

Gaining new business



*If you can imagine it
you can achieve it!*

Prepare as if it was a first date and you ‘really, really’ like them.

Some time ago, I brought in a potential customer (who happened to be a friend) to see a colleague with the prospect of gaining his company work. He was going to be opening around 24 retail outlets over a two-year period. I was very surprised to see my colleague’s lack of preparation for the meeting and the most basic rules of ‘customer care’ ignored. It prompted some thoughts about how I prepared to meet potential customers; maybe this was something I had learnt over some years and perhaps even ‘seasoned’ professionals had never been taught to ‘meet and greet’ and needed guidance.

Before the meeting

Preparation

Before any meeting with a potential customer, be it an individual or a company, I find out everything I can about them. I then ensure the documents are prepared in exactly the same format and order each time and put in a pack. The pack contains the latest information filed with Companies House, Directors and Company Secretary information, latest accounts (I don’t want to act for someone who can’t pay my bill), pages from their website, a map of how to get to their office, a front sheet showing the time and place of the meeting, the email confirming the meeting and a note of my telephone call the day before to confirm the meeting.

Research

Having been given this information, I then set about looking at their website, reading all the pages in case there is something unusual on one page that I can mention at the meeting to show I have done my research. Having researched one potential customer recently, I commented on the date of the organisation’s incorporation and who the first directors were. The prospective customer said, “You know more about this company than we do!” The organisation became a customer.

It is a very good idea to make notes beforehand to use at the meeting. I always make the notes in the same order and in the same place on the page so if I need to refer to them during the meeting I can go straight to the section on the page and see the information I want, without breaking eye contact for very long. It is a good idea to let the customer see you’ve made notes: it shows you have done your research and made some effort. The constant feedback I receive from prospective customers is how impressed they are that I know so much about them before I arrive.

One chance at a “first impression”

In the meeting I mentioned at the head of the article, I introduced my colleague, who did not extend the hand in greeting. This may seem like primary school-level information, but I have seen so many people fail to greet a potential customer (or an existing customer) in this way. Maintain eye contact, smile and offer a hand; this is your only time to make a good first impression. To continue that good impression, repeat the person’s name back to them, as it helps to cement their name in your mind and you will not forget it. When another person enters the conversation, you are ready to introduce your prospect by name. When you see them again, you can greet them by name.

At the meeting

One of the most important lessons when meeting customers is to listen to what they say. Again, repeat it back to them if you want to, perhaps not in quite such extensive terms as they said it initially but it helps the cementing process. I have had a number of customers tell me one thing that infuriates them is repeating what they have already said or correcting someone who has not listened. If you don’t listen to them when you are trying to win their business, why do you think they will believe you will listen to them once they are ‘on board’?

Know your company

Know everything about each area of your business (including the support departments): who is in each department, how it is structured and how each interacts with the others to the benefit of the customer, again, including the support departments. Clients are impressed when you say to them that you can provide the same excellent service across each department because you speak with your colleagues about your, and their, potential customers.

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Avalon Solutions supports your business by looking at your business support and administrative processes and improving them. Avalon Solutions also offers business coaching and seminars on a variety of management topics.

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