

## **Building Trust as a Business Tool**

Trust as a business value has all but been abandoned, and the consequences are being felt. No one trusts companies anymore and everything they say is immediately suspect. The notion that they are trying to “sell” is more powerful than the idea that they are trying to serve, deliver benefit, or provide quality. Add to this mix the scandals of greed that rocked the American companies and the intentionally ambiguous advertising that defines how companies try to market, and it’s no wonder trust is in need of a comeback.

Tudog elects to encourage the development of trust not only because we believe honesty in marketing is correct, but also because we know it to be good business. The loss of credibility erodes opportunity, just as a reputation of trustworthiness creates opportunity.

Trust, in the business sense, is defined as more than just reliability. It is also the presence of honesty in interactions, and, critically, a lack of suspicion. Reaching this level of trust allows for you to offer new services and products, as the customer has come to view you as a fair and honest partner that takes their needs and concerns into account.

Building trust is a process that occurs over time and as a direct result of actions taken on your part to establish confidence. It is more than simply sticking to the truth, or not trying to mislead a customer. It is opening yourself up to the creation of a reciprocal and meaningful relationship.

The development of trust requires the cultivation of a relationship with two primary components – one active and one passive. The active component is confidence. In order for a person to trust you and your business they must have confidence in you, the leadership of your company, the reliability of your product, the honesty of your dealings, and the dependability of your service. The passive component is freedom, as in freedom from worry, freedom from fear of being cheated, abused, misrepresented to, or fooled. This freedom is a tremendous relief in a business environment and the joy of this freedom is typically rewarded with loyalty.

Customers need to trust your knowledge, both of your products, but also of their needs and how you can help resolve their challenges. The need for trust in this scenario is paramount, as without it, they will not be able to view you as a resource. True trust begins with your demonstrating genuine concern for the interests, benefits, success and well-being of your customer, both as a business and as human beings.

There are four steps to developing a trusting relationship, each of which are comprised of actions you need to take to establish, nurture, maintain, and grow the kind of trust that enhances your business. These four elements are:

### **1. Engage the Customer**

You engage your customer by demonstrating true concern and a genuine interest in the needs and challenges facing their business. By showing your concern, you draw the customer into a comfort zone as they begin to view you as a source of trusted solutions. Engaging your customer involves a mixture of communication skills; no verbal skills such as exchanging eye contact, and verbal skills such as asking questions. Small gestures

such as shaking your head in understanding, smiling, and communicating admiration and respect go a long way in earning trust.

## 2. Listen to the Customer

Tudog has published an article in a previous newsletter ("Listen Up: Listening As a Business Tool, November 2003) that discusses in length the importance of listening and how good listening is accomplished and demonstrated. Trust is developed when you show that you are interested in learning about the customer, their needs, their concerns, their preferences, and anything else they want you to know. You show your interest by letting them talk, and more importantly, by showing you are listening.

## 3. Share with the Customer

After you have listened it is important to share with the customer information about yourself. Take your lead from the customer with regard to the type of information you share. If the conversation has been strictly business, then stick to business. If the customer added details about his family, his hobbies, or other aspects of his private life, then share some insights into your life as well.

## 4. Commit to the Customer

This final stage of developing trust shows your commitment to resolving the customer's problems. Present the actions you propose to overcome challenges and explain why you are well positioned and highly capable of getting the job done. Share with the client the rationale for your proposed plan and how it fits into his timeframe and budget.

Maintaining trust is a lot easier than it seems. All you have to do is exactly what you said you would. Once you have earned trust, you need to view it as an extremely valuable aspect of your relationship. Safeguard it, because if you lose it you may never be able to get it back again.