



ALLEGIANCE™

The Power to Engage

The Top 9 Ways to Increase Your Customer Loyalty

Follow these and enjoy an immediate lift in the loyalty of your customers

By Kyle LaMalfa

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The Top 9 Ways to Increase Your Customer Loyalty

What is the Key to Business Success?

Every company executive will raise their hand and say they believe having loyal customers is a key to business success. But what are executives really doing about it? Most will point to their customer care training or CRM system and say, “that’s how we take care of loyalty here.” Some will also point to their monthly newsletter or discount program to demonstrate their efforts. All of these are good attempts. However, they are not enough.

Fostering true loyalty and engagement with customers starts at a basic level. These 9 principles will guide you in your efforts to create greater loyalty and engagement within your organization. It’s one of the most critical ways to retain more of your customers and grow your business faster. It can also be a powerful competitive edge. To understand why this is so necessary, let’s review the common problem facing most businesses today:

Companies are losing customers at a staggering rate, without really hearing from most of them ...

- Each year the average company loses 10-15% of its customer base
– *Bain & Company*
- “84% of customers who leave, do so because of poor service”
– *Forum Corp*
- “A typical business only hears from 4% of its dissatisfied customers—the other 96% leave, 91% for good”
– *Jim Barnes, “Secrets of CRM”*

By understanding these basic 9 principles, and putting them into practice at your organization, you’ll foster a culture of greater loyalty and engagement that will reward you with greater profits.

If you can’t tackle all of these right away, start with just one, then move on to another one after that, etc. The most important thing is that you start as soon as possible. As you better practice these, and track results, you will see loyalty levels swiftly increase.

I’ve broken these into 3 primary groups:

- ***Basic Concepts***
- ***Technologies***
- ***Business Outcomes***

60% and 80% of defecting customers describe themselves as “satisfied” or “very satisfied” just before they leave.

Business Week, October 2006

It costs between 5 and 10x more to attract a new customer than to keep an existing one.

The Council on Financial Competition

70% of the reason customers leave a company has nothing to do with the product.

Forum Corporation

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Basic Concepts

Understand 3 fundamental concepts about customer loyalty in order to make sure you are building on a solid foundation.

1. Satisfy your customers with product quality.

Satisfaction is the difference between your customer expectations and your service delivery. Know your customer's expectations and be prepared to evolve your product. This is basic business 101, but often it is ignored. People try all sorts of loyalty and sales gimmicks, yet ignore the fundamental business concept that business needs to be a balanced transaction: someone pays for something and expects a fair trade in return. Expectations of product quality come from many sources including, previous quality levels set by your organization, value propositions set in the competitive landscape, and impressions in the media.

2. Build loyalty by exceeding expectations and building opportunities for repeat business.

A generation ago, customer loyalty was a different game. Today's customers are quick to switch to the competition. Remember, your competitors are only a mouse click away.

- a. Be acutely responsive to customer questions, comments & complaints (yeah, that's right, complaints.) Often, these are your MOST loyal customers. If you resolve a complaint quickly, you can actually GROW loyalty
- b. Drive product development to offer more value for less cost
- c. Give your customers a chance to be loyal by offering products for repeat business

3. Engage your customers by reaching out to create a dialog.

Engagement strengthens your company's relationship with your customer by providing an open channel for communication and feedback. An engaged customer is more than satisfied and more than loyal. They go out of their way to show their association with your company. They also support you during both good and bad times because they believe what you have to offer is superior to others.

Engagement takes your customer beyond passive loyalty to become an active participant and promoter of your product. And engaged customers will want to give your more feedback – and you should be ready to handle it! All this translates into a more engaged customer who will spend more money with you over time.

So how do you become a company that actively engages its customers?

Follow these simple rules:

- a. Listen to customer feedback from comment cards, letters, phone calls, and surveys
- b. Respond quickly and personally to concerns of high interest to your customers – if you respond quickly, you can actually increase loyalty
- c. Organize unstructured feedback for tracking and trending over time
- d. Trust your customers to tell you what the problem is
- e. Use statistical techniques to discover which action items will have the most impact on your business outcomes

“Executives are finding that the winning differentiator is no longer product or price, but the level of customer engagement relative to the competition.”

– Rama Ramaswami, Senior Editor,
Economist Intelligence Unit

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Technologies

Adopt technology to help you manage large volumes of unstructured data and create actionable information from your feedback.

1. Complaint Management

Managing questions, comments, and concerns benefits your business in two important ways. First, as mentioned earlier, research indicates that an upset customer whose problem is addressed with swiftness and certainty can be turned into a highly loyal customer. Second, unstructured feedback, gathered and managed appropriately, can be a rich source of ideas. Hidden gems exist in your customer's complaints. You can start to collect and use that information as you:

- a. Establish channels (electronic, phone, written) to build engagement one customer at a time
- b. Encourage customers to let their voice be heard
- c. Create metrics to improve response to concerns ("time to first response," "time to resolution")
- d. Create metrics to measure loyalty before and after the problem
- e. Use technology to help you centralize the information, create reports, and structure drill-downs

2. Pro-active Surveys

Actively soliciting information from a population of customers is a time-tested technique pioneered by Arthur Nielsen (creator of the Nielsen ratings) in the 1920s. Survey research can be used for problem identification or problem solving. Questions with simple scales such as "agree/disagree" or "satisfied/unsatisfied" deliver quantitative insight for problem identification. Open-ended follow-up questions provide rich insight for problem solving. You can use a professional when survey help is needed.

- a. Make sure your surveys are short, bias-free and well structured
- b. Use random sampling to gather feedback continuously without over-surveying
- c. Create summary survey indices that can be displayed graphically and tracked over time

3. Enterprise Feedback Management

Enterprise Feedback Management (EFM) is more than just collecting data. EFM adopts a strategic approach to building dialogs with your customers. By wrapping customer dialogs with a technology, your company creates a structured, searchable and quantifiable body of information that can be used to drive critical business decisions.

- a. Empower customers to give feedback through common advertised channels
- b. Centralize reporting for pro-active surveys and complaint management solutions
- c. Structure quantitative feedback into a drill-down or rollup report
- d. Make open-ended feedback intuitively searchable

"The term Enterprise Feedback Management (EFM) is a term that started being used in 2004. Today, there are many companies that claim to be EFM, but most have only one or two components, and therefore are limited to just tactical feedback. For true EFM you need the ability to gather feedback, both solicited (such as through surveys and mystery shopping) and unsolicited (comment cards, web or other electronic submissions and in-person/live submissions).

Then, you also need the ability to manage that feedback, generate enterprise-wide reports, use analytics and dashboards, and make sense of it all with professional services. If a simple survey company claims they are Enterprise Feedback Management, turn and walk away, quickly."

– John Epeneter, VP Product Management, Allegiance, Inc.

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Business Outcomes

Tie the latest 'soft measures' such as satisfaction, loyalty, and engagement to 'hard measures' of actual business outcomes

1. Descriptive Statistics

Answers to survey questions take the form of either categorical (What state do you live in?), order-scaled (To what extent do you agree with...), continuous-scaled (What year were you born?) or open-ended (What do you like about...). Descriptive statistics such as mean, median, mode, top-box, and frequency cross-tabs summarize the multitude of responses into manageable information. Descriptive statistics may lie to you by failing to uncover relationships within your data, so be careful!

- a. Don't assume that the average is an appropriate measurement for every situation
- b. Make sure your analyst understands the nuanced interpretation of the right statistic
- c. Use crosstabs to begin to understand relationships between two variables
- d. Generously use graphics to convey information to non-technical people

2. Predictive Analytics

Businesses use a variety of statistical techniques to make predictions about the potential for future events. Furthermore, predictive analytics may be used to ascertain the degree to which answers from a survey relate to particular goals (such as loyalty and engagement). Tactical knowledge of action items that impact an outcome discourages the wasting of resources on ineffective programs, and competent statistical modeling reveals the insight of which tactical options have the most impact.

- a. Analyze data using a statistical technique to reveal the most important areas of focus
- b. Ask your analyst about common statistical methods including correlation, multiple regression, factor analysis, and logit models
- c. Recognize that the important areas of focus may change over time to respond with changes in the economic, competitive, and demographic environment of your business

3. Alignment with Business Outcomes

Whatever you do, the ultimate goal should be oriented to optimize business outcomes specific to your circumstances. Orienting your organization to focus on satisfaction, loyalty and engagement is no panacea. However, researchers have clearly documented evidence of short-term benefits to customer/employee retention and long-term benefits to profitability. In the modern economic landscape, loyal customers and loyal employees supply your organization with a huge competitive advantage.

- a. Determine whether your engagement outcome is best measured by satisfaction, likelihood to purchase again, likelihood to recommend, or another voice of the customer (VOC) metric
- b. Create hybrid VOC measurements using more than one metric if necessary

"One of the biggest business growth opportunities today is to focus on engagement. Companies that make it fundamental to their business cannot be touched by competitors. They enjoy more profits during tough times, and grow faster during good times. It truly is an untapped opportunity just waiting for those who will grab it."

– Adam Edmunds, CEO,
Allegiance, Inc.

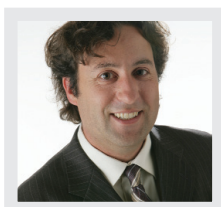
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- c. Link your VOC metrics with business outcomes like shareholder returns, annual sales growth, gross margin, market share, cash flows, Tobin's Q, customer churn, or employee turnover
- d. Be aware that changes in loyalty/engagement scores generally precede changes in business outcomes (typically by 45-60 days)

It may not be the easiest process to do by yourself, but stay focused and keep your eye on the goal: increasing your engagement and loyalty equals increasing profits and a strong competitive edge. Don't feel like you need to do everything yourself. If you want to make it happen. Choose a partner who has the technology, best practices and experience already in place and ready to help you. Allegiance is that partner.

Allegiance

For more information about how to increase your loyalty and engagement, visit www.allegiance.com and learn about the Allegiance Engage Platform, which is a software platform and services designed to help companies actively build engagement and link it to business outcomes to grow revenue faster.



About the Author

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Kyle LaMalfa helps Allegiance clients fine tune and optimize their customer, employee, and feedback engagement processes to align closely with idealized standards.

LaMalfa has been analyzing data professionally since 1996. Along with undergraduate degrees in mathematics and economics, LaMalfa will complete a master's degree in statistics in 2007. His professional experience includes time as a software quality engineer for a large financial services company, a data warehouse engineer at a mountain resort, a freelance consultant for local businesses, and the lead statistician for a market research company. Throughout his career, LaMalfa has worked with managers and executives to answer business questions using statistical data and research. Problem solving specialties include customer/employee attrition, customer/employee engagement, data mining and predictive modeling.

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