



Trust Is Worth More Than Likability

Being transparent with information will secure customer loyalty

By Tina Serio Saunders

We know instinctually that people buy from people they like. But how much does just being liked by a decision maker really help when a problem comes into play? If a problem occurs and damages your company's reputation with the customer, does being liked save the day? I don't think I'm alone when I say, "No."

The fact is, with today's availability of information and abundance of competition, you must go beyond the "like" emotion. Kindness, charm, jokes, history and friendly conversations may make the customer's day more enjoyable, but they don't provide value to the customer or guarantee loyalty to you.

Mistakes happen. When you experience a bad situation within an account, a track record of trust and transparency can go a long way. Your clients need to know that you actually have their best interest at heart. You must have their trust. And in the best business relationships, that works both ways.

Last November I had the pleasure again of hearing a speech by one of my former professors, now a national business consultant and author. Dr. Martha Rogers' latest book (Coauthored with Don Peppers) is titled, "Extreme Trust: Honesty as a Competitive Advantage." I highly recommend it to any business owner, or sales or marketing professional. In summary, it reinforces that transparency is inevitable with the progressive technologies we have today and it is incumbent upon us as trusted business advisors to be sure we are being transparent with our customers.

Jan/san is not the most transparent of industries. There are some practices in place that are not illegal and are in fact clearly spelled out

(somewhere) ... but we don't always make it a practice to be sure our customers are aware of particular details. Sometimes we skip clarification because it's easier not to explain the nuances, whether because it's more profitable (in the short run) not to, or because we are just not well enough informed ourselves.

My advice is to learn the details, even the smallest of points, and take the time to make sure your valued customers understand them. Most key decision makers will appreciate the knowledge and understand the logic behind some of our unique approaches to product differentiation.

For example, I'm fairly certain everyone who has accepted free dispensers already knows there is some reason why they are free. So why not take a second to elaborate and build trust?

Think customers will never measure toilet tissue or paper towel rolls? Think again. If we know our prospects want to compare apples to apples on products, why do we refrain from publishing all relevant information?

Some of the product approaches that may protect our investment in large accounts can also undermine our credibility, but only if we are not transparent. We have to share this information so that they trust us enough to solidify a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship. This is a valuable conversation we need to begin immediately. **SM**

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