



RESTAURANT CUSTOMER SERVICE RECOVERY:

TURNING A NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE INTO A LOYAL CUSTOMER



In today's overly-competitive restaurant industry, customer retention is more important than ever.

Patrons have more options to choose from than ever before when it comes to restaurants and cafes to give their business to. They're going to visit the places where they feel most comfortable, and places offering exceptional customer service.

According to the [*American Express*](#) Customer Service Barometer, "7 out of 10 U.S. consumers say they've spent more money to do business with a company that delivers great service." Conversely, according to [*New Voice Media*](#), "Feeling unappreciated is the #1 reason customers switch away from products and services."

The studies and statistics go on and on, and they all point to the same thing.

Providing great customer service improves business, while poor customer service can quite literally destroy it.

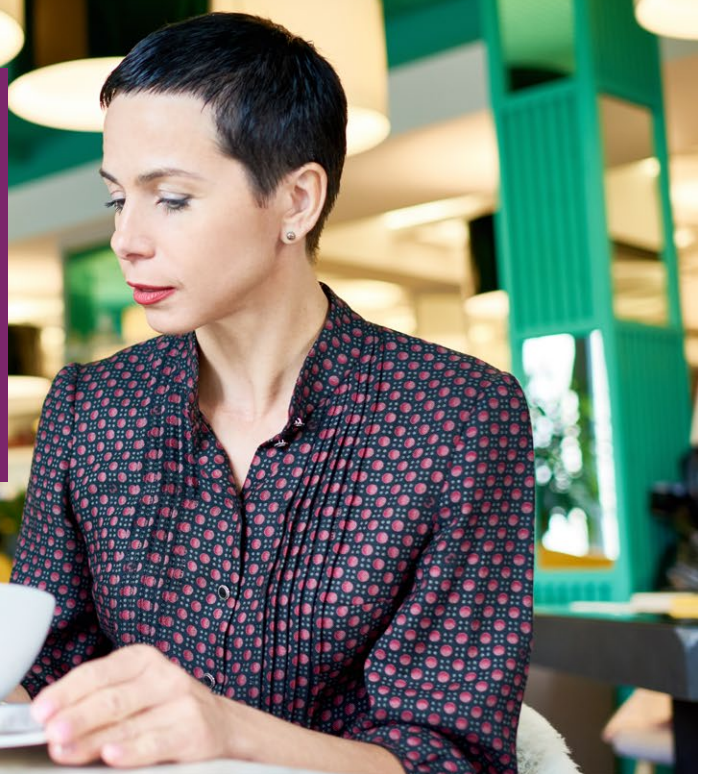
It only makes sense that providing stellar customer service should be a strong focus for your restaurant business. But even if you strive to provide excellent customer service, there will eventually come a time when a customer has a negative experience.

As author and customer service strategist, [*John Tschohl*](#) explains, "If there's an industry that seems to have more problems, and more difficulties, and more things that can happen that are bad, it's got to be in the restaurant business."

When negative customer issues arise, it is important to act quickly to resolve them and keep the customer happy. Doing so will help ensure that they continue coming back to your place of business again and again. This is the core idea behind restaurant customer service recovery.

WHAT IS CUSTOMER SERVICE RECOVERY

Customer service recovery refers to the process of identifying a negative customer experience or a dissatisfied customer, responding to them and resolving their issue quickly, and then converting them into more of a loyal customer than if they had never had the negative experience.



Another term for this scenario is the ***service recovery paradox***. Defined by Wikipedia as, “a situation in which a customer thinks more highly of a company after the company has corrected a problem with their service, compared to how they would regard the company if non-faulty service had been provided.”

A negative customer experience is an excellent opportunity for you to convey to the customer how valuable they are to you and your business. And it is why every

business should have a solid customer service recovery process in place.

Steps for Effective Restaurant Customer Service Recovery

When customers complain, or when you notice a customer having a negative experience, it is imperative to step in and begin resolving the issues at hand as quickly as possible. This is where having a defined customer service recovery process can make a difference, so that everyone involved will be on the same page, and so that the process is swift and seamless.

Every restaurant is different, and every place of business has its own set of challenges, policies and procedures. That being said, here are some ideas to help you create the best procedure for your business.



1. Always offer a swift and genuine apology. Even if you feel the customer is being petty or that the issue is trivial, remember that experiences are subjective and to the customer it is a genuine issue.

Have the mindset of owning the issue that is being raised to you. Recognize that the issue is that person's perception, and if you want to be seen as valuing your customers, then you should recognize that their perception has reality in their eyes.

Apologizing is not admitting guilt, it is simply a way to acknowledge that the customer is unhappy. So, apologize either for the condition, or for their experience as a result of the condition.

2. Give the customer ample time to explain their issue without being interrupted. Remember that empathy – real or perceived – begins with active listening. When you or your staff feel that you already know what a customer is feeling, it becomes impossible to truly listen to their language and spot other subtle clues.

Listen closely to the customer and look them in the eyes as they explain their situation. Remember to withhold any judgement and don't draw any conclusions at this point. Understand what the customer is trying to convey and ask non-judgmental questions if necessary.

3. Once you understand how the customer feels, you must determine the cause. It could be a training issue, a staffing issue, or an honest mistake. Whatever the cause, it is important to know what that cause is so that it will be easier to make the customer happy and mitigate the issue moving forward.

Often times, when a customer is explaining their issue, they will hint at what they expect from you to resolve it. Knowing this, and understanding the cause of the problem, it becomes easier to “wow” the customer and win them back.

4. Offer a solution. If your company allows the manager to offer solutions at his or her discretion, many customers will be satisfied with some sort of compensation. If you do not want to offer free items, one solution might be to give a percentage off the bill, or a free item during a future visit. Whatever you decide, it is up to you and the customer to come to a resolution.

As restaurant writer and previous marketing manager for Upserve, Theresa Navarra explains, “Of course, it’s important to empower your staff to offer something extra to mend that relationship. Perhaps it’s a free dessert,

or a glass of wine or 10% off the check. Be sure to determine what level of complaint warrants what solution beyond just fixing the problem for your restaurant.”

Once a solution is decided upon, make it happen as quickly as possible. Swiftiness should be a focus through this entire process. This shows the customer that you are serious about making them happy and that they are valuable to your business.

5. If possible, make sure to follow up and thank the customer for their patronage and understanding. By continuing open communication, the customer will feel more appreciated and odds of a future visit will increase.

Again, every restaurant and retail store is different, so the procedure you decide to implement may differ from the steps above. The important thing is to have a procedure in place so that you can act swiftly whenever a negative customer experience arises. The quicker you act, the better the results will be, and the more valuable and satisfied the customer will feel. Always leave things on a positive note.

What To Do When You Miss a Customer Having A NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE



If you miss a negative experience without resolving the issue, and you find a negative customer review on one of the online ratings and reviews websites like Yelp, TripAdvisor, or Google, follow the [TACT method outlined here](#). Ideally, though, you want to catch them prior to leaving a rating on one of these popular and powerful internet sites.

Fortunately, Bloom Intelligence has the ability to send automated messages to customers asking them for a rating of their recent experience. The system allows users to configure the message to be sent after every nth visit. For example, every 5th visit a customer makes to your establishment, the message will automatically send. It also allows users to set a threshold under which a follow-up message will be sent.

If the customer gives a rating that is above the threshold that you can configure, say 3.5 stars, you can respond to them with another email thanking them for their patronage and asking them to rate you on any of the major ratings websites. You can even include links to your specific pages on these sites. This is a great way to continue reinforcing higher online ratings.

More importantly, should the customer give you a rating below your configured threshold, you can respond with an automated email containing a sincere apology, and an incentive for them to come back and give you another chance. This can help mitigate the chances that they leave a scathing review on one of the major ratings websites, and helps to increase your overall customer lifetime value.

IDENTIFY AND ENGAGE CHURNING CUSTOMERS



If you missed a customer having a poor experience at your place of business, and you miss a negative rating or review they may have left online, then there is a good chance they will not be returning to your place of business. The customer has churned. Again, Bloom Intelligence employs powerful tools to help identify churned customers, as well as customers who are at risk of churning.

Bloom uses advanced algorithm sets to help determine when this is the case. When a customer fails to return by their expected return date, they are marked as being at risk of churning. At that point, Bloom can send them an automated message asking them to come back, perhaps containing an incentive such as a free dessert or appetizer.

“We haven’t seen you for a while and we miss you. We hope everything is well with you and look forward to seeing you soon! We’d like to offer you a free appetizer with your next meal. Hope to see you soon! Your friends at...”

Bloom users are seeing up to 38% of their at-risk customers come back through their doors – many of whom they would have never realized were churning. In today’s competitive marketplace, rescuing any at-risk customer is paramount for business success. Remember it is always cheaper to save an at-risk customer than to acquire a new one. Imagine seeing 38% of your churned customers returning! And once it is configured, Bloom does it all for you automatically.

Save Your Customers with

RESTAURANT CUSTOMER SERVICE RECOVERY



It doesn't take much for a restaurant guest to take their business to the competition. This is why when the inevitable negative customer experience happens, you should have an automated procedure to recover your at-risk customers.

When done swiftly and properly, you can end up with a loyal customer who enjoys your place of business even more than if the negative experience had not occurred. And at the same time, they become an

advocate for your restaurant brand. This is a huge win-win.

Unfortunately, you won't be able to catch every negative experience when you have a manual process, which can result in a poor rating on a popular ratings website, or worse, a churned customer. When this happens, it makes sense to have an advanced WiFi marketing and analytics platform like Bloom Intelligence to help you to automate the recovery of your churning customers.

This allows you to stay on top of your at-risk customers and get them back through your door for that all-important second chance.

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