

SALE  
fresh  
markdowns

right now  
WOW!

# surviving in a shopping nation

how to increase loyalty and encourage repeat business

Sometimes *sales* can seem more like survival on Cuthroat Island. With loyalty waning, we have turned into a nation that is always looking for that better deal or that lower price — a true Shopping Nation. Here are some survival tips for increasing customer loyalty and encouraging repeat purchases in a world where loyalty's no longer the norm.

EDITORIAL | LENANN MCGOOKEY GARDNER



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**Loyalty.** It's a great idea — customers who appreciate you for what you do, and who wouldn't think of retaining someone else to do that type of work for them. It's kind of a quaint notion. But loyalty is mostly dead.

Let's check this out: are you loyal? Think of the people who provide services to you; do you continue to patronize them, without even thinking about it? Or do you "shop around?"

America — and much of the rest of the world, too — has evolved into a culture that shops. People are always looking — for a better deal, a lower price, or some miracle that will allow them to get acceptably good services for much less. They may not seek out other bidders, but when an amazing offer comes their way, it's hard to ignore!

In a world in which loyalty isn't the norm, where the best customers are often seeking competitive quotes just to keep current suppliers "honest," what can be done to grow a firm's revenue base?

Here are a few ways for you to increase your customers' loyalty and encourage repeat purchases:

**Have a Plan for Sustaining Relationships**

If your customers aren't hearing from you, they're probably not thinking about you — but they are thinking about the people who've called them today, proffering a better deal for the services you currently provide.

Do you have a system for getting in touch with your customers on a regular basis? You should! A minimum of one contact per quarter is essential, more if there are legitimate reasons for you to call. If nothing else, send an article likely to be of interest to them, and put a personal note on it, saying that you're thinking of them and would be happy to discuss the subject of the article, their situa-

tion, or overall progress with them sometime soon. Say you'll call them next week to set up a time for that chat, if they feel it's appropriate.

**Stay Aware of Your Value, and Make Sure Your Customers Do, Too**

Whenever possible, calculate return-on-investment: that's the increase in profits, not sales, net of the expense of paying for your service or product over a reasonable period of time. If your services or product are likely to help your customers grow their sales, it's fairly simple to compare their sales before working with you to their sales after doing so. Other services and products cut expenses; be sure you collect information about their expenses after working with you, and compare those figures to expenses prior to your arrival.

Your value may be difficult to calculate, but you should work hard to quantify something. What's their savings — if not in money, then in time, even just reduced hassle, as a result of their decision to work with you?

**Share the Story**

When you have made a significant difference for a customer, create a case study — the story of a customer's experience with you, written out in narrative form. Explain to your customer that you do this as a matter of course; you keep the case studies, like customer testimonials, for the benefit of others who are considering working with you, so they can understand the kinds of results you've been able to help people achieve. When your customers read a case study of their own success, there's an ego boost there, and that contributes to that elusive loyalty we all seek.

If you don't have the time to put together a case study for each of your successes, there are companies that can help you. One such business is **compellingcases.com**.



- MORE
- BETTER
- FASTER
- FOR LESS

**“If your customers aren’t hearing from you, they’re probably not thinking about you.”**

### **Bring Them Customers**


Your prospects are in business, too, and there’s probably nothing you can do for them that will be more appreciated than buying from them yourself, or sending others to do so!

### **Earn the Business**

Set aside time every single week to communicate with at least a few of your customers — set up a schedule so such contacts are made regularly — and always act on any requests you uncover, even if they’re not your normal line of work. Might you refer them to someone you know who can be of help? That’s better than their seeking a supplier in the Yellow Pages! Could you locate some information for them? Can you help in any way at all? If so, then do it! Going out of your way to help a customer might cost you a little in the short term, but in

the long term that extra effort you put in will be noticed by the customer.

It’s naïve to expect that customers, no matter how satisfied, are likely to be loyal, long-term, to any supplier of services. Customers are forever alert to the possibility that they may be overspending — and, on top of that, there’s an appeal to anything that’s fresh and new! But it’s easier to respond to the solicitation of someone new — someone who says he can do the same job and do it for less — when the relationship with the existing supplier has been allowed to deteriorate.

It’s true that it’s much easier to generate dollar #2 in business from an established customer than it is to get a new customer to spend dollar #1. But nurturing relationships is necessary for that, and, in a busy world, the only way such nurturing occurs is if you schedule it and make it happen! 

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