



Market Before, During and After

The marketing and sales challenge doesn't end when the customer walks in the door and sits down at your table. Quite honestly, it's only beginning. Does your company keep marketing itself to the customer after the sale is made? What's the key to this question? Customer Service – which, among other things, is marketing in disguise. Here's a recent customer service experience that illustrates the challenge.

Recently we were working with an online service that acts as a broker between potential customers needing marketing services and marketing service vendors. Vendors set up profiles and prospects come looking for marketing information and tools. Some prospects request referrals of appropriate marketing firms to help them create and execute programs. The broker then matches qualified vendors and prospects. When a customer has actually looked at a preliminary profile of the vendor, the broker provides the customer contact information and bills the vendor for the lead. The vendor is then free to pursue the prospect directly and submit a formal proposal. Simple?

Here's where it gets tricky. What if the broker bills the vendor, even though two customer prospects never respond to any attempts at contact – no return phone calls, no return emails – no contact whatsoever? How valuable is this lead, do you think? Worth paying for? Given that the expectation set by the broker is that all leads are pre-qualified, and that prospects have agreed to speak with vendors who have submitted a preliminary proposal – we think it's worth talking to the broker about the viability of the two leads we received. So, we contact the broker's online customer service department via email (their preference) and explain the situation including the number of contact attempts we made and how (email, phone). Our question was what is the policy for handling situations when the pre-qualified lead turns out to be totally non-responsive? Here is the response we got, in its entirety:

“Once you receive a client's contact info, it's on you to contact them. FYI.”

We responded by restating the question (since it didn't get answered) and asked for the name of someone who might be able to help us. Here is the response we then got.

“Feel free to call. 760-721-6845. From there you can get a personal reponse (sic) that may help you more.”

Okay – no name, but a phone number. Progress, right? We called the number, got voice mail, and left a message. One day, two days, three days, one week. You guessed. No response whatsoever.

Next move? We contacted by telephone, the account manager that has been sending us our “pre-qualified” leads, left a voice mail describing our issue and requesting a call back. Again, no response whatsoever. So, we sent an email restating our issue, with the last two “customer service” emails attached, reminded the account manager that his customer is actually the vendors who pay the fees, and requested resolution on the matter.

Here's the response we got from the account manager:

“What's your #? I will call you and we can resolve it.”

Great! We replied with a number and time that would work. That was 9 days ago and you guessed it – we're still waiting. Perhaps from their perspective the sale is made and that's all there is to it. They invoiced for the service (whether it got delivered or not) and they are done. Hmmm – pretty interesting view of marketing and selling, no?

Here's a secret – **the sale is never done**. If you don't continue to market to your customer by providing the best information, follow-up, and service you possibly can, you will be a victim of “reverse marketing.” Translation: If we told you the name of the company, how many of you would warn your friends and colleagues about using them?

-- Lisa D. Dennis

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