



### **Building a Trusted Brand**

I've written before about the importance of creating a dialogue with your customers as a key way to build your brand. These conversations reveal information that helps to accomplish branding's most important job: building trust. Without trust, your customer won't settle into a consistent pattern of repeat purchasing, and they will not be as likely to share their enthusiasm for your brand with others.

As in any important relationship, trust is earned. How do you do this?

1. Identify and meet your customer's expectations – Understanding your customer's needs and buying habits will help you direct your message to the right audience and expand your market. Customer feedback can be gathered through surveys, but also through email correspondence, support calls, chat sessions, and posts on social media. Mining blogs can also yield clues about potential customers. What you learn is crucial to fostering a meaningful relationship. They need to know you care about their opinion.

2. Stimulate loyalty – make them come back again and again by consistently and creatively meeting their needs. When reaching end users, offer loyalty benefits such as coupons, memberships and value-added incentives that provide advantages. For B2B and B2C companies, service what you sell with user-friendly, knowledgeable support and service.

3. Encourage word-of-mouth referral – motivate your customer to share how great your product or service is with friends, family, and coworkers. You can offer incentives or discounts to your best customers for recommendations. Ideally, your existing customers help grow your customer base because everyone wants to share a good thing with the people they care about.

In other words, your customer and customers' friends become your brand advocates. They are motivated by a good experience and trust you enough to spread the word... this is business gold and an important component to your overall brand strategy.

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