

“Create a magical experience to attract customers and keep them coming back”



USA Today (May 2016) – Recognizing that a lot of makeup goes unused, Julie Fredrickson and Chelsa Crowley set out to revolutionize the cosmetics industry.

Last year, the duo launched Stowaway Cosmetics, which offers smaller, “right-sized” products designed to not weigh down a purse or makeup pouch. But acquiring customers in a crowded industry proved challenging.

“I’m not Kevin Costner, this is not *Field of Dreams*,” says CEO Fredrickson, referring to the 1989 movie in which Costner’s character lives by the motto, “If you build it, they will come.” In the real world, Fredrickson says, “we need to go where people are.”

Figuring out how to **attract and keep customers** is vital if a business is going to be successful and grow. And not just one strategy will get you there. Here are seven ways you can find customers and keep them hooked:

1. Find the right partnerships

To find customers, the New York-based seven-employee firm partners with other small businesses that serve similar customers. For example, a frequent traveler would likely appreciate miniature-sized makeup so Stowaway might tell its customers about a travel company in return for the travel company introducing its customers to Stowaway. “Being friendly and partnering well with others is an amazing way to reach new audiences. You’re also showing that you offer more value than just the product you sell,” Fredrickson says.

2. Get the details right

“You’ve got to create something magical. I sometimes compare it to an artist. An artist is given a blank sheet of canvas and they create a beautiful painting,” says Virgin Group founder Richard Branson. “An entrepreneur is given a blank sheet of paper and that’s their company and they’ve got to get all the details right whether it’s the quality of the staff, the quality of the chief executive the quality of everything and at the end you’ve created the perfect picture.”

That was the goal when the company started its U.S. airline, he says.

“We launched an airline in America 10 years ago – Virgin America – and every single little detail is right from the quality of uniforms that the crew is wearing, the comfort of the seats, the comfort of the lighting and so on.”

Improving the customer experience

To keep customers coming back, Joseph Michelli, a consultant who helps companies with their customer retention strategies and author of Driven to Delight: Delivering World-Class Customer Experience the Mercedes-Benz Way offers these strategies:

-Walk the customer walk. Put yourself in your client’s shoes and analyze the entire sales process through the final transaction.

-Ask and observe. Listen to customer compliments and complaints.

-Make it personal. Let customers know their concerns are important and offer a concession that they would want.

-Be willing to shift: If adjusting a policy or procedure can improve the customer experience, be ready to pivot and change.

3. Use social media

Engage consistently on social media, advises Tory Johnson, *Good Morning America’s* small business expert. Johnson suggests creating a monthly grid that spells out your content daily and consider using themes such as motivational posts on Mondays — but also leave room for spontaneity. “Create content that allows you to connect with your desired customer,” Johnson advises. Also, beware of constantly urging your followers to buy. “Resist the urge to sell endlessly or your friends, fans and followers will flee quickly. Serve the audience with valuable

content and you'll keep them hooked."

4. Mind your online image

In today's marketplace, there is definitely room for businesses to offer more value. Customer satisfaction nosedived in 30 industries in 2015, according to the American Customer Satisfaction Index. But online-based industries tended to draw fewer complaints, suggesting that customers are looking for speed and convenience. It also underscores the power of online reviews. A 2015 survey by Web site optimization company Bright Local found that 92% of consumers read online reviews and 68% said online reviews made them trust a business more.

That's what Bob and Cammy Bauer have found. The owners of a Wilsonville, Oregon-based Mr. Transmission/Milex franchise credit 30 online reviews in which the auto care company scores an average of 4.8 stars out of 5 with bringing in new customers. Bob routinely tells customers that the five-employee company would appreciate an honest assessment of their experience online. "Eight times out of 10, they do it," he says.

5. Respond to negative feedback

While the Internet can be a boon for some businesses, it can magnify the reach of a complaint. Businesses should respond to grievances on social media and show that they are willing to make amends, says Michael Plummer Jr., owner of **Our Town America**, a 57-employee franchise in Pinellas Park, Florida that connects local businesses with community residents. "It shows 'we do care about our customers,'" Plummer says.

6. Be willing to spend

Connecting with customers can require some expense. Stowaway Cosmetics has introduced its brand to customers by syndicating content about makeup via social media, blogs and emails. That requires paying for the content to be created, as well as software for designing Pinterest pins, web site landing pages and other graphics that will get customers' attention.

7. Assess after — and during

Once businesses win customers, they have to work to keep them. San Francisco-based marketing agency Ready State does this through client engagement and getting the customer more involved. Instead of waiting until an assignment is

finished to run a 'post-mortem' on it, "we also run 'pre-mortems' in the middle of a project," says Steven Wong, co-founder and chief operating officer of the 22-employee firm. A senior person sits down with the client, hears their concerns, and sometimes shifts the approach entirely.

Anticipating the needs of current and future clients is critical to small business success. "Everything hinges on the customer," says Joseph Michelli, a consultant that helps companies figure out how to keep customers coming back. "If you take care of the customer, profits will come."

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