



White Paper

Are You Customer Friendly?

Find out if your farm/greenhouse/nursery management software is adapted to your customers needs. Discover customer oriented strategies that could help enhance your sales and brand awareness.

How easy is it for customers to place an order with you? How often don't you have what they are looking to buy? What percent of your orders go out 100% complete, on time and with the quality of product that customers expect? How quickly do you respond to customer requests? How well do you listen to them? How willing are you to issue a credit based on a customer complaint? What effort do you put into making your customers feel they are important to you ... and, that they come first? These are the types of factors that customer's judge you by.

Being seen as "Customer Friendly" is essential to your long term success. This is not an option in today's business environment as your competitors will grab and hold your customers if you don't meet their expectations. But what do you have to do to be considered "Customer Friendly"?

It starts with YOUR business Culture. From the top down, your attitude towards your customers drives how the whole business feels and treats your customers. Are they treasured or just a source of revenue? Do you go the "extra mile" or do you always stick by your rules? Owners and managers set this attitude and it permeates out throughout the organization. These attitudes get encoded into policies and rules, both formally and informally. In turn, these are distributed and used throughout the organization. Not only should these policies and rules put the customer first, but they need to be clearly stated and known by all. Even more important is that employees abide by these policies and rules and show the greatest deference possible to your customers.

Are your employees empowered to make decisions? If your employees are "rule driven" without the flexibility to interpret rules for the mutual benefit of all, this will come across to your customers ... and not well! Seldom can rules provide the answer in all situations. Hence, employees need to be given the power to make decisions. While these decisions may not always be agreed with, they need to be accepted with coaching if a different outcome is sought in the future.

Is your software supportive of the customer? Software that doesn't give immediate access to information needed to answer customer questions can make you appear "customer unfriendly". For example, is the product requested available? Or, what did I order last time as I'd like the same items this time. Or, when did my order ship and where is it now? Similarly, software that doesn't default basic information about a customer, such as pricing, terms and ship to address, can lead to errors and customer dissatisfaction.

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Does your software proactively update the customer? Automation tools are available to automatically update the customer with relevant information. For example, current item availability, order acknowledgements, shipment notifications, and invoices. Customers are increasingly expecting this type of attention. By automating these processes, it eliminates error and provides an added service ... and, in the case of availability lists, can be used to automate the importing of customer orders.

Do you give web access to your customers? Increasingly, customers expect to be able to enter orders over the web at their convenience, check on the status of their orders, make changes, and look at their order history. They expect to be able to print this information, as needed. This option is often interpreted as a measure of how much you care about your customer and your transparency in your relationship.

Do you exchange information electronically? Many customers find it easier to transmit a file to you than to pass this information to you by fax, by mail or by phone. This file can be a simple spreadsheet listing or it may be as a standardized EDI (Electronic Data Interchange) file. Either way, customers are increasingly expecting you to have this ability as it saves both time and reduces errors.

Do you manage by exception? Do you have processes in place that raise alerts when there is an exception, such as delayed shipping or orders being shipped short? Handling exceptions in a timely way has huge value. This can be done through a dashboard that is updated frequently with status and exception information. Or it can be done with reports that are automatically generated when the exception occurs.

How is your account management handled? Do you have software that tracks and manages your interaction with customers as well as your prospects? Do your account representatives have quick access to the information you already possess about your customers/prospects? Are they reminded based on your expected contact schedule? Is this database of information used for marketing research and automated marketing? There is an expectation now that account reps will deliver on their promises, keep to a schedule and know what they have already learned.

Conclusion. Being “Customer Friendly” is simply expected today. The cost of the alternative is just too expensive to any business. This starts with the “ethos” of the leadership and how it is encoded into policies and rules that govern the customer relationship. Even well intended policies and rules can go astray if they are not interpreted correctly or are too rigid.

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Employees need flexibility in how they execute the rules. From there, it is a matter of internal processes, information and management. Having software with built in business rules, quick access to customer and product information, and exception management is required in today's competitive environment. Interfacing your system with theirs makes it even better. Expectations are rising and you must meet or exceed these expectations if you are to hold onto your existing customers and grow your customer base.

Argos Software develops and supports ABECAS™ Insight, an enterprise level Nursery and Greenhouse Management Software system, . This system is modular and includes Receivables with Collections Management, Sales Order Processing, Delivery (Dispatch) Management, Inventory Management, Purchase Order Processing, Production Management, and Accounting. Various other modules are available including Contact Management, Equipment and Facilities Management, Payroll, Freight Management, Handheld Systems, EDI, Business Intelligence through Dashboards, and Automated Processing through our Task Agent. To find out more about this system, email us or call **1-888-253-5353 Ext 2.**

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