



# Episode 17:

## At Your Service: How to Keep Your Customers Coming Back For More

[A transcript of this episode.](#)

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Welcome to the Professional Website Investors' Podcast, the show where we talk about what it takes to successfully buy, operate, scale, and sell a thriving e-commerce business.

When it comes to doing business online, we believe that buying an existing website is far superior to building one from scratch. So, if you're a career professional who's looking to become an e-commerce store owner, listening to this show will give you the knowledge, tools, and community support you need to be successful.

I'm your host, Ryan Cowden. This week we're joined by Ian Bond from ProfessionalWebsiteInvestors.com. In this episode of the Professional Website Investor Podcast, Ian and I discuss how to design an online experience that converts users into loyal customers.

It's a crowded marketplace out there. The internet is full of websites offering what you offer. The amount of choices can be elating and overwhelming to online shoppers. Just getting people away from Amazon to your store is a small victory, so how will you get them to stay? In the constant shuffle of online advertising and marketing, why will people choose your store over another? One of the best ways to find and retain customers is the attention you give them, the service they receive, and the experience they have when they interact with you and your brand. How do you create that experience for your customers? How do you design a user experience that creates

loyalty in a highly competitive market?

On this episode, you'll hear an overarching philosophy to guide your customer service. This includes Ian's advice to be helpful through providing great content, and to be everywhere by providing multiple ways for customers to see your product. Next, we'll discuss some helpful content that will create a happy customer experience, including a strong About Us page and publishing product guides for your users. Then, we'll talk about some excellent customer support advice for your virtual assistants, including how to use emails and templates to structure client interactions. After that, Ian shares some advice on how to keep customer interactions positive, which is to focus on the question being asked, and to communicate your effort to resolve the problem. Finally, we'll share some problem solving techniques for times when customers aren't happy, which include providing discounts and working with suppliers to handle returns.

If you're ready to improve your customer service experience across your entire platform, then this is one episode you won't want to miss. There's a lot of actionable advice in this episode, so grab something to write with, because you're going to want to take notes. As always, I'll be back on the other side to wrap up any loose ends. So, without any further ado, here's my conversation with Ian Bond.

RYAN: Okay Ian, welcome back to the show. How's it going?

IAN: Ryan, it's never been better here in the sunny middle. What's it like in ... I guess sunny Southern California?

RYAN: It's pretty sunny. It's temperate. Step outside, it's in the 80s.

IAN: Oh wow.

RYAN: Kind of boring actually.

IAN: My daughter was just out in West Hollywood, I guess, so if you're in that area. She had the time of her life. She got back to a snow storm in Washington DC, so ...

RYAN: We're in our own world out here. It's ...

IAN: Yeah, so she said, "Dad, that's where I'm moving to."

RYAN: For sure.

IAN: So, for what it's worth ...

RYAN: Well, we have a great topic today.

IAN: We do.

RYAN: I'm excited to dive into this. You're going to press me a little bit.

IAN: Yeah, yeah.

RYAN: ... some secrets.

IAN: I want to know your secrets, yeah, because we're talking about customer service. We want customers to have a good experience when they come to our websites. We want them coming back after they interact with our website and with us. Before we dive into the specifics, I'd like to know, is there an overarching philosophy or idea that you have regarding customer service?

RYAN: Yeah, so the episode's title is At Your Service: How to Keep Customers Coming Back for More. I think there are two, count them, two strategies that we employ generally. One is to be helpful, and two is to be everywhere. We can dive into that.

IAN: Okay, great.

RYAN: What does that mean, first of all, just being helpful, how would you define that?

IAN: Sure, so we talked in a recent podcast episode of having the best pages on the internet, right? The best pages are the best product page, the

best collection page, the best brand page, really get people to buy into the brand. Then I also talked about other content, and other content, that may be things like shopping guides, or buyers guides, or installation guides. Those last few appeal to people are very much at the top of the funnel, and they rank really well to get people to come to your site. They also are very helpful at capturing people's email addresses. Getting people to come to your site, you not only get to cookie them, so that you can track them around the internet, but you can also get their email address.

In terms of being helpful, in the process of going from being a suspect of being one of your clients to being a true process, people have to do a lot of information gathering. You want to be early in the process of helping people gather the information they need. Again, I've given compliments to the people that do Amazon Affiliate sites. I think they're quite good at helping educate people, and help people do comparison shopping. I think people that do high-ticket drop shipping, which is what we do, which is high air price things, a minimum of \$500, average price is above \$1,000. The higher up you go, the more information that needs to be gathered. Being helpful is doing that. It's doing the SEO piece. It's obviously having knowledgeable customer service people that can return phone calls or return emails, and give people the answers to frequently asked questions, or quickly contact people and offer to followup. That is absolutely a lost art on the internet. People just don't do that. We do it.

When we get an abandoned cart, which we get a fair number of, we will respond to people and tell them, it is in stock and ready to ship, or it's not in stock and here are three alternatives. We try to be helpful doing that.

Any way that you can think of to be helpful to the customer, either on the page, through the SEO that I mentioned, through the guides, to things like frequently asked questions, those are all things that I would think fall into the bucket of being as helpful as you can, helping people get the information and the advice that they need. Because oftentimes, in addition to information, they want to speak to a human being to get advice. 'What about this versus that' kind of a question. It could be on your site, matter of fact, I was just going back and forth with one of the guys that we work with this morning, and someone called up and of course we have the answer on the site, but people will dial the number and just because maybe they didn't find

it, or maybe they just want to hear somebody's voice. They're about to spend a fair amount of money, and as much as we try to make it something where we don't have to be involved, sometimes somebody does have to be home, involved.

RYAN: Those are all things I think fit into the 'be helpful' category.

IAN: Okay.

RYAN: You've said before that that's part of your business strategy, that's part of how you differentiate yourself from these big chains, providing that very helpful-

IAN: Yeah, absolutely.

As we've mentioned before, one of our big focuses is on home furnishings. We love things around the house. Americans are crazy about lots of things, but their home is one of them. Try to call up the guy at Home Depot on aisle three and get ... who has just some ridiculous array of merchandise, and get some kind of a detailed response. I think we can crush the competition. Being very niche-focused in what we do. We are not a superstore. We are doing niche authority types of sites where we are really experts in what we sell, and it shows. Because you can't go there and buy ... It's not a Sears Department Store, although they don't exist anymore. But it's not like that. It's not like at Home Depot. They're very focused on specific niches, so we're that expert.

RYAN: Okay, got you. That's 'be helpful.' What do you mean by 'be everywhere?' What does that mean?

IAN: Well, there's a statistic, and I don't know how accurate this is, that for people to purchase, they need to see you and your brand six, seven, or eight times. They may come to your site, which then allows ... Well, they do come to your site. Once they come to your site, you have a few opportunities. First of all, you're going to cookie them. Secondly ... You're going to track them around the internet using retargeting strategies, both on Google and sometimes on Facebook. We will always use Google. Facebook is a little bit less, I think, been a little less successful for us. I do think that

people spend so much time on Facebook that it makes sense. We try to keep it to a minimum. Just showing up on Facebook is okay, but we're putting more effort around Google. People are on ... We've all been followed around by Google when we've gone shopping for something.

As a side note, it never ceases to amaze me how when I go to a competitor's site, I don't get followed around, so that there are people that are not doing this. It's amazing to me. It's incredibly effective, so you go shopping for a site and you don't see them show up in the New York Times or some other webpage that you're going to with a Google Ad, they're not retargeting you, and that's a big opportunity. That is one strategy, the retargeting strategy.

If you go on site and, I just mentioned, we have these helpful guides, and you give us your email address, now you will be in our email funnel. We will be touching you every ... We have a set schedule. We will be sending you more information, probably one of the guides, or more information about things that we know that you have an interest in. We'll ultimately be making you an offer some time down the line for some kind of a discount. We do use email marketing, so I think that that's a really good strategy.

One of the things that we started to develop going back about 18 months ago, which has been quite helpful, is YouTube. YouTube is a phenomenal search engine, second largest search engine in the world. Now, anything that we can do in videos, and we do a fair amount of video, reviews, either product reviews or collection reviews, we will post on YouTube, and so we can advertise on YouTube, and you can find us on YouTube, so we try to attract people by using YouTube. I was actually looking at our numbers last night and things that we posted going back 18 months ago, it's amazing the number of views that people ... that we've gotten. I think ultimately, that's probably led to some of the direct searches that we've had that have converted into sales.

Those are just three examples of 'be everywhere.' We have got a Pinterest strategy, so for a store that is ... We think it's an incredible candidate for Pinterest, so that's another tangent strategy that might be applicable to some people. Be helpful, be everywhere, and I think that's the one-two punch.

RYAN: Okay, great.

RYAN: In terms of specifically things you want to have on your site to help people, you mentioned having an FAQ page for frequently asked questions. Is there anything else that you think your website should have, just to enhance that customer service experience?

IAN: Yes.

IAN: I go back and ... I think there's a laundry list of things, there's a check list of things. Obviously, you want to have a very strong About Us page, people do want to know who you are, what your story is. That's very important. I mentioned that we ... For our top selling products, for our top selling suppliers, we want to have the best on the internet pages for their best products, for the best collections for our best brands. We want to have those. We do want to have that other content that I mentioned, which is things like comparisons within a brand, or within a collection. There may be different styles, and we can do a compare and contrast. This one has more storage than that one. That one has a different design feature than another one. Things like that. We like to do that. The installation guides, the buyer's guides, where we compare different brands and what we think they're good for.

We look for, obviously, the most searched terms in the niche that we're in, and then we write content to, we think, help people make a better decision or to enlighten them, and then that obviously allows us to cookie them to the extent that they give us their email address. We can do email marketing for them, and so it all works seamlessly together. But on page FAQs are awesome. About Us page too. These are the best on the internet pages for your products, for your collections, for your brand. Then these guides are wonderful and we spend a lot of time doing that. We work very closely with our suppliers on those to make sure that we've captured everything, so ...

Yo, by the way, since the suppliers are your lifeblood, it's a wonderful opportunity for you to partner with your suppliers and show them that you love them and that you appreciate them. Then, we always take the opportunity to ask to get their "Where to Buy" page. Then that provides us

with an additional link that Google will recognize and make our content and our listings even more relevant, so it's a virtual circle, really.

RYAN: Okay, great.

RYAN: One of the themes that you talk a lot about on this podcast is outsourcing work to virtual assistants or virtual employees. I want to know, how do you include your virtual assistants and virtual employees in customer service?

IAN: Well, as I've said before, we live in a part of the world where we're sleeping when America's shopping. Our employees are handling 90%-plus of the customer service related issues. My wife will often quarterback an issue that arises. It may be a question that she uniquely knows the answer to, and she can provide. It may be something that came in late in the shift and we want to respond to it, we can send an email back. We like to do as much communication as we can through email as opposed to phone. As a matter of fact, when you call our phone number, we will ask you to email us at Support@ or Sales@ whatever the website is. It's very hard to get hold of people, they often don't answer their phone when they don't recognize the number.

If you put something in their inbox, they can look at it at their leisure, which is, I think really important. We try to be as helpful as we can at contacting people that way. Since we've templated everything out for our VAs, it's very easy for them to take a template and engineer and construct a response for people on something that would be a normal inquiry that we would get. We use our VAs to do all of our customer service. We do have someone now that we call a Sales Manager, and that allows our VAs to say we're going to have a sales manager call you, because that's a technical question that I think that he can answer better.

We're especially employing this as we move from the \$1,000 - \$1,200 average price point to \$3,500 - \$5,000 average price point. Especially where things become more ... very high-end retail and B2B. When you get into that realm, you need to have another level of sophistication, I think, in the advice that you provide, and without being sexist, oftentimes a male voice.



RYAN: Okay, okay.

RYAN: When you train your employees for how to handle the customers, one of the things that's important is you want to keep all the interactions positive. ... excuse me. You want to keep all the interactions positive, but sometimes when people reach out for customer service, they're not in a great mood all the time. What kind of things do you tell your VAs to keep the interaction positive?

IAN: I think we face this every day, so it's a great question. The reality is, if I've heard my wife say this once, I've heard her say it 1,000, 10,000 times. It is to really try to read what the question is being asked and address the question. So often, so often, particularly with VAs, so often there is a ... I don't know, a general approach where they don't really address the question, they don't really further the issue in the mind of the client. Nothing is more frustrating for someone who's reached out to customer service to find out about something, particularly if they've already ordered, and not get the answer they're looking for. It's better to say that we're checking and we're coming back than to offer what is really not an answer, a non-answer.

The first thing we do is try to really coach people to get to the real crux of the question and address it. There's no shame in saying that I don't know the answer, we'll have to maybe come back to them with an answer. That's not a problem. It's a horrible experience for someone to get what is a non-answer that doesn't look like they're going to follow up on it anymore. That's horrible.

The question you didn't ask, which is what happens when something goes wrong, that's a whole other remediation kind of conversation, and how do we remediate things. We do the best we can, and there are several strategies to do that, but I think the intention of your question was, how do you try to stay on the positive side before you get there. The best way to do that is to answer the questions that people have as completely as you can. You've all kinds of resources available. I just mentioned a situation where the answer was literally on our website, so we keep track of all the frequently asked questions. We have those resources, we have those answers, and we have templates for people to either respond in email or to return the phone call if it's a phone call.

RYAN: Okay, cool.

IAN: Well, you hinted at what my next question is going to be, which is the remediation piece. What does that look like when there really is a problem that you have to step in and solve?

IAN: The practical piece of remediation is that what has happened is the customer may have received something and, more than likely, there might be some damage or there might be something that doesn't necessarily fit perfectly their expectations. Now, since ... I'll just use our largest store where all of the great bulk of the suppliers bring goods into the Port of Los Angeles, these things ship, and 75%-plus of the country lives in the central in Mid-Western time zones. We've shipped it already across the country, it's opened up, and it doesn't meet the customer's expectations. Literally the best option that you have is to provide them with some kind of a discount so that they do not return it, because they've already stated to you it doesn't meet their expectations. This is not a situation where someone has by choice decided that they don't want it. This is not buyer's remorse. This is something that's fallen short of their expectations, and you clearly have some culpability.

The best thing you could do is try to figure out how you can do a trade where you can maybe discount it for them. If there is a situation where we can get the supplier to chip in for that, we're always working with the suppliers. That happens if there's some kind of a minor chip or some kind of a defect, we'll get the suppliers to contribute to that, we'll contribute to it. But it's normally a heck of a lot cheaper than shipping it back across the country and then getting it restocked. Since the way that suppliers accept things is only in the original packaging, it can be very challenging to send things back to suppliers.

One of the good things about running a high volume business is that this is a very low percentage of the orders that we process on a monthly basis. Some months we go without any. But we've had to learn that the first thing you want to do is try and cut a deal and move on with your life.

RYAN: Okay, right. Right.

RYAN: All right, so to sum it up, what's your overarching approach to making sure that the customer has a good experience with your website?

IAN: I think it goes back to providing the best and most helpful information and advice that you can. You can do that through lots of different ways. Trying to track them to come back, trying to send them targeted things. Then I have said that we really exist because we provide an excellent upfront experience with information and advice. Then because we're in home furnishings, a lot of the things we do in home furnishings, and we're shipping big, bulky things and there's an expectation, a lot of times, that there's a window that needs to be ... installation window because it might be part of a remodeling project, is the shipping logistics. We spend a lot of time providing people with followup on the shipping logistics. We literally, depending on what's going on, have multi-touch points during that process. That makes us unique in the niches that we operate in against the big box guys, and even against the online-only internet retailers. They just don't spend the time doing it.

We think if we put ourselves in the minds of the customers and what are they concerned about, we think that that gives us a leg up, because we're thinking like trusted authorities in a very narrow niche, and we have the luxury to put ourselves in the shoes of our customers and maybe presume what they might ask next.

RYAN: Okay.

RYAN: Ian, that was really helpful. Thank you so much. I guess we'll see you next week on another episode.

IAN: My pleasure, and thank you so much for your time today, Ryan. It's great to reconnect.

RYAN: Yeah, same here. All right, see you.

IAN: Thanks.

RYAN: All right folks, there you have it. That wraps up my conversation with Ian Bond of Professional Website Investors. He shared a ton of valuable

insights and advice today on how to provide an amazing customer experience to turn users into loyal customers. We also shared some tools and resources which will all be linked up in the show notes at [ProfessionalWebsiteInvestors.com](https://ProfessionalWebsiteInvestors.com).

I hope you enjoyed our conversation. Please consider subscribing, sharing with a friend, or leaving us a review in your favorite podcast directory. Until next time, best of luck in all that you do, and we look forward to seeing you on the next episode of The Professional Website Investor Podcast.

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