

Smart Company: Growth Article

20. Ask your customers what you do

Have you considered engaging your customers in your growth planning. Apart from the fact that your customers will probably be better off if you were more successful, they actually are your best source of information on what you do well and what you do poorly. Tapping into their knowledge of you might be the best information you can get on how to fine tune your business for growth.

The most effective way to grow is to focus on something you do well which gives you a competitive advantage, provides a premium pricing opportunity and has sufficient market potential that you can readily meet your growth objectives. However, we don't always know what we do well nor are we necessarily sensitive to what we are not doing well. If you are not getting regular customer feedback, you might be working under a mistaken belief that everything is going right. At least doing customer surveys will give you a first cut at your customer interface.

Smart business owners tap deeply into customer feedback to fine tune their offerings. In this regard you actually want timely, honest feedback. You don't just want the warm and fuzzy thanks when you really need to know where you are not performing effectively, what mistakes you are making, how you might be misleading customers or where you are setting the wrong expectations. Customer complaints should be high on the list for action. Every complaint is a trigger to what you need to investigate and fix. By staying on top of the complaints, you ensure that your employees and your customers know that quality of service is important – a very good message to your customers.

How about being a little bit more proactive. Find out about the customer experience. Could you improve it? What problems are they solving with your product or service and can you find a more effective way of solving the problem or meeting the need? Try asking them if there are other related products or services which they need. Could you add those to your portfolio? Are there other uses for your product or service which the customer is unaware of which could lead to an increased level of business for you?

Customers actually like being asked about their experience with your business and with your products or services. Most will willingly engage you in a conversation if they think you genuinely want the feedback to improve the customer experience. If you then take their comments and change the way you do business or improve the products or services as a result, you should let them know. They will be very pleased to know that their feedback was important and was used. Your reputation will be improved as a result.

You also should not forget that customer engagement is a form of competitor blocking. The customer who is remembered, who is asked for feedback and who sees improvements as a result of their interaction with you is receiving value in the exchange. This is a gentle form of entanglement where the customer has a stake in your business.

They become emotionally attached to your business and feel good about dealing with you. That keeps them coming back. A great competitive advantage.

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