

Women Entrepreneur Guest Blogger

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Boost Your Customer Service. Add WOMP and Find Apostles

By: Hilary Kaye | 04/26/2010

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My last post from the WPO [conference](#) left off with the thought that you'd better have more apostles than terrorists in your corner if you're going to succeed. That may sound like a no-brainer, but it seems that for many companies, this customer service axiom is oh-so-hard to do. Customer service seems to be a lost art these days, but Neeli Bendapudi, professor of marketing at the Fisher College of [Business](#) at Ohio State University, had some good thoughts to share.

An energetic Bendapudi captured those of us in her audience with everything a good speaker needs: great content and a powerful, entertaining delivery. I can only imagine that her classes at Ohio State are packed. Her topic, customer apostles, had applications for all, whether we sell products or services.

Cutting to the heart of [customer service](#), Bendapudi urged us to find out who loves our product or service, understand what they want from our company, and then deliver.

It's quite simple, but Bendapudi says most companies use a production orientation rather than a marketing orientation, i.e. focusing on attributes vs. benefits. "Your customers are asking, 'What can YOU do for ME?' Look at your product through THEIR eyes, not yours."

For those who learn how to do this, **WOMP--Word Of Mouth Power**, is the answer. But there is both positive and negative WOMP, communicated by either your apostles (those who absolutely love your product or service and will do everything they can to tell people of their love) or your terrorists (those who have had a bad experience with you and can't wait to tell others of their unhappiness). When you have a huge pile of apostles and only a few straggling terrorists, you've got it made. I know I'm going to check on my apostle head count when I get back to the office!

Here are a few brief thoughts culled from Bendapudi's talk:

- [Companies need](#) to be "Gumby"--in other words, become flexible in your approach, morphing and changing as needed to achieve optimum WOMP.
- Make sure you are leading a learning and teaching organization. "If you empower dummies, you will get bad decisions."
- Pay close attention to complaints: Most people don't complain; instead of letting you know, they complain with their wallet or their feet. So if they do complain, consider it a gift.
- And if they DO complain, handle it right. Remember the acronym **LAST**: Listen, Apologize, Solve The Problem, Thank Them.
- A crisis is a terrible thing to waste--it's a perfect time to make the changes you need to make. Again, good can come out of a bad situation.