



There's No Substitute for Great Customer Service

Small businesses should keep good, old-fashioned customer service in mind when implementing new technology.

By [Lauren Folino](#) | Nov 3, 2009

Small businesses struggling to keep customers and entice new ones can test out new call center technology or sign up for social media sites or even implement customer relationship management (CRM) software, but there's no substitution for treating customers well. Experts suggest that small business owners keep this in mind when looking at new technologies.

According to customer service expert [Kristina Evey](#), president of the [Grand Rapids, Michigan](#)-based customer service management company Centric Strategies, people don't buy products or services – they buy relationships.

"The No. 1 reason that people leave a place of business is based on how they were treated," Evey explains. "Smart companies understand the value of their current customer base, and recognizing what they need to do in order to keep them. By focusing on the customers, the smart companies are really broadening their customer base by increased referrals."

[CSN Stores](#), a [Boston](#)-based e-commerce home and office goods retailer, is one company that remains committed to improving customer relationships during the recession, says CEO and co-founder [Niraj Shah](#). "We sell one million-plus different items across more than 20 categories, so we group our customer service representatives [CSRs] by specialty," he said.

With a focus on call center technology, CSN Stores has also designed proprietary CRM software for tracking loyal customers and rewarding them for their business. [Shah's CSRs](#) also reach out to customers on social media outlets and networks to engage them in dialogue, which helps CSN get candid feedback about the company and its reps.

"We have enhanced many consumer promotions, deals and rewards this year and plan to do the same in the next year – in an effort to bolster customer retention, interest and loyalty," he said.

Another way that SMBs can easily respond to and connect with their customers is by using a cloud computing service, such as one created by [MailScanner has detected a possible fraud attempt from "mail.google.com" claiming to be Salesforce.com](#). These platforms allow companies to interact with customers via several channels simultaneously, such as email, call centers, [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#), by using an application that operates entirely in a web browser.

"One thing to keep in mind," said Salesforce vice president of corporate strategy, [Bruce Francis](#), "is that small businesses and medium-sized businesses are now getting access to world-class technology that they've never had access to before. They are able to use the tools that the big guys are using, and that is a really big advantage."