

Show Me You Know Me

By Steve Yastrow

Imagine a restaurant you have visited 50 times. You love bringing friends there, and when you arrive there this evening you experience their typically high level of customer service. The hostess asks how many are in your party, and seats you immediately. The waiter shows up right away to take your drink orders and tell you the specials. The meals all arrive on time, at the same time, and plates are bussed as soon as they become empty. The food is excellent, and the service works perfectly, like clockwork.

Now, imagine the same restaurant, with the same high level of food and service. Only this time, when you arrive the hostess greets you by name. She sees you have friends with you and takes you to the large corner table where she knows you like to sit whenever you bring people to the restaurant. When taking drink orders, the waiter gives you a knowing smile, and when you smile back you both know that you have just confirmed you want the drink you usually order. When describing the specials, the waiter tells you which ones have seafood in them, since he knows you have a shellfish allergy. During your meal the manager walks by and, seeing you are in a conversation, gives you a smile, a wink and a little wave, acknowledging you without interrupting you.

Let's explore the differences between these two scenarios. Everything that was great about the first situation depended on the restaurant's food and service offerings; you had nothing to do with it. Another set of people would have had essentially the same experience you had. **The second scenario had all the same food and service offerings, but what made the experience special was how it was differentiated for you.** Another party of people would have had a completely different experience.

"Show me you know me"

Our marketplace is laden with endless choices. Customers have many options that can meet their needs, and they see most of these choices as easily substitutable for one another. Although the food and service in the first scenario are excellent, most customers would believe that they could also find great food and service elsewhere. Although these customers might visit this restaurant many times, their loyalty will never be steadfast.

On the other hand, a customer's loyalty for the restaurant in the second scenario would be much stronger, for this simple reason: **By personalizing the service, and making it more about the individual customer than about food and service, the restaurant in the second scenario has created an experience that can't be duplicated by the competition.** Customers see products and services as interchangeable and substitutable, but they see themselves as unique. If you go beyond customer service and make the experience about the customer, the customer will see the experience as unique.

The best way to differentiate your business is to differentiate your customers. Show your customers you know them, and honor what makes them unique. Your customers are saying, effectively, "If you want me to pay attention to you, show me you know me."

"Show me you know me" is a principle that is easier for smaller organizations to apply, which makes it a great leveler of the competitive playing field. In the old days, the company with the biggest advertising budget had a significant advantage. **Now, companies that can get closer to their customers, build relationships with those customers, and fulfill the promise of "show me you know me" can win.** The biggest obstacle many smaller companies have is that they try to mimic large organizations and use a one-way communication marketing strategy, and they don't take advantage of their small size to build intimate customer relationships.

Take Notice

Over the next week there will be many times you are a customer. During these occasions, notice how well businesses show you that they know you. How often does it happen? Are they personalizing the experience for you, based on what they learn about you, or are they giving you an experience that they could give to anyone else?

How Do You Compare?

How does your organization compare? Are you able to fulfill the promise of "show me you know me," or is your service based on delivering your offerings to all customers in the same way? Are there certain customers where "show me you know me" happens more easily than with other customers? Why?

Try This

Make a list of 5 - 10 of your top customers. Assess how well you currently practice "show me you know me" with them, and then describe ways you could improve upon this. Can you further personalize the experience based on what you know about them? Can you acknowledge their uniqueness in the ways you serve them and communicate with them?

Remember the mantra of today's customer: "If you want me to think you're different, show me that you know what makes me different." When you show customers that you know them, they will be much more likely to reward you with their loyalty.

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