking your customers what they expect of you, don't forget to provide them with some feedback. If you gathered ideas from the shop floor, put up a notice thanking everyone for their participation and listing the expectations you are taking action on. Why not display an Expectations Charter?

If you had responses via e-mail, reply and again outline what you have done. You could even list the expectations on your web site.

Having gone to all this trouble of asking, reviewing and taking action, it's all too easy to forget what you committed after a few weeks or months. Make sure that at least once a quarter you re-visit the original list and check that you are still delivering what your customers expect of you.

What Can You Expect?

If you have followed through on the steps, what's in it for you? After all, the customers get what they want; what's your payback?

- Your customers are likely to return more often
- They are more likely to remain loyal customers
- They will spend more
- They will be an ambassador for you and your business
- They will generate referrals

Some pretty compelling reasons to put an expectations programme in place!

So, review these steps and consider asking your customers what they want of you. If you can manage their expectations, you manage their experience and so manage your profits!

