

Creating an Experience

How do you feel as a business owner right now? If you didn't say you were even the least bit "stressed out" by the business environment, or the national news, or anything else, you'd be a very unique individual. We are all probably feeling some sort of anxiety as our chaotic economy works its way through the recession. Your customers are no different than you right now. Stressed out customers are changing their purchasing patterns in response to reduced purchasing power and the anxiety that comes with it. How can your business benefit from this?

Retail businesses must be proactive in responding to the anxiety experienced by customers. Customers are still buying. They still seek some reward, some escape that is affordable to them... something that can economically satisfy the urge to purchase something new. While they continue to purchase, value has become even more important to the decision. Proactive businesses will recognize the changing purchasing habits of consumers and find a niche within their line of business to satisfy those changes. That niche may simply involve creating an "escape" within your business, where a customer can discover ways to satisfy their needs and have an experience that makes them leave your business feeling better than when they came in. Customer experience can be a powerful differentiator between you and the competition.

A retailer I visited recently was very good at creating this type of experience. She was so good at relating to me, that I spent a little more than I intended. However, I felt better when I left. It was worth it for me, and I will go back again! What did she do that increased the value factor for me, and the amount of the sale for her?

First, she made an intentional effort to greet me with a smile and a friendly atmosphere when I arrived. You couldn't tell if she was stressed! It was a breath of fresh air to enter the well organized and well decorated store. The atmosphere was refreshing. The owner was conversational and was genuinely excited and knowledgeable about her product line. Secondly, she took time to show me the unique items that she carried; taking time to single out the ones that she realized would be perfect choices for me. Of course, she had to spend time chatting with me and getting to know me in order to figure this out. As the owner of the store, she knew that establishing a connection and making a customer feel welcome and important were key strategies. What was obvious was that she had reinforced this strategy with her employees. I observed that each person that came into the store was treated the exact same way by different employees. The owner and each employee went above and beyond to make each customer feel that they were among friends. It was truly an escape from the stress of the day.

Before I left, the owner made sure that she collected my contact information so that she could let me know when she had events of interest, or new product lines, that I might like. I noted that she took time to make notes in this information of the product lines that particularly interested me that day. Her strategy is to continually work to seal the connection with her customers and generate the important customer loyalty that we have

discussed in prior articles. The beauty of this strategy is that it only takes effort... and doesn't cost anything.

Step back and observe your business. Be mindful of how you and your employees relate to your customers. What do the customers experience? What can you do to create the "escape" that your "stressed out" customers need? Your local Small Business Development Center is a great place to come and brainstorm new strategies to build your customer relationships and your business. Services are free and confidential. Visit www.sbdc-longwood.com for more information.