

Don't Sit By While a Business Closes

Written by David Specht, Jr.
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A business in small-town America opens its doors. There is a flurry of excitement. The Chamber of Commerce holds a ribbon cutting. The local newspaper takes a photo.

Some time later, that same business closes. There is no story in the paper. The Chamber of Commerce doesn't mention it. Someone's dream dies — with no fanfare at all.

This scene is played over and over again, in towns all across America. However, it doesn't always have to end this way.

Businesses cease to exist for a variety of reasons. However, I believe that most business owners would accept help and advice from informed sources.

I believe that most Business-to-Consumer (B2C) companies fail for similar reasons. Here are some of the more prevalent ones:

Poor Quality of Product/Price

I have seen many restaurants open with large portions of good quality food at a reasonable price. When times get tough, they tend to reduce their portion size, raise their prices and/or go with lower quality ingredients.

The changes do not sit well with the regular customers, who leave to find other options. The same is true in other retail industries, whether it is a boutique or a flower shop.

Poor Customer Service

People will pay more, overlook some amount of quality, and put up with some inconvenience for great customer service. A smiling face, a genuine interest in the customer and a high level of competence always works wonders.

Dirty/Run-Down Facilities

The best product in the world won't sell if it is in the wrong packaging. Local businesses need to understand that. People are more "facility aware" than ever. Thanks to HGTV and Food Network, everyone is a fashion/design critic. People will not return to a dirty establishment.

Poor/No Marketing

"I put a sign out front. That should be enough." No. It isn't. The human mind is far more fragmented than it ever has been. Reaching people who are overwhelmed with events and messages need to be reached more directly and more often. The sad part for a local business is there are many low/no cost marketing tools that go unused every day.

What Are We Supposed to Do?

If you are in business to serve the community, or members of it, you are a community leader. As the community grows and flourishes, your business will reap the benefits.

When we enter a business that suffers one of the above deficiencies, we should be willing to have a heart-to-heart with the owner. Keep in mind, that it takes a good relationship and a great deal of trust for someone to accept constructive criticism.

"Your staff is rude to customers."

"Have you thought about painting the walls to bring things up to date?"

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“People are noticing the lower quality of your product as of late.”

“There is a moldy smell in here.”

“When are you going to replace the light in your sign?”

Questions and statements like these are tough to give and tough to receive. They should not be given “off the cuff” or in front of customers/clients.

However, the most important thing you can say is, “I want to help if you will let me.”

All business leaders have something of value they can share with other business leaders. Some have accounting and cost control abilities, while others may have a great grasp of marketing and customer service.

Working together, local businesses can draw on one another's strengths, for the betterment of all. Can you imagine what our cities and towns might look like if we actually worked together in this manner?

Sometimes, though, businesses closed regardless of what we do to save them. But there is a certain level of satisfaction knowing we didn't just stand by and watch it happen.

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