

Cruising Toward Success

Ahoy marketers! Don't get shipwrecked!

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I recently took a cruise to Alaska on a family vacation. It was my first cruise. Of course, like many business owners and entrepreneurs, I couldn't simply enjoy the mountains and glaciers; I had to somehow connect it to marketing.

So, here are some lessons learned from the cruise line - and how to apply them to your business. (The cruise line was Celebrity by the way. I thought about making this post anonymous, but by revealing the brand, I am proving point #1).

Consider every customer - large or small - an ambassador (or potential torpedo) of your business.

Social media, review sites like [Yelp](#), [TravelAdvisor.com](#), [foursquare](#), and blogs now give every satisfied or cranky customer a way to spread the love (or venom), whether on a boat, at an event, in your office, or at your store.

When you have a captive audience, do not exploit that privilege.

Some marketers make the mistake of "overselling" at every turn. At times, I felt like I could not walk into a room or down a hall on the ship without a Celebrity representative reminding me of something I could do or buy. Give your customers a little breathing room rather than continuously cross-selling. Reinforce via communications that your customer made the right choice by selecting your brand, but do not beat him/her over the head with constant sales messages or aggressive cross-sell. (This applies to events, retail sales, email, and other forms of direct marketing, as well as social media.)

Do simple, unexpected things to "wow" your best customers.

We loved our afternoon fruit plate. (Even little things can go a long way).

Make sure your staff serves as brand/business ambassadors.

A couple of disgruntled employees on the cruise badmouthed their employers. If you treat your staff really well and retain inspirational leaders, your employees are less likely to whine and grumble to customers.

If you mess up (even if it's not your fault) apologize immediately.

We missed the famous Fjords due to an electrical problem which delayed departure from port. We immediately received an apology note and a \$200 credit. Sweet!

Above all, get immediate feedback from your customers.

Celebrity diligently followed up with a customer satisfaction survey. Let your customers know via email surveys (like those offered by [Constant Contact](#)) or phone calls that you care about what they have to say. The mere fact that you asked will mean a lot. Do not be afraid to hear negative comments and new ideas; that's how we grow and innovate.

Follow these steps and I won't guarantee totally calm seas, but at least you can avoid some of the big scary icebergs and oil spills that result from neglecting your customers.

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