



Regifting...

Every year it happens. That Aunt. You know the one. The one that still pinches your cheek even though you are in your 40's... All wrapped up in the most flowery paper and bow imaginable... she presents your Christmas gift together with a kiss that would do a St Bernard dog proud.

With fear and trepidation dressed up as gratefulness you carefully open it – taking as long as possible to avoid having to look at what unique offering you have been presented with this year. With gratefulness worthy of an Oscar, you exude platitudes and over and over you say “really, you shouldn't have”... As soon as you leave the family lunch you moan over why she gives you back the present you gave her the previous year (which she had given you the year before that). To break the cycle, before the day is done, you have decided to put it on eBay.

I know the pain you feel. There's a running joke in my family about having donated a particular item to a fête, only to have it purchased and “re-gifted” to the same person the following year. Really?

What are the chances of being given something you didn't want by the same person 2 years in a row? Perhaps the acting is too good. Being polite might need to be mixed with something a little less subtle like “I have no idea what I am going to do with that!”

I received a re-gifted present... what I should have said was “I have no idea what I am going to do with that.” Instead, I said “that's lovely”

All too often in business we have similar experiences. As a customer, you have a suspicion that your suppliers don't really understand their customers, nor their customers business.

As a consequence, every time you head into a store, you are offered products that are of no use to you. The first time is excusable, the second time is slightly annoying, and if it happens a third time it starts to feel a lot like one of those re-gifted presents.

The product starts to get a bad smell. Nobody wants it and the current holder of the “gift” is blatantly trying to getting rid of it. You have to ask yourself two questions:

- What's wrong with the product that they are so keen to get rid of them; and
- Why didn't they accept my “no” the first time? Are they that desperate, or are they simply ignorant of my needs?

A great example of this is a recent experience I had in a market in Asia. I had to walk through this particular market every day on the way to the subway. Each day, I would be offered products I had no interest in by store keepers seemingly desperate to offload their merchandise.

Why a middle aged guy in a suit would need a metre high vase is beyond me. However; every day for a week I was asked to buy the vase (all while I was speed-walking towards the train). After a few days the sales pitch became more annoying: “You come by every day, surely you want it now?”

So it can be with your products and services. Without taking the time to think (and ask) the customer about what they are looking for, what sort of work they do, and how they use the products and/or services you provide how are you sure you are not offering the same products time and again to the same people?

There are two fundamental rules in business. First – know your products. Second – know your clients. Quite simply, this means you have to understand what your products do, and how they would suit the needs of your customers. Then, after you understand the needs of your customers, you can recommend appropriate solutions to them.

Apart from the personal knowledge you gain over time of your customers, you should also be logging all this information in a good customer relationship management tool (CRM). This can be as simple as the notes section of your accounting program, or a more sophisticated tool which can determine predictive modeling (i.e. what your customer will likely purchase next). For most businesses, that level of sophistication isn't necessary – this system is what supermarkets use to determine stock orders so they don't run

out of the products you need.

In today's competitive market, there really is no excuse for not taking the time to understand what the customer is looking for. This knowledge can take as little as 60 seconds to gather. However, it can help you make more relevant suggestions to the client.

There are two basic rules of business: know your product and know your customer. This is the only way to offer relevant solutions to your customers' needs

This ability to suggest different products to customers allows you to create something which drives loyalty: relevant advice. Research by a group in the US (Baystreet Advisors) says clients' value advice that helps them to become more productive, reduce their costs and complexity and increase their efficiency and profitability.

When was the last time you stopped to think about the suitability of a product or service to a customer BEFORE

you tried to sell it to a client?

How would better information on your customers help you avoid a re-gifting style scenario, where you offer the same product time and again to the same person (who always says no?)

As we head into the Christmas holidays, now is a good time to think about your products and services. Do your customers feel you are simply trying to sell them the same old solution again and again? Do they actually need it?

Start using a CRM to track what you are promoting, and to whom. While it does take time, your customers will thank you for not trying to provide what feels like a re-gifted solution time and time again.

This Christmas, if you are stuck with some re-gifted items in your "present box", think about giving them away to a charity shop. Someone might just buy it who genuinely wants it. But look out if your family is determined to find that 'perfect' gift even the charity shop might not be safe... it might just end up in your stocking again next year 😊

To all clients, we take this opportunity to wish you all the best for Christmas and a happy and successful 2013!