

Three things to remember when communicating with customers in uncertain times



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Uncertainty is the common denominator for any business trying to stay connected to its customers right now. There are so many things we simply can't answer or have little to no control over as we try to manage through unprecedented change and threats to our businesses.

As marketing professionals, we have to rethink how to best speak to customers at a time when it is certainly not business as usual. Customer loyalty is truly on the line for many different reasons. How you communicate with customers now can make all the difference in whether that customer relationship thrives.

In our experience, we have seen far too many customer loyalty programs built solely on transactions. In the best of times, transaction-based programs don't deliver true customer loyalty. They are price focused and the best discount often wins the sale. A focus on transactions or making a sale in times like we're experiencing now will not be what endears your product, service or brand to a customer. Very likely it will do the opposite.

True customer loyalty is built on developing and nurturing a relationship. And strong customer relationships are what just might help save your business.

Here are three things we see as essential to communicating with your customers and helping to nurture a relationship in a very trying time:

- 1 Demonstrate compassion.**
Show your customers you sincerely care about them, their business and the business issues they are dealing with. Make it personal and genuine. The last thing they need to see is a standardized letter or email that speaks in general terms. Your communications should be relevant to them, their business and their potential concerns.
- 2 Be transparent.**
Tell them the truth—explain what can or cannot be done at this time from your standpoint as a supplier or partner. Promise to keep them apprised on a regular basis. Let them know when things are changing and how it might affect them—good or bad.
- 3 Step up.**
Now is the time to go above and beyond in how you service and support your customers. Offer special terms, different delivery options, extra counsel, access to critical information—anything you can do to make their lives easier and their businesses more productive. This is the time to stand out from your competitors and show how much you value your customers.

These three points may seem obvious at first but they are actually basic to any human relationship. Compassion, transparency, exceptional service and support are building blocks to a solid customer relationship both in good times and even more so when times are tough.



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