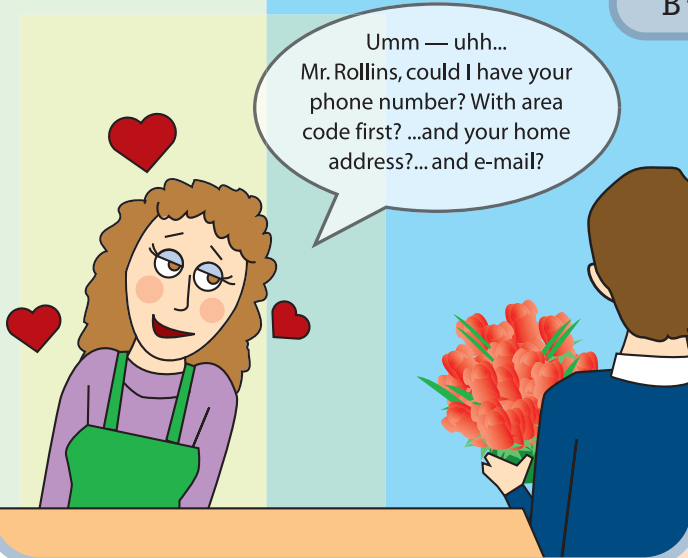


Counter Intuitive: Smart sales and service tactics

By Tim Huckabee



Capture Customers' Vitals

So many shops I visit miss golden marketing opportunities because employees don't get new customers' contact information, whether it's out of laziness, forgetfulness or shyness. Customers are used to sharing their name, address, phone number and e-mail address when they shop at the mall, on the phone or online, so why not at your store?

If you and your employees remember to ask all new customers for their vitals — with confidence — your customer list and marketing opportunities will grow significantly. Here are some hints to help.

Educate your staff

Does your staff know your system doesn't keep a customer's profile without an address, phone number, etc.?

Have they ever been given a chart of the accepted postal abbreviations, such as St. for Street and Rd. for road, so they are taking accurate information? Help them help you. Make sure employees understand that you actively reach out to customers via direct mail — or plan to do so soon.

Train your staff

There is a huge difference between, "Can I have your address?" and, "Finally sir/madam, where is your credit card billed?" Teach your staff to sound confident, and customers won't hesitate to give their information. If they do, simply explain, "It's our company policy — and our bank requires it." Capture e-mail addresses by asking, "Do you have an e-mail address you'd like to share so we can inform you about holiday specials?" If needed, I volunteer that "Ours is a closed system, and we do not sell our names to anyone."

Track the results

Run a report to scan orders, checking for addresses. Go back to employees still not getting customers' info and re-emphasize why it's important. Let them know you're monitoring them.

Next month we'll talk about how to put customer contact information to work to help you earn more.

Tim Huckabee is president of Floral Strategies, a one-on-one sales and customer service training company exclusively for florists. Got a customer service challenge? Tell Tim and he'll tackle it in an upcoming column. E-mail tim@floralstrategies.com or call (800) 983-6184.

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www.Workz.com: Although you may be already swamped with junk mail, get on all the mailing lists that target your customers. Study the competition to make your marketing materials stand out. This is just one of several (free) marketing tips from Workz.com, an online resource for small businesses looking to use the Internet to grow their business. Click on "make money" in the top menu for tips such as "Show off your best-selling items on your (business) home page. A large image of your hottest product, placed near the top, will catch buyers' eyes and prompt viewers to learn more."

Don't Miss: The chance to subscribe to the weekly e-newsletter, a great feature if you don't have time to weed through all the marketing articles.

www.Vote-Smart.org: The lazy days of summer are long gone and with the fall weather come elections. Make sure you're in the know about all candidates. This site provides a political resume for each candidate and charts out their positions on important issues, including immigration, agricultural funding and taxes. Check out their voting records, campaign finances, endorsements and background information.

Don't Miss: The link for "fun facts" about each candidate. Find out which former president Sen. John Kerry idolizes and what book President Bush couldn't put down.