



The Power of Relationships

How to build long-lasting customer relationships to help you do more business



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When you're a small business, you have one distinct advantage over the big guys: customer relationships.

Every time you're talking with a customer in-store, emailing someone who has a question, or answering the phone, you're building a relationship. The odds are good that you know many of your customers' names and what they like. You may even know a bit about their personal lives.

It's almost impossible for bigger companies to establish the same connection with customers (that's why those that do really stand out).

Want the really good news?

It's never been easier to grow the relationships that are so crucial to your business's success. With valuable channels like email and social media, you are able to stay top-of-mind and more connected to your audience than ever before. As a result, you'll be able to build trust and familiarity with the people who can help grow your business.

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Using Relationships to Your Advantage

While the big guys try their hardest to engage with consumers on a local level, few big brands can match the experience put forth by business owners that live and work in the same community as their customers.

Here's a closer look at why this is:

1. Your business has a personality

When you let your personality into your business, it separates you from the competition and allows people the opportunity to connect with you.

That's what compels people to return to small businesses in the first place. People like to do business with those they know, like, and trust.

Sure, convenience and prices are factors in their purchasing decision, but keep in mind that a great experience is also a deciding factor.

ASK YOURSELF:

- *How do I show the personality of my business across all points of contact?*
- *How can I use my personality to create a memorable experience for my customers?*

2. You know your customers

You know your customers in a way that big businesses don't. If someone tweets you, you may know who they are. If they call the store, you probably know their name.

Your customers will remember their interactions with you, whether they were online or face-to-face.

If it was a good interaction, they'll tell friends about it and they'll keep coming back.

ASK YOURSELF:

- *How can I give my customers recommendations that suit their individual needs?*
- *What kinds of discounts and deals can I offer that I know my customers will like?*
- *How do I market my business to the customers I already know, so I can keep them coming back and get people with similar interests coming to my store?*



Using Relationships to Your Advantage (cont.)

3. You can build relationships that last

A lot of your customers are coming to you because they genuinely like your business. And the more times they come back, the more likely they are to become your most loyal fans.

You're in charge of making sure that your business flourishes. Having long-lasting relationships can be the most important part of that growth.

Small businesses know that repeat customers and loyalty are the best parts of having relationships in the first place. You get to know your customers and they become personally invested in your business.

ASK YOURSELF:

- *How do I make sure that my relationships with customers last?*
- *What do I do to reward customers who keep coming back?*
- *How can I continue to build those relationships?*

The next steps...

The odds are good that you already have great relationships with your customers.

Continue to focus on those relationships. You'll find that your current customers are your best source of new business, because they end up marketing your business for you through word-of-mouth.

Of course, you may have noticed word-of-mouth has been rapidly changing over the past decade thanks to social media and mobile devices.

In the next section, we'll take a closer look at how the evolution of word-of-mouth marketing is helping small businesses reach their next great customer.

The Evolution of Word-of-Mouth Marketing

When we speak to small businesses, most estimate that roughly 90 percent of their new customers come from referrals. Word-of-mouth has always worked — and it still works.

What's changed, however, is how we now solicit information from our networks.

Sure, we still ask our friends, family, and co-workers for their feedback. And we also share our experiences with them, the only difference is now, we're often using technology to do it.

This means that when people talk about your business the discussion is no longer limited to private face-to-face interactions. Instead, these discussions are now often publicly visible — due to the widespread use of social media.

Your customers now have a voice that can be heard beyond their immediate circle of close friends and family.

How to leverage the “voice” to help you do more business

With the addition of this social media megaphone, you, as a business owner, can drive dramatically better results with a lot less effort. This is because social media enables a different level of customer engagement, one that you can use to encourage and reward customer conversations — conversations that include positive mentions, endorsements, and “likes.”

Plus, it's much easier, less expensive, and infinitely more fun, to interact with people you already know — your existing customers, clients, donors or members.

By engaging your customers, you make them part of your marketing team.

It's this visible engagement and the positive endorsements that will bring you tomorrow's customers. Not only do your current customers and fans influence how others perceive your business, they help build the trust you need to get others to do business with you.

Engagement does even more to help word-of-mouth.

By engaging, you deepen your existing relationships while allowing others to get to know, like, and trust you before they may be ready to purchase from you. Engagement also allows you to stay top of mind with those who may recommend you and/or need your services.

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The next steps...

In the next section we'll take a deeper look at how you can build on word-of-mouth referrals by adding email marketing relationships into the mix.





The Power of Email Relationships

Many online relationships begin on social media.

These sites are great because of the social word-of-mouth that happens when you're engaging with your connections.

But due to the nature of these networks, you don't have much control over who sees your updates or even when they see them. Not to mention these connections aren't necessarily yours. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and any other network can make changes that impact your ability to connect.

This is why you should always be looking to eventually move these social connections to your own turf, your email contact list.

How to entice social connections to become email contacts

In most cases, you'll want to offer some type of free resource on your website in exchange for an email address. This could be a special report, a guide, behind the scenes information, or some type of special discount for email subscribers.

Choose something that gives immediate value to your email subscribers.

And, in order to keep them on your list long-term, you'll want to think about how you can consistently deliver information that keeps them engaged.

Make your contacts feel special

Chances are you already provide a great experience for your customers when you're face-to-face. Let email extend that experience.

When someone takes that step to subscribe, they're saying, "I'd like to get to know you better." They've invited you into their inbox. You don't want to abuse that relationship by constantly promoting your products and services.



TIP: If you're not sure what type of offer will entice people to join your list, consider reaching out to your best customers to get their advice. Why did they join your list? What is their favorite thing about being a customer?



The Power of Email Relationships (cont.)

Create a compelling newsletter

You want to create a newsletter with content your subscribers aren't going to get anywhere else. What this information depends entirely on your industry, your company goals, and what will move your readers to action. A great rule of thumb is to create relevant content your readers will find interesting, useful, or otherwise entertaining. Stuff that could stand on its own even if you had nothing to promote.

Over the long term you'll build stronger connections

The benefits of these connections can come in many forms: possible collaborations, new opportunities, better visibility, and a larger audience for your business to engage with.

Don't underestimate the power of email marketing relationships.

Email marketing allows you to control your message, when it goes out, and who receives it.

Subscribers have actively made a decision to give you permission to contact them which means they're interested in what you're offering.

You're able to build stronger relationships with people, and people do business with or help people they know, like and trust.

By adopting a strategy that incorporates both email marketing and social media marketing, you'll have more opportunities to strengthen customer relationships and to use those relationships to reach your next great customer.

The next steps...

In the next section, we'll introduce a new strategy to help leverage the relationship-building power of each of these valuable channels.



TIP: Effective email relationships start with getting permission before adding someone to your list. By giving people the chance to opt-in you'll have more people opening, engaging, and acting on the messaging you send out.



Why You Should Market to Your Best Customer

The idea of focusing on your best customers first isn't a message small businesses typically hear when it comes to marketing their business. After all, it's all about new customers, right? But when you do think about new customers and how people are finding your business — aren't many of them coming to you through people who already know you and the type of service you offer?

While there may be exceptions, the vast majority of small businesses rely on current customers to introduce them to new customers.

How to identify your best customers

It shouldn't be difficult to figure out who your best customers are. After all, you and your staff are interacting with these people every day. Put your heads together. Chances are you already have a list of customers in mind.

But there are also other tools readily available to you that can make it easy to identify your biggest fans. While in years past, marketing and advertising didn't allow you to keep tabs on who was seeing your stuff and responding to it, tools like email marketing and social media have made it quick and easy to do just that.

You can find out:

WHO IS ACTUALLY READING YOUR EMAILS?

Metrics like opens and clicks can go a long way when it comes to identifying your best customers.

Do you have a 40% open-rate? Great!

Now, who are those people? When did they join your list? How often are they opening your emails?

You can do the same with your click-through stats. Who is actually clicking your links? What type of links are these people most frequently choosing to click?

WHO ARE YOUR MOST ENGAGED FANS?

Today, there are more ways than ever for consumers to interact with brands online. Whether it's Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, or Pinterest — your most social customers may also be your best customers.

There are even social functions like check-ins, recommendations, and online reviews that many of your most loyal customers could be using already.

You Know Who Your Best Customers Are. Now What?

Once you've identified who your best customers are, you need to come up with a way of making them feel appreciated.

Here are a few simple approaches to help you do just that:

1. Set up a loyalty program

Loyalty programs are great because they not only acknowledge your best customers but also encourage repeat business from every customer that walks through your door. The type of program you create depends entirely on type of business you run.

2. Reward customers with exclusive content

If you are using email marketing for your business, you can also create an exclusive list you use to connect directly with your most loyal advocates. Planning a sale or event? Rolling out a new line of products or services? Let them know first by scheduling a special email a few days before notifying your entire contact list.

3. Celebrate your customers on social media

You can use social media as well. Here at Constant Contact, we have our All Star Awards which recognize customers who have had success with our online marketing tools.

When these customers are chosen, we highlight their success in blog posts, and on Facebook, Twitter, and across our social networks.

4. Listen to your best customers

In addition to celebrating their success, you also want to make sure your best customers know that their voice is being heard.

These are the people who know your business best. Giving them a way to share their feedback will make them feel special; it will also help you better understand your customer base as a whole.

Consider creating an online survey and sending it to an exclusive list of customers. By sending it to people who know your business best, you know you'll get results you can trust and that you should act upon if necessary.

5. Don't forget the value of a handwritten note

It may seem strange in our digital world, but taking the time to write a "thank you" to a customer who recommended you to a friend or shared their feedback on Facebook can show what type of business you really are.



Remember: Most of your best customers are already talking about your business. Focus on providing an experience at your place of business that customers will not only remember but will want to tell their friends about. That's how you gain your next customers from your best customers.



Bringing it all together...

To recap:

As a small business, customer relationships are the biggest advantage you have over your bigger competitors.

With the affordable and easy-to-use online marketing options available to small business owners today, it's never been easier to grow those relationships.

By developing a marketing strategy that focuses on building those relationships and rewarding the people who already know, like, and trust your business you'll have more opportunities to grow your bottom line and will generate valuable referrals for your business.

Beyond that, by creating marketing content designed to engage your audience rather than sell to them directly, you'll be more likely to keep the attention of fans and followers on social media and will have more people reading your emails each month.



Remember, it's much easier, less expensive and infinitely more fun, to interact with people you already know — your existing customers. Start there and you'll be on your way to growing your business and reaching your next great customer!

Not a Constant Contact customer?

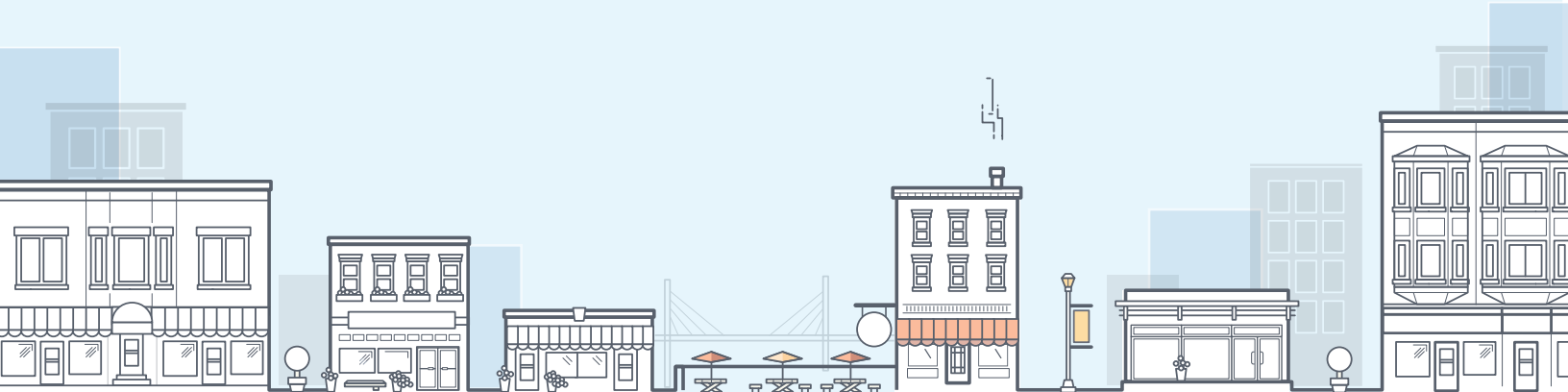
The Constant Contact Toolkit has everything you need to connect with your customers across of the channels that matter — including email, social, mobile, and web — so that you can build the long-lasting relationships you need to succeed.

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