

5 tips for small businesses

How to build trust with customers



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Learning how to build trust with customers isn't just good practice—it's essential for sustainable growth. When customers trust your business, they buy faster, spend more and become your most effective marketing channel, through word-of-mouth referrals to colleagues and industry contacts. At its core, trust means customers believe they'll have a positive experience at every touchpoint with your company.

1. Set expectations through clear communication

Trust comes when customers feel confident about the experience they're about to have with your company. To build that confidence, help them understand what they can expect in terms of finding the products and services they want, paying for them and the support they'll get afterwards.

Clear signage in physical locations and detailed descriptions for online product listings can help avoid any confusion or misunderstanding about what you're offering and the policies you support. Do you allow free returns? Say so early on. Do you have a clear and comprehensive privacy policy that governs the data you collect from your customers? Make the policy link easily accessible.

Do a walk-through of the entire customer journey, from the moment someone discovers your business to when they become a customer. If there are any moments where they might be unpleasantly surprised or caught off guard, find ways to educate them first. Use all the channels at your disposal, from email and texts to social media.

2. Deliver a consistent customer experience

Customers trust what feels familiar to them. That's why it's essential to honor commitments, such as opening and closing hours, wait times, delivery schedules and procedures for placing and tracking orders.

There should also be consistency across channels. Customers naturally grow suspicious when information about your shipping or return policies on your website differs from what they've seen in a physical store. They should also receive the same information whether they speak with an employee on the phone or through a website chatbot.

Most importantly, product and service quality should meet consistent standards. If customers order a product online, for instance, it should arrive on their doorstep looking and functioning exactly as it appeared on your website.

3. Offer social proof from existing customers

"Social proof" can take many forms:

- Collect your most positive reviews and create a "What our customers tell us" campaign.
- Shoot simple video testimonials and post the clips to your website and social media.
- Use purchase data to identify your bestselling products and highlight them online and in-store.

Make what your most loyal customers say a core part of your messaging, because that's what prospective customers trust most. To inspire trust, social proof needs to be specific, genuine and recent enough to be relevant.

4. Personalize engagement

When you reach out to a customer to recommend a new item based on what they've recently bought, you're sending a strong message. You're showing you've taken the time to understand them and are proactively working to develop your relationship.

The same thing happens when you send emails that recognize customers by name and offer content tailored to their interests, or when you alert them to a product defect before they have to contact you for help. Loyalty programs that allow customers to collect and redeem rewards can provide even more data to enhance personalization efforts.

5. Follow through with fast and easy customer service

When products arrive late, break down or service is poor, customer trust is at risk. Being responsive regardless of whether they choose to ask for help via phone, email or any other channel is important. Also, try to provide the correct answers to their questions and solve problems thoroughly, without making them repeat themselves or making them feel like just one of many customers needing assistance.

Excellent customer service not only addresses issues in the moment, but also focuses on continuous improvement. Surveys and other feedback mechanisms gauge how well you're delivering on customer expectations.

If all this sounds like a tall order, consider using technology like artificial intelligence (AI). The 2025 Verizon Business State of Small Business Survey reveals that 24% of small businesses are utilizing AI to power digital personal assistants, which can assist them with customer service.

How to build trust with customers after a mistake

One misstep can break trust, but you can rebuild it through consistent action. When mistakes happen, listen carefully to what customers have to say. Explain what happened and apologize appropriately. Then, outline what you'll do to avoid the same mistake happening again, and any steps you can take to make it up to the customer.

Learning how to build trust with customers is an ongoing process, but it is well worth the effort. It's what can make the difference between customers who come and go and those who become loyal customers for life.

The author of this content is a paid contributor for Verizon.