

Customer Service Is Not Account Management!

Executives and sales people often use the expressions "customer service" and "account management" synonymously, but with little context. They rarely give thought to the differences between these two important functions. Yes, customer service and account management are functions, not people. While you may have customer service and account management teams, there are roles others play in delivering those services.

Let's define customer service and account management

Customer service occurs whenever a client asks you for something. They call your call centre or send an email with a request and are looking for "responsiveness." That evaluation is not limited to the customer service department.

Account management is the proactive, prescriptive set of activities you deliver to your clients. These are the actions you take to provide meaningful value to your clients beyond what you sell. Rarely, do I find companies with documented account management strategies beyond a basic A,B,C classification by recognised revenue.

Executives preach the importance of account management, but most do not define it or formulate a plan to do it methodically. Most importantly, companies miss out on the opportunity to differentiate themselves through account management. **That differentiation can help you win more business at the prices you want!**

The first step is to define A,B,C classifications, but don't limit the analysis to recognised revenue. Recognised revenue is one aspect, but also consider potential revenue and strategic account as another look at your client portfolio.

You may be doing a smidgeon of business with an account, but if you deployed a winning account strategy with them, they could become your largest client! If you only consider recognised revenue, you would not have this account on your radar screen or serve it properly.

Other accounts may be strategic in nature. Due to their name, brand or a particular solution you deployed, this client is tremendously valuable to you and should have a more robust account management experience than their recognised revenue supports.

But what account management experience will you provide? Again, these are proactive activities you will take to retain and grow your client portfolio. Once you have ranked your clients, define the account management experience for each of the A,B,C tiers.

Address aspects such as:

- **Executive sponsorship** – A member of the executive team is tasked with developing relationships with key members of the account.
- **Number of client meetings per year** – Based on the ranking, determine how many times you will visit them and for what purpose.
- **Number of business reviews per year** – These are meetings to review the account's performance and update on new initiatives in your company.
- **Number of invitations to corporate per year** – Purposely inviting them to your head office to meet for a defined purpose.
- **Focus group/advisory board invitations** – These are sessions to discuss new products, services, etc. It gets them engaged with you and strengthens the relationship.
- **Reports provided** – Keep in mind that anyone can email a report. Want them to experience meaningful value from you? Analyse the report. Share with your clients what you are seeing. Ask questions based on the data, make recommendations, and help them make informed decisions. You know more about the world of potential solutions than your clients do. Share your expertise, so they have the best solution they can have for the money they are willing to invest.
- **Newsletters provided** – These can be done easily with online tools. They keep clients informed of industry happenings, not just solicitations. Provide value that helps them in their roles, not just peddling your wares!

Based on your business, your account management options will differ. The key is to define an account management experience, by client classification, that allows you to **deliver meaningful value**. During prospect meetings, talk about how you provide account management – in ways the competition does not.

Account management could be the differentiating factor that wins you more business at the prices you want!

