

The Essentials of Face-to-Face Customer Service

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Today we are going to talk about face-to-face customer service, what it means and entails and why it is important. Some institutions and companies are only just opening up again to face-to-face interactions with customers and clients after a long period of remote working. It is essential that we are aware and reminded of key components of this type of customer-facing transaction to ensure a positive and productive experience for all concerned.

What is face-to-face customer service? Although we can see faces and speak to each other via a screen, face-to-face means in person and physically present with the other person. At a time when it is so convenient to just log into Zoom or other communication software and hold calls, meetings, and training, why is face-to-face customer service so important? And how do we get it right?

Many people prefer the 'personal touch', which a computer screen simply cannot provide. Seeing and speaking to someone in the flesh, developing a rapport, and not having to worry about being 'on mute' are all preferable to using video for some. You might work in an industry that requires in-person contact by its nature. You might work with individuals who either *have* to physically come to see you or simply prefer to.

How can we make sure we provide the essentials of face-to-face customer service, and, indeed, what are they?

In the Forbes article [Five Essentials to Providing Excellent Customer Service](#), the five key elements listed are respect, trust, communication, access and positive attitude. Whilst all of these qualities could be utilised in online customer

transactions, it is far more impactful when considering them for in-person experiences. When dealing with customers in a face-to-face environment, body language and nonverbal communication all help towards gaining the trust and respect of the client; ensuring that what you are saying matches how you are presenting yourself. Honest and open body language, alongside a professional in-person manner, means that you are helping to establish a relationship of trust and respect between you and the customer, using honest communication and a positive attitude. Plus, of course, meeting with the customer in person gives them access to you in a way online transactions cannot.

As the article states:

Having a positive attitude, a kind smile, and a friendly tone can make all the difference in helping your customers feel appreciated. Good communication with your customers is another key to making them feel comfortable and secure in transacting with you.

Just as some customers are reluctant to interact solely online, so too are many businesses.

In an archived [New York Times article](#), Don Peppers states that:

"The power of the old way of doing business is not just that I can look you in the eye," he said. "What's personal is that I remember what you like from the last time."

Despite this article being almost a quarter of a century old, this applies even now. It underlines the personal touch that digital interactions can lack. Eye contact is key to establishing trust, respect, and authentic communication. Something which cannot be replicated over the internet. Familiarity and recognition can be reinforced in person.

Essentials, then, for face-to-face customer service include eye contact, authenticity, and positive verbal and nonverbal communication to establish a relationship of trust and respect between both parties.

What else do you think is essential in the face-to-face customer service dynamic?

Alana worked in the face-to-face customer service industry both in the UK and USA for over a decade. She says: *what worked for me in building relationships with customers was active listening and really engaging with the customer's wants and needs without interrupting or interjecting with my own sales agenda. I prioritised smiles, eye contact, and warmth. Being authentic with the customer as well as maintaining professionalism at all times, helped to foster an environment of trust and positivity for both parties. Something I always had to keep in mind was that I was permanently 'on show' to our customers. I made sure never to get lazy with my*

body language or let my awareness slip. Providing a great customer experience relied on mastering non-verbal communication to demonstrate my interest in solving their issues. Making positive first impressions was essential.

In the Forbes article [Build A Community Around Your Brand: The Benefit of Face-To-Face Interaction In A Digital World](#), written prior to the pandemic, author Erik Huberman claims that:

“The reality is that brick-and-mortar activations are still incredibly important (and prevalent) and that brick-and-mortar online sales are still dominating.”

The article talks about the importance of community:

“Your community is populated by people who are at least mildly interested in your brand and at most incredibly invested in your brand. Creating a place for all these like-minded individuals to gather allows them the chance to give you feedback, ideas, and valuable information.”

He goes on to say that:

“Brands need to be more than just their products or services these days. Building a community around a brand is becoming increasingly popular, be it through branded content or physical activations. One of the best ways to build that community is through personal interaction. Getting face time with your customers through physical activations, attending events or otherwise is key to fostering that sense of community.”

Fostering that sense of community is essential. Suppose a customer has actively sought out a personal rather than online interaction. They value the idea of an in-person community or the social aspect of the service. Otherwise, they could have just chosen to be a part of the community online. It is our responsibility to maximise this opportunity and to build that relationship in person. Perhaps even more so, post-pandemic.

How can we do this?

Firstly, by providing a welcoming environment for the customer. We need to ensure the space is inviting, clean, and well-stocked. In addition, we need to be helpful, knowledgeable, amenable, and adaptable.

The McKinsey article [The State of Customer Care in 2022](#), states that:

“Customer experience is more important than ever—yet it has never been more challenging as companies face a perfect storm of increasing call volumes, talent

shortages, and rising customer expectations [...] Call volumes are up, employees are leaving and harder to replace, and digital solutions aren't yet delivering on their full promise. Add rising customer expectations and decades-high inflation to the mix, and it's easy to understand why customer care leaders are feeling the pressure. The stakes couldn't be higher as teams try to adapt to a post-pandemic era of customer care."

Here, the phrase 'customer care' is just as important, if not more, than 'customer service.' Whilst we aim to provide a service for our customers, we also want to show them that we care. This is easier to demonstrate in person, as outlined previously, with our verbal and nonverbal communication, our personal touch, and warmth, building the rapport in real time and face-to-face.

Customer service essentials are summarised well in this [Business2Community article](#). Broken down into ten key points, these are:

1. A warm welcome.
2. Product knowledge.
3. Positive language.
4. Body language.
5. Listen.
6. Be adaptable and patient.
7. Put yourself in someone else's shoes.
8. Ongoing review and feedback.
9. Passion.
10. A happy exit.

In summary, we want customers to feel glad they came to us in person. We want them to feel reassured that we know what we are talking about. We hope to come across as genuine and positive. The customer must feel that we are listening to them and understanding their needs. They do not want to feel rushed or unimportant. We should authentically impart our knowledge and passion for the product or service. Ultimately, the aim is for the customer to feel uplifted by their experience.

Can you think about a time when you received great customer service face-to-face? What made it special?

What one change can you make this week to make a customer's experience even better?