CUSTOMERS COME FIRST

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It's five times more cost effective to get a sale from an existing subscriber (or keep an existing subscriber) than to find a new one. In his new book "Pushing the Envelope," Alan Rosenspan offers the following suggestions for helping your newspaper adopt a customer-focused mentality.

1. Treat subscribers differently than prospects. They know you. They've already bought from you. They should never receive the same direct mail package that prospects receive - with one exception: if you send it to them first and explain that you're giving them first crack at your offer.

2. Treat them better. How many newspapers have special introductory offers for new subscribers that existing subscribers don't qualify for? Neiman Marcus has special fashion shows and events exclusively for its best customers. They also receive points toward free gifts.

3. Make sure everyone treats them well. Circulation and sales know who the best customers are, but other departments may not. And that can be dangerous. When Jan Carlzon, CEO of Scandinavian Airlines, looked around at other airlines, he was appalled at their poor customer service and negative attitude. He reviewed every step of the customer contact process and identified five times when the airline interacted with a customer. These are the "Moments of Truth." In the airline business, they are: making a reservation, getting tickets, boarding, flying and retrieving baggage. Carlzon recognized that at any of these crucial moments, the airline could either strengthen a customer relationship or risk losing them. What are your moments of truth?

4. Have a relationship with your subscribers. What would you think of a friend who called you only when they needed something? Not much of a friend. So why don't more newspapers talk to their existing customers more often - to ask them how they're doing, let them know about new rates or products or ask their opinions or thoughts?

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