

Say Thanks

Don't miss an opportunity to let your customers know you value their business.

Everybody likes to feel appreciated, and the customers you do business with are no exception.

According to Mike Robbins, a Concord, CA-based speaker, consultant and author of the upcoming *Focus in the Good Stuff: The Power of Appreciation*, there are three important elements to every sincere thank-you. It has to be "genuine, it's got to be specific and it's got to be personal," he says. "If it's all three of those, there's a good chance it's going to have the impact you want it to have."

If you're thanking a client for placing a re-order with you, be sure to also tell her how much you value your relationship with her and tell her, for example, how working with her benefits you. "That really impacts people, and tells them, 'I mean something to this person,'" Robbins says.

Robbins advises business owners to think about the sort of thanks they'd appreciate getting. Would it be a mass e-mail or a handwritten note? Would a card out of the blue have more impact than one you'd expect to receive at the holidays? "The more personal it is, the more genuine it seems to be," he says.

Definitely "make it personal," says Kevin Stirtz, a marketing and customer service expert whose consulting firm, the Stirtz Group, is based in Burnsville, MN. "Maybe your client has a hobby or an interest you know about. Send him

something related to that interest. It says thanks, but it also says you pay attention to the personal side of the relationship."

Stirtz cites as an example a colleague who wanted to thank a loyal client. "He knew the client had a family member who had died from cancer recently," he says. "So my colleague made a donation to the American Cancer Society in his client's name and then sent his client a card and note referencing the donation.

"The client was very moved," Stirtz says. "It was a classy way to say thanks, but it also affirmed the friendship that had developed through working together."

A small gift can be appropriate when beginning a relationship with a client.

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DAVE WEINTRAUB, PINNACLE PROMOTIONS

"If a customer buys from you and to thank her you send a small token of appreciation, you're going to build rapport," says Dave Weintraub of Pinnacle Promotions, a Norcross, GA-based apparel distributor. He recommends sending a small branded item, such as a cap, towel or can cooler, with a handwritten note expressing appreciation.

In retail environments, gifts to customers can say something about the character of the business. Emerson Smith, president and CEO of Metromark

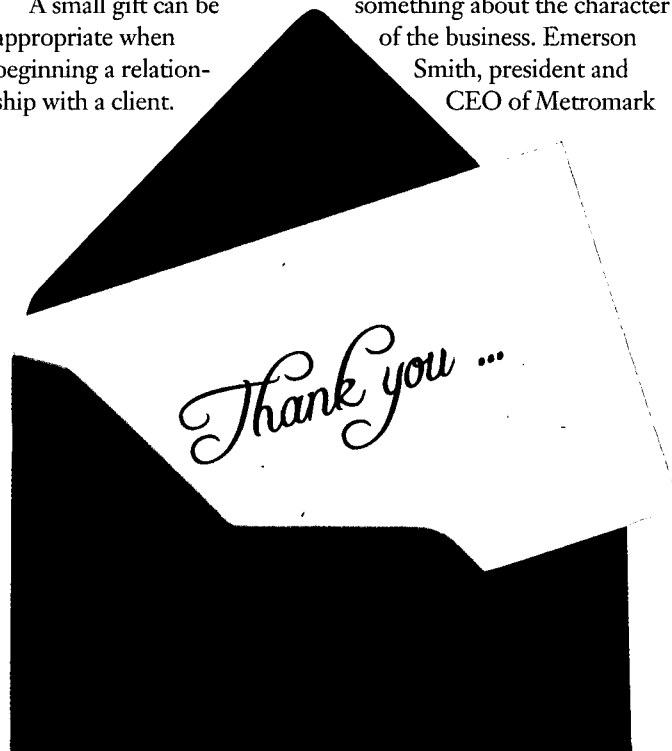
Research, a social science research company based in Columbia, SC, cites a clothing store that gives customers who purchase at a certain level a jar of barbecue sauce.

"The owner created the recipe and has a food company make and package the sauce," Smith says. "The sauce is also sold at the shop. The local newspaper has run several articles about this store and its now-famous barbecue sauce."

To say thanks to their best customers this past Christmas, Bellingham, WA-based Logo Bible Software sent its customers a branded water bottle with a 50% coupon inside. "They loved it," says Daniel Foster, a representative for the company. "We had a 15% response rate and generated 400% of the program's cost in sales. So not only did it help our customers feel appreciated, but it made money too."

"In the end, customers just want to be told, 'We appreciate you purchasing from us,'" Smith says. "Let us know if there's any way we can improve our selection of merchandise and to improve our service to you." ■

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