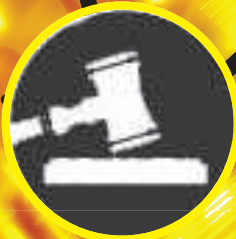




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October
2021



WHO'S WHO IN BUSINESS



5 statistics that shed some light on the nature of customer loyalty

Loyal customers are the backbone of many successful businesses. According to InMoment, a firm devoted to helping businesses compete in the experience economy, 77 percent of consumers acknowledge having ongoing relationships with specific brands for 10 years or more. Such relationships can prove to be lifebloods for businesses, and that value is even more apparent when looking at five key statistics related customer loyalty.

1. A 2018 survey from the market research firm AYTM found that products are the leading factor that makes customers loyal to a brand. The survey of United States internet users found that 55 percent of respondents cite quality products as the driving force behind their loyalty to brands.

2. That same survey found

that poor product quality was the no. 1 reason why brands indicated poor quality would lose customer loyalty, as 51 percent of respondents indicated poor quality would

See LOYALTY 7

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Strategies to identify what your customers want

Metro

Defining what customers want is something all successful businesses must do. No two customers are the same, so determining their needs and wants requires flexibility and a fluid approach that leaves room for business owners to adapt as their customers' needs change.

Adapting to changing customer demands was perhaps never more important than during the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak of the deadly coronavirus in late 2019 forced both consumers and business owners to change how they shop and sell products, respectively. Those changes were made seemingly overnight, as governments across the globe placed restrictions on businesses and individuals in an effort to curb the spread of the virus.

As the world gradually emerges from the pandemic, business owners must once again determine what their customers want. That's as significant a challenge as ever, as how consumers find the products they need has changed considerably since the onset of the pandemic. The financial experts at JP Morgan note that the pandemic drove more shoppers online. By the end of 2020, e-commerce accounted for 16 percent of all sales in the United States. That



Metro

marked a nearly 5 percent increase since the first quarter of 2020.

Business owners may face a

challenge in determining what customers want after the pandemic, but they can utilize various strategies to help that pro-

cess go smoothly.

- Solicit customer input. Though vaccination rollouts have gone smoothly so far, many consumers are taking a cautious approach to getting back to normal. Soliciting customer input can be a great way to gauge their comfort levels as well as what they're looking for in a post-pandemic climate. Customer surveys can shed light on the psyche of your consumers and what they're looking for from the businesses they trust. Once customer feedback has been analyzed, business owners can then tailor their offerings to meet the shifting nature of consumer

demands, making every effort to appeal to as many customers as possible.

- Lean on sales teams. Sales teams interact directly with the customers, be it in person, via Zoom calls, emails, or other channels. Business owners can lean on their sales teams for input regarding how customers are feeling and what their goals for the future are. Instruct sales teams to speak directly with customers about their short- and long-term goals, and then utilize their feedback to inform decisions going forward.

- Work with a consultant. An

See CUSTOMERS 11

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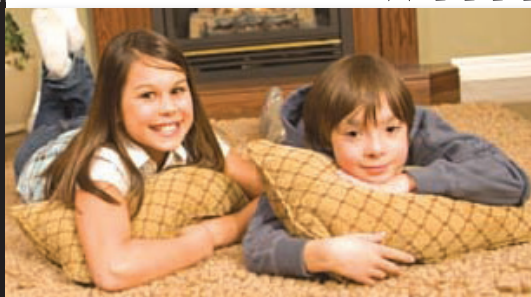


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How to find the right candidate for a job

Metro

Recruiting is an inexact science in the best of times. A host of variables must come together for businesses to connect with the perfect candidate, and recruiting professionals spend their entire careers facilitating such connections, even during a time when connecting with others has been more difficult than ever.

Businesses have faced many challenges over the last year-plus. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on various industries. As businesses look to rebound from such effects, finding the right candidates for new openings may present some unique challenges. Though some businesses may be back in their offices, many continue to operate remotely, while others may have decided it benefits them to continue working remotely even after the pandemic has ended. The effects of remote working are far-reaching and even extend to recruiting. Though it may be challenging to fill positions during the pandemic, firms can implement various strategies to find the best candidates possible for each opening.

■ Reexamine hiring protocols. Hiring protocols are implemented for a reason, not

the least of which is ensuring hiring managers and department heads get as strong a feel for a candidate as possible. But companies may need to revisit such protocols as they try to fill openings during the pandemic. For example, if company policy mandates that each candidate is interviewed in person by two managers before they can be offered a job, tweaking that rule to two virtual interviews may be necessary.

■ Be flexible with your offer. The challenges of the pandemic are not exclusive to businesses. Professionals are facing their own challenges, including how to juggle their responsibilities at work with their obligations at home. That balancing act has always been difficult, but it's become even more challenging as parents must arrange for child care during a time when

See JOB 15



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How to make the most of Small Business Saturday

Gifts and gatherings take center stage come the holiday season. The holiday season begins on Thanksgiving and continues until New Year's Day. During that time, families gather to exchange gifts, break bread, celebrate their faith, and toast the year to come.

The good times and gatherings that are such a big part of the holiday season were absent from many celebrations in 2020. Though the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing, the successful rollout of various vaccines should make the coming holiday season feel more normal. That means gift exchange-

es and gatherings are back in play. Savvy celebrants recognize the benefits of shopping early, and Small Business Saturday is a great chance to get back in the holiday swing of things while supporting the local businesses that make communities so unique.

■ Plan ahead. Small Business Saturday takes place each year on the Saturday after Thanksgiving in the United States. Since its inception in 2010, Small Business Saturday has grown in popularity. American Express estimates that 110 million people participated in Small Business

Saturday in 2019, which underscores how shoppers can benefit from planning ahead. Research sales and inventories of local businesses you want to support so you're ready to go come Saturday morning.

See SATURDAY T7



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Saturday

From T6

Doing your homework can make it easier to navigate the crowds.

■ Reserve a table at your favorite restaurant. A great meal with friends and family can be an ideal way to cap off a day of shopping, and it's a great way to support a local restaurant. It's worth noting that a National Today survey of 1,000 shoppers that focused on Small Business Saturday shopping habits found that food and groceries were the most popular things to buy local. Saturday is traditionally a popular night to dine out, and that popularity is even greater on Small Business Saturday.

Loyalty

From T2

compromise their loyalty to a brand.

3. A 2018 study from Bond Brand Loyalty found that customers are increasingly willing to share personal information in exchange for rewards. The study found that 87 percent of loyalty program members were willing to allow their activities and behavior to be watched, monitored and tracked in exchange for personalized rewards.

4. Tech plays a significant role in customers' willingness to connect with brands. The Bond study found that 95 percent of loyalty program members wanted to connect with brands through tech such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR).

5. Consumers continue to favor loyalty programs. A recent report from Forrester Research found that 72 percent of adults online belong to at least one loyalty program. In fact, the report found that the average person enrolled in a loyalty program belongs to nine such programs.

Businesses can take various approaches to inspire customer loyalty, and such efforts can pay significant dividends over the long haul.

ness Saturday. Shoppers can ensure they aren't waiting for a table by booking a reservation in advance.

■ Check your social media feeds. Many small businesses have recognized the value of

communicating directly with consumers through their social media feeds. Throughout the day, shoppers can keep an eye on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to learn about special sales or events. In ad-

dition, shoppers can share their shopping experiences via their own feeds. Many small businesses rely on word-of-mouth from existing customers, so this can be another way to show your support for the

establishments that call your community home.

Small Business Saturday is a great way to begin the holiday shopping season on the right foot.

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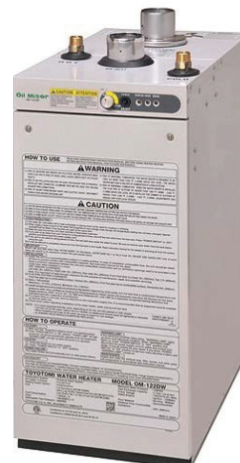
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Local wineries sprouting up in a town year you

Metro

Rose from wineries outside of Washington, D.C.? Specific vintages from the Finger Lakes region? Reislings from Ontario? Chambourcin from central New Jersey? California may still be the hub of commercial domestic wine production, but vineyards across North America are showing that they, too, can produce quality, flavorful wines for their communities.

Winemaking businesses are taking root all over Canada and the United States. In 1999, there were just six wineries in Loudoun Valley, Va., a region near the nation's capital. By 2013, there were 40 wineries in that same region, and the number keeps growing Ñ so much so that the region has been dubbed O.D.C.'s Wine Country.Ó

Loudoun Valley is just one area of North America that has seen a boom in local vineyards, wine tastings and direct-to-consumer resale of products produced on their estates. The Wine Business Monthly database indicated that the total number of wineries in the United States reached 9,091 in 2017, which was a 4.5 percent increase from the previous year. Wines of Canada points out there are now more than 800 licensed wineries in Canada and more are in the planning stages. The most popular areas for producing Canadian wines are southern Ontario by the Great Lakes and the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia.

The regions known for producing American wines are more diverse. While California, Washington and Oregon clock in with the most wineries, Texas, New York, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, and Missouri make up the top 10, according to the American Association of Wine Economists. All 50 states and the District of Columbia now have their own wineries.

With so many star-spangled and maple-leaf loving wine enthusiasts, one never has to travel far to sample a local vintage. What makes many local vineyards so appealing is their backstories. Consumers have long

been interested in the origin tales behind products, as taste and appearance alone often do not move niche items. Local wineries appeal to the public because they connect consumers to the wines and the vineyards on an emotional level. Who doesn't want to see a local vintner succeed in an industry dominated by big names from Europe and else-

where? In addition, serving and enjoying a wine from one's own state or province can be a talking point at any gathering, helping to inspire even more local wine fans.

Local vineyards and wineries are branching out across North America, providing perfect places to relax and enjoy locally produced products with meals.



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5 ways to support small businesses this holiday shopping season

Metro

Small businesses long have been the heart and soul of local communities. There is something to be said about being on a first-name basis with a local restaurateur or another small business owner, as such familiarity often translates into exemplary service.

According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, small businesses account for 99.9 percent of companies in the country, due in large part

to the broad definition of small businesses (those with fewer than 500 employees). However, the vast majority of businesses in the United States have a staff that's smaller than 20 workers, according to the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council. These firms employ nearly 60 million workers, says the SBA.

Despite the prevalence of small businesses, fewer than 80 percent of entrepreneurial small business ventures

make it beyond their first year, and only around half

make it beyond five years.

Consumers who want to

help their favorite small busi-

See **SUPPORT 10**



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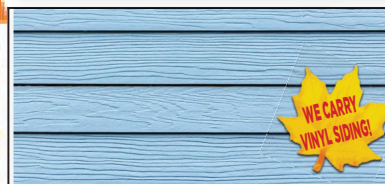


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Support

From 9

nesses survive can use the holiday season and beyond to set the course for success. Consumers can make a concerted effort to fuel this important cog in their local economic engines.

■ Shop local. The concept is simple but effective. Opting to shop in local stores over larger conglomerates and franchises can help small businesses take root. Before making holiday shopping lists, visit local stores and base gift ideas on items they have in stock. Chances are those gifts will be one-of-a-kind.

■ Purchase gift cards/certificates. All businesses have slow periods, and post-holidays is often a time when sales stagnate. Gift cards may bring new customers into local busi-

nesses who might otherwise not have patronized them, potentially creating new repeat customers.

■ Cater holiday meals and gatherings. The holiday season is chock-full of entertainment opportunities. Individuals can rely on nearby restaurants and other food and beverage businesses to cater holiday parties. Some businesses also may be willing to discount or donate food for nonprofit group activities, such as church holiday bazaars, school holiday concerts or fundraising fairs.

■ Mention small businesses on social media. The holiday season breeds excitement. Therefore, when shoppers are in local stores, they can snap pictures of products and overflowing shopping bags and post them online while praising local businesses.

■ Think about subscription gifts. Enrollment in a health club or a massage

therapy service are gifts that keep on giving for the recipient, but also help ensure consistent incoming cash

for the business providing the service.

When shopping this holiday season, consumers can

look to the small, local businesses in their communities that help make towns and cities unique.

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Did you know?

The end of the year is often a popular time to volunteer, as the spirit of giving that's synonymous with the holiday season compels millions of people to make an effort to support local charities and nonprofit organizations. In years past, that might have made it difficult for prospective volunteers to find organizations in need of volunteers. However, as the world continues to confront the COVID-19 pandemic, charitable organizations and nonprofits may have a host of opportunities for prospective volunteers. A 2020 report from Fidelity Charitable found that volunteer activity shifted consid-

erably during the pandemic. Prior to the onset of the pandemic in 2019, 81 percent of volunteers lent a hand in person. That number dropped to just 35 percent during the pandemic. That left many charities and nonprofits in need of in person volunteers. The rollout of three successful vaccines will no doubt compel more people to volunteer in person as 2021 draws to a close, and there should be plenty of opportunities to help charitable organizations in need. In addition, the pandemic might have led some nonprofits to expand their remote volunteering operations, an expansion that does not

need to end even as the world gradually transitions to life after

COVID-19. That should mean there's still plenty of chances to

embrace remote or virtual volunteering.

Customers

From 3

outside consultant can provide objective analysis that can be invaluable as businesses transition to a post-pandemic world. Consultants can utilize their knowledge of the industry to determine what a given business is doing or not doing to separate

itself from its competitors. Consultants also can recommend strategies that will help businesses adapt to what experts like JP Morgan suggest could be a business landscape that may never be the same as it was prior to the pandemic.

Identifying what customers want may require some creativity and flexibility as the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Some dining trends that will hang around after the pandemic has ended



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Metro

The restaurant industry is slowly getting back to normal after a very rough year that saw more 110,000 eateries temporarily or permanently close their doors. Thanks to rising vaccination rates and other factors, including as-

surances from public health officials regarding the safety of dining out, consumers are once again comfortable with the idea of going to restaurants.

As restaurants begin catering to larger crowds, it's ex-

See DINING T13

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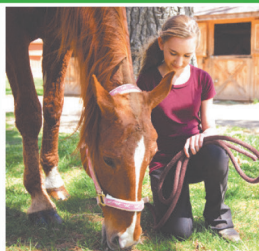
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Dining

From T12

pected that certain changes implemented in 2020 are bound to become permanent or, at the very least, stick around for a little while longer.

■ Reservations will be necessary. Many restaurants, even those that did not require reservations prior to the pandemic, may continue to encourage them. Not only will reservations give them greater control over the volume of patrons they host, but they also afford staff ample time to clean and disinfect tables and other surfaces.

■ Outdoor dining will still be available. Outdoor dining filled an important need and presented restaurants with an avenue to

generate revenue when indoor dining was restricted or prohibited. A May 2021 Morning Consult survey found that diners prefer outdoor dining to indoor dining. With that in mind, restaurants likely will still set aside outdoor areas for diners to eat comfortably, particularly those who were successful in creating attractive and comfortable al fresco offerings.

■ More restaurants will offer takeout options. Even though on-premise dining had started to catch up to takeout orders for many restaurants by the spring of 2021, takeout figures to stick around to satisfy safety-minded customers who still desire curbside convenience.

■ Expect increased sanitation technology. Restaurants may continue to make upgrades with safety and

sanitation in mind. In addition to touchless sink features, self-flushing toilets and minimal touch or touchless payment methods, businesses may implement UVC light air purification systems and upgrades in HVAC filtration. Barriers that were effective in preventing the spread of disease may remain in place to continue to protect workers and patrons from any type of airborne illness.

■ Loyalty programs will grow in popularity. Many organizations have implemented loyalty programs to track how often consumers patronize a business and to

offer discounts and other deals for repeat customers. Restaurants may increasingly roll out loyalty programs that allow diners to earn points for each meal and reward repeat business

through emailed coupons or free items.

Dining out is gaining steam as customers increasingly feel confident and comfortable enjoying meals away from home.

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How consumers can show their support for local businesses

The road back to normalcy after the COVID-19 pandemic figures to have some twists and turns. Even after the rollout of vaccines began in late 2020, public health agencies like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization emphasized the importance of people keeping their collective guard up, as previously unseen variants of the virus were still being discovered.

A slow march toward recovery has begun, but the uphill nature of that march underscores how important it is that communities continue to come together to support each other as well as the locally owned businesses that make towns and cities so unique. Consumers who want to help the local businesses in

their community rebound and thrive in the months and years ahead can show their support in various ways.

■ Take charge of your to-go order. Convenience became the name of the game when ordering food during the pandemic. Curbside pickup service was offered as a safety measure, and many restaurants that never previously offered delivery or takeout started to do so to generate revenue at a time when in-person dining was limited if not disallowed. Some restaurants began offering delivery through apps like Grubhub or Uber Eats, and though that may be convenient for diners, restaurants must pay a fee to utilize those apps. In lieu of ordering through a third party delivery service, consumers can take

charge of their to-go orders and pick up the food themselves. That saves restaurants the delivery app surcharge, allowing them to increase net profits on the meals they sell.

■ Continue to be loyal. A recent study from researchers at the Harvard Business School found that a customer's eighth purchase was an average of 80

See LOCAL 15



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METRO

Local

From 14

percent higher than his or her first purchase. That highlights just how valuable repeat customers are to small businesses. Consumers who have had positive experiences with small businesses in their communities in the past can continue to support those companies by looking to them first when they need new products or services. Doing so not only helps small businesses retain more customers, but it increases the likelihood that consumers will again have positive buying experiences.

■ Share experiences via social media. Small businesses recognize the value of social media. A 2021 survey from Visual Objects found that 74 percent of small businesses in the United States are active on their social media accounts at least once each week. Social media can become even more valuable to small businesses when their customers utilize such platforms to share positive experiences and encourage their friends and neighbors to patronize local businesses.

Consumers can take various steps to support small businesses in their communities as such establishments look to regroup and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Job

From 5

many schools are only offering in person lessons part-time, if at all. Though some businesses may want new hires to work full-time in the office, to find the right candidates they might need to relax those restrictions until life returns to

some semblance of normalcy. Being flexible with new hires in regard to remote working might attract more qualified candidates.

■ Consider contracting new hires. It's understandable if hiring managers are nervous about offering full-time work to candidates they have never met in person. If that hesitation is proving too much to overcome, companies can of-

fer positions on a contractor basis with the opportunity to become full-fledged employees in a few months or when the pandemic ends, whichever comes first.

Recruiting during the pandemic has posed some unique challenges. A few simple strategic shifts can help recruiters overcome such challenges en route to connecting with the right person for the job.

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