

## **Building Business Relationships in Today's Market**

I am a small business owner. That is exciting to say out loud! As a business owner, a true key to my success has been bringing back the long lost art of “customer service” through building business relationships. These days, effective customer service can take on different forms, but the bottom line is you must provide high quality service in many forms to retain clients and earn referrals.

How many times have you called customer service for one of your “life vendors” and either hung up with the purpose of calling back hoping to get someone else or hung up after a long frustrating conversation during which ultimately you got nowhere. Now we could be talking about the phone company, your insurance carrier, a retail store, the “returns” department for virtually anything...you get the idea and can probably think of a few examples of your own. As I said earlier, customer service seems to be a long lost art. Not enough businesses have friendly, knowledgeable and patient customer support.

That said, when I decided to start my own business I knew that client satisfaction was going to be on the top of my list! There are many ways to accomplish this. A consistent warm friendly manner is one. When your clients know they can count on you to be happy to hear from them, you've made progress. I've worked with people who made me ask myself, prior to contacting them, “Well, I wonder what kind of mood he or she will be in today?” That puts the conversation off to a stressful start.

In addition to providing great customer service to meet your client's needs, you should have a method for building that relationship by touching base without a sales pitch. I've discovered an incredibly simple, cost effective relationship marketing tool that I use every day. It is an online business greeting card system, and it is positively the best marketing investment I have made for my business. I type much faster than I write, so an online tool works best for me, but if you have the time to take it a step further and handwrite your business greeting cards, that's even better! After all, who doesn't like to receive a greeting card? Greeting cards have a personal touch. I send a non-sales greeting card with a very short message each month to all of my clients, just to let them know I'm thinking about them. I reach out to prospects and networking contacts on a regular basis. The feedback has been incredible. Of course, anything you send should be followed up with a phone call but the card can be a great ice breaker, especially for those of us who dread making those calls.

In my business, I utilize several relationship building methods that attribute to the high bar I set for my customer service goals. I attend networking events which, in addition to giving me the opportunity to meet new prospects and vendors, also provide a venue to have a quick conversation with an existing client or contact. I invite clients and contacts to connect via social networking tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Biznik and LinkedIn. I'll drop an email to check in or pick up the phone. The bottom line is along with providing high quality service through my work, I can directly connect much of my success to the relationships I have built and fostered with my clients and contacts. I consider all of these activities critical components of customer service. The result has been satisfied clients that continue to utilize my services and happily refer their contacts my way! By keeping in touch with my contacts, whether or not they are a prospective client, I have also had referrals sent my way.

So, I invite you to join me in bringing back the art of customer service through building business relationships! Select the methods that work for you and be consistent. Not only will your business see results, but the process can be rewarding on a personal level.

**\*\*\*AUTHOR BIO\*\*\***

Katie Bauer is a certified Social Media Marketing Specialist and the owner of Effective Virtual Assistance, located in Northern Virginia. E.V.A. partners with small businesses locally and nationally to develop and manage social media marketing success campaigns giving business owners the time they need to focus on core business and revenue generating activities. We also offer a variety of general administrative services. With a firm belief that the success of a client is our success, we are highly motivated to go above and beyond with each and every project.

Website: <http://www.effectiveva.com>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/effectiveva>

Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/katiebva>

Email: [Katie@effectiveva.com](mailto:Katie@effectiveva.com)

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