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Turning sales into service

By knowing your customers' needs, you can seamlessly turn your expertise into sales.



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Demonstrating exceptional service enables you to build customer loyalty and repeat business. That's what gets you ahead of your competitors, but what takes you to the next level? The realisation that service and sales go hand in hand.

Pharmacy professionals are often wary of terms like 'sales strategies', 'up-selling' and 'cross-selling'. Many believe such sales techniques will threaten their established customer relationships. Others fear they will be viewed solely as sales people, when they really see themselves as health professionals.

With the hundreds of products that pharmacies stock and advertising overload in terms of new products, it is understandable that customers become confused. Even when they ask for a specific product it might not necessarily be the best one for them. Customers look to you as an industry expert to explain what options they have to fix their ailment, so don't be afraid to demonstrate your knowledge. Sometimes the ailment can be prevented or better-managed with more than one product (cross-selling), and sometimes the more expensive product has the extras that they want (up-selling).

Cross-selling is about informing your customers of the breadth of your product range. It involves offering your customer a product that is related to what they are already purchasing. It can be as simple as asking if they would like an immune-system booster if they bring in a prescription for antibiotics, or special laundry soak if they buy a head lice treatment.

Often customers don't realise what else they can purchase to improve their health or prevent the ailment.

Up-selling is about offering higher-priced products as a superior purchase. For example Mrs Smith may come in to purchase a blood glucose machine. Rather than selling her the basic model that she has picked up without looking at its features, you may ask what she needs from the machine. Through a few simple questions and active listening you might find she is after a model that features no strip handling, auto calibration and an extended warranty. This enables you to suggest a more advanced model that meets her requirements. Not only have you found her the best product for her needs but she will be grateful that you took the time to listen to her. Up-selling can prevent your customers having to come back for a return or refund, or even worse, choosing to shop at another pharmacy where they receive more advice.

If you're worried about annoying customers with sales pitches to purchase additional or more expensive items, don't be. Customers appreciate hearing about the benefits of a product or service that improves their health and demonstrates value in their money spent. You want your customers to realise you genuinely care and are interested in what they are saying. The impression a customer has of your pharmacy is only as good as the impression they have of you so this needs to be perfect.

Here are some ideas to improve

your opportunities to cross-sell and up-sell to win your customers every time.

1. Be yourself – Most opportunities to up-sell or cross-sell arise naturally. For example if your customer needs some cold and flu tablets, ask if they might need some throat lozenges or an immune booster too. This shows that you genuinely care about how they are feeling and it might be something they had meant to get but had forgotten anyway!

"If you are confident in your knowledge, your customer will put their confidence in you."

2. Know your products and prices – When you know a product inside out, it is easy to recommend it, not just when a customer asks but whenever you feel it's appropriate. Customers often know the result they want but have no idea what products they need to get there. If you're cross-selling, only recommend relevant products – don't recommend something that you know won't help your customer simply to make a sale. They are trusting your advice and if you let them down, the relationship will be over. In regards to pricing, if you know the prices of your products you can offer options to suit their budget. Not knowing correct prices can cost you the sale and the customer's return business too.

3. Listen carefully – this is imperative in order to understand what your customer needs. Ask the necessary questions and make

sure you really hear what they are saying before recommending anything. If you take the time to show genuine interest in what your customer wants – after all, they know their body better than anyone – they will be truly impressed with your knowledge and value your advice.

4. Focus on the benefits of a product – not its features. Ninety per cent of a purchasing decision is made on an emotional level. Customers love to hear words like

'new', 'improved' and 'proven'. Using these words can be especially useful if you can relate this back to what their needs are. Do, however, be honest. If they ask for something specific which you don't think is necessarily the best product for them, explain why and offer at least one other alternative.

5. Use examples/stories – telling your customer about a product that has worked for you or another customer gives that extra level of reassurance. Personal endorsements go a long way. Remember, you want the customer to trust your advice and enjoy their experience in your pharmacy so much that they return. A single bad experience can guarantee you will lose their future custom.

Thinking differently about sales is all in your attitude – if you are confident in your knowledge, your customer will put their confidence in you.