

Live your brand and keep your customers for life

What happened to my neighborhood hardware store? I arrived last weekend and was greeted by an “Out of Business” sign.

I ventured two towns over to the closest local provider and received a warm welcome from a knowledgeable associate eager to help me find just what I needed. Unfortunately, I’ve found that all too often this type of experience is not delivered consistently by small local businesses. We are in a day and age where the small local provider must step up to survive in an environment with fierce price competition, not only from regional and national providers but from an online marketplace with many choices.

My message to small businesses: Step up and compete by living the brand. Don’t let your competition outbehave you. You have a significant advantage when it comes to engaging your workers. Help them understand the branded experience your customers want most, and motivate them to deliver it every day.

In today’s competitive market, local businesses must realize they can’t get away with average or below average service (too late for my local hardware store). When a customer has a bad experience, he or she will tell others about it almost 80 percent of the time. In our Internet-driven, social-media-crazed world, those bad experiences reach a much larger audience. Your customers won’t just tell three people about their bad experience; they may tell 3,000 people.

Let’s take a moment to think about the local companies you love to do business with. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath. Think about the local business that appreciates you as a customer, where the employees know the brand and do the brand consistently. Want a little help? These are usually the same companies you feel good about referring others to. In fact, you do refer them.

Here is an example of a company I love to do business with. Last fall, I had an experience with a local provider of digital home technology. Having just completed a kitchen renovation and an addition to our home,



ON PERFORMANCE
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I thought it was time to invest in the fun stuff—computers, TVs and stereo sound. I was referred to a company called HouseDigital. Checking the website (myhousedigital.com), I learned that the company would help customers understand their desired “digital lifestyle” and select the perfect products and solutions to match their needs.

It sounded interesting, so I reached out to Adam Goldfeder, president and founder, and requested a consultation. Here is what I experienced with Adam during my initial consultation and review of proposal and then with his team during the installation.

- They were not interested in selling me technology. They wanted to help me buy the perfect technology my whole family could enjoy at a price I was comfortable with.

- They removed jargon and fear. Purchasing high-end electronics can be intimidating and filled with uncertainty. HouseDigital employees focused on ways to use it, further ensuring that I would not buy more than I needed.

- They made me the expert. It was clear right from the start that HouseDigital people believed it was their responsibility to make sure my family and I knew how to use every piece of equipment. The experience was not going to be limited to “Here is your welcome pack and owner’s manual. Good luck, and thanks for the business.”

In the weeks that followed my installation, Adam made himself and others available (even providing cell phone numbers) to answer any questions we had. Of course, there were some. I made three calls to HouseDigital in the first two weeks. During two of the calls the staff immediately

dealt with my problem (user error). The third involved a problem with my wireless router. By the end of the day, a technician had arrived for a quick fix.

I decided to contact Adam and ask him what makes HouseDigital different from the Best Buys of the world and other local and regional providers of high-tech audio and visual technology. His response was interesting in that it matched my experience perfectly. He shared with me three things he believes make his company different from the competition:

- We don’t ever oversell. We help you buy the perfect technology your family will enjoy.

- We show you how to use everything.

- We want you to be a customer for life.

Whether it’s two weeks after your installation or two years, we want to help you maximize your use and enjoyment.

“Let me give you an example,” Adam said. “Last week a customer called on a Friday night (around 8) because they were having a hiccup with a HouseDigital audio system and were expecting 20 people over for a party. Not only did we take the call, we took ownership to fix the problem. We can do this for two reasons: We have the knowledge and experience, and we want to keep our customers for life. Try calling a big-box store on a Friday night for service.”

Now back to those companies you love to do business with. Pick one. What is it that they do to make you a customer for life? Write down a few things that make them different, and incorporate these ideas into your growing business.

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