



Deliver the

WOW!

to Make More Money

Glory Borgeson

Defining “Wow!” and “Ow!”

What if you could create a loyal customer base filled with people and businesses who stick with you (and keep buying) through tough times, refer others to your business constantly, and lead your company to increased profit?

Sounds great, right?

At any point in time, in both great and poor economies, your goal isn't just to attract new customers but to keep the old ones coming back over and over—and for them to bring their friends. Today, customer service is considered part of marketing: It's not just about problem solving anymore. This process actually helps position your business.

In this day and age, it is not enough to have a system in place for dealing with customers' issues promptly and smoothly. Now, you need a strategy with built-in extras, benefits that are above and beyond what the public expects from you and your business. These extras have to be planned into your regular, day-to-day commerce because you can be sure that your competitors are hanging out their own honeycomb trying to attract the same bees as you.

I call these built-in extras the “Wow!”

These are the actions you (and anyone representing your business) do for customers and, as a result, your customers actually say “Wow!”

The interesting thing is that many businesses not only do nothing to elicit the “Wow!” response from their customers, but they actually take actions that tick off customers. The results of such tactics are lost sales, lost customers, no referrals, bad gossip about your company, or a combination of these. I call this the “Ow!”

Why in the world would a business choose to tick off customers, which results in the “Ow!” response?

Since I've been working on this topic for some time, I'm ultra sensitive to when, as a customer, I'm treated with "Ow!" or "Wow!" customer service. I feel like I'm on the *Candid Camera* crew, catching people at either their worst or best. (When I get the "Ow!" customer service treatment, I wonder if I'm a subject of *Candid Camera*, as I'm thinking, "This has to be a joke.")

But, no, it's not a joke. Some business people often treat customers so thoughtlessly, it's a wonder that their businesses have any customers at all.

Let's take a look at what "Wow!" and "Ow!" treatment of customers is all about and how it affects your profit.

Deliver the "Wow!"

Think about the last time you took your car in for new tires, an oil change, or for any other type of maintenance or repair. Did the mechanics do their job thoroughly? Did you wait for your car while it was being serviced? If so, what did the waiting area look like? Was it clean? Or could it have used a good scrubbing? Was anything available to drink? Were you able to connect to the Internet while you waited? Was there a television? Was the TV screen clear or fuzzy?

Most of our expectations of an auto repair business are mixed. We set a high bar for how well our cars are serviced, but we keep a low bar for our experience as customers while we wait. After we pay for our service or product and leave, we're not particularly thrilled with our customer experience, but we're not entirely disappointed either.

Fast Tire in Antioch, Illinois decided that just providing excellent service to their customers' vehicles wasn't enough. They wanted their customers to come back for "the wait." On Fast Tire's website, they describe their facility as providing the "ultimate in entertainment and luxury while you wait for your car."

Entertainment? Luxury? At a tire shop?

Is Antioch one of those very wealthy suburbs of Chicago?

No, it isn't. It's in the northeast section of the state, near the Illinois-Wisconsin border, and is your typical Chicago suburb.

Fast Tire wanted to provide a customer experience that would bring people back, create more referrals, and create more profit, not just because of great service and products for customers' cars, but also because of the customer experience just waiting in their lobby.

They have a coffee bar, serving Starbucks coffee. There are three computers with Internet access at semi-private, restaurant-style booths. In their "Sports Zone," there are two plasma TVs showing sports programming. There are a couple additional TVs to program as you wish, several plush chairs, and a fireplace. You can even watch a technician align your tires via another monitor in the cushy waiting area.

Their prices are competitive, they have state-of-the-art computerized service, and highly trained technicians.

Can you say, "Wow!"?

Owner Tony Lavelle has figured out that the way to get his customers to say "Wow!" is to deliver a customer experience that is way above the bar.

It's Crazy to Deliver the "Ow!"

My own file folders are teeming with stories of businesses that did not deliver any type of customer experience that wowed me. They made me say "Ow!" when their version of "service" really hurt.

Are they trying to drive my business away? Do they want me to tell others about my negative experience with their business? You would think "Yes" and "Yes" by the manner in which they treat people.

My previous bank is a case in point. I banked there for over 20 years. Both my business and personal accounts were well established there. One day, unbeknownst to me, someone made an error. It came to my attention (two weeks later) through two pieces of mail that charged me for several non-sufficient funds fees. I knew I had enough money in the account to cover all payments. I gathered some documentation and went to the bank. A pleasant personal banker said they would order a copy of the deposit slip.

I'll spare you from the boredom of the details.

Before we knew who made the error, I talked with the personal banker and stated that some day we're going to be old ladies. And when we become old ladies, we're going to make a lot of errors in our day-to-day transactions. And we're going to need to be working with businesses (such as banks) that help us with our old lady errors, not penalize us for them. She agreed. And then she acknowledged that the bank (a new bank that took over the old bank, by the way) wants to make money from the fees (and they hope customers will just pay the fees without questions). She also mentioned if the teller made the error that their systems would have corrected it over night.

A week later, after reviewing the deposit slip in question, it turned out the error was the teller's error. While the bank reversed all of the charges, I received no apology, no acknowledgment that the error was not my error, no assurance that they would train their tellers to review deposit transactions

before moving on (as they used to do), and I had several businesses that received bounced checks and I had to deal with them myself.

“Ow!”

I proceeded to find a new bank in town and received this bank manager’s word that his tellers review transactions before completing them and that his bank isn’t in business for the fees they can get from customers.

And I’ve told my story, with the bank’s name, to many people.

In the current economic climate, how can a bank (of all businesses!) afford to treat customers in the manner I was treated by my original bank?

By delivering the “Ow!” instead of the “Wow!” they lost my business-- and I’m telling my story all over town.

How does the “Ow!” even start at a business that prefers to keep its customers?

You probably have several stories of your own—of painful customer treatment when you’ve been the customer.

How does the “Ow!” even start at a business that prefers to keep its customers?

It’s basically the result of having no plan in place.

How do you get a plan in place that eliminates all possibilities of the “Ow!” and elicits the “Wow!”?

It all goes back to the customer’s experience with a business, which is a strategic, stepped process that can be examined, reworked, redeveloped, and implemented so that “Ow!” responses don’t occur, and you elicit the “Wow!” response from customers as a regular part of your business.

What Do Your Customers Really Experience from Your Business?

Wouldn't it be great if a few of your customers could record every phone call, save every e-mail received, and have a little video camera that records all in-person transactions with your business for, say, three months?

You could really get a good idea of what it is like to be a customer of your business.

You could learn if your employees' responses to customers give them a great experience, a poor experience, or some type of experience that is neutral.

You could evaluate much more easily how likely your customers are to stick with you, refer others, and remain loyal over the long run.

Barring these over-the-top ideas to record several customers' experiences with your business, you have to capture it somehow. You will either have to survey several customers, have someone pretend they are a prospect or customer and report their findings to you, or use a really good imagination to envision what the customers really experience.

Consider the following points of contact when evaluating your customers' experiences with your business:

- A prospect contacts your business to inquire about your products or services (or a prospect is contacted by a salesperson)
- The customer makes their first purchase
- The customer receives the product or service they purchased
- The customer has a problem with the product or service and contacts your business
- There is follow-up contact, initiated either by someone at your business or by the customer
- Future sales to the customer

What actually happens at each point of contact? (For example, at the point of first contact, are prospects greeted cheerfully or grudgingly?) How does the customer experience your business at each point? (For example, does the customer sense his issues are expertly handled? Or does he wonder why your people are not well-informed?)

After each point, how does the customer feel about your business?

You see, it's all about how the customer feels after he or she completes a point of contact with your business. If they feel that "Wow!" feeling, you have made an extremely positive impact on the customer, which will translate into a loyal customer who sticks with you through tough times and talks about you positively to others (read: referrals). Remember, it is much easier to upsell the "Wow'ed!" customer, who, on so many fronts, leads to increased profit.

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It's perplexing that in a questionable economy any business (B2C or B2B) would choose to deliver poor customer service which results in customers who complain, buy less, or stop buying altogether.

Because so many businesses don't "get it" and continue to tick off their customers, this is the time to differentiate your business (like Tony Lavelle has done at his Fast Tire business) by making a few "tweaks" to get your customers to say, "Wow!"

Granted, Tony made more than a few tweaks to his business. But if you start by making one or two changes to your business to get your customers to say "Wow!" you will be well on your way to creating more loyal customers, getting referrals, upselling your current customers, and creating more profit.

What About You and Your Business?

Now it's your turn. How can you build "Wow!" experiences into your regular way of doing business? What types of "Wow!" experiences can you create? Start by brainstorming ideas that you can turn into "Wow!" If you're struggling to come up with a list of solid "Wow!" ideas, try these to get your creative juices flowing:

- Think about other businesses, for which you are their customer, to whom you've been loyal for some time. Why have you continued to do business with them? What have they done over time that has made you a happy customer? Have they ever done something that made you say "Wow!"?
- In your role as customer with either your B2B business' vendors or as a consumer, think about situations when you've thought, "It would be nice if they would _____" (fill in the blank). What did you wish they would do? If those businesses went above and beyond your expectations, what would they do for you?
- Interview some of your customers and others familiar with your business. Ask them what your business can do to "Wow!" customers. Consider several points of your customer's experience with your business.
- Put the ideas together from the first three bullet points to help you brainstorm a good list that are all possibilities to elicit that "Wow!" from your customers.
- Whittle down your brainstormed list to the best ideas, and then divide the ideas into categories, such as:
 - Ideas that can be implemented: Quickly; In 6 months; In 1 year
 - By Cost: No cost; Low cost; Medium cost; High cost

- Prioritize the list. Which ideas are no cost or low cost and can be implemented quickly? Start with those ideas, implement them, and make them a part of your regular way of doing business. Add new ideas to your plan as time and money allow.

Isn't it time for your company to make more money with a solid customer base that grows because of the incredible experience customers get when they do business with you?

Isn't time for your company to make more money with a solid customer base that grows because of the incredible experience customers get when they do business with you?

Be the business that "Wows" people, creating loyal customers who stick around in all economic climates, send you referral business, buy more, and lead to increased profit. 📈



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Glory Borgeson is a business coach, speaker, and author of *Catapult Your Business to New Heights: Sure-Fire Strategies to Increase Profit*. Glory has over 25 years worth of experience in several industries. She specializes in coaching small business owners and executives in the first two years of a new position. To learn more, head on over to borgesonconsulting.com.

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