

Hello, it's me!

Tonya Fry discusses why, in such an automated world, service and relationships are still what sells, whether you are selling cranes, financing or widgets.

Maybe it's just me, but are you getting tired of the impersonal way of doing business today?

We hardly talk on the phone any more – its text and e-mails now.

We can buy just about anything we need online, from something as simple as a bag of plastic straws – yes, you can order them on Amazon, and I know because I've done it – up to a new vehicle. It will be delivered right to our door and we never have to step foot into the store or auto showroom.

We go to the big box stores and you have to self-checkout and hope that you don't make a mistake as there will only be one associate to service 20 registers.

We don't have to go into a bank anymore – we can use an ATM to get cash and use our mobile phones to make deposits.

Although this can be very convenient in our busy lives, it has taken away the personal touch.

As a business owner, I ask myself, 'When did servicing the customer stop being an important part of the sale?' Call me old-fashioned, but if I am going to be making a major purchase, I'd like to speak to a human being. I'd like to get to know the people I am going to be doing business with. I want them to know my company and understand my company's needs.



THE AUTHOR

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Filling in a generic form online can only provide a very generic result. Talking and listening during a sales call will almost always lead to a more tailored solution to my needs.

Partners in success

Shouldn't it be the same with financing? Most of the time, the application and financials do not paint the entire picture. As a financial representative, I want to take the time to learn about my customers and their businesses. I find it enjoyable to hear about how my customers started their companies, grew their companies and are handing them over to the next generation.

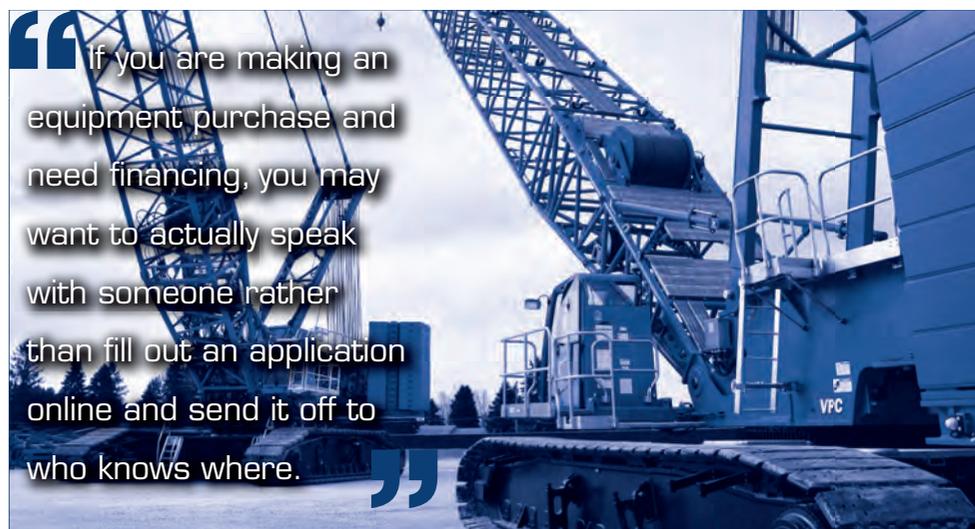
These conversations are what help me foster a relationship with that customer. They allow me to find out what the customer does and does not want for financing. For example, maybe my customer's business experiences seasonality and I need to tailor the financing to fit their cash flow needs. Had I not spoken to them on the phone, and just submitted the application, I would not have found that out. I would have presented them with an approval that did not work for them, and wasted both our time. What about a situation with a customer that had some years with declining revenues and is now showing growth? If I do not speak with the customer, and find out what is transpiring, obtaining an approval, may be much more

difficult and timely. By having the story behind it, I can better present the request to my credit person, and have a better chance of getting an approval that works for my customer.

Your finance company should understand that in today's fast-paced business world, our customers are busy. If you are making an equipment purchase and need financing, we think you might want to actually speak with someone rather than fill out an application on-line and send it off to who knows where.

What about once the transaction has been closed? I believe that no customer wants to feel like they are just another number. With large funding institutions, if the customer has a question, they typically need to call the customer service line and navigate the myriad of options. Customer service is an important aspect of doing business. Our customers can pick up the phone and reach someone at our office at any time during office hours. And most have our cell phone numbers to reach in an emergency. Doing business with a company that can get to the bottom of any problem quickly will allow you to go back to doing business.

In such an automated world, service and relationships are still what sells, whether you are selling cranes, financing or widgets. Customers not only want to believe that you value their business, but that they can look to you as a partner in the success of their company. ■



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