

Five tips and techniques for kennel and cattery owners that will boost profits and keep customers coming back

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With all the doom and gloom being stirred up by the media I thought it appropriate to offer this report for AsureQuality members that has nothing to do with odours but all to do with getting and keeping customers. Here are a couple of techniques to use that cost nothing and will assist you over the coming months

1.Reception Area

Often clients only get to see the reception area when picking up or dropping off their beloved pets. Therefore, first appearances are crucial. The reception area is the face of your business so always ensure it is clean, tidy and welcoming. Remove all clutter, clean the floor daily and use a deodoriser in the corners of the room each morning to freshen things up. Fresh flowers are a nice touch also and ensure any facility pets (sorry have to pick on dogs here) that spend their time looking gorgeous in the reception area have a regular bath. Particularly on hot days or when you have the heater on during winter, dog odour may well be the first thing your client smells when they walk in.

2. Ensure clients feel valued

Feeling valued makes us all feel good. That is why airlines, credit card companies, appliance stores and other companies have gold cards, VIP lounges, special offers to VIP customers and other services/products designed to be specific to the good customers. People like to feel that they are special and it can be an expensive exercise to achieve this. How do you achieve this without investing lots of these \$\$\$\$\$?

Use this simple technique that costs very little but means a great deal.

Send your top clients a hand written thank you card after they have had their pet in to stay. When was the last time you received a thank you card from anybody, particularly handwritten? Nobody thanks you for anything these days and particularly not in a hand written card. Your clients will glow with pleasure and feel very valued. The cost to you.....a 50 cent stamp, some ink from the printer, some quality paper to print it on, plus a photo of you and your pet on the cover with your logo.

3. Give your valued clients something for free that costs you nothing

A hand written card is great, but why not go the extra mile and provide a free gift inside the card. Here is one idea that provides a lot of value to your customers for little or no outlay from you. Select a **good** local restaurant and ask the owner if he/she would be prepared to give you some “two for the price of one” main meal vouchers that you can use to promote their business to your customers. If he/she refuses, find another restaurant that will participate. The cost to you is nothing and the restaurant owner will make up the lost

profit on the free main meal by selling drinks, entrees and desserts plus he may gain a new client that could become a regular for years to come.

4. Understand your clients and give them what they want

Understanding what your customers needs are, plus their likes and dislikes and their frustrations, helps you create value for your clients and for your business. Customers will pay a little extra if the benefit for them out weighs the cost. To find out these needs use a anonymous survey form at check out time that asks the client if there are ways you can improve their experience or make their lives easier. Provide an envelope so the form can be filled out in complete confidence and get them to mail it back to you. Look for a common theme and if you find that theme introduce it to your business and then let your customers know about it. The common theme may be something as simple as changing your opening hours by half an hour, or adding a different food type to the menu or providing a "tidy up" service before pickup, or a grooming option. Little things can mean a lot to your customers and remember if the benefit of the product or service outweighs the cost to the customer then you will have a sale. Plus, you will be miles ahead of the competition and your customers will be impressed that you care enough to ask.

5. Encourage referrals

Referrals are the cheapest and most effective form of marketing. Ever been to a lovely restaurant and then told everybody about it the next day? Ever had great service from a computer repair man and passed that on to friends and family? Clients love to tell friends and family about a good experience. It is human nature, so capitalise on this and use it to grow your business. Ask your customers for referrals. It can take some getting used to but it's a good marketing tool and not used enough. A good customer will happily give you referrals if they like what you do. Treat your clients' right and they will be your marketing machine for a long time.

Well that's all from the odour guy this week and I wish you well in your businesses. Until next time happy pet boarding.