

# TOYS & GAMES

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## retail beat

### Five greetings that boost sales to walk-in visitors

Quick, what's the typical greeting used most often by 60 percent of retail stores? You're right if you guessed, "Can I help you?" The visitor's usual response, "No thanks, just looking." The problem is the walk-in customer is never "just looking." They came into the premises because at some level they perceived a need. This greeting only *reminds* visitors that they're not here to buy. Lousy selling strategy.

The way you and your front line employees greet walk-in customers has a huge impact on your bottom line. Here are some tips to ensure that you and your employees greet customers in a way that makes them want to buy and keep coming back.

#### 1. Show that you recognize them

If you deal with customers, the two most important words are not, *please* or *thank you*, but are your customer's first and last names. Take the restaurant I patronized in Greece, for example. As I walk in with my friends, he shouts, "Jeff, you're back! Welcome!" He smiles at the rest of my party and says, "I see you've brought your friends, excellent! We'll clear one of our best tables for you!" At this point I don't care what the food tastes like—this guy gets my business.

If you don't remember the customer's name, you need to at least let them know that you recognize them and are happy to see them. So an effective greeting would be, "Well, Hello! It's nice to see you again." Customers return to secure, friendly environments. Show that you recognize them, and they'll want to come back.

#### 2. Ask if they've been in before

One of the best money making greetings is, "Hi, have you been here before?" Michael Gerber, author of the best seller, *The E-myth*, says that his clients who have switched from, "Can I help you?" to this greeting have seen sales increase by 16 percent. While Gerber claims to have no idea why this works so well, I think it's because this greeting reminds the customer that they've been at your business before, so it's a familiar place. Familiar means safe. Safe means trust. And trust means buy.

With this greeting the employee can also add, "Welcome back, we appreciate your coming to see us again." That provides that all-important recognition. They can ask the customer about what they bought on their last visit and how they like it. That provides the opportunity to provide positive reinforcement and/or clear up any concerns.

If this is the visitor's first visit, then the employee has a great excuse to show them around, identify needs and point out specials. At any rate, if saying, "Hi, have you been here before?" can increase sales by 16 percent, then it's certainly worth a test.

#### 3. Ask about the weather

I realize the weather is an often-used topic, but it's disarming, and gets the customer talking about something where they can be the expert. The critical step that's often missed is you need to respond to the customer's comments. That shows that you're listening—not just *techniquing* them. Once you've addressed their comments, you can then transition from the weather to identifying their needs. Example: "Well, at least you're in from out of the wind now. What brings you in aside from the cold weather?"

#### 4. Complement appropriately

Be careful with this one. If you do it wrong, you'll be construed as being a phony and will lose the most important thing you need to sell—trust. So don't offer a *general* complement such as, "Don't you look good today." Instead make sure your complement is relevant and specific. If you work in a clothing store you might say, "That scarf is terrific; its autumn colours are perfect with your colouring."

#### 5. Use a conversation piece

Interesting artwork, a talking parrot, or anything you place near your entrance that draws comment is great. It gets the customer talking, questioning and interested.

#### 5. Timing is everything

More important than *what* you say, is the fact that the visitor is acknowledged - not necessarily served - the moment they enter. One study revealed that 68 percent of customers who leave do so because they feel like no one cares that they're there. Picture entering an establishment waiting to be served. Then use your watch to count off 30 seconds. You realize that even half a minute is too long to wait.

One of my seminar participants, a bakery owner, ensured a fast greeting if the employees were working in the back room by installing a doorbell that rings as the visitor enters. They call out, "Hi there, I'll be right out!" and they keep the business. Simple and smart. ■

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