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How To Build a

CUSTOMER
ENGAGEMENT

Program

There are many ways to build a customer engagement program, but the best way to get started is by establishing a simple and solid foundation. From there you can launch numerous strategies that will capture your customers' attention and keep them coming back to your business.
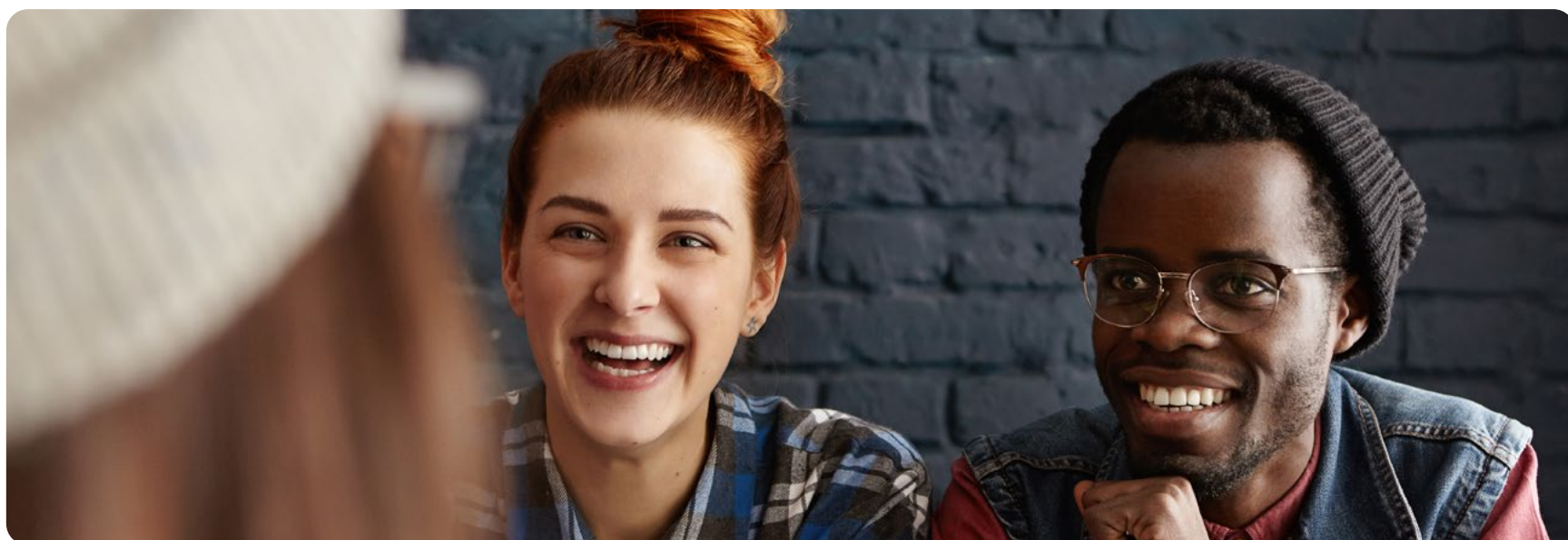
What is Customer Engagement?

More than price, convenience, or selection, consumers become loyal to the brands they love because of their experience.

Customer engagement plays a major role in their experience, which forms either a positive or negative impression that can last for a long time.

So what is customer engagement exactly?

86%

of consumers will pay for a better customer experience.

Customer Engagement:

Every interaction between you and your customers, either in-person or through digital media, such as email or text.

Advances in technology and proactive marketing strategies have significantly increased the number of potential interactions between you and your customers. These make it easier to interact directly with every customer on your list in a variety of ways.

EXAMPLE:

Two Way Texting

Send every person on your customer list a text message giving them details about your new online ordering and curbside pickup policies. If they have a question, quickly answer it to provide improved service and a better experience.

Customer engagement improves the quality of your services through innovative ways of communicating. It's not just for marketing, so you'll need to understand how engagement impacts every aspect of your business.

72% of customers will share a positive experience with 6 or more people.

Building a Solid Foundation

A solid foundation is critical to the success of your engagement program. Without one, your results will be disappointing and might cause you to give up on your customer engagement efforts.

Taking the time to develop the foundation helps you find innovative and exciting ways to reach new and repeat customers.

Customers who had a very good experience are **3.5x** more likely to repurchase and **5x** more likely to recommend the company to friends and relatives.

To get your customer engagement program started, you need 4 things:

1   A Simple Implementation Plan

2   Technology/Apps

3   A Customer List

4   Content

A Simple Implementation Plan

Who will be running your engagement program? How will they do it? Who is the audience? What is the message? These questions need to be answered before you can get going, so let's break each one down to get a better understanding of each one.

Organizations with a cross-team approach, keeping the customer at the heart of all initiatives, are nearly twice as likely to exceed their business goal by a significant margin.

Just like other marketing activities, an engagement program requires some time to set up and run.

You may need to divert your current schedule away from other projects, especially the ones that aren't bringing the returns you wanted.

It's time to assess what's working and what is not, then allocate those resources toward customer engagement.

Why? Because an engaged customers is five times more valuable than a new one.

Depending on the size of your business, the following roles determine the people in charge of implementing a successful program:

Program Leader

One person should be in charge of running your program. For a small business, that's typically the owner or a general manager. They can implement campaigns or delegate tasks to their employees. The leader is also in charge of developing goals, analytics, and technology.

Engagement Specialist(s)

This role can be one or more employees who are responsible for enaging with customers. They also play a role in gathering or creating content, but don't need to be seasoned marketing professionals to do it.

Learning Advocate

A simple training process provides guidance and direction for anyone participating in the program. Without it, more mistakes will be made, and your efforts will not reach their fullest potential.

Engagement requires people with great attitudes that aren't quick to react in a negative or unfriendly way. They should have lots of experience answering questions about the products and services you provide. It's important to have your people in the right position and with the proper tools to perform their tasks, which will empower them to succeed.

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Technology/Apps

Having the right technology in place can save you hundreds of hours and prevent missed opportunities.

Automation plays a big role in this, so choosing the right applications will enable your engagement strategies to perform at their best.

Some applications engage directly with customers while others are indirect or passive, waiting for customers to interact with them.

SmartConnect's all-in-one customer engagement software has everything you need.

The following list of features is separated by category to give you a good idea of what you can expect to use on a regular basis:

Direct Connections	Passive Connections	Tools
Two Way Texting	*Keywords*	*Social Media Integration*
Bulk SMS Messages	*QR Codes*	*Analytics*
Text Reminders (Appts)	*Reviews*	*Segmentation*
SMS Contests	*Q&A SMS Bots*	*Subscriber Import*
SMS Polls	*Mobile Coupons*	*Subscriber Management*
Automated Texts	*Loyalty Kiosk*	*Mobile Administration*
SMS Birthday Wishes	*Web Signup Widgets*	*Email Integration*
Loyalty	*Voicemail*	*Link Shortening*

To get started, you should become familiar with the tools that make connections, build relationships, and make your job easier. Almost all of them are easy to use and don't require much time to learn.

The time you do take to learn them is worth it, because each tool is designed to make your job easier. Understanding them is integral to implementing a smooth engagement program.

EXAMPLE:

Bulk SMS Messages

In minutes, compose a bulk SMS/text message about an upcoming sale.

Include all customers on your list, and schedule it to be delivered next week.

Or, if you'd rather, only send it to a specific group of customers to which the message will be most relavent.

Experience-driven businesses grow their revenue **1.4x** faster and increase customer lifetime value **1.6x** more than other companies.

Text keywords are also quick to set up and take just a little effort to advertise. Unlike Bulk SMS messages, they are a passive method of connection.

EXAMPLE:

Keywords

After reading a table tent, a customer texts your keyword to a long code number. This places them on your list of text recipients and sends them an auto response containing a digital coupon.

EXAMPLE:

QR Codes

Also include a QR Code on the table tent that when scanned, automatically texts the keyword to the long code number. It's easier for the customer than manually composing a text message.

Messages that you send to customers are direct forms of communication. These activities have significant returns when implemented properly. Just remember to put yourself in your customers' shoes when determining the message content and frequency.

Start by sending just a few communications to get a good understanding of how they work and how your customers respond.

Growing Your Customer List

Don't panic if your customer list has just a handful of names. There are several ways you can quickly change that:

1 **Keywords**

2 **QR Codes**

3 **In-Store Advertising**

4 **Word-of -Mouth**

5 **Bulk SMS**

6 **Email**

Keywords and QR Codes capture more attention and make the process entirely automated. If you have a list of emails, reach out to them and ask them to opt-in to your text messaging list. For extra motivation, offer them a discount or freebie just for signing up.

Promotions are a good motivator for people to join, so think about a campaign that will really get people to sign up. Just keep in mind that what you offer and how quickly you can respond means a lot.

- Be sure to show value over price.

- Create an automated welcome response: a personal one, something authentic and fun.

- Have a good idea what future promotions will look like to offer a glimpse of more to come.

- Make them feel special and appreciated: thank them.

Organizing Content

You might have already sent out a message or two, and maybe even created a couple posts on Facebook. That's a good start, but you're going to need a plan going forward to engage with your audience and build relationships.

Whether it's text, email, or social media, writing the message always seems like the most difficult thing to do. More times than not, you don't know what to say or how to say it.

Often, the problem is a lack of direction. But with clear insight and a little organization, you will know what to say and how to grab people's attention.

These 4 steps will get you started:
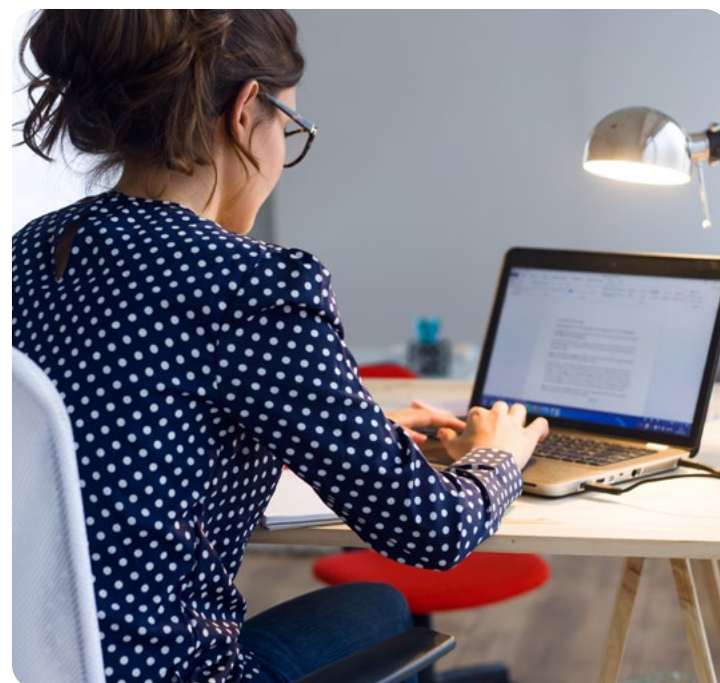
1 Organize Tasks

Spreadsheets are great for organizing tasks and files. Google Sheets are perfect for getting real-time updates from multiple users. Whatever you choose, it will serve as a guide to see what has been done and what lies ahead.

2 Schedule Activities

Each message you create will be assigned to an activity, such as a text or keyword welcome response. Some of these activities can be automated, while others should be scheduled on a calendar and sent during the most appropriate times. Frequency of messaging does matter, especially when promoting events such as sales and new products or services.

Here's a list that matches frequency with the platform:

- **Social Media**
  Daily. By consistently posting interesting and useful content on social media, you'll increase the chances that new customers will find you.
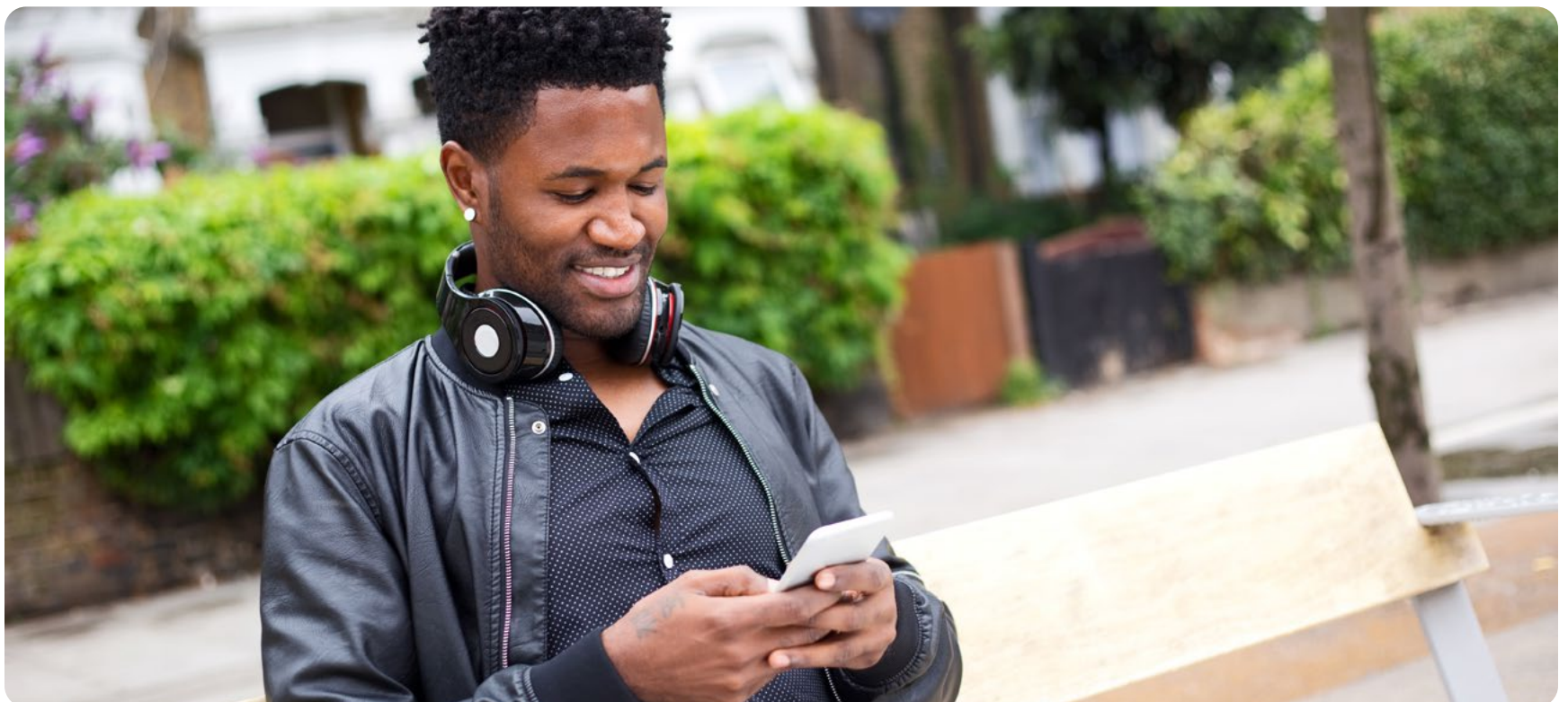
- **Texts**
  Special promotions, contests, or discounts. *A couple of times a week.* Anything more than that will feel like Spam.

- **Email**
  Weekly or monthly, depending on the amount of content you're sending.

- **Polls/Surveys**
  Every three to six months. Getting feedback is important to stay ahead of market trends.

3 Broadcast on Multiple Platforms

Creating and sending a message to customers requires coordination, because you're not just sending it via text. You should also send it through email and post it on social media. More activities coordinated around one message increases the potential to meet your goals.

4 Reply to Customers

Customers expect an immediate reply, regardless of the platform. Setting up notifications is a great way to meet their expectations and provide a better customer experience.

Knowing the Platform and Audience

For your first messages, keep them short and simple and stick to one topic.

There's a lot you want to say, but your customers aren't ready to hear it all at once.

A simple message gets noticed and is usually appreciated.

Plus, many of the platforms that you will be using have limits on how many characters and words you can use.

The list on the right outlines how much you should write for each platform.

- **Bulk SMS:** 140 characters (about 25 words or 2 sentences)

- **Text:** 2-3 sentences, no more than 35 words.

- **Email:** 200 words. A couple of paragraphs.

- **Social Media:** 3-5 sentences.

- **Polls/Surveys:** No more than 6 questions that are one or two sentences long.

Responding to Customers

Customer service took a big step forward when texting became a tool to engage with customers. But the medium does require a certain level of etiquette and responsiveness.

These simple tips will set you up for text messaging success:

> "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently."
> —Warren Buffett

- **Reply as Quickly as You Can**
  People are generally not very patient when it comes to waiting for a reply. The average time customers are willing to wait is 45 seconds during an online chat. They want your attention, so you're going to need to respond quickly or else miss an important opportunity.

- **Be Transparent**
  You need to make what you know accessible to others. This means delivering bad news early. You'll also need to make customers aware of the entire situation: why products are on backorder, what the product availability is, or changes in delivery options.

- **Be Accountable**
  Never forget to hold yourself and your business accountable for mistakes that were made. This rebuilds trust and shows that you do care about your customers.

- **Resolve the Problem**

  You'll need to empower your employees to act. The person replying to a customer's text should have the power to rectify any bad situation or escalate it to a manager.

- **Follow Up**

  To help improve the overall customer experience, following up with customers can solve problems before they become more significant issues. This avoids negative online reviews and may save you on expensive refunds.

Creating Engaging & Authentic Content

Bulk SMS only allows 160 characters. This includes the space between words and punctuation. Other platforms allow for more words and images, but the message may get ignored because it's too long.

With fewer words to use, you need to get to the point quickly and make it a pleasant experience, but don't rush the conversation or be pushy.

- **Be Authentic**

  Your audience wants to hear about your brand. Use your authentic voice so they will know that you want to engage with them. Otherwise, your message could sound like spam.

- **Put the Promotion/Discount First**

  Get to the point right away, because notifications display only a couple words at a time.

- **Use One or Two Emojis, No More**
  Studies show that an emoji expresses more emotion than a handful of words.

- **Incorporate Photos or Video**
  Be entertaining, but not obnoxious. Keep your media relevant to the message.

Summary

Research has shown that people want to engage more with the brands they purchase from. They also want to know more about how these brands can enrich their lives. This means that your products and services are special to them.

A successful engagement program does all of this, but it depends on the organized flow of information to your customers. Once you have a solid foundation in place, you can creatively engage in ways that will build stronger, more enduring relationships with your customers.

SmartConnect has all of the tools you need to build a great customer engagement program. To learn more, please watch our **Demo Video**. Or, request an **Online Demo** with one of our experts. You can also call or text us at 727-463-9987.

We look forward to learning more about your company!

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