

# Retention is crucial

Retaining customers might not be as thrilling as attracting new ones, says **Diane Banister**, but it is absolutely vital for the success of your business

**C**ustomer retention rarely seems to attract much attention until attrition levels start to hurt, or competitor activity starts to cause alarm.

Organisations often focus on the more visibly sales-related options of gaining new customers, or increasing the spend of existing ones. Yet winning a new customer is probably costing you a lot more than retaining an existing one — some estimates say six to seven times more.

In the past, customer and competitor apathy might have helped you retain your customers. A proportion of your market will stay with you simply because they perceive the effort or risk of switching to another supplier outweighs any potential benefits.

But do you really want to rely on apathy? What if you could have more certainty and control? Most organisations would agree with the logic of customer retention and many would see the telephone as a key channel in their plans. So what distinguishes the companies that do this well?

Ultimately, customers stay with you because they trust you and what they see or

experience of you. That is your brand—and how well you implement your brand.

Popular understanding of brand is often visual: logos, advertising, product packaging, posters. But what about your brand voice? And what about what you actually do — your accuracy, competency, doing what you said you would do?

Everything that your people say or do has an impact on how your customers perceive your organisation. And, if your customers start to develop a poor perception, they will either leave or be vulnerable to an approach from your competitors. In addition, products and services in many markets are becoming increasingly commoditised, so your brand voice could provide a valuable means of differentiating your products and services from those of your competitors.

But people are all different. How do you achieve any kind of consistency and brand voice when there are so many different personalities talking to your customers?

For all the sophistication and investment in marketing, it comes down to the right language for your market place and the



ability to translate your marketing strategy into behaviours and conversations that your people can have with customers.

Of course, the fully scripted approach gives you total control over the words that are used — but often also leads to decreasing returns on listening skills, personality and tone. In contrast, a dialogue approach — where you develop your people to use a call structure, key phrases, type of language and tone — lets you step back and let your people communicate. This gives you a two way conversation, flexibility to respond to the customer and enables your employees to buy into, rather than resist, your brand behaviours.

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*There will always be a cost to customer service. Why not understand how you can use that activity to strengthen your business?*