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## Providing Services to Your Customers

Your customers are critical to the long-term success of your business and how you provide products and services to them will become part of your brand, whether you mean it to or not. You want to make sure to provide them with an experience that is aligned with your brand and aligned with why they chose to buy from you. Doing this will enhance the value of your intellectual property (“IP”). Doing the opposite will reduce the value of your IP.

Here are some things to consider:

- Customer Agreements - Intake
- Branding
- Third Party Support
- What To Do When Things Go Wrong

### 1. Customer Agreements - Intake

When you on-board a customer, they experience their “first impression” of how you actually do business. Everything you do with/to them at this point makes a big difference in how they judge your quality, your values, your objectives, your competence, and your character. You get to craft how this experience will happen, so be sure to do so intentionally.

For example, if you want to come across as professional, you better have an agreement for them to sign that reflects that quality. If you want to come across as fun/flexible then your documents and staff interactions should reflect that, too. There is nothing that says that you can't be professional and flexible/fun, you just have to make sure that the experience highlights those qualities.

### 2. Branding

Be sure that your brand lines up with the promises and delivery of the rest of your business. Think about what subconscious messages are sent by your brand by the colors, images, words, phrases, even the relative sizes of fonts. You also want to make sure that your excellent brand is in front of them at every good opportunity. When you are making them happy, or at least satisfied, have your brand right there. This way you take credit for it.

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### 3. Third Party Support

A business can get into a lot of trouble when it outsources. All the sudden, the experience that your customer has depends on the behavior, attitudes and actions of a third party. Unless you have a lot of experience with that third party, you want to shield your customers from interacting with them. You also want to have back-up plans in case the third party fails to deliver.

It is also helpful if you keep your customer in the loop that you are relying on a third party. If you do, they can be more open to you having to scramble to fix things if that third party fails to deliver. If the first time that they find out that you are outsourcing is when there is a service failure, they will likely be pretty upset.

### 4. What To Do When Things Go Wrong

This is a GREAT opportunity to build your brand and to show your customers your higher capabilities. First, you need to dodge the big trap. That trap is: being defensive.

When you are defensive, you are protecting yourself (which implies you need protecting), you are seeking to shift blame (which implies you can't handle feedback/criticism), and are looking to avoid consequences (which implies you cannot be trusted). So, avoid being defensive unless your attorney strongly counsels in favor of being defensive (maybe avoid it even then, there are some really defensive attorneys).

Take responsibility. Have a plan for solving the problem. Offer concrete action to make things better. Show that you are strong and don't need protecting, that you are always improving and can handle feedback/criticism, and that you are accountable and ready for consequences and therefore can be trusted.

People don't spontaneously talk about their service providers unless something out of the ordinary happens. When they do, it makes an impact on the value of their branding. When something goes wrong, that is a chance to do something out of the ordinary, in a good way, and to build brand value and increase the value of your IP.

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