7 Ways to Increase Employee Product Knowledge, Excitement & Motivation to Learn More

Has this ever happened to you?

You walk into a camping gear store and ask the salesperson about the difference between two tents, and all he does is go to the tents corner of the store and read the product description notes that are attached to the tents.

You ask further questions, and he doesn't know how to answer them.

If you came into the store to figure out the differences and buy the best tent for your situation, you're probably walking out at this point. You might as well spend time watching YouTube tutorials or asking questions in camping forums, than buy the wrong tent and freeze to death in your first ever camping trip.

Of course, as a result, you might be buying somewhere else, somewhere that will help you get the answers you need, so you don't have to worry about your safety, and can focus on having fun.

We understand this as customers, yet when it comes to running our own team, we sometimes forget.

Or sometimes, we're so familiar with our products, we assume everybody is.

But it is our responsibility to make sure they are, so when customers call in, email in or ask a question via chat, our employees will know the answer. They will know how to guarantee our customers are taken care of, and have everything they need to succeed with our products, and tell their friends they, too, need to give us a try.

Easier said than done?

100%. That's why, today, we're bringing you a 7 step guide, and suggest that you go deep into your customer's world before you go wide to train employees on as many product features you can.

Before You Start Your Employee Product Training, Make Sure Employees Understand Your Target Audience

Let's say you sell camera equipment. You could be selling camera equipment to parents trying to take better photos of their kids, to hobby photographers who want to go deeper into their craft, to National Geographic photographers who make a living with their camera, or to store owners who connect you with end consumers – just to name a few options.

How employees show up in customer interactions, or how they work in the back end to develop your business and products, can be very different depending on the target audience.

So here's the first thing you need to do:

1) Get Employees Familiar with Your Top Target Audiences

Before you train employees of anything at all, make sure they get to know your main target audiences, also known as your top personas.

If you're still not clear yourself on who your ideal customers are, watch this 7.5 minute video from HubSpot to get a ton of ideas on starting to figure it out:

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSTfs0SFiHo

As you see, the video talks about how important it is to know your audience in order to develop content for your marketing, but knowing your audience and understanding its challenges is also key to understanding what they need from your products.

Start Your Employee Product Training by Sharing the Difference Your Company Makes in the World

Whether you help customers figure out their personal style, build wealth, or make their team more productive, your product solves a problem and helps someone succeed in something, overcome a challenge, or get 10 minutes of laughter in an otherwise grueling day.

When you start with the results, with the impact your products make, you can get your employees excited. They start understanding that they don't just work for another stylist,

software company or comedian. There's meaning to what they do, and if they do it well, they'll contribute to making someone's life better, even if only a little bit.

But how do you get started?

Here are three ways.

2) Share Customer Success Stories with Your Employees

The easiest way to help employees understand how their work benefits the end customer is… to show them how their work benefits the end customer.

In other words, interview real customers for case studies – or borrow the case studies your marketing team has already produced – and share them with your employees.

For example, if you were Google and you showed this case study to your employees, the next time they sat to develop the AdWords product or answer customer emails, they would be seeing a real life customer in their mind's eye – in this case, Susan, the founder of a dog daycare owner, who went from zero customers to 30 employees once she figured out how to attract customers with Google ads.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqHpm7OLWWY

But if you don't have case studies ready to go and you can't interview customers at the moment, create a presentation on your own that shares customer stories – their challenges, how your company helped them, and what results they saw.

You might even want to take a page from Salesforce's director of employee content strategy, Leah McGown-Hare, who dressed up in red carpet attire to share how 21st Century Fox uses their product to collaboratively plan their movies' schedule and budget for marketing and distribution – but that's optional, of course.

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3) Share Your Company Story

Sometimes, a company is created because its founder experienced a challenge, and there was no good enough product in the market, so the founder went and created one.

In this case, it's possible that how the founder overcame the challenge using the product she or he created is similar to how customers now overcome a similar challenge.

This, for example, is the story of why John Lee Dumas started Entrepreneur on Fire, a successful podcast in the entrepreneurship space.

As you can see, Dumas was once where his listeners might be now – frustrated with their jobs, wanting freedom, not sure how to get there. Then, he used podcasting and found business success, and that desired freedom. Since Dumas teaches other entrepreneurs how to podcast successfully, this video can help his team envision the impact they'll have on customers' lives.

4) Share What Else Your Product Sales Help You Do

Sometimes, when companies grows, they're able to contribute to creating a better world beyond their direct customers.

Dick's Sporting Goods, for example, decided to invest in public school sports programs that are losing their regular sources of funding. In the following video, they tell the story of helping a high school girls' hockey team in Alaska, so these girls can get sports scholarships to college and know that their needs and careers are just as important as the boys'.

Stories like this help convey the bigger picture of your company's mission, values and culture to employees, and enroll them in that mission. As Virgin founder Richard Branson said in an interview, ==employees that feel proud of their company will show up better and will make a bigger effort when it's time to serve customers [link to article about customers vs. employees]==.

Once You've Set the Foundation, Drill Down to Specific Product Features, So Your Employees Know How to Help Your Customers Achieve Success

Now that your employees believe in the transformation your products can create, it's time to drill down and teach them about actual product features, so they can know how to help your customers actually reach these transformations.

5) Demonstrate Thorough Product Usages

Now that your employees know who uses your products and why, it's time to understand *how* they use them.

We recommend being as thorough as possible in your training. According to [Adweek](#), "81% of shoppers conduct online research before buying," meaning that, by the time they talk to one of your employees, they already know a lot about your products. You don't want a situation where they reach out to your team for help, only to find out they understand your product better than the company's own employees.

Therefore, make an effort to show as many features as possible, and as many use cases as possible. Clarify how different sectors of customers might use the product differently to solve a wide range of challenges.

For example, if you sell ice cream like Ben & Jerry's, you might want to show your employees how to make s'mores ice cream cake...

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… but you can also show them how to bake with their kids while helping Jamaican youth… without leaving their home:

6) Give Your Employees Answers to Customers' Burning Questions

If customers keep repeating the same questions over and over again, your employees need to know about it.

If they're in the frontlines, there's a high chance they'll be getting these questions directly.

If they're in development or production, they'll need to find solutions for it.

If they're in marketing, this might influence their strategies – from content marketing to landing page copy.

Either way, to ensure you don't miss anything, use multiple sources.

Start with the common questions your company already gets via phone, email, chat and social media. Ask the people in charge of answering these questions to write them down in a shared company file, so you can track which questions come up most.

For example, if we go back to the Ben & Jerry's example, the brand is well known for its sustainability and social values, so one of the questions they get is where do their milk and cream come from.

If your website has an in-site search option, see if you can discover the most common search queries site visitors make, then instruct your employees how to handle questions on the topic.

Then, review your company's most popular articles, videos and other social media posts. If customers are drawn to certain topics significantly more than others, your employees will likely need deeper training on these topics.

7) Let Employees Experiment with Using Your Products Themselves

The best way to understand someone is to walk a mile in their shoes, right?

So for your employees to provide the kind of empathetic service that increases customer happiness [link to article about how to teach agents empathy], it's important that they experience what customers experience when they use your products.

Now, don't expect employees to buy your product and train themselves, not even at a discount. Provide them the product yourself as an investment in your company.

If you can't afford to give each employee her or his own product, let them share this in duos or small groups, or experiment one after the other with a product that's already in your office. Alternatively, if your products are digital, create demo accounts or trial accounts, to provide free access for a limited time.

But make it a priority for them to experience using the product, share whatever challenges they come up with, and ask you questions when they're not sure or don't understand.

Here, for example, is how LinkedIn's team uses LinkedIn for marketing:

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This could give you additional product training opportunities – you could end up covering topics you never thought of – and will help employees emphasize with customers, and thus be more proactive about helping customers overcome their challenges.

Bonus Tip: How to Avoid Developing Training Materials from Scratch

While this won't be relevant to all companies, we figured we could save at least some of you extra work.

If you have a marketing department or a marketing manager, or if you serve in that role yourself, you could probably use some of your company's marketing materials in your training sessions. If your content helps educate customers about your product, it can probably help educate your employees as well.

But if it's not relative to you, we recommend doing the opposite – develop training materials that (at least some of which) could be re-purposed for marketing.

Get your employees and customers talking the same language, and watch product sales and customer retention rates soar.