

CONCIERGE CUSTOMERSERVICE

HOW TO GIVE CUSTOMERS WHAT THEY WANT AND **MORE**, TO ENSURE CONVERSION, RETENTION, REFERRALS AND PROFIT

What's the primary concern of most wholesale distributors and manufacturers? Profit. But as you face such challenges as disintermediation, the growth of nontraditional competitors and technological transformation, ensuring profitability becomes increasingly challenging.

Despite these challenges, your keys to success lie exactly where they always have: ensuring that you convert and retain customers, particularly the customers for whom profitability stands highest. How do you do that? Simple: Provide Concierge Customer Service to your most profitable customers, which can **increase profitability by:**

- ★ Increasing customer retention, because you're serving your customers at the highest level;
- ★ "Cloning" your best customers, by generating an endless stream of referrals from them;
- ★ Increasing your conversion of prospects to customers, by

generating five critical forms of social proof that demonstrate you serve your customers well;

- ★ Maintaining continuous process improvement within your organization, by constantly ensuring that you offer Concierge Customer Service.



HURLBERT

Those benefits represent the outcomes that are most important to companies like yours, because they are the outcomes that drive profitability. In this article, we outline the simple steps you can take, right away, to gain these benefits.

WHEN AND WHERE

Survey and social networks expert and former LSU professor, Dr. Jeanne Hurlbert, Ph.D., will discuss "Concierge Customer Service," **Sunday, Nov. 6** from **8:30 - 10:00 a.m.** and again from **10:30 - noon.**

GIVING CUSTOMERS M.O.R.E.

There's nothing mystical or magical about providing concierge customer service to give customers MORE—and most of the time, it doesn't require anything extraordinary. It's primarily about:

- ★ executing the fundamentals,
- ★ executing them well, and
- ★ executing them consistently.

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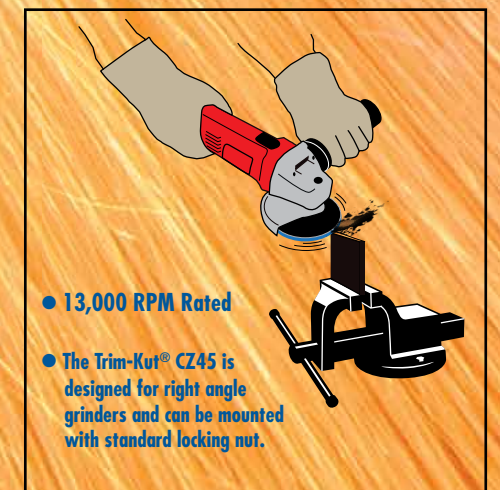
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Let's look at four key elements of concierge customer service, the components of giving your customers MORE:

4 KEY ELEMENTS OF CONCIERGE CUSTOMER SERVICE

1 Mindset — Those who handle customer service in your organization should be lifetime learners who maintain a positive orientation not only toward your customers but also toward the other members of your organization. They need to become patient problem solvers who are good at “taking the role of others,” which means they know how to gather details on problems and learn what the customer wants.

2 Ownership — Your employees should assure customers that they will handle every issue personally — and then do so, with no excuses. As they move forward, they should keep the customer apprised of each step/action that they take. And ultimately, they should provide a solution.

3 Referability — Referrals provide gold to your business because they allow you to reach deep into your target market to “clone” your best customers, at virtually no cost.

4 Experience — Ensuring that you continue providing a wonderful customer experience provides the key to distinguishing your business in the marketplace; the key to referability; and key to satisfaction, loyalty and retention.

Remember, it costs five times more to acquire a new customer than it does to retain a current customer. That's why the dividends on giving your customers MORE prove to be so high.

OBTAINING THE FULL BENEFITS OF CONCIERGE CUSTOMER SERVICE

Garnering the full benefits of concierge customer service requires putting into place a system to garner customer feedback. The two key components of the system we use with our clients are the Opportunity Generator and the Customer Feedback Generator.

Together, these two tools let you answer the most **fundamentally important** — yet ubiquitously unanswered — questions in business:

- 1 What do your customers really want?
- 2 And how satisfied are they with the degree to which you're providing what they want?

Let's look at what these two key tools can do for you.

THE OPPORTUNITY GENERATOR

Concierge Customer Service must align with the priorities of your customers — which means you must know what those priorities are. **You can now serve them better than your competitors can because you now know them better.** What's more, you can also focus your content, products/services and marketing directly on the issues that you know are most important to your most important audience — your customers.

And of course, one key issue to measure is your customer's touch points preferences. For example, how, and how often, do they want you to communicate with them? How quickly do they expect answers to their questions? When we've measured these customer preferences, the data have proved invaluable to our distributor clients.

THE CUSTOMER FEEDBACK GENERATOR

The Customer Feedback Generator lets you ensure that you continue to serve your customers, and especially your best customers, at the highest level. The bonus here is that you can leverage this same information in your marketing, to **skyrocket conversions**, externally; and to **ensure continuous process improvement** and **ensure you retain your best customers**, internally.

Your ability to do that comes from **five forms of social proof** that the Customer Feedback Generator provides:

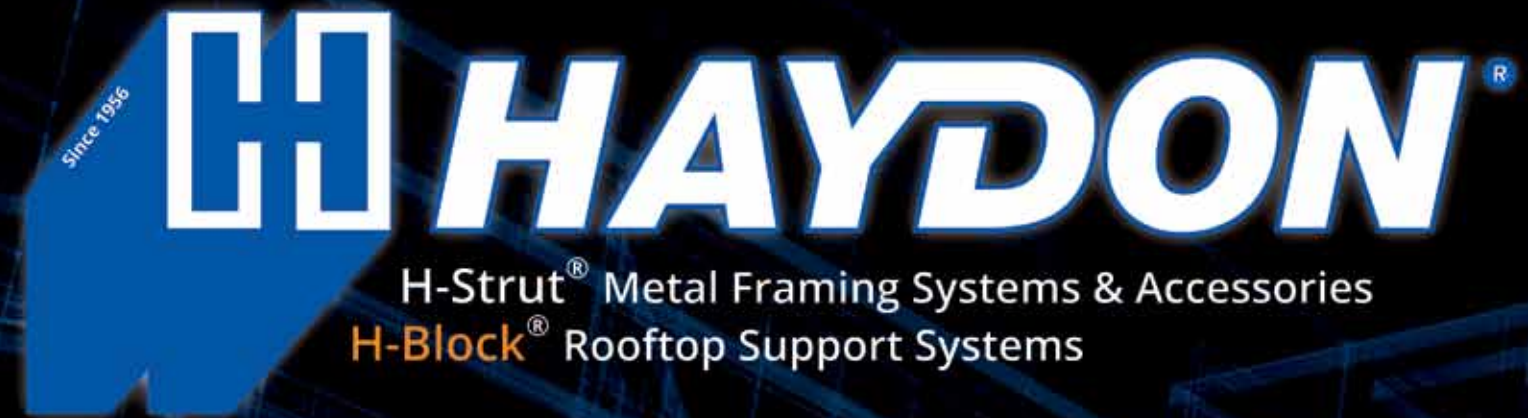
- 1 Testimonials;
- 2 General or “overall” satisfaction data;
- 3 Specific satisfaction data;
- 4 Referrals; and
- 5 Online reviews.

Testimonials provide the “stories that stick” with prospective customers. These stories persuade best when they describe: 1) what the problem, issue, or challenge was, *before* using your product or service; 2) the experience of purchasing from you, working with you or using your product or service; and 3) the results the customer obtained.

But even the most glowing testimonials may not convince prospective customers who may worry that the

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Offering Concierge Customer Service, then, provides the keys to conversion, customer retention and endless referrals that ensure your profitability. **CS**

Dr. Jeanne Hurlbert served on the faculty of Louisiana State University for more than 20 years. Her company, MySurveyExpert.com, is the first company to put affordable, high-quality survey systems in the hands of small businesses. Visit www.mysurveyexpert.com.

testimonials were hand picked or don't represent typical results. *Statistical satisfaction data* provide the most powerful form of social proof to overcome that hurdle.

General satisfaction data tap the global or overall satisfaction with your product, service or business. They typically provide useful information for your marketing, because they're easily interpreted and offer a summary indicator. However, to really ensure that you serve your

- 1 If overall satisfaction is high, they can illuminate areas that can still be enhanced. This proves key to continuous process improvement.
- 2 If overall satisfaction proves to be low, these measures provide vital information to identify critical areas of improvement — including customer service — on which you can take action to increase overall satisfaction before it affects your bottom line.

These general and specific satisfaction measures aren't just useful internally; they can also fuel your marketing by providing even more ammunition to increase conversions, sales and revenues.

Referrals come most easily when you *invite* satisfied customers to refer their connections to you. Because your customers' connections are highly likely to be similar to your current customers — your ideal target market — and because your customers' connections are much more likely to trust you if they receive a referral directly from someone they know and trust, conversions on referrals prove to be extraordinarily high.

IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO
SIMPLY MAKE SALES.

★★★★★

customers at the highest level, and to maintain continuous process improvement for your business, we recommend combining these measures with *specific satisfaction data*.

Specific satisfaction data augment the general or overall data in two ways:

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Online reviews often lie “off the radar” for wholesale distributors and manufacturers, but they have become a key driver in consumer decision-making. A recent Deloitte study shows that 25 percent of Americans do “comparison shopping” on the web and fully 75 percent of surveyed respondents feel that the information on online rating sites is “generally fair.” This means that the decision-makers in the companies you serve will increasingly turn to these reviews. If you're providing Concierge Customer Service to your customers, they can automatically be invited to leave online reviews with the Online Review Generator.

PUTTING CONCIERGE CUSTOMER SERVICE IN PLACE

To survive and thrive in business today, you must become customer-centric. Chief customer officers have grown from less than 20 *in the world* in 2003 to the point at which more than 1 in 5 (22 percent) of the Fortune 100 and 10 percent of Fortune 500 companies have a chief customer officer. That person is charged with ensuring that the company serves customers well.

Whether you have such a formal position or not, putting customers — particularly your most profitable customers — at the center of your business is critical to your success in the rapidly changing marketplace in which companies like yours operate.


It's not enough to simply make sales. You must acquire customers. And to retain those customers, you must know them well so that you can serve them well by providing concierge customer service to them. You do that by giving your customers MORE—ensuring that your mindset is customer-centric; that you take ownership when a problem arises; you are referable; and the customer has a positive, memorable experience.



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