

Thank You

The simplest tool businesses have to retain customers is "Thank You."

A few months back, my significant other called Nintendo to complain that our Wii was not working properly and he wanted it repaired. Not only did Nintendo thank him for notifying them of the issues we were having, but the friendly voice offered to repair the unit at no cost and give us an additional year warranty from the date they repaired it. Nintendo made us life-time customers.

There are many opportunities to thank our customers. We should thank them when they do business with us, when they refer business, when they call to complain, when they allow us to better serve them, and when they provide genuine feedback (positive or negative). In the case of Nintendo, they verbally thanked us for our feedback and patronage and rectified a frustrating situation above and beyond what was necessary.

While there are many forms of thank you's, the most effective are personal, genuine, and immediate. This can be achieved by writing a letter or thank you note. I like to keep a box of blank thank you cards in my office- just in case. After a company allows me to discuss my services with them, I immediately send them a thank you card in the mail. While my letters give a general thanks for granting me the opportunity to share my services, I always make sure to mention a specific point in our conversation to personalize the letter. I prefer to send a letter in the mail rather than e-mail because often times, potential customers will have dismissed us out of their minds after a couple days have passed. When the letter arrives, it's a friendly reminder that we are there... When they need us.

Another way in which I like to say thanks, is by simply saying thanks. A verbal warm and friendly thank you can go a long way. Again, make sure you highlight a specific point in your experience together.

Depending on your budget, you may also want to send a small gift. Even if you don't have a large budget to give out sports tickets or expensive bottles of wine, there are plenty of affordable options that show you appreciate their business. Did the customer mention a specific sports team or vacation spot they really enjoy? Send the thank you on a themed post card... State, "Thought you would like this..." Coffee mugs, Starbucks gift cards, cookie bouquets... All inexpensive options to say thanks. One tactic to avoid in gift giving; giving out your companies branded items. According to Liana Evans (2010), unless you give your customers a limited edition or personalized version of your product or service, saying "thank you" with your own "stuff" comes off as self serving and a bit tacky. This amounts to silently saying, "I'm too lazy to get you a gift that you'd appreciate."

In any case, the power of a genuine thank you shows your customers that you value your relationship and hope to continue building on it. Whichever method works best for you, just make sure thanks is heard loud and clear.

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