

Responsiveness: The Key To All That Is Good In Business

In an industry with more than 21,000 competitors, how are we still ticking — and not just ticking, but growing after 16 years? It is hard to reduce all the moving parts to only one reason, but on the whole it all boils down to customer service.

What does customer service mean to us? Responsiveness. In an industry where the same products are pretty much available to everyone, where do we get the momentum to grow and prosper?

It's like the Cowardly Lion's speech in the Wizard of Oz where the answer to all questions is "courage." Well for us the refrain is "responsiveness."

You may ask what do we mean by responsiveness. In our playbook, it means getting back to our clients right away **even if we don't have the answer immediately**. Does that make all the difference? You bet it does. When I call a contractor to come fix my leaky shower, the one who calls me back right away scores in my book. Even if he/she cannot come right away, just the fact that he/she acknowledged my call goes a long way, and I feel much more willing to wait for his/her

time to free up. When our clients call or email with a question, product inquiry or issue, we always acknowledge their call or email right away. It seems so obvious and simple but obviously it is not as we constantly call vendors that don't get

back to us right away. Sometimes by the time they get back to us we have already placed our order with another vendor. As the old adage goes, "You snooze you lose." Responsiveness is something we live by. We are always

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there for our clients.

An example of being there for our clients even under the most dire circumstances was during Hurricane Sandy, a super storm that incapacitated the Northeast in November 2012 for at least a week, and longer in many places. Without any power in our office for a full week, our team members worked on their cell phones from home and even public places, searching for phone numbers online and contacting vendors, UPS and clients to make sure orders were not going to be delayed, and that if they were our clients would know the whole story. We did not drop the ball on any clients. We even fielded a rush inquiry and made it happen the old-fashioned way — no signed/approved paperwork, just word of mouth via cell phone.

We have two simple rules to be responsive: respond to emails and phone calls within 30 minutes and get our clients a first round of ideas within 4 hours. Of course we are flexible and often get back to our clients right away and get them ideas much sooner than 4 hours. Under any circumstance, however, we always acknowledge that they have contacted us so that they know we are working for them and will get back to them with answers soon.

This had always been our way of doing business, but a few years ago we put our core values down on paper, and now we train everyone at our company to meet these core values. We also focus on instilling the following traits: a positive attitude, good communication, responsiveness, accuracy, flexibility, hard working, customer focused and having initiative. We use our core values as a guide when we hire team members and when



Wendy Ferber

we evaluate them. Everything we do is geared toward meeting these values. At the end of the day, when these values are met, the result is responsiveness.

Each morning our entire company “huddles” in our conference room. It is an amazing way to connect with one another, help one another with issues and concerns, share information, learn from one another, and work on improving our responsiveness. It is a daily training session that feels more like a pep session to provide the best customer service possible. In these huddles we work out how to be responsive even when our clients don’t know it. Consider the below examples of what goes on behind the scenes to provide our clients what they want on time:

Marketing Technology Company

Order: Candy jars for holiday gifts

Situation: Vendor called two weeks before the candy jars were supposed to ship and said they didn’t have the candy jars and they were not going to be able to do anything to fix the situation.

What We Did: We called vendors all across the country until we found one in California that had the exact same jars and had them hold them for us. We then called our original vendor to have them shipped overnight so they could finish the job on time.

Result: The client received the candy jars on time and had no idea that there had ever been a problem.

Major Law Firm

Order: Tote bags

Situation: The size of tote our customer wanted was not available domestically so we had to do an overseas order. The time frame for overseas orders is approximately three months. That requires a lot of follow-up considering a normal order is delivered within approximately 15 working days.

What We Did: We followed up with the factory for three months straight to ensure the order would be delivered on time. (We make the same profit on an order that takes a few check-ins during two weeks as an order that takes at least 12 check-ins during the course of three months.)

Result: The client was very pleased with their custom tote bags.

Major Financial Institution

Order: Chocolate-covered popcorn for a tradeshow

Situation: The vendor was supposed to deliver the popcorn

by refrigerated truck to Florida on a very specific day to a specific location, but the vendor delivered to the wrong location a day early. That location could not accept the delivery and the popcorn had to remain refrigerated. There was a very large additional expense to store the popcorn in the delivery truck overnight and re-deliver it the next day.

What We Did: We spent an entire day on the telephone with the delivery site, convention center and vendor trying to get the popcorn to the refrigerated facility on the right day.

Result: The popcorn made it to the right place on the right day so that the client never knew what had happened.

We have additional guiding principles that also help us respond to and meet clients’ needs:

- We put the customers first even when something happens that is not our fault.
- We follow up on everything from sample orders to purchase orders to order deliveries — we never assume that something has delivered.
- We always try to accommodate changes to orders.
- We always offer clients all the samples and proofs they need.
- We are always professional.
- Things won’t always go right, but we will always make them right.

Our clients thank us over and over again for being so responsive. In a world where there is so much going on at all times, clients appreciate that we are able to stay focused on them and respond to their needs right away. **CCN**

Wendy Ferber is the CEO of Pride Products Distributors LLC, a company that provides innovative promotional products and corporate gifts. She can be reached at 973-788-6985 or at wferber@pride-products.com. For more information about Pride Products, visit www.pride-products.com.



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The image shows a logo for Pride Products with the text 'PRIDEPRODUCTS' in large bold letters and 'Innovative Promotional Products & Corporate Gifts' below it. Underneath the text are five icons in square frames: a red and black cooler, a computer mouse, a colorful umbrella, a green mug, and a stack of colorful t-shirts. At the bottom of the frame is the website 'www.pride-products.com' and the phone number '973.564.6300'.