

# FIRST POINT OF CONTACT

We all know how crucial the first point of contact with clients and staff is, but are we maximising the opportunities around us? What did you do in your four to 10 second window?

YOU don't get a second chance at a first impression so it is critical you learn your first point of contact (FPC) and analyse the message you are sending.

A first point of contact may be identified as one of the following:

- Your first day in the role of manager
- A shopfront's appearance
- Your receptionist and/or foyer
- How the phone is answered
- A website

Your FPC could be many of these and they all need to send a professional and consistent message. A marketing plan should help in getting clients to you, but how you service them will directly affect their loyalty and your profit.

Ask yourself two questions:

- Are you aligned with your marketing message?
- Are you delivering the service people expect?

## Manager's first day

What impression did you give when you first walked into your new role? Did you acknowledge all staff personally? Have you tried to build relationships with employees?

Research shows your answers to the above questions can attribute to 70 per cent of your success. Have you made your expectations of staff and customers clear? Do you know what they expect from you? Have you taken the time to find out? Your long-term success as a leader is greatly affected by the first impression you make on your new team. Make sure it is one you are proud of.

## Customer contact – face to face

Your customers should see you as helpful, friendly, sincere, genuinely interested and confident. The impression your customers have of you and your business can be formed before you have the opportunity to impress them with your excellent product knowledge and service skills.

## Opening statement

Your opening statement is absolutely critical to your success. I have heard many people stumble here and this can create an impression of incompetency or disinterest.

Whether you are opening a meeting or greeting a new customer, follow these simple rules:

- Know what your opening line will be
- Practise your opening so it feels natural
- Believe your opening
- Know how you would like your delivery received - consider body language and tone used
- If you are not sincere, your customers will detect it

## Phone answering

Who is answering your phone? Do they answer knowing the basics of your business, who works there, what you are selling and how you are structured?

I was speaking to a client the other day who had called to offer a contract to another company. The receptionist, who wrongly assumed he was doing a cold sales call, rudely turned him away. Needless to say, the lucrative business deal has gone elsewhere.

Frontline staff are crucial to your ongoing success. Invest the time and energy into ensuring they are trained to represent your company's objectives and values.

## Office or shopfront

Is this space clean and tidy? Is your reception area professionally laid out? Are your window and shop displays clean and adhering with marketing messages? Can customers find you or are you hidden away?

Research shows customers will form an impression of your business within the first three to four seconds of contact - this often occurs before they've even entered the front door.

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**Website**

Is your online message integrated with existing ones? Does it stipulate what you do or sell? Does it give enough information to prospective clients?

Think of your website as your online brochure.

**Car advertising**

If you are driving a company car then you are a mobile advertisement. Last week I was shocked to see someone driving in a company car giving rude gestures and throwing rubbish out the window. This type of behaviour reflects on your business and can be very detrimental.

To sum up, you need to identify and analyse your first point(s) of contact. Consider whether it is currently working and your future actions to ensure ongoing benefits. A small investment of your time and energy now could make a big difference to your long-term survival and success.

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