



Ensuring a positive customer experience during all phases of a construction job will help increase your client base

BY SCOTT WOOD



Want MORE Business?

What differentiates one business from another is not only its product or service, but also the client experience. For instance, why do so many people who've had a home built or remodelled say they'd never do it again? Because it didn't turn out as they expected, or it was more complicated and protracted than they anticipated. In contrast, people who have a positive experience with a construction company

become loyal clients who return for future projects and refer the firm to colleagues, friends and family.

Give Clients What They Really Want

Clients want their money's worth – a dependable contractor they can count on for work they can't do themselves. A great client experience is all about the golden rule. Treat others the way you want to be treated.

More specifically, it includes the following elements:

Know the client. Take the time to get to know individual clients and their unique needs. What problems or challenges are they trying to solve? What are their plans for the new property? Create realistic expectations.

Don't let technology replace timely and consistent personal communication with clients. Reach out to make clients feel valued and demonstrate that their satisfaction is the company's ultimate goal. Provide expertise and guidance by suggesting the best course of action to take, explaining options and helping clients make decisions. "Each client has to think he or she is your only client," says Joe Percario, president of Joe Percario General Contracting in Warren, N.J.

Establish – and then exceed – quality standards. Because quality is subjective, its definition has to be mutually agreed on by contractor and client so both parties know when it has been achieved. Always strive to exceed the set standard. "Quality control is about having experienced project managers and supervisors," Percario says. "Always account for those management costs in your bid. If your price is a little higher than a competitor's, clients will hire you anyways, provided your initial presentation highlights your project management expertise."

Deliver on time. Failure to deliver on schedule raises doubts about whether the company always stands behind its word. "Clients' time is money," Percario says. "They don't mind paying a little more for having their project completed in a timely manner so they can rent out properties or open businesses sooner."

Make customer service everyone's job. Anyone at any point of contact with the client – whether in person, by phone or electronically – has the power to positively or negatively influence the client experience. This includes company owners, receptionists, accounts receivable personnel, salespeople, project managers, workers and subcontractors. "A good experience starts with a good first impression," Percario says. "Our first response team is trained to make a masterful presentation to prospective clients. Our office staff, too, is trained to be the voice of the company."



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Stay involved. Construction business owners need to stay involved throughout the project to ensure all staff and subcontractors deliver excellent client service. Two companies may offer equally good products, but clients prefer the one that is organized, meets expectations, communicates regularly and listens well. “You have to own the client relationship as well as the client-subcontractor relationship,” Percario says. “I call subcontractors ‘exclusive representatives’ and consider them an extension of my company. They need to know the complete scope of work and understand the client’s needs. I involve them in project meetings and introduce them to clients early on. Solid project management is essential to ensuring neither the client relationship nor the subcontractor relationship is jeopardized.”

Besides generating repeat and referral business, a client-friendly environment enhances a company’s ability to attract and retain quality employees. People don’t want to work for a company that treats its clients badly because, most likely, it will treat its employees poorly as well. Further, in smaller communities where bankers may know both the construction company’s personnel and clients personally, obtaining financing also may depend on creating a positive client experience.

Follow Up and Follow Through

Determining if clients are having a positive experience is a prerequisite for improvement. One method of measurement is to track repeat business and referrals, as well as rework and warranty work. In addition, the promptness with which clients pay their bills may indicate satisfaction.

Most importantly, ask clients what they really think. An absence of complaints does not guarantee satisfaction. Getting feedback on completed projects has to be done in a non-threatening way. If the company owner personally visits clients and asks their opinion, the answers may be polite, rather than honest. It’s better to send a questionnaire people can complete in

private. However, wait a few weeks after the project has been completed before sending the survey; everything may seem perfect on the first day, but issues may arise later.

“Client surveys give you actionable information and are a point of differentiation to the marketplace because they let clients know you care,” Percario says. “Make sure to provide contact information in case they have questions about materials, installation or maintenance. This puts them back in touch with the lead qualifying department for up-sells, additional business and referrals. When clients don’t respond to the survey, we have a trained lead qualify team member call and get the questionnaire answered while at the same time discussing the benefits of repeat business and referrals.”

Positive client feedback also can be used for marketing purposes, as well as for employee incentive programs. Because followup with a questionnaire creates

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expectations, it’s even more important to follow through with necessary rework or warranty work. “If there is a complaint, send an experienced professional to the site for an inspection,” Percario says. “The worst thing you could do is ignore those issues once you’ve been paid. After all the hard work you’ve done to build a great client experience, you’ll be viewed as just another money-grabbing contractor.”

In the current economic conditions, as businesses begin to recover, increased market share goes to proactive companies that streamline their operations and implement processes to deliver customer service excellence. Giving clients what they really want and treating them the way they want to be treated assures business success in any economic environment. 

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