

Service Excellence

Developing skill sets to meet customer expectations

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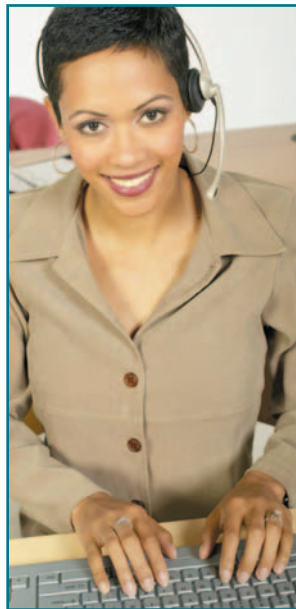
Service. It's what most office equipment companies claim to offer. Service excellence — many claim to have that level of commitment to service as well. But how do customers know for sure? How can dealers back up their service excellence claims? In the age of complex and ever-evolving technology, the ability to truly deliver high-quality customer service distinguishes office technology dealerships from competitors.

Customer loyalty is critical. Without your customers' satisfaction you have little room for growth and development. Healthy relationships with customers play an important role in the success of a business. Because companies are now using multifunction office machines to perform a variety of networked tasks that keep their businesses moving, customer service expectations continue to grow. Companies cannot afford lost hours caused by a down machine.

These increased customer service expectations create the need for your service technicians to have multiple skill sets. The base elements to attaining quality customer service and benefiting your business are three-fold: knowledge of your customers' needs, a solid knowledge of the technology that addresses those needs and the interpersonal skills necessary to deliver high-quality service. By continually seeking new learning and training opportunities for your employees, you as a dealer can offer the added value of proven quality service and dedication resulting from years of continual demonstration of best-in-class service.

Knowledge is Key

As we know in our industry our customers usually only think about their office equipment when something is



wrong; either their machine is down or they are unhappy with their current operations or costs. Often, a down machine results in lost hours and added stress for everyone. For this reason alone, proactively seeking solutions and developing a dependable knowledge base to react quickly to any situation can result in quality customer service.

At the Gordon Flesch Company service is so critical to our business that we have set a priority to have the largest and best-trained service technician team in the country. In fact, service technicians make up nearly one-half of our employees. This allows us to get to the customer as quickly as possible with the right parts to fix the problem. The goal is always to fix the problem on the first call. Customers want that — and expect that.

Needless to say, training is a key component of developing effective, confident service technicians. Within our company, our training focuses on real, everyday situations. But keep in mind that a fully trained service technician does not happen overnight. It takes months of investing in training to develop service technicians who are operating at their peak performance.

Once service technicians are trained well, we provide a supportive company culture to keep them fulfilled, motivated and appreciated. We want to ensure that we maintain a strong technical team; our technicians' average tenure is more than ten years with our dealership. This is vitally important to sustain and build on the close customer relationships our technicians have developed.

Invest in your teams and encourage certifications, such as Canon's Association of Technical Services Professionals (ATSP) Certification, to ensure that your company is building a solid knowledge base and increasing the effectiveness of

your service technicians. The ATSP program is designed to uphold the high performance standards intended to support the needs and expectations of Canon customers. It provides assurance that its certified members have attained a level of knowledge and performance that is second to none in our competitive business.

Dealers should arm not only service technicians, but also the sales force and call center employees, with a continual flow of knowledge through training — not only to prepare everyone to react to customer issues in an organized manner, but also to facilitate problem prevention practices. Building knowledge around preventive maintenance and seeking to uncover patterns and issues can be used to predict potential problems before they occur, thus increasing the up-time of office technology.

Building Long-term Relationships

In any industry it is important to consider who is spending the largest percentage of time in front of the customer and to be confident in their customer interactions and ability to address individual customer needs. In today's rapidly changing market, if you fail your customers a new competitor will quickly find opportunity in your misfortune and pick up your lost business.

Service technician training should go beyond equipment repair. It should also include interpersonal training that creates a skill set to help build long-term customer relationships. In most cases the service technician is your company's face to the customer. We have come to know that a salesperson makes the first sale; the service technician makes the second, third and fourth sales.

The ongoing service technician and customer relationship has the potential to create the familiarity, personal dedication and immediate attention that customers want and need. Customers who realize that the service technicians understand the sense of urgency and the implications resulting from a down machine have the added comfort of working with a dealership they can be confident of in terms of quick reaction and service. Technicians familiar with the customer's business understand their equipment usage and can apply their knowledge to the next level of predicting patterns of service and formulating preventive measures to increase up-time.

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The Service Delivery Solution

While traditional customer service is often focused on the service technicians who spend the highest percentage of time with the customer, the sales force and call-center employees can complete the total customer service package to optimize a dealership's quality of service. Call center employees and salespeople should be held

to the same service and relationship-building standard and training as technicians in the field. For instance, the more accurately the call center is able to immediately diagnose a customer's need, the more quickly and efficiently the on-site service technician is able to solve the issue. Similarly, sales team members confident in their service technicians provide more strength to their sales pitches when working to address customer needs.

A strong relationship between sales and technical service teams creates accountability and reduces risks of empty promises. Completing the service package develops a solid core for a reliable dealership known for its knowledge base and best-in-class service capabilities.

The Future

As the office technology industry continues to move forward in the customization of technology to meet individual customer needs, service must continue to evolve. Individual customer needs should be addressed through a thorough understanding of the customer's business and by delivering the appropriate service needed to make certain that the requirements of the office technology equipment are achieved.

By developing an effective knowledge base and building solid customer relationships, the complete sales/call center/service technician team can provide new levels of proactive (preventive) and reactive service. Dealers who strive to better serve their customers increase equipment reliability and up-time, which leads to customer loyalty, confidence and satisfaction — and, ultimately, your growth. ■

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*Based in Madison, Wis., the
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