

# Serving Customers Electronically

**M**anuel, the owner of Sports Awards USA, has just met with the designers he hired to develop his company's Website. They asked him to list what his customers look for when they shop at his store. Manuel closes his door and concentrates.

"The first thing customers ask," Manuel thinks, "is whether we make trophies or ribbons or plaques. We'll



need buttons on the home page that link to pages about each of these products." He jots down the product lines at the top of a sheet of paper.

Then, starting with Trophies, he lists the features customers look for and the benefits available to them. "Shoppers look for specialty trophies. They ask if we have bowlers, figure skaters, tennis players, golfers, and skiers. We'll need an eye-catching message that tells them where to click

for a complete list of available trophies. We'll also need pictures and descriptions of each trophy, ones that show the type of base, the height, and the cost." For benefits, he writes, "Over 100 trophies to choose from! Discounts based on quantity. Fast delivery. Monthly online specials."

After Manuel completes the lists for each product line, his thoughts return to the customers, and he makes additional notes about features that will entice them to the Website. When he finishes and reviews his lists, he's pleased. He knows that a well-running, comprehensive site will improve

customer service and increase sales. He expects the Website to increase orders by at least 25 percent in the next year.

## What's Inside

### *Here, you will learn to*

- ◆ use technology to create relationships
- ◆ provide a human touch to technology
- ◆ use email as an effective customer service tool

Workshop

8

## The Way of the Future

Today, over half of all U.S. retailers sell products or services on the Internet, and online sales are growing at a rapid rate. In 2018, E-commerce sales accounted for almost 10% of all retail sales.

That's a major change from just 25 years ago, when most consumers had never heard of email, the Internet, or the World Wide Web. In today's world, all employees must know how to use technology to build customer relationships.

## Developing Customer-Focused Websites

Many companies are working feverishly to get online. Often, they hire professional Website designers to create their sites, but the designers rely on the companies to provide the content for the pages. If you are asked to contribute to the Website implementation process, keep these important tips in mind:

- ◆ On each page, sell the benefits to the consumer of staying at your site. Focus on what the customer wants to know. For example, most customers don't care about the history of your company; they want to know how your company can help them.
- ◆ Be sure the site has a well-functioning search engine.
- ◆ Provide concrete product information. Since customers can't see and touch the products, they need specific information to make sound buying decisions.

- ◆ Include a FAQ page, where customers can quickly find the answers to frequently asked questions.
- ◆ Make it easy for customers to contact your company. Prominently display the email address, toll-free number, customer service hours, company's address, and names of top management.
- ◆ Before launching the site, ask a select group of customers to test it and report on its effectiveness and friendliness.



Research has shown that customers prefer easy-to-navigate sites that utilize secure servers. They don't like companies that respond slowly to their email messages or orders, sell their customer data, run out of stock frequently, or have complicated returns policies.

The Internet has massive strategic and operational implications for the delivery of service excellence across all business sectors.

— **STEPHEN CONNOCK**

*Chief Executive,  
Institute of Customer Service*

## Serving Your E-commerce Customers

Companies that want to retain their customers' make it easy for shoppers to email or call customer service representatives who answer questions promptly. Your company may want to offer chat technology, where customers can chat online with customer service representatives. As Rick Kilton, the founder of RK Consulting, noted, "Customer loyalty is created when the customer develops a bond with the *people* in a company. A Website is not likely to develop or nurture loyalty as well as human interaction. The key is to provide both automated and human support."

## Providing the Human Touch

No matter how customer friendly you think your company's Website is, realize that customers, especially first-time users, may experience difficulties and become frustrated, upset, or angry. In serving customers who reach you through your company's Website, you have four main responsibilities:

1. Help the customer feel at ease.
2. Provide the answer the customer needs.
3. Tactfully show the customer how he or she can use the Website to find the answer.
4. If possible, obtain feedback about the usefulness of your company's Website.

Meeting these responsibilities requires you to listen, teach, and problem solve. You also need solid knowledge of the information in your company's Website and know how to use the search engines effectively. Your goal is to make your customers feel competent, so they will visit your site again.

Lou Garcia, the executive director of the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals, notes, "Because of the speed, convenience, and ease of access of online customer service, consumers are finding it to be an incredibly useful and attractive resource." But its usefulness depends on how helpful, instructive, and understanding the representatives are.



# ? Did you know?

Although it may seem like the Web has been around forever, that's far from the truth. It was introduced in 1989 by English computer scientist Timothy Berners-Lee as a way for physicists employed by the European Laboratory for Particle Physics to communicate with one another when working in different parts of the world.

## ACTIVITY 8.1

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

### You Can Do It!

You are a customer service representative for the office supply store Staples. A customer has just called asking if you sell laptop computers. She can't find them on your Website. She wants to see pictures of the laptops and compare their features. Open the company Website ([www.staples.com](http://www.staples.com)). Then, in the space below, record the procedure you will instruct the customer to follow. List each step. The first step is provided.

1. Type "laptop computer" in the search box on the Staples home page.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Compose a description of one laptop computer sold by Staples. List its features and its price.

## Using Email Effectively

Each day countless customers and businesses use email to communicate because it is convenient, inexpensive, and easy to send. It arrives at its destination almost instantaneously and can be sent day or night without concern about the recipients time zone.

For business, email is an efficient way to respond to customers' questions. But it also has many other important uses:

- ◆ Send emails to announce product or service updates.
- ◆ Provide customers with reports and other documents via email attachments.
- ◆ Stay in touch with customers by sending monthly notes or newsletters.
- ◆ Communicate the same message to multiple recipients at one time.
- ◆ Remind customers of warranty renewals, contract dates, and more.

## Responding to Customer Email

When you respond to a customer's request by email, address the customer's concern in the first line or two. Write in simple, non-technical language, and stick to the point. When possible, use bullets and other formatting techniques to provide structure. Finally, keep your paragraphs short. Busy customers don't have time to wade through a lot of unnecessary words.

If you receive several email requests for the same type of information, create standard wording, called "boilerplate copy." Recognize, however, that every email request is unique and add a few sentences before or after the boilerplate copy to address the customer's particular concern. Using standard copy will mean you won't have to reinvent the wheel with every response.

Write in a polite, friendly way. If you know the customer's name, use it in the salutation. Because email does not convey emotions well, avoid sarcasm and humor.

Be sure to proofread your email carefully. Even though email is informal, keep it professional.

Grammatical and typographical errors will detract from your message.

Finally, remember that email is not private. Customers may copy your messages and send them to others. Your employer can also check your email. Be sensible and careful in what you write.





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## Managing the Flood of Email

With so many customers using email to contact a company, it's not unusual for employees to feel overwhelmed by the number of email messages they receive each day. Here are some suggestions:

- ◆ Ask supervisors whether your company can automate its acknowledgments to customers, letting them know their email messages have been received. Other messages can also be automated, as long as they provide detailed information that accurately answers the question that was asked.
- ◆ Determine whether your company's Website can list different email addresses for different types of questions. That will help ensure that messages reach the people who can best answer them.
- ◆ Categorize the email messages you receive, and prioritize the categories. Give complaints and orders higher priority than letters requesting general information about your products or services. Generally, complaints should be answered by phone. Other messages can be answered by email within 24 hours.

## ACTIVITY 8.2

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

### Read My Email

Compose an email message that relays the following information to a customer. Include additional points that you think are important.

The customer's health care policy has arrived at your insurance office, and you would like the client to stop by for a short meeting so you can review the policy with her. Suggest two or three times when you are available and ask her to call for an appointment.



## GETTING CONNECTED

Web-based customer service can be a challenge, and the following Websites will guide you toward successful Web-based customer service:

<https://myqss.link/Web-Based-CS>

<https://myqss.link/Pros-and-Cons>

## WORKSHOP WRAP-UP

- Online customers prefer Websites that load quickly, are easy to navigate, and provide access to live support.
- When customers contact you because of difficulties with your company's Website, empathize, problem solve, and then show them how to use the Website.
- Smart employees today use email as an effective and efficient way to stay in touch with their customers.
- If you receive large amounts of email, prioritize your messages, dealing with complaints and orders before routine inquiries.
- When responding to customer email, use simple, non-technical language and stick to the point.