



How to retain customers or encourage loyalty

Finding customers can feel like an uphill battle at times, but retaining their custom, and not losing them to a competitor can be so much more difficult. So how can you make sure that once a customer has engaged with you, they will come back to you, time and time again?

Here we've pulled together some top tips for how you could consider growing customer loyalty and drive sales in the wake of National Pet Shop Day.

- **Be real:** Online shopping or engaging in webchats with automated bots is more common than ever these days, and the possibilities offered by AI lessens the occurrence of human interaction even more. But in the pet industry, where relationships between owner and animal are at the forefront of everything, removing those one-on-one, personal conversations, could be disastrous.

Pet shops hold the unique position of being able to foster real, beneficial face-to-face relationships based on responsive, interactive dialogue without robotic or computerised interfaces getting in the way. This is a valuable tool when it comes to encouraging loyalty as it makes for a more authentic retail experience where bonds between individuals can be built.

The trust you have already built amongst your existing customer base is no doubt already paying dividends with regard to repeat purchase, but it's important not to rest on your laurels, and continue to keep having these important conversations, and proactively reaching out wherever the dialogue has perhaps slowed down.

- **Be rewarding:** The trusty store card is by far one of the retail industry's biggest success stories when it comes to encouraging loyalty or repeat purchase.

While it may not be possible to set up a scheme such as 'Nectar' or a 'Clubcard', there are still ways to attract customers back with an engaging loyalty scheme. Consider implementing a stamp card system, where customers are rewarded after a certain number of purchases, or offering special incentives on the anniversary of their first custom.

By monitoring a customer's purchasing habits, you can create personalised offers. The customer will feel listened to and valued for their loyalty, whilst you, as the retailer, gets access to beneficial data which will highlight potential cross-selling opportunities.

- **Be generous:** Discounts and occasional promotional freebies can work well to increase client loyalty. If you already run a loyalty programme like those mentioned above, this mechanism is really straightforward, and can be a quick win. However, another way to create excitement, anticipation, and return visits is to provide consumers who have recently made a purchase access to exclusive prize draws.

Similarly, you could run competitions for those existing customers in return for feedback or reviews on your service and product offering, which can again help with building relationships and making the customer feel valued. Feedback on your loyalty schemes themselves is also very useful. For

example, if you don't know which ones are effective, you risk investing money in something that won't pay off or giving up on something that is genuinely beneficial to you.

It's also important to be mindful of the financial viability of any discounts, or the additional costs of any giveaways against the potential business benefits and what the likely uptake will be, otherwise the impact on the bottom line may not be as positive as you'd hoped.

- **Be more:** Offering something extra that your rivals won't is another approach to give customers the impression that they're getting a good bargain and that they are appreciated.

Is there anything else you can provide devoted clients? How about getting first dibs on a seasonal discount, having front row seats at a new product launch party, or even getting to be a member of a focus group or product trial panel?

- **Be genuine:** Authenticity is one of the most important factors that determines customer loyalty. Understanding and taking into account the needs of your clients is a good strategy. If you could walk in their shoes, what would you want? What kinds of things would make you want to keep going back to a business?

Finally, even though it might seem obvious, providing excellent customer service is by far the most sure-fire method to differentiate your store in a crowded market. By giving your customers the finest experience possible, both you and your team members will make them much more eager to return, and you'll gain much more personal satisfaction too.

