

Let's Talk Customer Service!

By Jason K. Cupp, *Kolbe Certified Growth Consultant, Team Builder, Professional Speaker and Landscape Industry Certified Manager*

Business owners today are faced with challenges to separate themselves from their competition every single day. I remember about five years ago when green industry companies had a flock of clients lining up to do business with them. In fact, oftentimes price was not even a consideration; one of the larger factors was when the project could be installed, or when the maintenance contract could start. Since contractors had a backlog that could often be months long, or full maintenance crews, new clients had to wait for the opportunity to do business with whom they selected.

My how times have changed.

Surely, there are a multitude of contractors, who have escaped the challenging and unquiet marketplace we have all been forced to operate in, but the greater majority struggle with weeks of backlog - or simply no backlog at all.

This phenomenon has shifted the focus that contractors have to strategies that possibly have once overlooked. If they were not overlooked, they most certainly were not as much of a priority as they are today.

In my travels and working alongside landscape and ground management contractors from coast to coast, I've found that those strategies have included: competitive pricing, unique and creative designs, operational efficiencies, debt and overhead reduction, repurposing equipment and materials, investing in their team, and, most importantly, customer service.

Some of the greatest organizations in the country simply have amazing customer service. They offer an incredible product coupled with great customer service, and customers flock to their brand. Notice that price is not as much of a factor.

I'll point to two household name brands that everyone who is reading this has heard of: Apple and Starbucks.

I'm an Apple fiend. In fact, my entire life is run on Apple products. They work, they make me more efficient, and they make me seem more creative than I really am. But they are at the top of the market in regards to price. But, more importantly, they kill clients in customer service. Have you ever had a problem

with your iPhone or other Apple product? If so, you know you can make a FREE appointment to take it in, and most of the time, they simply replace it. Now that's saying something. That's actually saying a LOT. They have built loyalty by delivering an amazing product coupled with no-holds-barred customer service and client communication - at a premium price.

Starbucks is on virtually every corner in the United States - and even abroad. The product is consistent. The first time I traveled to Western Europe, I walked into a Starbucks in Paris and ordered what I normally order at my neighborhood Starbucks. It was the exact same drink - that I would get a mile from home, and I was thousands of miles from home. If they make a mistake, which every good company does - not only do they remake your drink the correct way, they also typically give you a coupon so the next drink is on them. And, if you've ever had a \$5 latte, they are not inexpensive. You can certainly get a cheaper hot drink elsewhere. Again, amazing product coupled with no-holds-barred customer service and client communication - at a premium price.

See a trend?

I've found that most green industry business owners have tried to win the war on the crazy economic conditions by trying too hard to compete on price. YES, customers demand a competitive product, but they also don't want to be left in the abyss of horrible communication and customer service.

The difference between the green industry contractors who have a Profit

and Loss Statement that looks amazing, and a Balance Sheet that looks the same - typically is all about client communication and customer service.

In the highly competitive world of the green industry - now and always - the value propositions and "do differently" that your business has is the basis for success from a branding and marketability standpoint to operations to financials.

In this year's Keynote presentation on March 5th at the MGIA 26th Annual Trade Show & Convention in Novi, Michigan, I am excited to share my observations, case studies and anecdotes from what I've learned on the topic. Additionally, at the end of the talk, I will share my "what to do tomorrow" list of things you can do, at very little or no cost, to improve your businesses customer service and communication.

The question is: Do you deliver an amazing product coupled with no holds barred customer service and client communication - at a premium price? ■

For more information on the MGIA 26th Annual Trade Show & Convention, visit www.landscape.org.

Jason Cupp is a former Green Industry CEO of 23 years turned Growth Consultant. In his 23-year career history, Jason owned or was partners in green industry companies that spanned commercial and residential construction, maintenance, snow, parking lot maintenance and distribution. Now, his focus is on growing companies of all sizes and industries through Team Building and Analysis, Human Resources, Sales, Marketing, Public Relations, Social Media, Information Marketing, Profitability and Financial Analysis. For more information, visit www.jasoncupp.com.