A Retailer's Guide to Winning Customer Hearts

Every so often, we're graced with a love-at-first-sight customer—someone who stumbles upon and clicks with your business instantly, loyal to you forevermore. But they're far from the norm. Winning the hearts of customers [usually] takes more than a single experience, and rather a cocktail of shared values, personalization and multiple positive interactions.

While that perfect mix might be different for every customer and every business, here are a few tactics universally proven to improve acquisition, engagement and retention. Make sure you're doing these four things to nurture your customer relationships this month and beyond—because love shouldn't be reserved just for Valentine's Day, of course!

Engage with them on social media

A few stats you won't be able to unsee:

- More than half of today's shoppers prefer to use social media for customer service, over phone or email.[1]

- 60% of users who complain on social media expect an answer within an hour.[2]

- Failure to respond can lead to a 15% increase in churn rate.[3]

Monitoring your social accounts for customer service inquiries should be a priority, but taking time to respond to customers who engage positively is the extra step that will set you apart. Especially in a year of limited face-to-face contact, it humanizes your brand, builds trust and—quite literally—shows that you're paying attention to what your patrons have to say.

Be it a question, comment about a pleasant experience or compliment on the post, a response—even as simple as a quick thank you—can go a long way.

Give loyal customers the VIP treatment

The more data you collect, the clearer it will be to identify your highest spending and most frequent customers. Concierge services, exclusive offers and unique rewards are all ways to treat your biggest fans. Considering that roughly 20% will produce 80% of your future revenue, it pays dividends to cultivate and nurture that top 20%. Find ways to make them feel special and add value at every interaction:

- Free personal styling sessions or private shopping appointments
- Handwritten thank you notes
- Preview or pre-sale events
- Birthday discounts or small gifts

Remember that [CRM software](#) integrated with your POS offers a holistic view of every customer across your business—whether they are shopping online or in multiple brick and mortar locations—so you're able to maintain that relationship no matter which channel they visit.

Integrating a loyalty program with your POS system makes it easy to identify what kinds of incentives customers best respond to.

Add a charitable or socially conscious component

A recent survey found that 71 percent of consumers will spend more money at a small business if it supports a positive social or environmental cause[4]. When you add in generational factors, like 81 percent of millennials expect their brands to make a public commitment to good corporate citizenship[5], it's clear that incorporating a charitable or socially conscious component can win hearts *and* offer a boost to your bottom line. Not sure where to start? Connect with local nonprofits and organizations in your community to see if there may be opportunity to partner.

Personalize their experience

It's the age-old plea: All that our loved ones want is to be understood! Retailers who are standing out from the pack today *know* their customers, inside and out, and are delivering personalized shopping experiences that keep them coming back for more. How? Through constantly collecting, analyzing and acting on customer feedback and data at every part of the [customer journey](#).

Think about it: You aren't (well, we hope!) making business decisions in the dark: You're mining historical data to staff your store, buy inventory and market to your customers, all before they even walk through your doors. The most successful retailers are taking it a step further in using cloud-based, mobile clienteling tools that give sales associates a snapshot view of customers, empowering them to make targeted recommendations, place special orders and enroll in loyalty programs.

Finally, post-sale, they're closing the loop, crafting highly relevant email campaigns and promotions that inspire future purchases, positive reviews and loyalty.