

## Top tips: Keeping the customer relationship going and increasing lifetime value

During this time of change, virtually all of us are having to adapt how we work. It is vitally important we continue engaging with customers - both internal and external ones - to keep the customer relationship going.

We should be proactive and ambitious in reassuring our customers via whatever channels we know will reach them. Even small interactions with customers become hugely important at a time like this, so we need to consider how best to achieve it. In a recent [media statement](#), our CEO, Jo Causon said:

*“How organisations respond over the coming months will be remembered by customers and employees for years to come. As we have seen time and time again, in difficult times, these are the real moments of truth – and when we emerge from this, the organisations that have connected with customers in an authentic way will be rewarded with ongoing loyalty.”*



### Engaging with your internal customers – keeping the relationship going

Ensure your workforce is informed of ongoing developments inside and outside of your organisation (including any changes to policy and process, the latest government advice, and your organisation’s response). This will help to ensure colleagues are best placed to engage with customers and continue to build trust and long-lasting relationships.

However, is there anything else for which we should prepare? And what advice can we share with our internal customers and other organisations? Are we planning for the short-, medium- and long-term? Are we thinking about the footprint we are leaving and how that will reflect on us in the next six months? Hard as it is, we must have one eye on the current situation, and one eye on the future.

Organisations need to be consistent in their approach to how they communicate internally so that they can reach customer touch-points across the entire business. This will help ensure colleagues and front-line staff are best placed to continue to deliver services, as well as any changes to services, thereby maintaining a strong and positive relationship with customers.

Providing a consistent, reliable service is incredibly important, and there is an absolute need to deliver a brilliant service in these challenging times. Engaging with your internal customers will enable you to go above and beyond to maintain a positive customer relationship.

For example:

- Gas and electricity suppliers have promised customers on pre-payment meters that they won't be cut off during the coronavirus outbreak.
- Supermarkets have introduced allotted times of the day when only the elderly, vulnerable and disabled, or NHS staff and other key workers such as social care workers, can shop.
- JetBlue became the first airline to waive fees for changes or cancellations. The move went a long way towards reassuring current customers as well as bringing new ones on board.

To think about:

- In what ways is your organisation adapting/ changing as a result of COVID-19? For example, if you're adjusting operations to maintain your core service, how is this being communicated to internal customers? What impact will this have on existing SLAs, for example?
- In what ways is your organisation maintaining customer service through innovation and flexibility? For example, thinking about shift patterns that allow for the fact that there are multiple family members in the house at the same time, and whether colleagues can divide their working days differently. Could staff be deployed differently if their usual services are not currently needed?
- Are you asking your staff for their ideas and getting them to be creative in how they are delivering? Are you involving them in developing short-term adjustments that meet the needs of your customers now along with the future needs of your organisation?



### Engaging with your external customers – keeping the relationship going

Are you thinking about what your customers might be going through, and how your product or service could help them with that? What are you doing to verify this/find out?

It is important to communicate clearly honestly and transparently, so there are no surprises for your customers. This will help keep the customer relationship alive, and continue to build trust; it is also an opportunity to test the real quality of your service. A 'moment of truth'!

Knowing your customers well will pay dividends in the future. So think about which of your customers will need additional support or require flexibility in how you operate and communicate with them (especially with [vulnerable customers](#)). Some organisations are offering advice on managing through difficult times or thinking differently about what they are doing for whom, and when. These gestures of support at a critical moment in customers' lives won't be soon forgotten and will help maintain a deeper relationship long into the future.

To think about:

- Be creative, accurate and consistent in your communication. Try to use a customer's preferred method of communication where possible. Are they likely to need increased personal contact versus those who would prefer digital communication?
- How can you adapt short-term to retain the relationship for the future? Who is at risk in your customer supply chain?
- Use positive language, have a can-do attitude – what can you do to support your customers?
- Know your customers and don't make assumptions – ask your customers what they would like or need you to do differently, or not at all so you can meet their current requirements and expectations. Gaining insight through customer feedback is integral to understanding your customers, and keeping the customer relationship going, even more so during challenging times. It will support you to make short term changes to maintain momentum without compromising standards or longer term delivery
- Think about what your customers need right now and how you can fulfil that need.
- Be authentic, empathetic, and transparent with your customers to continue fostering the relationships you've already built, and to nurture the new ones that will grow as a result of how you operate your business and respond during this time. For example, you may need to rethink some advertising and promotion strategies.
- Be proactive with local communities: organisations should be doing their best to

- make sure their actions do not negatively affect members of the community. Think about how you might enhance relationships with local communities in which you operate during this time of crisis.
- Don't forget about your critical partners. Are any of your stakeholders and suppliers struggling? How are you keeping in touch?



What might be the impact?

Great relationships can be maintained and strengthened during this challenging period, but not without thought and effort. A key component is two-way communication and understanding of each other's position.

It is about helping customers see how relevant your service is to them at this time or adapting it if necessary. Being of value in good and bad times will lead to longer-term engagement and, ultimately, much higher lifetime value.

*We hope these top tip are useful and we'd love to hear your feedback. Should you have any questions you would like to ask us on this topic, or for more information about our Vulnerable Customer Masterclasses please get in touch at: [enquiries@icsmail.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@icsmail.co.uk)*