



8 TIPS TO TURN Happy Holiday Customers into Loyal Customers

All Year Long



#HolidayAdCountdown

As you plan your holiday marketing strategy, think beyond just the holidays. You can extend your holiday successes into January, February and all year long by focusing on customer satisfaction.

Whether you are a retailer, restaurateur, services provider or professional, **customer satisfaction is the key to retention.** Satisfied customers are more likely to become loyal customers, or even advocates for your business. There's a 60-day "honeymoon period" in which it's easiest to convert a first-time buyer into

a return buyer. And once you make that conversion, 70% will become regular customers.¹

With time at a premium during the holidays as you juggle the demands of your business and your personal holiday preparations, it may seem impossible to provide consistent customer satisfaction. It's not. The following checklist of tips will make it easier to keep customers happy during the critical holiday season – and keep them coming back after the New Year.

1. PREPARE FOR THE UNEXPECTED.

Managers, particularly those on the frontline, must be prepared for unexpected problems that affect customer satisfaction. Severe snowstorms can affect everything from staffing and inventory to shipping. Customers who are in a bad mood may be difficult to please. Although some factors are simply uncontrollable, managers should brainstorm potential problems and be ready to respond.

- **Action Item:** Put stressed-out customers in a better mood with festive [holiday music](#), refreshments and comfortable seating for customers to rest. Play [holiday movies](#) on your restaurant, bar or waiting room television screens. And of course be sure that the festive atmosphere you're creating is also reflected in your holiday marketing. Online display ads are a great place to build awareness, and they make it easy to swap out creative messaging as you approach key sales and shopping dates.
- **Action Item:** Prepare for how winter weather may affect your business. Stock inventory ahead of time, or use suppliers in different parts of the country. If a product is out of stock, offer to ship it free of charge when it's available.

HELPFUL HINT



Jacqui Genow

**J. Genow
Marketing,
@JGenow**

Marketing Consultant

"One of the biggest mistakes I see local businesses make is not developing a holiday marketing plan with retention in mind. Holiday sales are great, but what if you could turn that holiday gift-giver into a lifelong customer? What if the good cheer you spread during the holidays could turn your best clients into advocates who refer business to you throughout the year? You can, but it takes planning."



2. THINK MOBILE.



In 2014, sales on mobile devices accounted for 26% of online Thanksgiving sales, 22% of online Black Friday sales and 21% of online Cyber Monday sales.² Even if your customers aren't buying on their devices, they're definitely researching and comparing prices there.

- **Action Item:** Make your business website mobile-friendly. [Google's April 2015 update](#) means mobile-friendly websites now rank higher in mobile search results. Once prospective customers find you on their mobile devices, make it easy for them to buy from you with features such as a click-to-call button to contact your business.
- **Action Item:** If you sell online, ensure your e-commerce shopping cart works smoothly on mobile devices.
- **Action Item:** During the holidays, ask customers if they'd like to receive text messages from your business. Follow up after the holidays by texting special offers and alerts.

3. MAKE IT EASY FOR CUSTOMERS TO COMPLAIN.



More than 90% of dissatisfied customers never complain – they just go elsewhere.³ Listening to and rectifying complaints can turn critics into brand advocates. Seventy percent of customers will do business with you again if you resolve their complaint correctly; 95% will do so if the complaint is resolved on the first interaction.⁴

- **Action Item:** Assign someone to monitor your business' social media accounts and address any complaints or negative feedback quickly. Social media monitoring tools such as HootSuite and Sprout Social can help by displaying all social media comments in one dashboard, so you can see what's going on at a glance.
- **Action Item:** Make sure customers know how to contact you by mail, email, phone or in person with complaints. Regularly check your business website and any online directories in which you're listed to ensure your contact information is up to date. Addressing complaints quickly will help prevent other customers from experiencing the same dissatisfaction.

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Marketing,
@JGenow**

Marketing Consultant

"There is nothing more aggravating to a consumer than to have an issue or question about a product and be unable to find someone to help them. The longer it takes to get a human response, the more likely you'll lose that customer for life."

4. CREATE RELATIONSHIP PROGRAMS.



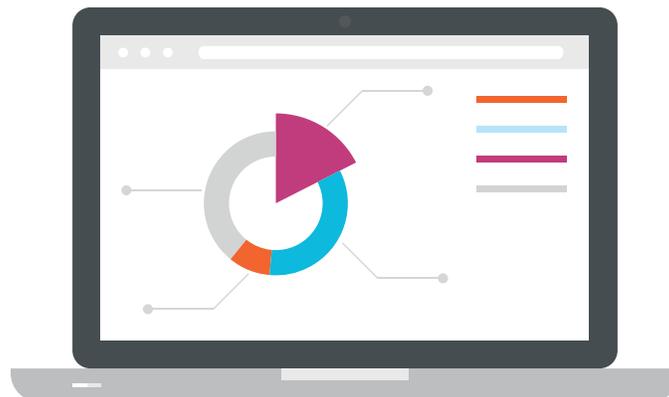
Relationship strategies increase customer loyalty both during and after the holiday season. Whether you use a simple punch-card program or a digital loyalty app such as Belly or Perka, loyalty programs build bonds with customers by rewarding them for doing business with you. They are also great differentiators that you can play up in your marketing.

- **Action Item:** Segment your loyalty program into different levels – a tactic that has been shown to increase membership.⁵ (Consider how American Express segments cardholders into Gold, Platinum and Black Card members.)
- **Action Item:** Drive 2016 sales with a New Year Rewards program allowing customers to accumulate points for holiday purchases and redeem them in January. Offer loyalty program members “sneak peeks” at new products or services you’ll offer in 2016.

5. COLLECT DATA DURING THE HOLIDAYS AND USE IT FOR POST-HOLIDAY MARKETING.

The more you know about customers, the better you can serve them in the future. Implement systems to track important customer data so you can personalize future interactions.

- **Action Item:** Collect customer emails during transactions, and then follow up with post-holiday offers relevant to their interests, past purchases and buying habits.
- **Action Item:** After the holidays, take time to measure which products and services were most and least popular during the season. Use that information to plan for upcoming holidays, such as Valentine’s Day, Easter and Mother’s Day.



6. FOCUS ON CONTROLLABLE ISSUES.



Plan for uncontrollable events, but focus primarily on what you *can* control, such as customer experience and exceptional service. In 2014, holiday-related social media conversations about superior service were far more prevalent than those about price.⁶ Use your social media channels to highlight staff members' holiday traditions; include quotes about how much they enjoy interacting with customers to reinforce your brand's alignment with superior service in a more personalized way.

- **Action Item:** Provide customer service training (especially for new or temporary hires), and set service standards for employees.
- **Action Item:** Use guarantees to differentiate your product or service offerings and reduce the risks for customers buying gifts from your business. Create a flexible return policy, and share it with customers pre-purchase so they'll feel confident their gifts can be returned.

7. SAY "THANK YOU."

Sending a holiday card, thank-you card or relevant offer after the holidays builds bonds with your holiday customers and keeps your business top-of-mind in 2016.

- **Action Item:** Develop a thank-you e-card to send on Christmas Day, or a Happy New Year card for the last week of the year.
- **Action Item:** Send customers post-holiday offers related to holiday purchases. For instance, suggest iPad cases for someone who bought an iPad, or hair-care products for someone who visited your salon. The offers don't have to be discounted – the point is that they are personalized with relevant products.



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8. MAKE MEASURING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION A PRIORITY.

If you don't know what customers want, need or expect, everything else is spinning your wheels. Ongoing efforts to measure customer satisfaction are vital to good customer service during the holidays and all year long.

- **Action Item:** Conduct a quarterly customer survey using a tool such as [SurveyMonkey](#) (its basic functionality is free). Boost participation by offering a small reward.
- **Action Item:** Train point-of-purchase staff to ask customers about their experience. Hold regular staff meetings to share customer feedback and remedy problems.

Customer satisfaction is an important measurement of business success that you should monitor all year long. Don't have time to implement every action item on this list? No worries. Simply choose the ones that make the most sense for your business, your budget and your available time. Then watch your holiday customers return in January, February and beyond.

HELPFUL HINT

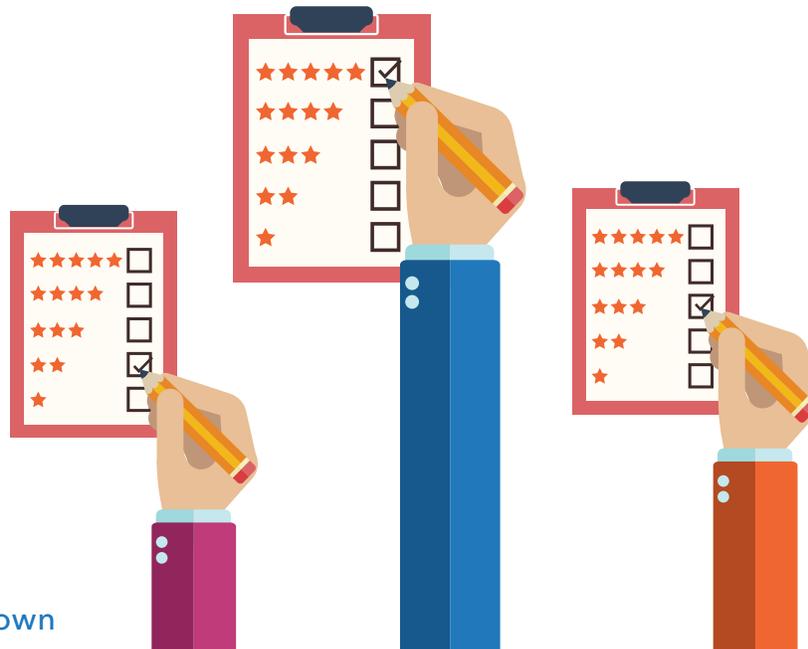


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RESOURCES

- ¹ AgilOne, "Engaging and Retaining Customers Post-Holiday Season," <http://www.agilone.com/academy/engaging-retaining-customers-holidays-2/?popup=1>
- ² Internet Retailer, "Online Sales Are Up 15% for the Holiday Season," <https://www.internetretailer.com/2014/12/10/online-sales-are-15-holiday-season>
- ³ 1st Financial Training Services
- ⁴ Lee Resources International, Inc.
- ⁵ HelpScout, "The Business Case for Loving Customers," <https://www.helpscout.net/whole-company-support/>
- ⁶ 2014 SAP/IPSOS Holiday Gifting Poll, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/sap/2015/01/02/social-media-analytics-reveal-2014-holiday-shopping-trends-and-insights>

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