

Customer Advisory Boards ... The Golden Key To REALLY Knowing Your Customers and Making More Sales

by Arnold Sanow – www.arnoldsanow.com

"Determine the wants and needs of your clients first and then work backwards to develop the products and services".

Knowing, understanding, and giving your client what he/she wants can be the difference between success and failure. Furthermore, according to the Pareto Principle, "20% of your clients or products/services will provide you with 80% of your income". Only by *really* understanding your clients will you go beyond surviving to thriving.

Although there are a number of methods to find out about your clients wants and needs one of the least utilized but most effective strategies is creating a working advisory board.

An advisory board is made up of your best customers, those 20% who provide you with 80% of your income. By having a board comprised of the "20%" you not only find out how to get more customers like them but also how to keep them coming back.

The main purpose of the advisory board is for your business to get input on a regular basis. The advisory board gets together between two to four times a year to review ideas, strategies, plans, the mission, goals and specific marketing tactics. For example, at one meeting you may want to get input on different business strategies or a marketing brochure.

Although you can get input from a number of different people, many times it can be misleading. In one situation where I was developing a marketing plan for a travel agency my client asked me for my opinions about senior citizens travel habits. Since I'm not a senior citizen my opinion is not as reliable as someone who fits this target market. In fact, the major reason many boards fail is they are made up of all types of clients and not just the 20% who make up the core of the business.

By sharing your plans and strategies with the key target clients who make up your board you get invaluable information about the attitudes and beliefs of your best clients. In addition, by keeping a regular advisory board together you can call them between meetings to discuss any new ideas. The board members can also help your company by acting as "mystery shoppers". Everytime they call your agency, use your services or buy products, have them fill out a report and send it to you with their experiences. You can also hire professional mystery shoppers; my company supplies each of our mystery shoppers with a checklist so they can rate their experiences after each visit. A board member or mystery shopper might look at certain things such as, *prompt approach, verbal acknowledgment, eye contact, pleasant phone greeting, length of time on hold, politeness, responsiveness, appearance of facility, agents listening ability, add-on sales encouraged?, were benefits sold?, and more.*

As mentioned, the advisory board should meet at least two to four times a year. The ideal size board is between nine to twelve people. The most effective boards meet for at least three hours, while some meet for a full day and others for a weekend getaway. In most cases the board members are compensated. The most frequent kinds of compensation include gift certificates, free weekends away, lunch or dinner or a direct payment.

In these turbulent times with strong competition and uncertain consumer behavior, you need a winning edge --- and one of the best investments to boost your bottom line is through a customer advisory board.

About Arnold Sanow

Arnold Sanow, MBA, CSP (certified speaking professional) delivers content driven, interactive and entertaining keynotes, seminars, training programs and consulting. He works with his clients to assist them in building a more positive, productive and profitable organization. He has delivered over 2,500 presentations, written 5 books, to include, "Marketing Boot Camp", and "Get Along with Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere", is an adjunct professor at Georgetown University and the President of The Business Source, Inc.

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