

Pulling Ahead Of The Competition

By Creating An Experience, Once Innovative Sales Pro Turns Customers Into Stakeholders

by Fred Firestone

If a business continues to do what it has always done, it will get what it has always gotten. In these challenging economic times, it often means that as demand shrinks, top-line revenues do, as well. In order to pull ahead of the competition and get a bigger piece of the pie, a business has to do one of two things: either further differentiate its products/services or further differentiate its selling system. One sales professional that understands what it takes is Cathy Krubsack, of Lacefield Music.

Visit one of Cathy Krubsack's Lacefield Music stores (South County, Jamestown and Fairview Heights) and you might surmise Krubsack is

Krubsack: The products we sell are pianos, organs, keyboards, sheet music and accessories. The services we sell are group classes for adults who have always wanted to play a keyboard instrument.

What business are you in?

Krubsack: Lacefield Music is in the business of making music a fun and relaxing hobby. We also provide a lifestyle for our mature adults who enjoy making friends while they are learning to make music.



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Cathy Krubsack of Lacefield Music has increased her sales by adding value to her clients' buying experience. "We try to add value by making their visits fun and exciting," she said.



How would you characterize your relationship with your customers?

Krubsack: Our customers are like an extended family. Product needs to be sold, but we truly care about our students/customers. We worry if they are sick, or have other problems. We also want them to enjoy their classes and their instruments to the fullest extent possible.

How is what you sell or how you sell different from the competition?

Krubsack: What we sell in terms of product, is similar to our competitors with the exception of the home organ business. The home organ business requires a completely dedicated staff that caters to the needs of the mature adult.

These employees make sure that mature adults not only learn to play music and work

in the organ business. It's much more. Her customers become partners in the Lacefield experience. From regular picnics and events to a Wall of Fame that is filled with pictures of happy customers playing their organs, she has succeeded in setting up an experience that transitions customers into stakeholders.

Recently, a customer passed away. His obituary listed his membership in the Lacefield Music Organ Club as a defining part of his life. Krubsack has what it takes to pull ahead.

Cathy discussed the Lacefield Music experience in a recent interview.

What product or service do you sell?

all the features on their instrument, but that they also have lots of fun in a social environment with others who are enjoying the same hobby. How we sell is quite different from our competitors. We offer free piano or organ classes to anyone who buys a musical instrument from Lacefield Music. When we present our product we make sure that the customer is aware that they are not just buying a keyboard instrument. We will make sure that if they have a desire to learn to play, that we will give the customer that opportunity. We also have wonderful adult piano and organ classes that are free when they purchase an instrument from our company. We also provide free "button pusher" classes for those who have purchased an electronic product. The features on the electronic pianos and keyboards are wonderful, but can be very

intimidating. These are the “extras” that make us different from our competitors.

In addition to providing a specific product or service, how would your customers say you add value to their buying experiences?

Krubsack: We try to add value by making their visits fun and exciting. We also train our employees to know all the products on the floor so that they are able to properly demonstrate and teach our customers how to use their new, or future products. When they take advantage of the free classes, they also make new friends. Some of the other “extras” we provide are: free concerts; theme parties, such as Valentines Day, Christmas, St Patrick’s Day; trips, such as cruises, going to the Lake of the Ozarks, Tunica, touring the Lowrey organ factory; picnics; and potluck dinners. When a customer walks through the door, they know that they can pour themselves a cup of coffee, grab a few cookies, visit with the staff or some of their friends, and sit down anytime and play any instrument in the store.

How do you instill a sense of ownership in

your employees?

Krubsack: Our employees know our policies completely, so that they are capable of making a decision when the need arises. The employees that are teaching our classes know that they are seen as an extension of Lacefield Music. Without these people taking care of our customers we would not be able to provide most of the services discussed above. They have a tremendous amount of input into the operation of the sales/teaching end of our business.

Why are your sales people successful?

Krubsack: Training in sales, following the company standard of delivering more than you promise, and really believing and understanding that the extra services offered are what make the difference when a customer honors our company with his or her business. We have also found that those without a strong and honest work ethic will fail within a short period of time. This is because, not only do most of our employees sell the products, they also are the teachers that the customer sees every

week in their classes. This promotes a large degree of accountability.

Sum up how you WOW your customers.

Krubsack:

1. Free classes with purchase.
2. Fun group environment with peers who are also beginning music makers.
3. Concerts, parties, picnics, potluck dinners.
4. Trips, cruises, and other events that require a getaway.
5. An entertaining monthly newsletter telling all of our customers about this month’s events and classes.
6. An “at home” atmosphere where they can come in anytime for coffee, cookies, fellowship, or to just practice their lesson and ask questions.

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