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Your Customer Strategy is Vital

By [jasonvistaprint](#) | March 10, 2010 | [Customer Relations](#), [Micro Business Issues](#), [Micro Business Perspectives](#)

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This guest post is part of our ongoing [Small Business Perspective](#) series, and is written by [Caprice de Lorm](#), owner of [de Lorm Designs](#) in Orange County, CA.



Customers are one of your greatest assets. How you care for them reflects back to your business in the types of clients you acquire and maintain. It reveals the values that your business truly embraces and the processes that have been set up to support, or perhaps are out of sync with, your company's core values.

When you think of how you serve your clients, what comes to mind? What are the processes that your company follows to provide and ensure quality customer service? What do you have in place to actively, and perhaps even proactively, support an environment of quality customer service at every step of the customer lifecycle?

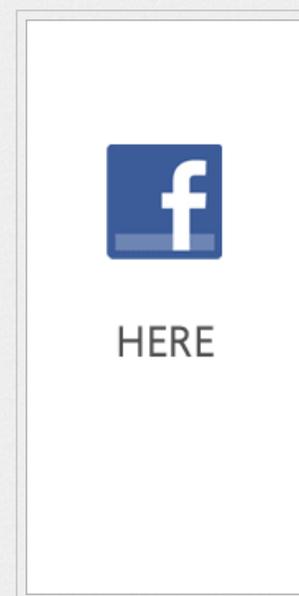
[Wikipedia](#) defines [customer service](#) as "the provision of [service](#) to [customers](#) before, during and after a purchase." One barometer I use when assessing customer service processes is to ask clients to provide feedback about how they experience doing business with my company. It is important that my company is considered easy to do business with, a team player in meeting the client's business goals, and a valuable resource in the planning and implementation of their marketing goals. Being responsive, approachable, and creating seamless interactions is also important, so I also seek feedback in these areas.

As you look at your business operations, take the time to carefully review and identify what you do during each phase of the customer lifecycle to support a quality experience.

Before: This includes the presale and sales processes. Elements to consider are the processes for how you qualify and contact potential clients, what you have in place to make sure that the needs and desires of your clients are understood and met through your products and/or services, and the types of documentation and other materials provided in the qualification and sales steps. This will ensure that the potential client clearly understands the aspects of doing business with your company.

During: This is the step where the sale has been made and the project is being implemented. This phase can include designs, reviews, beta tests, and installations/implementations. How you treat and communicate with your customers during this time tells the story about how you value your employees, your customers, and the relationships. It also reveals your commitment to quality service. It is important to provide ongoing communication regarding status, provide meaningful and responsive feedback mechanisms, and have in place a process for the proper handling of issues and concerns that might arise. This is the time to show that your business "can do" and "does do" in a way that creates ease and contribution in meeting the client's needs.

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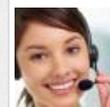
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After: This includes the post sales and post implementation processes. There are opportunities during this phase to check in regarding the project, ensure that the client's needs were met, and ask for additional input and possibly referrals. If there are open issues to address, now is the time. You might uncover other needs or opportunities or perhaps discover a disconnect that you can address and resolve. This time also provides the opportunity to thank the customer for their business and to reinforce the value that you provide through your services.

How your organization is structured, trained, supported, and compensated to meet the definition of customer service will contribute to or distract from your customer service goals. If you and your employees know how to listen to your clients, paying attention to both words and actions, you will be able to identify how you are perceived as it relates to providing good customer service. If you have clearly identified and strategically created processes for offering quality customer service during each of the lifecycle phases, you will find that you are able to obtain and maintain quality clients.



Customer Service Skills: Use Them

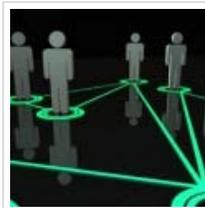
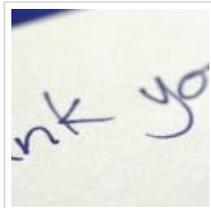
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About the author

The lead contributor to the blog is Jason Keith, senior communications manager at Vistaprint. Jason and his team are deeply involved with Vistaprint's micro business customers on a daily basis and lead the efforts in mining micro business trends, behaviors, and attitudes. A former journalist with more than a decade of experience in the communications field, he and his team conduct surveys, analysis and create micro business case studies to get a better understanding of the issues facing this unique group of entrepreneurs. To reach him directly email microbusiness@vistaprint.com

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