4 Ways to Make the Best First Impression With Your Customers

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Being a great communicator is probably the No. 1 skill you can have as an entrepreneur. In fact, in an interview for CNBC's "Make It," Warren Buffet said that he has only one diploma hanging in his office: the communications diploma he got from Dale Carnegie in 1952. If Buffet credits his success to becoming a great communicator, I'm all over it.

Communication with your customers is important throughout your entire relationship. But it's especially critical when they first engage you or buy from you. Those first interactions set the tone. They can build trust and loyalty, or they can leave people irritated and confused.

Here are some tips to improve that initial interaction.

Speak their language

Learn to communicate in your customer's language. I don't mean translating from English to Swahili (though depending on your business, that might be important). It's translating what you know in a way that anyone unfamiliar with the industry or topic can understand.

Every industry has its own language. I specialize in digital marketing, so terms like search engine optimization (SEO), ad extensions, conversion rates and pay-per-click (PPC) are part of my everyday conversation. But most of my new clients and

students don’t have a clue when they start with me. When accountants talk about ESOPs or GAAP, or architects mention fenestration and tectonics, most of us are lost.

Unless you’re talking to another professional in your field, avoid industry terms and acronyms. Industry lingo doesn’t make you sound smarter. It makes you sound as if you don’t care if the person you’re talking to understands or not.

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Communicate about your process or product

No matter what kind of business you have, you have certain processes that you take for granted. The product you offer has certain characteristics that are super familiar to you, but your customer may not understand them.

For example, real estate is second nature to me. It took me a while to understand that rushing through our process for selling a home in a three-minute presentation wasn’t really communicating it to clients. It was all new to them. I learned I had to take time and break it all down, because they don’t have my experience and don’t know what I know.

Clients or customers may deal with you infrequently, or maybe only once. How often is someone going to come to you to handle their divorce (hopefully not all that often)? How many times will they need you to design their landscaping or coach their company through a merger?

And for many industries, the process and technology can change a lot over time. A friend of mine used rental cars all the time travelling for business, but that was several years ago. When she rented a car recently, she couldn’t even figure out how to turn the darn thing on. She didn’t know that the

headlights came on automatically, or that the car automatically turned off at stop light and turned itself back on when you hit the gas. She had driven cars for many years, but the technology had changed dramatically. A few minutes of explanation up front would have saved her a lot of frustration.

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Step into their shoes

Stop and think about what your clients may not know about your process or product. Maybe it's how expensive the process will be, how much time it will take or how much they'll need to participate. Maybe they don't know how much maintenance the product requires or how to work its special features.

Remember back to what other clients have questioned or misunderstood. Are they usually shocked when your invoice arrives? Do customers often call you saying the product "doesn't work" because they don't know how to work it?

Maybe it has to do with results they expected. Clarifying expectations from the get-go will save both you and your customer many headaches down the road. If your wrinkle-reducing cream won't show results for six weeks, tell them that. If you'll be giving your client a ton of homework between sessions, let them know up front.

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Explain then repeat

Think of going to a doctor's office and getting a diagnosis. Even if it isn't life-threatening, your brain is so busy trying to absorb how it might impact your life that you miss

80% of what the doctor says. If they break it down for you, you might understand it at the time. But as soon as you hit home, you realize that you don't fully understand what was said or what happens next.

It's the same with our clients and customers. Even if you take it slow the first time through, you can't expect your clients to retain everything you tell them. Often, they'll smile and nod, but once they walk out that door, they're full of questions. Have you ever left an auto dealership after the salesperson explained all the bells and whistles of your brand new car? How many could you actually remember five days later?

I create videos for my clients to remind them of what's expected during every phase in both my coaching and my real estate business. You can do quick videos to demonstrate your products' features and how to use them. You can create written follow-up pieces. Just make sure the writing is clear, concise and not filled with a bunch of detail they don't need.

Your first communications are critical to the ongoing relationship with your customer. When you take the time to step into their shoes and speak their language, explain your process clearly and continue to follow up, that relationship gets built on a rock solid foundation.

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