

Three steps for SMEs to target communications and drive customer excellence

 By Jacques van Wyk 14 Apr 2016

SMEs should treat the personalisation of communications as a huge opportunity rather than focusing on the potential impact of poor communications as a risk to their businesses.

Exceptional customer service is the hallmark of the SME. A smaller client base often makes it much easier to know individual customers and understand their specific needs. How SMEs look to communicate with their customers should naturally be an extension of this service.



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According to recent Ricoh research, six out of 10 consumers would no longer support brands if communications from those brands were poor. In addition, two-thirds feel less loyal and would spend less with brands that send them irrelevant information. Nearly one-fifth of consumers said they have actually taken their custom elsewhere after being spammed by irrelevant material from product and service providers.

Alienating existing customers can have an immediate impact on a company's revenue and cash flow, while irritating potential customers erodes its pipeline. It takes a long time to gain a customer's trust, but generic and impersonal communications can destroy that trust almost instantly. For small businesses in particular, this should be treated as a warning that irrelevant communications can impact their future growth and their very survival.

SMEs, often more agile than larger businesses, are in prime position to react to customer feedback faster, change their communications strategies more quickly, and win customers from bigger competitors. They should prioritise taking advantage of the opportunities more personalised communications can bring. Key focus areas should include:

- 1. Stitching customer data together** - The information smaller businesses hold on their customers and prospects is often scattered across the company, and frequently isn't stored digitally. As a result, SMEs will likely find it difficult to alert consumers to relevant deals and offers with a high degree of accuracy. SMEs must focus on what information they currently hold to learn more about their customer base. They should prioritise integrating data from silos across the business into a single source to get a complete picture of their customers. It's easier to achieve that before they grow.
- 2. Don't be afraid to seek outside help** - Customers are often bombarded with information because printing and mailing material is rarely co-ordinated. SMEs should engage with an expert consultant to digitise both their customer data and the methods used to collate it. Data, easier to handle in a digital format, can be quickly analysed to effectively

tailor communications. In addition, production and posting costs will be kept to a minimum if unnecessary communications are eliminated from the system. Ricoh's Business Process Services, for example, help streamline operations so they are more efficient and embrace the multi-channel communication formats demanded by customers today.

3. Seek feedback and tweak - SMEs shouldn't be afraid to ask their customers to feedback on the communications they receive. Knowing where to make improvements is critical considering 57% of people claim the quality of printed materials they receive directly impacts their perception of a company. Setting up a simple feedback system online, in-store or in-branch, goes a long way to helping customers feel valued and get repeat business.

Nurturing key relationships is critical to business growth and SMEs should trade on what they do best: knowing their customers. Tailored communications will help them stand out from the competition, make a real impact, and take their business to the next level.

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