



Matt White

Diecast Report

Educating Customers to Increase Sales

How to nurture new customers into becoming long-term clients.



Many times, no matter how hard a dealer tries, it is easy to forget the basics of being a hobby store owner. The art of merchandise sales can take years to learn, and I would like to share a three-step approach that has worked for me. For the new hobby dealer, these ideas can get you thinking about sale concepts. For experienced dealers, perhaps this approach will refresh your hard-earned knowledge. My specialty is diecast, but many of these ideas apply to other product areas as well.

It is of paramount importance for a dealer to remember that good old-fashioned service is something a customer cannot buy from your store but, if provided, will earn the respect and loyalty from every customer who receives it.

For example, how many times have you heard a customer say something like “There’s so much to choose from; I don’t know where to begin.” For a dealer, this is a great opportunity to both educate and sell a customer. How you handle it can help make your business a success. If you’re

paying attention, you’ll realize that the customer just told you he wants to be educated—and looking to you to do the job. Investing a little time and knowledge at that point will not only demonstrate that you know your business but that you also care. In many cases, assisting a customer with a difficult decision by itself can help make a sale.

There is a pitfall in providing too much information. Confusing a customer by over-education is a big risk. There is a great amount of information that can be passed along, such as the number of manufacturers, the multitude of products they offer, and the price points of these products. Provide information in small doses. Too much information all at once can overload a customer, resulting in the confused customer walking away. Your goal is to educate without overloading. Stop often to ask questions and allow a customer to do the same. A back-and-forth dialog will help engage a customer in his own education. Once a customer realizes you are there to help, not confuse him, you’ll be on your way to developing a long-term client.

Here is a simple three-step approach that has worked for me when I’m asked, “How do I get started?”

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1. Begin by asking, "What type of vehicle interests you?" Better yet, toss in some passion: "What kind of car do you love?" It doesn't really matter if it is a car, military hardware, or other vehicle. The point is that being selective guarantees a future commitment to a product that a customer truly wants. By helping a customer choose—or perhaps just realize—what he loves, you will never go wrong.

2. "What scale do you prefer?" The answer to this is determined by the desired quality as well as by the budget and storage space. Many manufacturers make the same model in many scales. Retailers often overlook the space issue. Making a customer aware of it early on can pay dividends, however. After all, a customer who leaves the hobby because of inadequate storage and display space doesn't do himself or you any good. Smaller scales also have an advantage because a customer can buy more products more often.

3. Once you know the type and size of vehicle a customer likes, you should keep him informed of the general release schedule of those models. This will provide him with information that can be used to plan future purchases. With today's electronic media, this is rather simple. Just add the customer to your database and then forward the new product information via e-mail in a regular monthly mailing. If you don't have a customer database, begin with this customer and build one today.

Once you've identified the desires of a customer, you will be able to focus on what he wants while maintaining purchases within his budget, thereby establishing him as a solid, long-term client. And once you know what he is really interested in, there is no problem suggesting other possibilities. Just keep in mind that you need to maintain his commitment and not confuse him with too many options.

Regardless of the time it takes to help a customer, the most important thing to remember is that you can turn him into a long-term customer by listening to what he's interested in, helping him determine what he truly wants and then providing it to him. And keep the communication going. As long as a customer has fun and enjoys the "retail therapy" he gets at your store, you'll have a loyal client forever.

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