

Conduct Customer Follow-Up

Customer follow-up can occur in a number of ways, and for a variety of reasons. The important thing is to use a method suited to the customer and the situation. In this case, one size does not fit all! Here are a few examples of matching the follow-up method and message to the customer and purchase:



1. Telephone message

"Mr. Stavros, this is Angela at The Well Heeled and I just wanted to make sure your boots arrived. Our records show they were shipped last Friday. If you have not received them by now, or if you have any concerns about your order please call me at.... If everything is to your satisfaction, no need to call back. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you and I hope you'll come see me next time you need shoes."



2. Thank-you card

"Dear Mrs. Rhodes, I certainly enjoyed helping you select a garden bench for your yard and I hope you are enjoying your morning coffee among the many birds that you mentioned visit your garden. Please come see us again at Gracious Gardens—we loved hearing about your planting adventures. Sincerely, Doug Harper."



3. E-mail

"Dear Mrs. Jenks, I just wanted to check in to verify that your new computer desk fit the space you had in mind. Hopefully you are enjoying the new workspace as you read this. If you have further needs for your home office, please call me. Thank you, Glenn Yoshida."

Follow-Up Etiquette

In addition to matching your method and message to your customers and their purchases, there are some other things you should consider in planning your follow-up. The first, of course, is whether you should follow up at all!

To follow up or not... Not every purchase requires a follow-up. You needn't call a customer who just bought a ninety-cent pen to see if he's happy with it. On the other hand, if the customer who bought the pen told you he was testing it out to see if he was going to order a large quantity for his office, it would make sense to follow up with him.

Certain types of merchandise—appliances or computers, for example—are costly and can be damaged during delivery. After such a purchase, it is customary for the sales associate to contact the customer to make sure the merchandise was received in good condition—*after* the scheduled delivery date, not before.

You may also want to ask the customer if the store's delivery people were courteous and careful. Their satisfactory performance is also part of what you're selling the customer.

Phone savvy... Exercise good judgment when conducting telephone follow-up. Not every customer will appreciate one more phone call in his or her busy day, so be sure that the customer's purchase warrants phone follow-up. If it does, consider the most appropriate time and place for that call.

For example, you may have noticed that telemarketers tend to call at dinnertime because they know people are likely to be home. Many customers resent such an interruption (unless they have specifically asked you to call at night).

It might be better to call during the day, leaving a voice message if necessary. In most cases it is acceptable to leave a message such as the following:

Sales Associate: "This is Taylor, from the Computer Store, and I just wanted to make sure your PC was delivered. I enjoyed helping you select a workstation for your son. No need to return this call if everything is okay, but please call me at 123-4567 if you have any problems with your computer or software or if I can be of further service."

This leaves the customer in control and does not place an unnecessary burden on him to call you back.

Keep it professional... Sending an occasional postcard to your best customers is one very effective—and unobtrusive—way to maintain your relationship with them. While you want to personalize your notes by writing them by hand, you don't want to get personal in a way that would make your customer uncomfortable or that would seem inappropriate. For instance, you can write Rita Lamarr that you hope the wedding shoes she purchased were comfortable during her ceremony. But you don't want to ask her if she had too much champagne at the reception!

Tip: *Be sensitive about using postcards that others may read. For example, if you are following up on a gift purchase, enclose your note in an envelope.*

Staying in Touch

Make it pleasurable... The last thing in the world you want to do is alienate your best customers by making a pest out of yourself with too many cards and calls. Staying in touch with customers should be a pleasant, reassuring experience for the customer. A note to a customer immediately following a purchase is acceptable. So are occasional contacts that provide your customer with information she will value—a sale, an in-store promotional event, etc. However, it does not mean camping on the customer's doorstep, leaving a note on the customer's windshield, or visiting the customer at her place of work.

In their best interests... Most stores advertise special sales or other promotional events. But customers do not always pay attention to these ads. Customers often appreciate receiving a postcard that informs them of key events, tells them about no-interest charges on store accounts during Christmas, or reminds them of the birthday discount your store offers. It makes customers feel special and shows them that you are looking out for their best interests. A handwritten note from you may also give them that extra incentive to come in.

Valuable contacts... This is where knowing your customers and referring to your client records come in handy. Use your client record system to note items your customer asks for and is interested in—even if you are unable to provide them at the moment. The store may get the merchandise in the future, or you may find some alternative merchandise that would suit the customer's needs. Then you can contact the customer. Even if he no longer needs the item, the customer usually appreciates that "you remembered."



WHEN TO FOLLOW UP

Following are a few situations that warrant follow-up with a customer, including one example of the type of follow-up that might be appropriate. For the remaining situations, write in your own ideas of what follow-up might be appropriate.

SITUATION

Your customer comes in every few months to see if you have any new neckties from his favorite designer.

FOLLOW-UP

Write him a note to let him know that you are expecting a new shipment in a week. Offer to hold some for him if he calls you with color preferences.

-
1. Your customer has purchased an entertainment center and asked to have it delivered and set up in her home.

 2. A customer recently returned a golf bag because it did not have all the features he wanted. You have just found one in your catalog that might fit his needs.

 3. The customer has been waiting for some specific new books to become available. They have finally arrived.

 4. A customer has been in several times to look at wallpaper and has taken samples home but can't decide. You just found out one of your suppliers is sponsoring a wallpaper clinic, to be conducted by a noted decorator.

Compare your answers to the suggestions in the Appendix.