

MODULE 11: Promoting Your Telecentre

UNIT 4: CUSTOMER RELATIONS, PARTNERSHIPS AND ASSESSMENTS

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4.0 LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- Understand practice customer relationships
- Understand and develop partnerships
- Assess your promotional activities

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit, you learned about the importance of customer relations and customer service to the business of your telecentre. It was suggested that your clients can help in the promotion of your telecentre. In this Unit, we will consider other partners who can help you in promoting your telecentre.

If I tell you that you can increase your sales, without having to increase your budget for activities designed to promote your telecentre, would you be interested?

The key lies with your clients! Yes, the very people who are already patronising your product. Without clients, you will not be in business! Your customer is your best promoter! A word of mouth (WOM) can make or break your telecentre.

4.2 CUSTOMER RELATIONS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

Go back to the results of the survey you did in Unit 1.

Look closely at the results: Look at the number of clients who are still using your telecentre and the number who stopped using it.

There are many reasons a customer or client may leave your telecentre, but the reasons you will hear most often are:

- Your pricing was too high or unfair
- They had an unresolved complaint
- They took a competitors offer
- They felt you didn't care

How many of these reasons were mentioned in the survey that you did in Unit 1? If these reasons were not mentioned, what were they? Are they, in any way, related to customer relations? What exactly are customer relations?

Customer Relations is the approach of an organisation to winning and retaining customers.

The most critical activity of any organisation wishing to stay in business is its approach to dealing with its customers. Putting customers at the centre of all activities is seen by many as an integral part of quality, pricing, and product differentiation. On one level, customer relations means keeping customers fully informed, turning complaints into opportunities, and genuinely listening to customers.

On another level, being a customer-focused organisation means ensuring that all activities relating to trading for example, planning, design, production, marketing, and after-sales of a product or service are built around the customer, and that everyone involved with the management of the organisation understands and shares the same vision. Only then can a company deliver continuous customer satisfaction and experience good customer relations

Consider the following statistics before you spend time and money going after new customers and clients – that you do not currently have a relationship with:

- Repeat customers spend 33% more than new customers
- Referrals among repeat customers are 107% greater than non-customers
- It costs six times more to sell something to a prospective client than to sell that same thing to a customer.

What does customer relations involve?

It means treating your customers as if they are your partners and showing them that you truly care about them.

Their satisfaction with the right products and services offered by your telecentre should be your concern. **Your everyday goal should be to make your customer for that day come back**

again and again and again. No matter how big or small the transaction is with that customer, that customer should be one satisfied individual when he/she leaves your telecentre and one who will readily give good words for your telecentre when the opportunity arises.

Customer relations are very much related to **customer service**. Good customer service results in good customer relations. You can offer promotions and slash prices to bring in as many new customers as you want, but unless you can get some of those customers to come back, your business won't be profitable for long.

4.2.1 The Ten Commandments of Customer Service

These Ten Commandments will help you to design a great customer service plan.

1. **Know who is boss.** You are in business to service customer needs, and you can only do that if you know what it is that your customers want. When you truly **listen** to your customers, they let you know what they want and how you can provide good service. Never forget that the customer pays for your services and helps you stay in business.
2. **Be a good listener.** Take the time to identify customer needs by asking questions and concentrating on what the customer is really saying. Listen to their words, tone of voice, body language, and most importantly, how they feel. Beware of making assumptions - thinking you intuitively know what the customer wants. Do you know what three things are most important to your customer?
3. **Identify and anticipate needs.** Customers don't simply buy products or services. These products are associated with good feelings and solutions to problems. In most cases most customers need emotional not logical support. Knowing your customers will make you better anticipate their needs. Communicate regularly so that you are aware of problems or upcoming needs.
4. **Make customers feel important and appreciated.** Treat them as individuals. Always use their name and find ways to compliment them sincerely. People value sincerity. It creates good feeling and trust. Think about ways to generate good feelings about doing business with you. Customers are very sensitive and know whether or not you really care about them. Thank them every time you get a chance.
5. **Help customers understand the systems in your telecentre.** Your telecentre may have the world's best systems to get things done, but if customers don't understand them, they can get confused, impatient and angry. Take time to explain how your telecentre works so that even the procedures and processes are 'user friendly'. It goes without saying that the people involved in delivering the services are user friendly as well.
6. **Appreciate the power of "Yes".** Always look for ways to help your customers. When they have a request (as long as it is reasonable) tell them that you can do it. Figure out

how afterwards. Look for ways to make doing business with you easy. Always do what you say you are going to do.

7. **Know how to apologise.** When something goes wrong, apologise. It's easy and customers like it. The customer may not always be right, but the customer should get the feeling that they were given consideration. Deal with problems immediately and let customers know what you have done. Make it simple for customers to complain. Value their complaints. As much as we dislike it, it gives us an opportunity to improve. Even if customers are having a bad day, go out of your way to make them feel comfortable.

8. **Give more than what is expected.** Since the future of your telecentre lies in keeping your customers happy, think of ways to elevate yourself above the competition. Consider the following:

- ❖ What can you give customers that they cannot get elsewhere?
- ❖ What can you do to follow-up and thank people even when they don't buy?
- ❖ What can you give customers that are totally unexpected?

9. **Get regular feedback.** Encourage and welcome suggestions about how you could improve. There are several ways in which you can find out what customers think and feel about your services. Provide a method that invites constructive criticism, comments and suggestions.

- ❖ Listen carefully to what they say.
- ❖ Check back regularly to see how things are going

10. **Treat employees well.** Employees are your internal customers and need a regular dose of appreciation. Thank them and find ways to let them know how important they are. Treat your employees with respect and chances are they will have a higher regard for customers. Appreciation stems from the top. Treating customers and employees well is equally important.

Check Your Progress 1

Note:

- a) Please use the space given below each question for your answer
- b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this Unit

1. Define customer relations in less than 15 words

2. List the Ten Commandments of customer relations

i. _____

ii. _____

iii.	_____
iv.	_____
v.	_____
vi.	_____
vii.	_____
viii.	_____
ix.	_____
x.	_____

4.3 FORMING AND SUSTAINING PARTNERSHIPS

In the previous Units you have learned the importance of public relations, media relations and customer relations. These various relationships imply that you, as a telecentre manager or operator, look at other people and organisations as telecentre stakeholders that are present in your community. They are your partners. And, to make your work successful, you need partners and partnerships. These partnerships also develop into networks and networking.

In forming partnerships and networks, let us ask the following questions:

- How are potential partners identified?
- What kinds of partnerships can be developed with these partners?
- How will the partner benefit from the telecentre?
- How will the telecentre benefit from the partner?
- How will the partnership be sustained?

Let us consider these questions.

4.3.1 How are potential partners identified?

Partners can be:

Organisations and individuals who share the same goals and advocacy as your telecentre: Partnering or forging a working relationship with them will be easier than convincing agencies or individuals who do not have the same goals.

Organisations and individuals whose goals and advocacy can support your cause directly or indirectly: While the goals of that individual or organisation may not be exactly the same as

yours, you can still work together just like the various components of a system whose individual goals will contribute to the attainment of a bigger goal for the community.

Examples are factories, employment generating organisations, media organisations. You can be innovative when choosing partner organisations or individuals. The goal is that the partnership results in good publicity and sustainability of your telecentre.

4.3.2 What partnerships can be developed?

These partnerships are essential for a telecentres ability to become self-sustainable:

- A partner may offer free premises to the telecentre, or premises at very low rent.
- A partner may offer used PCs and other equipment to the telecentre at low cost.
- A partner may offer software, furniture or renovations at low cost or no cost.
- Partners can be the skilled people who can contribute their expertise to the telecentre at no charge because of their commitment.
- A partner may be a community library that offers a special exchange arrangement. For example, the telecentre can use the resources of the community library at no cost in exchange for computer usage for two staff members for a certain number of hours per week.
- A partner may be a local shop that offers special discounts to those who volunteer at the telecentre.
- A university may be a partner that can provide locally relevant information for a web site on health or agriculture, or can provide students to help in research or in tutoring.

In forging partnerships it is important to gauge the benefits that your partner can get out of the partnerships. You will need to research the potential partner in terms of its mission, vision, and advocacies. Shared goals and vision are the initial binding force in a partnership.

4.3.3 Steps to forming partnerships

Forming partnerships can be **active** or **passive**. Active partnerships require that you scan your community and your environment as to who can be your potential partner. Passive partnership will not require much effort as it is more informal and either their partners will come to you for the services you offer. And, you will go to them because of what they offer, without and formality.

For more active partnerships consider the following:

1. **Identify partners**
2. **Identify areas** of collaboration. These are specific activities directed at common areas of interest, goals and advocacies

- 3. Make a formal proposal** to form the partnership
- 4. Agree on terms** of partnership
- 5. Sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** that contains the terms of agreement – to formalise the partnership

4.3.4 Partnerships in marketing and promotion of your telecentre

Partnerships can **directly** or **indirectly** affect your telecentre marketing and promotion.

- 1.** Partnerships with media people and entities will have direct effect in terms of good publicity or discounted rates in advertisement. You will also get coverage by the media when you do programme or activity launch.
- 2.** Domino effect – when your partner gets good publicity, then you are attached to the good publicity also. Take note though that this can work in the reverse too.
- 3.** You can increase your visibility in the community by being partner to as many good organisations as possibly are in your community.
- 4.** Each partnership can be a news story for publicity.

4.3.5 Sustaining Partnerships

Ideally, if both parties are satisfied with the terms of partnership and as long as both parties still share the same goals, then partnership can be sustained. However there are specific activities to sustaining partnerships:

- 1. Monitoring** - programmes and activities under the partnership
- 2. Communication** - among partners
- 3. More commitment** - by actively and jointly working together

Can you name other kinds of partnerships that would benefit your telecentre or its clients? Your description of these partnerships should be very clear and concise and give exact details of the exchange. Are there organisations or individuals in your community which can be potential partners for this kind of exchange?

You can look outside the community as well. They could be national, state, regional or international organisations.

Check Your Progress 2

Note:

- a) Please use the space given below each question for your answer
- b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this Unit

1. List 5 steps to form partnerships

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____
- iv. _____
- v. _____

2. Name two kinds of partnerships

- i. _____
- ii. _____

3. Name 3 activities that sustain partnerships

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____

4.4. ASSESSING YOUR PROMOTIONAL STRATEGY

Is your promotion strategy working?

If you have implemented various strategies to promote your telecentre and your telecentre is not doing well, you will ask the question, why?

Assessing your promotional strategy is necessary to find out which scheme is working and which is not.

Assessment is fundamental to everything that you do in your telecentre. It can apply to equipment or hardware, the people who work with and for you, those in charge of the various aspects in the operations of your telecentre. Assessment also applies to procedure and processes of the telecentre.

Telecentre promotion activities have associated cost and while partnerships may have been lowered the cost of doing promotional activities, there are indirect costs – costs which should be working to increase the business activity of your telecentre – which is the main goal of promotion.

4.4.1 Assessment is needed for the following results:

1. Are the objectives of the promotional activities being achieved?
2. Which strategies are working? What should be retained in the next round/phase of promotional activities?
3. Which strategies are not working? What should improve or be removed? If improvement/refinement will be done, how?
4. Is the promotional strategy cost effective?
5. What other aspects of telecentre operations have benefited from the promotional strategies/activities?
6. How can we improve promotional strategies of the telecentre?

4.4.2 Simple assessment tools

A. *Data Gathering*

1. Keep a log of daily users. What services are used and for much time?
2. Take note of new customers. Ask where they are from and how they came to know about your telecentre.
3. Provide customers with suggestion/feedback forms and have a suggestion/feedback box and encourage customers to give feedback.
4. If time and budget will warrant it, conduct a simple survey in your community like the one which you did in Unit 1.

B. *Data Processing*

Look at the data you gathered from the simple activities listed above. Go back to the SMART objectives you formulated for your promotional activity. Are your data anywhere near your targets?

If you are far from your targets, list the possible reasons for this. If you were able to attain the target and more, identify good practices which could have contributed to it. You can also list other benefits, e.g. increased in partners, which are probable results of your promotional activities.

4.4.3 Using assessment results

As you have learned before, telecentre promotion is and should be a continuing activity. It may entail different strategies but with the same set of goals: **to increase the business of the telecentre and work towards sustainability.**

The results of simple assessment can be used to:

1. Revise and refine existing promotional activities
2. Plan an improved promotion strategy mix for your telecentre by making use of all other aspects in your telecentre operations e.g.
 - How to maximise your existing partnerships
 - How to attract investors to your telecentre
 - How to further boost your media image

Check Your Progress 3

Note:

- a) Please use the space given below each question for your answer
- b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this Unit

1. List three (of 6 things) that assessment of your promotional activities is needed for
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
 - iii. _____

4.5 SUMMING UP

In this Unit we have learned about customer relations, customer service, forming and sustaining partnerships and assessing promotional strategies. The main points are:

- Customer relations are essential to the success and sustainability of the telecentre
- Customer relations means listening to the clients
- Customer service means catering to the needs and wants of clients
- Partnerships are crucial to telecentre success and sustainability
- Partnerships can be formal or informal
- Assessing promotional strategies is needed for reviewing the plans and doing a mid-course correction, if needed

4.6 Check your Progress: Model Answers

CYP 1

1. Customer relations means treating your customers as if they are your partners and showing them that you truly care about them.
2. The Ten Commandments of customer relations are:
 1. Know who is boss
 2. Be a good listener
 3. Identify and anticipate needs
 4. Make customers feel important and appreciated
 5. Help customers understand the systems in your telecentre
 6. Appreciate the power of 'Yes'
 7. Know how to apologise
 8. Give more than what is expected
 9. Get regular feedback
 10. Treat employees well

CYP 2

1. Two kinds of partnerships: Active or Passive.
2. The five steps to form partnerships
 1. Identify partners
 2. Identify areas of collaboration.
 3. Make a formal proposal
 4. Agree on terms
 5. Sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)
3. Three activities that sustain partnerships
 1. Monitoring
 2. Communication
 3. More commitment

CYP 3

3. Assessment is needed for answering 3 of the six questions:
 1. Are the objectives of the promotional activities being achieved?
 2. Which strategies are working? What should be retained in the next round/phase of

- promotional activities?
3. Which strategies are not working? What should improve or be removed? If improvement/refinement will be done, how?

4.7 DEFINITIONS

4.8 ASSIGNMENTS

Do **one** of the following:

1. Choose two organisations in your community that you think would be good partners for your telecentre. List the reasons why you are selecting them and draft a MoU for the partnership.
2. Choose two businesses in your community. Make a chart with the Ten Commandments for customer relations and assess the business. Make a report on what you find.

The presentation could be

1. A 5-7 minute cassette or CD audio recording
2. A video tape (5 minutes)
3. A written essay (1000 words)
4. A drawing
5. A poem
6. A photos essay (with about 10 photos and text)

4.9 GLOSSARY AND REFERENCES

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