

Ask SCORE for Business Advice

“Ask SCORE” Column

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Build Loyalty with Customers by Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt

Many businesses spend their marketing budgets on advertising for new customers. That’s an important part of the plan, but given the cost of attracting new customers, doesn’t it make sense to spend some of the budget on building loyalty among existing customers? Pat Krienke, who owns Grassroots Grocery of De Pere with her husband, Mike, thinks so. She considers this one of the most important aspects of her business.

“I think that to say a certain percentage of my business plan is devoted to marketing would give the wrong impression. I am constantly marketing my business as it evolves daily, and it is my customers that keep me going,” Krienke said.

She builds loyalty with punch cards, cooking classes, recipe exchanges, and a monthly newsletter. As a graduate of E-Hub, formerly Urban Hope, and past SCORE client, she has learned from her mentors and classmates. Krienke wants to know her customers and makes listening a priority.

She noted, “I want each customer from the one who buys a ½ gallon of milk each week to the customer who buys most of their groceries each week at my store, to know that they are important to me. I try to make note of their names, although that is not one of my strongest qualities, and even what types of food they may like, so that I can offer them a personal shopping experience when they step through my door.”

She invites customers to join her email list. There is a monthly Grassroots newsletter featuring product information, recipes, a schedule of cooking classes, and other tips. The newsletter can be accessed on her website at www.grassrootsgrocery.com.

Many of the recipes are shared with special diets in mind. When customers shop for gluten, soy and casein wheat-free products, they often ask for cooking advice. Krienke explained, “Customers felt like they were unable to make the transition to cooking with these new products. I found that they wanted to learn from a person who had experience cooking with these foods.”

Krienke asked a few of her regular customers to share their cooking expertise, and started offering classes. Unique from most classes, students are sent home with new recipes and the products needed to prepare the foods.

“After each class, I ask the participants what they want to learn, and the next classes are based off of their answers,” she stated. “In that way, we are growing customer satisfaction and loyalty.”

When new customers visit, Krienke likes to offer a sample of one of her baked goods and likens it to the hospitality offered when friends come to her home. It is all part of her philosophy to encourage and reward loyalty by offering incentives, educating, and providing personal service.

“My customer is what keeps me going. I want to give them what they want if they are going to come back and shop again,” Krienke said.

If you'd like to learn more, contact the Green Bay Chapter of SCORE. Visit www.greenbayscore.org or call Cindy Gokey at 920-496-8930 for information.

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