

# NFRN Retail Standards ROI



**NFRN**  
Federation of Independent Retailers

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Great Customer Service is the primary skill to make your business stand apart from your competitors. We believe that Customer Service begins the moment the customer starts their journey to your store and continues back into their own home where they discuss their experiences good, bad or indifferent.

Enhancing customer experiences and growing loyalty will happen if the quality and freshness of products coupled with friendly, helpful staff and cleanliness of the store are at a high standard on a daily basis. Never allow complacency to set in by cutting corners or making do - always remember that negative news on your store will always travel faster than positive messages. Get it right and not only will your customers return to your store time and time again, but they will share their experience with family, friends and neighbours who will shop in your store too.

Your intention, as proprietor, should be to lead your team in all aspects of Customer Service by ensuring they understand how Customer Service is key to the success of your business. Serving customers is akin to “show-business” and staff need to know that arriving for work every day with a “happy face” will be noticed. Accompanying this, if staff are helpful, courteous, approachable and attentive to customers, this includes to young children (who are your customers of tomorrow), customers will have enjoyed the experience of shopping in your store. Staff should happily employ these skills, leaving their personal problems outside your business.

As independent retailers we strive to compete in a market swamped by multiple retailers, but it's your “customer service” and personal touch that provides the unique point of difference that keeps customers shopping local. There are some fantastic experiences of Customer Service within independent retailing, but there are equally some experiences that would drive a customer to a multiple, so it is important that we do that extra mile on customer service. For example, should we review our returns policy, after sales service policy, give the benefit of the doubt policy, regardless of our personal feelings. We might not always be able to beat the multiple retailers on price but our Customer Service will keep our customers returning to our stores.

Customer Service should derive from a natural instinct, however, it doesn't come easily for some people so we have put together a module to use as a reminder, guidance and training for you and your staff. It is by no means exhaustive in terms of Customer Service but we hope it is a helpful tool in your business.

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# Good Customer Service

**Key skills to ensure Good Customer Service are:**



POSITIVES	NEGATIVES
A welcoming atmosphere by means of staff greeting customers as they enter or shop through your store.	Poor communication by staff, which includes ignoring customers whilst doing their shopping in your store.
Smart and friendly staff that want to help customers have a good experience in your store.	Lack of knowledge and understanding by staff as to the store's products and services.
The ability for staff to act positively to customer requests.	Staff talking to one another or on the mobile whilst processing the customer's transaction.
Having a procedure in place to ensure staff must put the customer and your store first and foremost, regardless of their personal or business issues.	Business issues being discussed on the shop floor whilst customers listen.
	Lack of staff procedures to ensure the shop floor is kept clean, merchandised and updated at all times.
	Quality and freshness for customers to experience and purchase is not available.
	An unclean and untidy store.

**Unsatisfactory Customer Service is sometimes ignored initially by customers but continual lack of good standards will eventually impact on the store's sales and profits.**

# Staff Training on Good Customer Service

Never assume your retail staff understands how to carry out Customer Service effectively. Whilst it is a natural instinct for many, there could be many factors preventing it from happening which are not easy to resolve without resolutions to change being made:

The Barrier	The Change required – one step at a time
<p>The constitution of a person can impinge upon this key skill eg shyness, quietness, etc</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smiling.</li> <li>• Eye to eye contact.</li> <li>• Asking customers if you can help or are available to help should they need support.</li> <li>• Speaking with customers about their everyday issues and remembering to check for an update on a discussion topic.</li> <li>• Using the customer's first name.</li> <li>• Acknowledging children.</li> <li>• Having a full knowledge of the services and products available and being able to discuss them competently.</li> <li>• A welcoming atmosphere by means of staff greeting customers as they enter or shop through your store.</li> <li>• Having a procedure in place to ensure staff must put the customer and your store first and foremost, regardless of their personal or business issues.</li> </ul>
<p>Negative Staff having an effect on store standards and happy customers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that there is a set policy for all tasks in store. (Please refer to NFRN Retail Standards Essential Checklist for further guidance). This includes training staff through the checklists and on the job training.</li> <li>• When an example of "not how it should be" is demonstrated, this should be corrected by the proprietor discreetly (immediately after the customer transaction).</li> <li>• Inform staff that the "negative barriers" preventing trade is not acceptable.</li> <li>• Sometimes this may mean "established staff leaving naturally" if they don't like the quality standards being employed.</li> <li>• Remember, step by step and don't allow negativity to set in to change the policy – it's your business.</li> </ul>
<p>The store itself lacks presence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean, bright outside/inside to enhance the experience of the customer should be a priority. (If you need support and advice ask the NFRN).</li> <li>• A warm comfortable store.</li> <li>• Cleanliness of the store.</li> <li>• Shelves stocked with products that customers wish to purchase and meet sell by dates.</li> <li>• Weekly/monthly promotions that are prominent and attractive to purchase will naturally give the retailer a reason to return.</li> <li>• Having competitive staple product prices eg milk, bread, etc.</li> <li>• Dispose of clutter.</li> <li>• Dispose of shelving that is empty and bring products to the front.</li> <li>• Helpful staff making eye to eye contact with customers and having a conversation with customers.</li> <li>• Staff having a good knowledge of the services and products in store and being able to discuss the benefits competently with the customer.</li> <li>• Having a helpful returns policy.</li> <li>• Staff attentive to their customers and job as opposed to colleagues and mobile phone communications.</li> </ul>
<p>Surprisingly – what leads a customer to or away from the store is the proprietors lack of personality and approachability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a presence on the shop floor and chat with your customers - know their story.</li> <li>• Ask them how you can help or support them.</li> <li>• Always smile, have eye to eye contact and be approachable.</li> <li>• Cracking a joke or making good conversation helps.</li> <li>• Good price promotions and unique products is a must.</li> <li>• Working with the community to help their local events.</li> </ul>

**There are 3 parts to Customer Service and when all 3 operate in tandem customer service is guaranteed.**

- **Standards**
- **Products**
- **Service**

# Effective Communication to Ensure Good Customer Service

Maintaining Standards depends on you and your staff understanding what the standards are.

**This can only be achieved if:**

1. **Effective training is carried out**
2. **Then monitored**
3. **Corrective action taken**
4. **Assessed continually on everyday duties as outlined in the Store Standards (refer to the NFRN Retail Standards modules for further guidance and support).**

Below is a short task on how you can test your staff member on Effective Communication to ensure Good Customer Service in store:

Staff Task	Responses you require
How I (staff member) ensure that I pay attention to my customers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep eye to eye contact with my customer.</li> <li>• Engage them in conversation.</li> <li>• If it's a regular customer – I recall our previous conversation and ask for an update.</li> <li>• I pick up their worries and try to understand their situation.</li> <li>• I know when their health changes (if an older, frail person).</li> <li>• I know their age and if they try to purchase age restricted products.</li> <li>• I know their regular purchases eg cigarettes, lucky dip.</li> <li>• I know when supplies don't arrive in time, which is going to disappoint my customers.</li> <li>• I know if someone hasn't been in the store for a day or two.</li> </ul>
How do I show that I am listening to my customers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smile, nod, engage with them.</li> <li>• Stop what I am doing or tell them I need to finish this task but to keep talking as I am listening.</li> <li>• If it's a serious issue, I stop what I am doing, engage in eye contact and try to resolve the problem by taking action.</li> </ul>
How I try to give feedback to my customers without being negative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I stop and listen to their issue the moment they start to speak with me.</li> <li>• I use questions that allow me to address the situation from the beginning ie what, who, where, why, when and how.</li> <li>• If it is serious I take the customer to a quiet area to discuss the issue.</li> <li>• I shall ask the customer to allow me to engage with my supervisor/ manager and keep them informed continually of what is happening.</li> <li>• I shall always have eye to eye contact with my customer.</li> <li>• I shall engage in positive communication but at a level I am able to support my customer with.</li> <li>• I shall ensure my customer leaves happy that the issue has been/is being dealt with.</li> </ul>

**Implementing good Customer Service involves staff demonstrating their understanding of products and services that the business offers. You must ensure that staff are fully trained in:**

- Listening and positive conversational skills.
- Products and Services.
- Usage of equipment to ensure timely transaction & quality service eg Epos, paypoint, payzone, lottery, etc.
- Promotional activity.
- Prices.
- Provide information, advice and assistance with any complaints/queries.
- Dealing with lack of store standards and products.

# Implementing Good Customer Service

NAME OF EMPLOYEE _____
DATE EMPLOYMENT STARTED _____
TRAINING DATE _____
FROM _____
TO _____

Store Standards that are required to be achieved  
 (please add required training or take from examples provided above).

What I want to achieve during my training	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4

<b>Competence achieved in the following tasks:</b>   	<b>Knowledge and understanding to be fulfilled in the following tasks:</b>   
<b>Training Date Required:</b> .....	<b>Signed by Employee:</b> .....
	<b>Signed by Manager:</b> .....
<b>Signed:</b> .....	<b>Dated:</b> .....

There is always room for improvement in Customer Service and it is totally natural for a customer to experience a problem and make a complaint. Always treat a complaint as a lesson in helping to improve the service you offer your customers and improve your store.

# Dealing with Complaints

Complaint handling is a complex but important issue. Complaints can be about the following:

- 1. Poor quality products**
- 2. Being spoken to inappropriately**
- 3. The customer feeling he has been wronged in price, product, etc**

There are key skills you must employ immediately when handling a complaint.

1. Be polite, smile and make eye to eye contact.
2. Listen and do not jump to a conclusion. The customer needs to air what they have planned to say – let them engage first.
3. Be sympathetic and accept their comments (good or bad).
4. Reassure the customer that action shall be taken to resolve their problem.
5. Some customers will be apologetic and embarrassed at raising the problem, others will be angry and frustrated. Regardless of the situation, always thank the customer for raising the issue as it only helps your business to become better at serving its customers.

As proprietor you need to establish a clear system and make it easy for customers to complain by always using the what, who, where, why, when and how principle of questions.

- Take the customer to a quiet area of the store where they will feel they are allowed to voice their feelings privately (and ultimately you are keeping the rest of the customers flowing, unaware of the problem).
- If the customer is showing signs of frustration or anger – inform them that you are here to support them and if they tell you everything, you will be able to investigate and respond.
- Employ good questioning and listening techniques to gather the information. If the product is being used as evidence, listen to the customer's points before responding. If it is a complex issue, write it down, as this will help when you discuss the complaint with the supplier/manufacturer/employee.
- If the matter can be dealt with immediately, it is always better to let the customer leave the store happy but, if not, please assure the customer that you will deal with the matter and, if needs be, get back to them with an update.

Training staff on how to deal with complaints is not always possible, therefore it would be useful to train your staff on "live complaint" cases to see firsthand how complaints are handled (but you must ask the customer's permission first by explaining it is for training purposes).

Ask the member of staff to write down the nature of the issue and to feedback how it was dealt with in order that they can understand the store procedure and how they should deal with the situation if faced with a similar customer. Ensure the training task has been signed off by you before signing the employee off as being able to deal with complaints competently.



## Dealing with Complaints Training

Below we outline a table your staff can use to help build competence in complaints handling.

Customer Complaint	How Management Dealt with a complaint	Questions I would ask if faced with a similar situation	My key skills to help the situation are?	Comments by Management

Line Manager has approved \_\_\_\_\_ Dated \_\_\_\_\_

## Always improving on Customer Service training

Always use positive words when communicating with your customers. Negative words will offend the older customer, possibly annoy a younger person and also end up in departure of the customer, probably never to re-enter your business again. Always remember one wrong move will multiply by 20 in seconds.

Below are a few examples of Positive and Negative communication on the same subject.



POSITIVES	NEGATIVES
<b>We have similar offers that might better suit your budget.</b>	<b>You haven't got enough money.</b>
<b>I fully understand your situation and we want to help you. How about we contact our supplier who shall...</b>	<b>We only sell the product, any problems you need to ring the manufacturer.</b>
<b>The company policy means we have to request your ID before selling you an aged restricted product.</b>	<b>You're not 18.</b>
<b>Where did you buy the product from so I can try to trace the supplier and see if we can get the product in for you?</b>	<b>We don't sell it.</b>



POSITIVES	NEGATIVES
<b>Helping the retailer pick up their products and being of assistance through to the end of the transaction.</b>	<b>Letting the customer pick up their products without any support and help.</b>
<b>Greeting and meeting customers with a sincere smile and engaging in conversation. Knowing customers by their first name.</b>	<b>Not acknowledging the customer and nodding at them, thus not supporting their transaction.</b>

Whilst we all tend to rely on locals to support our shop, we also must consider the passing trade that drive by daily, weekly, in holiday periods, randomly. Every penny counts and in order to attract every customer into your store you must ensure that your premises look good outside before the customer steps inside.

## Building on your Customer Base

Always view your premises from the eyes of the “passing trade” and address the following questions to help make the continual changes you need to ensure you catch all passing trade:

- Are your premises appealing to stop at, eg debris lifted, clean walls, clear windows so you can see right into the shop, plants/shrubs outside?
- Is the shop entrance free from obstacles and welcoming?
- Do your premises indicate what services you offer eg Paypoint, Western Union, Post Office, Convenience, News, etc?

**When promoting your business, you must think of the various generations that visit your store and cater for their needs to ensure they return.**

- » Smaller product sizes for the people living alone.
- » Having loose products that can be purchased (but not age restricted product).
- » Being price conscious of what customers will buy and what is out of their price range.
- » Customers are your best research, ask them what they would like you to offer them and be guided on responses before you purchase.
- » Do research by visiting other retail outlets to see what they are promoting and always move with changing customer expectations.
- » Remember, in Retail, nothing stands still.

### Team presentation

In retail it is so important that the team reflect the same company image and having a standard policy that all staff operate under reflects that philosophy. An example of good Customer Service:

- Having a team uniform will promote a sense of team spirit and an organised store that customers can approach for support and help.
- Having the same standard of service, regardless of what staff member is on duty, is a must.
- Engaging in positive communication at all times must be guaranteed. We have outlined on page 10 the difference between positive and negative communication.



## Store Customer Service Policy

Every store should have a policy for promoting good customer service and have it displayed in a prominent place so customers can view it. It shouldn't involve complicated text but simple effective words that get to the point.

Below is an example of our thoughts:

### **CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY**

This store is the centre of  
**Customer Service Excellence.**

Our Customers are our number one priority.

We are here **to Serve – to Support – to Sell.**

We are **Courteous – Helpful – Polite.**

We take seriously your Complaints and will Endeavor to Help.

We will always **Value Your Custom.**

**Please inform us if we don't get it right.**

**SIGNED** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATED** \_\_\_\_\_



# Customer Service Questionnaire

From time to time it is nice to obtain feedback on how your store is performing by engaging with your customers. Customers are your greatest fans but can also be your number 1 critic. It's the number 1 critic's points that you need to be aware of to make your store a number 1 store in response to their valid and authentic points. Below we have outlined a Customer Service questionnaire that can be given to customers or to be questioned by staff when they visit.

Customer Service Check	Scale of 0-5 (0 being unimpressed – 3 occasionally – 5 Always)	How can we serve you better?
<b>Staff</b>		
Do staff acknowledge you the moment you enter our store?		
Are staff attentive to your needs should you require them in store?		
Do staff offer to support you whilst you are moving around the store?		
Do staff engage in conversation with you?		
Do staff engage in conversation with each other, ignoring you as a customer?		
Do staff help you to the car if your bags are heavy?		
Do staff obtain products in the store if not available on the shop floor?		
<b>Quality and Freshness of Products</b>		
Are we offering you quality fresh products to meet your needs?		
Are we offering products of the right brand and price to match your needs?		
Are we offering you enough product brands and services?		
Are we competitive on price?		
Are we too expensive?		
Do we offer you a unique product/service?		
Is the store fully merchandised and stocked to meet your needs?		

# Customer Service Questionnaire

Customer Service Check	Scale of 0-5 (0 being unimpressed – 3 occasionally – 5 Always)	How can we serve you better?
<b>Cleanliness of Store</b>		
Does the store welcome you in terms of atmosphere when you walk through to start your shopping?		
Is the store clean?		
Are the entrance and aisles uncluttered?		
Does the flow of the store enhance your shopping experience, ie organised?"		
<b>Standards</b>		
Do you believe this store employs good standards with regard to customer service?		
Do you believe this store employs standards with respect to cleanliness in terms of good housekeeping, food hygiene, health and safety?		
Do you believe this store offers a good service to the community?		









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We do so much more - visit our portfolio at: [www.nfrnonline.com](http://www.nfrnonline.com)

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