

# **Altman Dedicated Direct**

## **STRATEGY... TACTICS... RESULTS**

Column: "**Channel Crossing...**"

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Topic: **New Year Tips to Use Customer Service to Your Long-Term Advantage**

As each New Year comes around, every one of us has a burst of optimism. Why not take advantage of that optimism to make a new start with customers as well?

One caveat – I'm a marketer so my take on customer service comes with a marketing sensibility – how to use customer service to our eventual profitability benefit. With that disclaimer shared, let's look at ways to make a fresh start with our customers as the New Year begins.

How about thanking customers for their business? Sending a thank you email or mailing a thank-you postcard with no strings attached – no offers or promotions – will be a very well received gesture of good will. Customers are not accustomed to receiving a true and simple "Thank you". Promoting good will with customers without them feeling like you are "reaching in their pocket with the other hand" will go a long way towards them feeling respected and appreciated.

What about starting a new customer appreciation program? A simple loyalty program without numerous rules, points, etc. Offer customers in good standing the opportunity to save money on every order. A flat discount, upgraded or free shipping, or a sliding "the more you buy the more you save" approach can all be effective in helping you get more of the customer's purchases -- "more share of wallet" in relationship marketing terms. Have customer service make outbound calls to your top tier customers to advise them of the new program and it's benefits to them as well as advising those who call in about the new program.

If your product line has an appeal as a holiday gift, the new year is a great time to get in touch with those gift recipients at the "Ship to" addresses (assuming you shipped to the recipients address) and welcome them. Have customer service contact them by phone or send an email encouraging customers to call in. Start building your relationship with those gift recipients – give them tips on using your product and how to make the most of it. Make a special offer on add-ons or accessories they will appreciate to even better make use their gift item (your product).

Finally, consider a new incentive program for your customer service department. While you certainly don't want customer service to give short shrift to the service aspect of their jobs, provide them with incentives for making sales to new customers or selling add-ons to existing customers. Your customer service agents are in a perfect spot to understand existing customer needs and tailor a solution for them from your product line. Encourage them by making incentives available to them when they succeed at these efforts.



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As the page turns to 2008, make a resolution you can keep. Use customer service to help solidify your relationships with customer and in so doing make your entire customer service team be an integral part of your long-term success.

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