



UPPING THE ANTE ON SERVICE

IN THIS ARTICLE: Attracting and retaining customers. | The art of selling. | Training and developing staff.

Having worked in pharmacy and retail for more than 20 years, it's fair to say that I've witnessed a fair amount of change. The increased prevalence of technology, high rent costs, international and online competition and shifting consumer tastes have all had a dramatic impact on the retail landscape in Australia. In recent years, change has only accelerated and, for various reasons, we are seeing more big-name retailers close their doors.

While this isn't intended as a scaremongering article, the truth of the matter is that all retailers are facing some major challenges. For pharmacists, I believe these challenges lie in customer retention and the need for an increased focus on the customer. With so much choice now, the days of people coming back just because you are their local pharmacy are well and truly over.

CREATING A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE SO CUSTOMERS BUY MORE

One key area I believe will make a difference is the level of customer service being offered in-store. When a customer chooses your pharmacy for products or advice, you need to offer an experience they won't get at a competitor.

We don't know how much effort it has been for them to pack up the kids, find a parking space and drag the whole crew into the store with some semblance of order, so even the

simple stuff like a smile and a greeting can go a long way to getting this interaction off on the right foot.

From a business perspective, it all starts with having the appropriate number of staff and ensuring you have the right people doing the right jobs, so customers are not seen as an interruption or inconvenience. It's then about providing a positive experience when taking in a script or providing advice on the floor, which are opportunities for your pharmacy to really come into its own.

SELLING ISN'T A DIRTY WORD

One of the most common phrases I hear from pharmacists and pharmacy assistants is that "we don't sell in our pharmacy" and there's a lot of pushback when it comes to this area. Having been earbashed for many years with the need to 'companion sell', most pharmacy staff are gun-shy about that "dirty word" 'selling'.

While I agree that pharmacists don't sell, if you just rely on customers requesting products, you are doing them a massive disservice. Pharmacy staff must be better at listening and providing advice. Whether this is out on the floor or at the scripts counter, there is a big opportunity for those pharmacies whose staff take the time to engage more with their customers.

With the increased prevalence of online shopping, customers are (or think they are) more informed than ever. However, customers don't know what they don't know, so by asking questions and listening, pharmacy staff can be more informed, suggest the right product(s) and explain the benefits.

Most pharmacy team members are good at doing this, but they often stop before going to the next level and offering advice on complementary products or services, which could help customers get better faster and stay healthier. If you're not having these additional conversations, then you're not providing the best possible service.

There are two powerful outcomes when this is done well and consistently. If the customer doesn't buy, they still leave better informed and feeling as though you care about their wellbeing. Secondly, if they do buy, they're doing it for the right reasons and have been well informed. It's a win-win for them and your pharmacy.

Being able to provide quality advice to a large number of customers requires a team geared for success. This means having the right people in the right places, backed by the appropriate skills and training. Ultimately, this is how you make a big difference to the overall health and wellbeing of your customers and differentiate your pharmacy from the competition.



By Roger Simpson.
CEO
The Retail Solution

Roger Simpson is recognised as a leading authority on customer ROI in Australia's retail industry and a global expert on staff coaching, customer service and selling skills, with more than 35 years' industry experience. His company, The Retail Solution, has delivered training and coaching programs to retail clients in nearly 30 countries. Roger has partnered with boutique pharmacy consulting company Pharmacium to deliver leading training services to pharmacy clients across Australia.