

...REALLY...THE BEST RETENTION STRATEGY  
IS ALWAYS TRUMPED BY A CUSTOMER'S  
NEW RIDING LAWN MOWER...



## Handle With Care

By Tom Comi

Have you heard about the 15-year-old boy who operated his own lawn-mowing service? Once a year he would disguise his voice and call his customers on the phone.

**Boy:** "Hi, I mow lawns, and I was wondering if you need somebody to take care of yours."

**Customer:** "Thank you, but we already have somebody who mows our lawn."

**Boy:** "Can I ask you if you are happy with the current service you are receiving?"

**Customer:** "Yes, the boy we hired is doing a very good job."

**Boy:** "Thank you for your time. That's all I needed to hear."

Now some might wonder why the boy found the need to check in on his customers, but it stands to reason that maintaining current clientele can be just as important as adding new customers—if not more so.

I had the fortune of interviewing customer retention expert Shep Hyken last year for an article in this magazine. He explained that storage owners always have to ask themselves why their customers are doing business with them and not the facility down the street.

"These become your competitive differentiators, part of your brand promise," Hyken said. "Why would a customer leave? Is it price? Is it service? Is it just that they don't need your service anymore?"

Hyken said business owners often spend too much time and money focusing on adding new customers and not enough time keeping their current ones happy.

"It costs much more to get a new customer than to keep an existing customer," he explained. "If you are losing business to the competition, you must examine everything you are doing. If you are good, you shouldn't lose a customer to competition."

It's also paramount to never assume your customers are satisfied. It's your job to not only ensure their happiness but to inquire as to how they feel about the service you are providing.

A recent study commissioned by the White House Office of Consumer Affairs concluded that 96 percent of people who have a complaint will not complain to the people with whom they do business. Instead, they complain to their friends, neighbors and colleagues. So, not only are you losing current customers due to poor service, you are potentially losing prospective customers due to poor word of mouth.

The young lawn care provider I mentioned previously was savvy enough to know the difference between a content customer and a loyal customer. Now, if only I could find a way to get in touch with him to mow my lawn. ❖