

Are You Making an E-mail Connection with Your Customers?



By Wanda Sitzer

FOR MOST BUSINESSES, E-MAIL IS A FAST, EASY, AND INEXPENSIVE way to communicate with clients. For customers, it's a convenient and flexible communication tool. They can contact your business any time of day and a written response in e-mail can be saved for future reference. In addition, for some customers, e-mail can be a less intimidating form of communication than a phone call. They gain a sense of control and feel they're not going to be pressed to make a commitment. E-mail allows customers to gather information and make a decision on their own timetable without any overt sales pressure.

While you probably use e-mail everyday, here's a question to ask yourself: Are you getting everything you could be out of your client e-mail interactions?

Common e-mail errors

Because it's easy to type an e-mail and hit "send," sometimes responses can be too casual. Remember that while e-mail should be natural and conversational, it is still an opportunity to represent your business and build your brand. Your e-mails should clearly reflect your image and a level of professionalism that lends credibility to your organization, particularly in lean times when gaining and retaining customers is more competitive than ever.

Some of the most common mistakes made in responding to customer e-mails include:

- ▶ **You give a bare-bones answer.** You can get more out of an e-mail interaction if you not only provide a clear answer to the customer's question but also take the opportunity to provide a few brief, compelling reasons why the potential client should choose you over another transportation company.
- ▶ **You miss a chance for more business.** In the current economy, e-mail is a very economical way to reach customers and leverage new opportunities. If an e-mail asks about renting a sedan for a business meeting, for example, also include a brief sentence about how your services can be used for their personal needs. Or, include a quick link or line that references new or unique services they may not realize you offer.
- ▶ **Show customers you're worth it.** If a customer is looking at several companies, the quality and tone of your response can help him feel more comfortable with your organization. You want him to feel that there is a good fit between his needs and your company. This can be especially important if your prices are the same or higher than your competitors.

Reading into an e-mail from a customer

E-mails are a great way to build and strengthen relationships. The secret is in knowing how to write an e-mail that creates a real connection. The first step is figuring out what the customer really wants and what mood he or she was in when writing the e-mail.

- ▶ **Punctuation and capitalization give you clues.** If an e-mail is full of exclamation points and capital letters, it's likely they are frustrated or unhappy. Other clues include sarcastic statements and emoticons.
- ▶ **Speak the same language.** Someone who writes in a formal style probably won't respond well to very casual, personal language in response and vice versa.
- ▶ **Figure out what the customer is really looking for.** Read between the lines to decide what response or action on your part will truly address your client's needs or concerns.

How to write a great e-mail

Writing an e-mail that connects with customers, increases recognition of your brand, and strengthens loyalty is easy if you follow these tips:

1. In your opening, use the person's name, include your company's name, make a reference to the inquiry, and introduce yourself.
2. In a positive way, tell the customer you will find a solution; position your response. Good phrases to use include, "I'd be happy to help you with your request," "I can easily change your reservation," or "I'm pleased you're considering choosing our limo service for your event."
3. Show them you understand their issue and care about their feelings. You can do that by reflecting their emotions ("I'm sure you were frustrated..." or "I can imagine how confused you were...").
4. Watch your punctuation and capitalization. All caps are the e-mail version of shouting and too many exclamation points can seem either insincere or angry. Also, avoid using emoticons to present the most professional image possible.
5. Close by thanking clients for getting in touch and inviting them to get back to you with additional questions or concerns. That opens the door for continued contact and shows you take your relationship with them seriously.

Take a look at the following examples and see how big a difference a positive, informative response can make.

Sample 1 from a potential client:

Question:

We're having a bachelorette party and are wondering if your vehicles have a privacy partition?

Typical Answer:

Yes, all of our vehicles have a partition, and our chauffeurs are there to serve you and your needs.

Better Answer:

What a fun time! We're glad you're considering XYZ Limousine for your ladies' night out.

We appreciate that you and your friends are looking for some privacy. All of our vehicles have partitions and we're happy to serve you and your needs. Our chauffeurs promise friendly, discreet service as they transport you around town.

Can I go ahead and book your bachelorette party reservation? May we also suggest a location? We know our past customers have enjoyed ABC Bar & Grill, which offers discounts for groups.

Feel free to call us at (800) 000-0000 or use our simple online reservation form at www.xyz-limo.com for your party.

Regards,

Annie Conner
Customer Service Representative
XYZ Limousine

Sample 2 from an existing/regular account:

Question:

Can I have coffee and doughnuts in the car when it picks me up?

Typical Answer:

Yes, we can accommodate you. We charge a small fee for adding breakfast to your car.

Better Answer:

We know that having a hot cup of coffee would be a great start to your morning. At XYZ Limousine, we value your business and are pleased to provide coffee and an assortment of doughnuts for a small \$6.00 fee. Of course we offer water and the local newspaper for free.

Is there anything else you'd like for your travel to be more accommodating? We're here to make your ride as comfortable as possible.

Your regular chauffeur, James, will see you as usual on the first Monday of the month, coffee in hand. Or, don't hesitate to change your reservation by calling us at (800) 000-0000 or using our simple online reservation form located at www.xyz-limo.com.

Warm regards,

Andy Collins
Customer Service Representative
XYZ Limousine

Sample 3 a request to service a large group:

Question:

My family is attending a Broadway show and there will be 15 of us. Do you have large vehicles that can accommodate us for the trip?

Typical Answer:

We have stretch SUVs, vans, or minicoaches, depending on what you like.

Better Answer:

Sounds like you've planned a great trip to the Big Apple! XYZ Limousine offers a variety of vehicles to make your trip for 15 comfortable and safe—while entering the city in style.

We're pleased to share that our fleet for large groups includes minicoaches, vans, and stretch SUVs, each with amenities you'll appreciate:

- ▶ **Minicoaches**—pleasant high back seats and armrests, plenty of leg room, and a state-of-the-art sound system to play your Broadway soundtrack
- ▶ **Stretch SUVs**—promises a memorable family trip with leather interior, spacious seating for 18, and a light show for fun—while turning heads on Broadway!
- ▶ **Vans**—a comfortable, spacious, and safe ride with all the luxury of a limousine

Our prices range from \$00.00 - \$000.00.

What evening are you planning to attend the play? I'll be glad to help you make the right choice and book your transportation.

Feel free to call us at (800) 000-0000 if you'd like to talk more about your options or use our simple online reservation form at www.xyz-limo.com.

Regards,

Chandra James
Customer Service Representative
XYZ Limousine

Get more out of your customer e-mails

By learning how to write e-mails that make a solid connection with your customers, you'll enhance your relationships with very little time and effort. The end result? Happier customers are more likely to be repeat clients and recommend your company to friends and colleagues. **LD**



Wanda Sitzer, owner of LookListenBe, a consulting firm that provides customized training solutions for contact centers, has more than 20 years experience in the customer service and sales industry. She has guided hundreds of companies toward realizing the potential of service and sales representatives as corporate spokespersons. Contact Wanda at WandaSitzer@LookListenBe.com or call (443) 742-1291.