



# How Do You Sustain Trust With Customers?

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By Deborah Daily, Co-Owner, Buckaroo Marketing/New Media



In my last column, I described a variety of effective ways for building trust among those who don't know you. Once you've started the process, how do you maintain and grow that trust?

A recent experience with a prospective service provider helped me think about the steps I take to strengthen trust among my customers and prospects. The firm contacted me through a well-crafted email that mentioned some of the challenges our company has been seeing and offered expertise to overcome them. I'm skeptical by nature and through hard-won experience, so the fact I responded to the email speaks volumes about its quality.

The provider's initial response was outstanding. I received a series of friendly emails, many with links to videos that made it clear they understood the pain we were feeling as business owners and talking about strategies that could help. The advice came across as genuine, and each contact increased my trust. So when I was asked to schedule a phone conversation, I agreed.

Instead of the head of the provider, I wound up talking with an underling who pressured me as to whether I was willing to pay for the advice. I explained that I was careful with money, didn't hesitate to move forward when I saw value, but wasn't convinced yet. The provider followed up with a 45-minute call in which he asked detailed questions about our company's challenges and shared some great initial ideas. He asked if I was ready to commit, and I said I was closer, but was still thinking it through.

That led to another call, and when he shared his fees, I said that amount wasn't in the budget right now. His tone and attitude changed immediately. He stopped listening to my words. The emails and videos also stopped. Because I was unwilling to make a sizable financial commitment at that exact moment, he decided my company was no longer a prospect.

Establishing client relationships is always a form of negotiation. If both parties put their hands together and one begins to push, the other will push back. Ideally, there will come a point where both parties are comfortable. But at the slightest resistance, this guy threw his arms up and disappeared. I'm still stunned. I remember thinking, "Man, you started off really well and you just crashed." All the trust he had worked so carefully to create went right out the window, along with any possibility that we would ever engage his services or pass his name along to the many other business owners we know.

If you want to nurture relationships -- turning prospects into customers or transforming small customers into bigger ones -- you have to be willing to take the time to listen and overcome resistance. One big mistake many companies make is focusing on the potential income from an immediate sale instead of looking at the long-term value of a business relationship.

Compare that with an experience we had with a client in the transportation sector. Before the Great Recession hit, we managed a successful email marketing program for them, but when the economy fell apart, the president said he was struggling to stay afloat and pay his employees and couldn't continue the program. We understood, but we didn't abandon them.

Instead, I made a point of scheduling an appointment with him every few months to see how business was going. It took a few years, but one day, he said, "I'm ready to pull the trigger." He asked us to develop a new website and other marketing tools. Then he added, "Honestly, if anybody else had walked in my door and said they could do it, even cheaper, I wouldn't care. You kept in touch with me and that made me want to do business with you."

When you're facing pressure to produce sales numbers, it can be difficult to be patient, but I've learned that patience is generally more rewarding in the long run. After all, the business world doesn't revolve around what we do. We're not the only thing on a CEO's mind. She's thinking about products, profitability, or the dozens of other things that demand her attention. My job is to maintain a relationship with her so that when she's ready to move forward, we're the first company that comes to mind.

Sure, you can use the hard sell and try to squeeze as much money as you can get in the short term. That works for some people. But if your business is at it for the long haul, positioning yourself as a resource and maintaining those relationships will be substantially more rewarding.

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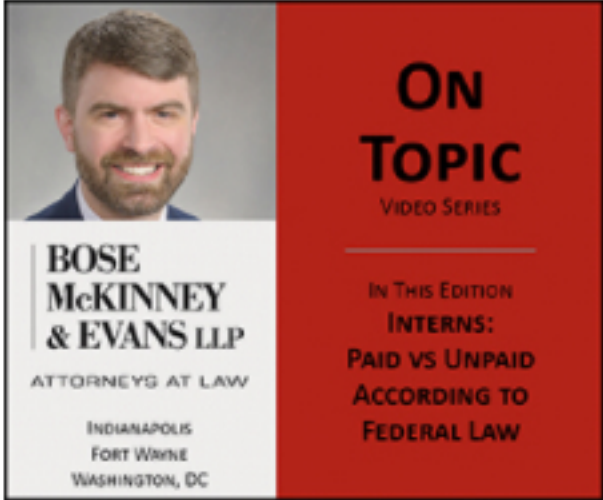
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