

ABi's series of 'Fact Sheets for Retailers' provide concise information on the key topic areas that impact on business success within the retail environment. Each fact sheet highlights the key issues and provides practical advice on the given topic.

If you would like any further advice on any issues relating to this fact sheet then please contact us. We will be delighted to help.

ABi Associates Limited is recognised by clients, businesses and agencies as one of the country's leading business development companies. We have over ten years of experience and expertise in providing business support to small businesses to succeed and grow.

Today's fast paced, competitive and chaotic consumer world provide a multitude of challenges for retailers. ABi offer a diverse range of unique, innovative and tailored business services to meet these challenges. These services include business diagnostics, training, sign posting, market planning, specialist consultancy and networking events. What ever your business challenge, we will show you a way of meeting it effectively.

ABi Associates Limited
The Grange
Neasden Lane
London
NW10 1QB
Tel: 020 8438 4550
info@abi.co.uk
www.abi.co.uk

Customer care review



Caring for your customers, making sure that your service is friendly and speedy, is probably the most cost-effective way of improving profits.

Happy customers spend more. They recommend you to their friends. And getting new customers is far more expensive than keeping the ones you already have.

The top two factors of importance for today's convenience store shopper are:

- Service (friendly)
- Speed (quick/efficient)

(source ACS Survey).

These are areas where smaller independent retailers have an opportunity to gain competitive advantage.

Here are some things that we should aim for:

- Increased sales through repeat business
- Improved customer loyalty
- A good reputation and a competitive edge

How can we do this?

Smile: It seems so obvious but if you are a shopper as well as a retailer then you will know that not all retailers can manage this obvious task. Some big stores recognise the importance of this and will employ 'greeters' but on entering many big stores, the person you encounter is a stony-faced security guard. After that you see the sales 'assistants' busily chatting among themselves and avoiding acknowledging your existence. Do you feel like shopping there? Only if you have to.

Good practice suggests that you should attempt to get immediate eye contact with everyone who walks into your shop. (This helps from a security angle too: see ABi's '**Retail Crime**' fact sheet).

Smiling at your customers means that you have acknowledged them and it will make it easier for them to approach you to ask for what they want if they can't see or find it for themselves.

It is possible, but difficult, to appear friendly without smiling so if you can't smile you will probably have failed to address the most important factor to shoppers.

Be polite: This is another "strategy" that costs nothing and is effective. If you can learn your customers names and start using them, that is even better.

Speed and efficiency: Don't keep customers hanging around. Speed and efficiency is important to customers so it should be twice as important to you.

Looking good: Take pride in your appearance and the appearance of the shop.

Build on your sales: Offer an 'after-sales' service. Build a longer-term relationship with customers that will make it easy for them to come again.

Resolve problems: Sometimes things go wrong. However, customer satisfaction levels often increase when problems occur - provided that you can respond well to those problems and resolve them efficiently.

So a complaint can be a valuable opportunity to gain a loyal customer.

You should say that you are sorry that the customer is disappointed. Listen to what your customer is saying. Take responsibility (don't pass the buck or blame other workers in the shop). Agree a resolution.

Training: Lead by example and train your employees in customer care. Your employees are at the front line of your operation and might need training in communication skills.

Canvas feedback: Ask customers for feedback by getting them to complete a 'customer satisfaction' survey. Keep the survey simple and, if possible, act on the feedback so that you can demonstrate to your customers that you are listening to them.

Your customers might suggest new lines for you to stock.

Keep your promises: If you tell a customer that you are going to do something - like get a product in for a particular day, or that you will deliver to them at a particular time - make sure that you keep your word.

Don't make promises that you cannot deliver.

Be helpful: You need to help the customer: don't just think about the needs of the business.

Take an interest: As your customers are human beings they

will have another life where they are not just customers. Take an interest in their lives and listen to what they tell you.

Maintain stock levels: This is especially important in certain product lines. Make sure that you can identify which are crucial to your business and make sure that your stock control procedures do their job.

Look after your employees: Happy employees are more likely to be friendly and helpful towards your customer.

Regular review: Step back and take an objective view of your business from a customer's perspective. Can you get someone else to act as a 'mystery shopper' and give you constructive feedback on how customers are treated?

ABi produces a range of Fact Sheets for businesses. The 'Stock Control' Fact Sheet provides additional information for independent retailers on this topic.