

E-Retailing Insight Providing Outstanding Customer Service Online

September 15, 2009

In the competitive retail climate in which we find ourselves, many retailers talk about customer service being a top priority, but how many truly follow through with such assertions? With the web becoming more prevalent than ever in retail and e-commerce, it is even more important that customer service be provided not only in person, but online. Consumers are regaining spending confidence. The exciting part of this upturn is that the holiday shopping season is nearing and 2009 is gearing to be the biggest year for online shopping in the history of the internet.

No matter what you're selling, it is important to provide outstanding online customer service. It is estimated that by 2012, over 50% of all retail purchases will be influenced by the web. Currently more than 60% of Canadian consumers go to the web to search out the websites of local businesses.

Retail is not just a real-world relationship any longer, and has not been for almost 20 years. E-commerce has grown along with the internet, becoming more sophisticated as the internet has. In order to have continued success online, an e-commerce retailer must be able to offer customer service over multiple channels:

1. **Contact Info** - list your phone and physical location information front and centre on your website. Offer a toll-free number for out-of-town customers.
2. **Email** - allow customers to email you directly from the site through a simple customer request contact form. Some sites only allow customers to email if they have a computer-based email client (eg. Outlook Express), which limits them to their personal computer. Some customers might not have this program, thus not allowing them to email you. All incoming email must be replied to, if not the same day, then at least within 48 hours if possible. You run the risk of alienating customers, otherwise.
3. **Website/Webstore** - for retailers, updating your website/webstore on a regular (and for some, this means weekly, or even daily) basis means providing outstanding customer service. For many customers, the website is the first point of contact with you. Retailers who offer multi-channel retailing, which allows customers to shop outside of a physical store, i.e. online, are providing good customer options, which is a huge part of customer service. Allow customers to buy online and pick up in-store, or offer same-day local delivery. In addition, you might allow online purchases to be returned in-store. These options offer huge customer service advantages over sites that are strictly mail order.
4. **Mail Order** - this type of business has been around for more than 100 years and is still very popular today. If you do still issue a physical catalogue, ensure that it is easy to reference online in the least amount of clicks or by searching. Clearly define your privacy, shipping, and return policies.
5. **Online Payment Options** - offer as many methods of payment as possible, such as all major credit cards, PayPal and online debit.

Whether you're new to e-business or an internet veteran, you should always remember that for many customers, the website is the first point of contact with your business and your customer service practices. Ensure that your site represents you well in that department. In today's competitive climate, if you don't treat your customer right, most likely someone else will.

We invite your comments on this discussion about multi-channel retailing. Please write us at e-retailing-insights@jammicron.com. Thanks!

Copyright 2009

E-Retailing Insights is a white paper series from Jammicron Technology, aimed at helping retailers get the latest information on Internet retailing. For more information, please visit:

www.jammicron.com