



Fiona Walsh

Avoid these 3 mistakes, watch business flourish

Simple ideas pay big dividends

I recently visited the new H&M store out at Coquitlam Centre. I am a big H&M fan, having visited these stores all over the world. What makes me such a supporter? Because their stores always have staff who smile and seem genuinely happy to see customers.

Staff are on the floor, ready to answer your questions and help you find what you are looking for. They chat to customers in a friendly manner. When the checkout lineup got longer than five people, they quickly put another cashier on. It's always a great shopping experience, which is why I keep going back.

Right after H&M, I walked into The Bay and had a very different experience. Next to no staff on the floor – I couldn't find what I needed and could not locate anyone to help me. One cashier at the service desk and a long lineup of people waiting to pay; nobody looked happy. This experience reminded me why I rarely shop at The Bay.

What kind of experience do your customers have when they come to your store to shop? Do they keep coming back? Do they rave to others about it? I hear a lot of retailers complain that they can't compete when it comes to the bigger stores. Yet as my story above describes, not all of the big retailers get it right. It isn't size that guarantees success.

There are three common mistakes retail businesses commit on a regular basis that cost them customers and revenue:

1. Making a poor first impression. I go into many stores where retailers stock great merchandise and have beautiful merchandising, yet the staff never greet me when I enter. No smile. No greeting. On more than one occasion I have seen staff continue personal conversations between themselves or on the phone, totally ignoring customers until they come up to the cash register.

A customer makes up his or her mind in the first eight seconds whether they want to shop in your store or not. What kind of first impression do people get when they walk into your store? Is your staff trained to greet all customers, even when they are busy? Do people feel welcomed when they walk into your store?

2. Believing that you just hang out your shingle and they will come. To be a successful retailer, you need to build visibility. Taking one newspaper ad out to announce your grand opening or your Boxing Day sale is not effective marketing. Develop a marketing plan that includes regular advertising in local papers. A smaller ad run multiple times is more effective than a large ad run once.

Do a direct-mail campaign to the local neighbourhood. Consider radio. Get out in the community and get known. Sponsor a team. Book Warehouse got great publicity lately by announcing their intention to sell all books at the US-listed price. Think about creative ways to get noticed by your customers.

3. Put all your focus on attracting

new customers and ignore existing ones. It takes a lot of time and energy to attract customers to your store – what do you do to keep them coming back? Every retailer needs new customers to grow, but many don't realize that it costs 75 percent less to keep existing customers than to find new ones. Focus 50 percent of your marketing dollars on existing customers. One Vancouver retailer, Ellis Fashions, sends out a regular newsletter to customers, talking about charity events they are supporting, hot trends and new merchandise arriving in the store. That regular reminder keeps her store

top of my mind.

Customers will be loyal when their shopping experience is a good one. Deliver consistently good service, treat customers well and be creative with your marketing. Any size retailer who does these things really well will be successful.

Fiona Walsh is one of only three business coaches in North America approved to provide the highly successful and popular Ghost CEO coaching program. An expert in sales and business development, she offers tips for growing your business at www.fmw Walsh.com.

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