

The small business guide to managing customer conversations and increasing sales

Conversations have always been at the very centre of business. As markets have evolved and the entire landscape of communication has changed, the importance of maintaining a line of conversation between your brand and your audience has remained a stable constant.

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As a small business, in particular, customer conversations are a cost-effective way to build your brand identity and convert browsers into buyers. But how do you make sure you get it right every time?

Let's take a look at five best practices and channels to help improve your communication and sales pipeline as a small business.

Why are conversations so powerful?

For *almost 60% of consumers*, human communication increases their loyalty to a brand and makes it more likely that they'll convert into paying customers. In other words, your conversations can be powerful.

Well-managed conversations with your customers can:

- Turn negative experiences into positive ones
- Turn angry customers into happy ones

- Help you *learn from customer complaints*
- Highlight new products/services
- Improve personalisation
- Teach you more about your audience
- Inform your customers of upcoming events (e.g. sales or product launches)

They're a valuable marketing strategy and a must if you want to create strong connections with your customers. But how can a small business manage conversations? Let's get into the top tips.

Best channels for easy communication

Start optimising your conversations by choosing the right channels. Aside from your in-store sales team, you can extend your reach and improve communication with carefully selected digital channels.

Chatbots and Web Chat

When dealing with a problem, chatbots and live web chats ensure customers get quick, easy responses. With chatbots, you can automatically answer simple queries or provide basic customer service, including letting customers book a table or arrange a product return. When the chatbot can't handle the query, customers are transferred to one of your team who can provide a more personalised, flexible experience.

Quick, convenient, and easy to manage, it's a smart tool for small businesses.

Review Management

Reviews provide a public form of communication that gives your audience

a voice, as well as

creating a space for potential shoppers to learn more about your brand. To improve conversations via your reviews, make sure you:

- Reply quickly
- Always remain polite and friendly
- Use your brand's tone of voice (TOV)
- Answer queries clearly
- Respond to negative reviews with a desire to resolve the issue

A lot of small businesses use review management software, like *Magic*, to make their conversations easier. With review alerts and branded templates, you'll be able to respond quickly and maintain your on-brand TOV every time.

Social Media

Social media is a dream for businesses looking to converse with their audience. *Around 75% of X* (formerly Twitter) users engage with brands on the platform, and it's a relaxed, informal space where you can build a lot of loyalty. Just make sure you or someone on your team are able to keep an eye on your social platforms to provide quick responses and drive engagement.

Best practices for customer conversations

Whether you're a one-man band or have a dedicated customer service team, best practices are essential for creating a branded approach to conversations that will leave your audience happy. Best practices can differ from brand to brand, but there are some business-wide approaches that we recommend sticking to.

Know how to listen

Listening is vital to all customer conversations. Practice active listening (particularly in face-to-face and phone conversations) by:

- Being present (no multi-tasking or distractions)
- Paraphrasing what's been said to ensure you understand
- Non-verbal listening cues (e.g. nodding and eye contact)
- Listening to understand first and respond second

Ask questions to dig deeper, too, and let your customer know you're taking the conversation seriously. For example, if they're asking for a product recommendation, ask what colours they like or what they're planning on using the product for, ensuring they feel heard and helped.

Take an empathy-first approach

Regardless of how the conversation is occurring, be it on a review platform, via social media, or face-to-face, you should always take an empathy-first approach. This means striving to understand what the customer is saying and letting them know you sympathise with any problem they're having, be it with your business or otherwise.

Empathy creates a better experience for your customers while cultivating a caring, supportive brand image. A little sympathy can go a long way in people's lives, too, making the positive effects go further than your business benefits.

Personalise your conversations

Over 70% of customers want personalised brand experiences. In your conversations, you can keep your audience happy with easy personalisation. Get to know the customer's name, remember their preferences for future recommendations, and offer responses that are

unique to their situation rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Respond quickly on digital channels

To avoid losing a potential customer to a competitor, always respond as quickly as possible on digital channels. As a small business, this might mean limiting your digital channels to just a couple that you're able to manage with ease. Or, if you have the budget, you can invest in communication managers to take care of responses for you.

Never lose your cool

One best practice that can never be ignored is not losing your cool. No matter how rude or angry the customer is, stay in control of your emotions for a professional, helpful response. Apologise, show empathy and use positive language to find a resolution.

How to increase sales through conversation

Conversations with customers provide the perfect opportunity to boost sales. You've got an engaged audience actively talking to you, so don't miss this opportunity!

We've already spoken about personalisation, but there are plenty of other sales tactics you can bring into your conversations. One is upselling, in which you recommend a more expensive product or service that may improve the experience or boost results for your customer.

There's also cross-selling, where you recommend associated products or services that can complement what the customer has already chosen to buy.

Get to know customer preferences when you talk to them, too. You can then ask if they'd like to add their email to your mailing list so that you

can let them know when certain items they'd be interested in come in stock, or simply update them on new products or services when you next see them.

Final words

As a small business, never underestimate the importance of conversing with your customers. From building a clear brand identity to using upselling to boost your revenue, the art of conversation is a must for your growth. Hopefully, these tips will have given you a clear idea of how you can start managing your conversations, making every interaction a breeze.

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