

---

# Your Bottom Line

---

By Dr. Henry J. Oles, Cr.Photog.

## Two powerful words

Business owners always search for fresh, unique ways to impress customers and acquire repeat business. However, many small companies often miss a golden opportunity which costs little, yet works wonders. Expressing the words "thank you" is all it takes.

In today's increasingly fast-paced, impersonal world, a meaningful statement of appreciation is unusual, and therefore noticed. Although it has been 20 years, I still remember an unexpected, personalized "thank you" letter my wife and I received from a local real estate agent who sold us property.

We were pleasantly surprised when we received this note a week after the sale closed, because the broker took the time to express appreciation for our business. The letter may have been a routine company "thank you" note produced from a word-processor, but the fact that the firm made this a customary business practice is important—and it definitely influenced our decision to return to the agent for subsequent property purchases.

Stop and think for a moment about the last few times you made major purchases—a house, car, furniture. Did the salesperson or company ever contact you again after the contract was signed? Probably not. Individual consumers are usually considered important only until a sale is closed.

Because I want customers to feel important, a customer appreciation letter policy was integrated into all my businesses. Although currently created in a computer, my "thank you" letters usually include personalized sentences, and always feature a hand-written signature. These notes not only express a statement of appreciation, but suggest that clients call for assistance or information on other related products—and many customers thank us for sending them.

An alternative plan has been established, in case competitive companies begin sending similar computer-generated "thank you" notes. Because it is our desire to be unique, we have already started sending completely hand-written notes of appreciation on attractive, professional

note cards, with hand-addressed envelopes—in an increased effort to let clients know we care about them.

Is this too "mushy"? I don't think so. I call it good business. No one would be in business long if they didn't maintain a strong customer base. Because customers make our business possible, we want them to feel positive about our services and consider us every time they plan to make another purchase. A "thank you" note is an opportunity to help make that happen.

It is most effective to send client "thank you" notes a week after a sales transaction is completed. Be sure to make the letter meaningful and personalized—and never make the mistake of sending a wedding album "thank you" note to a new mother who purchased baby portraits. Those types of errors are detrimental.

There are many ways to "stroke" customers to make them feel good about patronizing your business. This includes providing an exceptionally friendly physical environment; employees who quickly learn customers by name and address them accordingly; a quality product that exceeds customer expectations, and follow-up notes of appreciation. These techniques may not guarantee success—however, they can increase a studio's chances of enticing customers back to the studio, as well as generate referrals.

To maintain a strong business relationship with clients, it is important to treat customers as you would like to be treated. Everyone wants to be noticed and appreciated, and treating customers in a special way can positively affect your bottom line. ■