

# KEEPING YOUR CUSTOMERS

by: Michael Moore, General Manager Texas Advertising

## **What are you doing to ensure that your customer right now will be your customer again?**

The first thing you can do is give them a great experience. I tell people all the time that the best marketing you can do is just fulfilling the order/purchase/stay to a satisfactory conclusion. If you do that, the customer has mentally put you on their "approved" list for the next time they visit. I recently gave a seminar on why relationships are important in our industry. Many people get into the campground business because it makes financial sense but lose sight of the fact that you only make money by treating the customer well, thus having them come back again and again. For businesses-at-large, it's been proven to be financially viable to increase repeat business: according to a study by Fred Reichheld, Bain & Company, as little as a five percent increase in customer retention can result in an increase in revenue of 25-95%.

I'll never forget asking a very large campground in California how many of their 30,000 check-ins were repeats. I thought maybe 50-60%. You can imagine how floored I was that it was actually 81%, with another seven percent being referrals by family or friends! 88% in total had been to this campground before or heard about it from someone they trust. To me, this result shows two things: a) the advertising you're doing is for a small (but crucial) portion of the population that hasn't had the pleasure of visiting your park; and b) this park is showing their guests an amazing time so much that they want to come back. After all, that is the goal, right? To convert those 12% into the 88%!

So how do we do that? As with most things, it's the little things. How do you train your staff to answer the phone? After all, you're in the hospitality industry, which means they should be hospitable. If you answer the phone like a doctor's office, that's the interaction your potential or current customer is going to have. It also means making sure the reservation and check-in process is as smooth as possible. Send confirmations to those who reserve online. Send them information to preview ahead of time, like your

rules and guest guide, so they can learn what there is to do in the area. Have your welcome packets ready to go at the front desk, so a road-weary traveler isn't waiting any longer than needed upon arrival.

What about their actual stay? Escorting them to their site and dusting off their pedestal may not seem like a big deal but remember – it's the little things! Also, train your staff to be knowledgeable about frequently asked questions from your guests, and make sure the answers are covered in your guest guide; things like, "Where's a good place to grab a bite to eat around here? What's the number for the mobile repair guy you use? Where's the nearest Walmart?"

And how about after they leave? Do you send them a follow-up email to thank them for their stay, or, just as importantly, survey them about it? Not only does follow-up give your customer a good feeling, but it's also another touch point for your park, and a great way to know what you're doing right (and wrong!).

Don't forget to market and advertise to these people most of all. Remember the number cited above? Increasing your repeat customers just 5% could almost double your revenue, thanks to that customer coming back again and again. Email them when you're hosting opening events every year; announce things to do in the community; give them a special rate for coming back or referring a friend; update your Facebook page – all these things keep your name out there to reach people that already know it but may have forgotten it.

At the end of the day, you got into this business to make money. But every business accomplishes this in a different way. In our industry (which we're very fortunate to be part of, especially considering the events of the last year), let's not forget how the good ones do it—by keeping in touch, building relationships, and taking care of each other. ★

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~ Fred Reichheld, Bain & Company



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