



Customer Relationship Management

Customer Relationship Management, also known as CRM, is a strategy commonly used by businesses to effectively manage the relationship between the company and the customers/clients. CRM takes advantage of and leverages technology tools to facilitate the customer-business relationship. Marketing, customer service, technical support and quality management are affected areas.

Quality customer service is the foundation for effectively managing the customer relationship. In order to provide quality customer service you must first understand exactly what the customer needs.

Customer Service Questions

- What does the customer define as quality customer service?
- How does customer service level vary between different customers?
- How does your company define quality customer service?
- Do you regularly solicit feedback from customers on their satisfaction with your products and services?
- What formal programs are in place to solicit customer feedback?
- What programs are in place to effectively address customer complaints?
- Do you have any mechanisms in place to perpetuate the relationship with the customer after the initial transaction is completed?
- What software tools have you implemented to facilitate the process of providing quality customer service?
- Are you “connected” with your customers on an ongoing basis (as is common when using social networking tools)?

The Communication Factor

Good communication is the foundation for good customer service.

Do you communicate effectively with your customers and prospects? Although many would claim this to be just another aspect of marketing, and not a separate topic, it does pay dividends to address the issue of customer communication as its own topic.

For example, do you have mechanisms in place to help manage an ongoing relationship with your customers and clients? One example of this would be a company Facebook page or a Blog, and each mechanism would have its own advantages and disadvantages. The key thing here is that you don't just let your customers disappear after you have your first transaction with them; rather, you perpetuate and enrich the relationship.

One way to do this would be to collect email addresses from those you transact business with and send them a periodic newsletter. This newsletter would be an electronic tool that facilitates an ongoing dialog and promotes future transactions.

Listening is one of the most critical elements of communicating effectively. You need to understand their perspective, and to do that, you must listen to them. Many companies use a customer satisfaction survey as a way to "listen."