

Don't be weird with your customers



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– a Geelong Chamber
of Commerce initiative funded
by the Federal Government
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Every time you meet a customer there is an opportunity to find out more about them by asking questions. But asking questions can be tricky with a fine line between information gathering and just coming across 'weird'.

The best questions you can ask customers are the ones that elicit what they are doing with your products and services, and what else they might need or want next.

For example, big companies in competitive markets, such as Telstra and Optus, segment their customers based on their situation such as: 'family with x number of children, aspirational, own or mortgage house'.

Sometimes when you're on the phone with one of these big businesses, you may be asked a seemingly unrelated question to the reason why you're on the phone, such as: "do you need a phone for any children?" It will sound like a conversation, but is actually designed to find out: if you have any children; and, what age they might be. This information allows the company to determine where your family – you as a customer – fits into their segmentation, and therefore what products and services you might be interested in next.

So, what should you ask your customers? The first place to start is to gain an understanding of what your customers want your product or service for.

For example, if you own a homewares retail store, you will first want to know if your customer is buying for themselves or for someone else. If they are buying for themselves, it would be useful to know: what their taste is; what style of house they live in; and, their lifestyle.

Knowing this will give you an idea of not only what products to direct to them now, but what might interest them in the future.

In this scenario, some questions might be: "are you looking today for yourself or for someone else?" And, if they answer that they are buying for themselves, follow up with: "which room in the house are you looking at refreshing or updating?" Then, depending on the answer, show them examples of latest trends and ask: "what do you think of this trend" and "is there anything you like/don't like about it?"

All of these questions are conversational, and

are not normally answered with a "yes" or "no". At this point, you could then show the customer something that you think they might like based on their answers. If they're not ready to buy today, encourage them to take a photo on their phone of something that has caught their eye with your shop name and location in the screen shot so they can remember where they saw it.

Another example, is if you have a women's clothes shop, the line of questioning could start with: "are you looking for inspiration today, or for something in particular?" This is much better than the: "are you just looking?" question, which will usually get a "yes" response, and sometimes makes it awkward to restart a conversation.

Regardless of how they answer this first question, a follow-up can be: "we've just had a delivery of (whatever you've had a delivery of that might interest them), which can be both dressed up for evening, or dressed down for more casual occasions. Are you looking for something more formal, or more casual?"

Hopefully these questions will result in an answer that gives you a reason to show them a few items (not just one). Once again, these questions: are less likely to be answered with a "yes" or "no"; are conversational; open a dialogue that shows you're interested in their needs; and, gives you an idea of what might be suitable. If there is something that interests them, again encourage them to take

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a photo with their phone – or better still, you take a photo with their phone of them in the clothes – with your shop sign somewhere in the frame.

If you have a service based business and much of your marketing is through networking, this is the perfect opportunity to get to know potential customers while also being helpful. For example, you can start with: "what's the best thing about what you do?" and then: "what's the biggest challenge in what you do?" This will firstly give you an answer to the question "what do you do?" without having to ask it, and will also give you some information about where you might be able to help – whether directly or through another referral.

Questions like this are also good when you can be specific. For example, if you run a cleaning business, you can ask: "what do you like best about having a clean home / office?" and "what's the biggest challenge you have in keeping your home / office clean?" You can then empathise and give examples of what your customers say about your services, providing an opening to talk about your business, without making it all about you.

Every interaction with a customer is an opportunity to learn about them and help them get a task done. Customers not only remember if you've been helpful (or not ...), but if you have product that can be captured, make the experience more memorable by allowing it to be shared with friends and family. **BL**