

GROWERTALKS

Guest Column

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“I Have a Problem With My Order”

Rayne Gibson

It's the phone call we all dread to take. Something happened to their order and they're not happy campers. It's inevitable—this day will come. The truth is that plants, the medium that our industry is built on, are a beacon for issues. Plants play a vital role in sustaining life on Earth, providing oxygen, food, shelter and contributing to the overall well-being, yet have one huge flaw as a sellable product. They're a highly perishable product that relies on inherent beauty to justify value, solely judged within the eye of the beholder. Selling plants is possibly the most stressful job anyone in the horticulture industry can have. But you can use these traits to your advantage and create a gameplan to mitigate issues before they ever arise.

Adeptly handling sales scenarios and mitigating negative experiences are crucial for success. I'll delve deep into a series of intricate steps and dialogues tailored specifically for horticulture businesses. By the end, you'll have an understanding of establishing robust customer relationships, delivering on promises and transforming setbacks into opportunities for growth.

The initial conversation

John (a retail business owner): Hello, I met you at the trade show last week. I've looked over your catalog and I'm interested in purchasing your products for my business. Can you provide more details about your offerings?

This first conversation could set the tone for the entirety of the relationship. First impressions matter—be sure to make the most of it.

Certainly, John. I remember you! I appreciate your interest in our products. I want to get to know you a bit better—could you tell me more about you and your business? How did you get started? What are your customers like? Do you offer installation? What type and size products do you carry? Do you order from any of the other nurseries in my part of the world?

Laying the foundation of expectations through discovery

In this phase, it's crucial to establish an emotional connection with the new contact. By asking open-ended questions and actively listening to their needs, preferences and concerns, you can build rapport effectively. Try to work on the technique of focusing toward having them talk more than you do. The most important aspect to understand is that these conversations are about gaining and giving quality information.

John, you're deeply involved in the horticulture industry. Before we proceed, may I ask about your specific business goals? We like to really get to know our customers and what motivates them to figure out how we

can help them with achieving their goals.

Leveraging research

Before the conversation, you would have conducted thorough research on John's business needs and evaluated your competition. Armed with this knowledge, you can tailor your offerings effectively.

Based on the information you've shared, John, I believe our selection of products will align perfectly with your business. We take pride in offering unique and high-quality options backed by exceptional customer service suitable for businesses like yours.

Following through with promises

Once you secure an order, it's of utmost importance to uphold every promise made during the sales process.

Thank you for choosing us, John. I want to assure you that we'll deliver your products exactly as discussed, on time and in impeccable condition, ensuring they meet the high standards your business requires. If it's not too bothersome, since it's our first order, I'd like to send you fresh pictures of a few of the items you ordered, just to make sure they meet your standards. Then, when the truck is scheduled, I'll be sure to give you updates on when you can expect them at the doorstep.

Hand-tagging products

One of the most distinctive value propositions nurseries can offer is hand-tagging. This puts a personal touch to the order telling the customer that you're dedicated to making sure they're satisfied, ensuring that each order will meet the highest standards of quality and attention to detail.

Timely notifications

Staying proactive throughout the shipping process is crucial. It's possibly the easiest way to set yourself apart from much of your competition. This doesn't have to be highly intricate or incur costly tracking services—it can be free. Maintain a personal touch and demonstrate your commitment to customer satisfaction. When the carrier arrives to load up the plants, be sure to get their phone number. By receiving notifications from the carrier, you can ensure that you keep John's business informed on their delivery.

John, I just got off the phone with the driver and wanted to give you an update. He's at his first stop for the day and has two more in front of you. We're estimating that it will be after noon before he gets to you. I'll check back with the driver at lunch to get a better arrival window.

Uh-oh, there's an issue

Immediate action: In the event of an issue, immediate action is imperative. Avoid relying on text messages or emails; opt for a personal call instead.

John, I'm genuinely sorry to hear about this. I appreciate you bringing it to my attention. I want to make sure you're happy and resolve this as quickly as possible. Could you help me with all the details of the problem? A picture of the problem would help me tremendously.

The Power of Apology: Maintaining a slightly apologetic tone can go a long way in diffusing tension and demonstrating empathy.

John, I want you to know that we take this situation seriously. Your satisfaction is our top priority and we are committed to your business. I will investigate the matter thoroughly and get back to you as soon as possible.

Give it time: Use this as an opportunity to let the customer's emotions of agitation, defensiveness and possibly anger begin to settle and get back to a place of levelness. Do your due diligence and investigate the cause of the issue, bringing in others to help with this as needed, such as a sales manager or dock manager.

Okay, John, I figured it out. This happened because the crew was loading the order in the rain and the ink was smudged. I saw the paper myself. I just want to make sure to make you happy—what can I do to make the situation better?

Don't jump to solutions: The goal of the follow up is not to have the customer forgive you because of how it happened—they only care about how this will affect them. Stay in a slight apologetic tone and ask them what would make them move past this problem. Try to leave the solution up to them to present. This will ensure that the solution is tied to their emotions. Often, the solution will be of lesser punishment than what you would have offered.

As we reflect on the journey from the initial conversation to handling issues, it becomes evident that nurturing strong customer relationships and fulfilling promises are key pillars of success in business.

Remember, by following these principles and approaches, you can transform negative experiences into opportunities for growth and ensure your business relationships thrive in the horticulture industry.

Always strive for excellence in customer service. Continuously seek ways to improve your interactions and maintain the highest quality standards. Your dedication to customer satisfaction will undoubtedly set you apart and lead to long-lasting success in the horticulture industry. **GT**

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