SPIREON - CUSTOMER SERVICE GUIDE

5 Ways Plumbing Companies Can Provide 5-Star Customer Service

Customers can be your strongest advertising tool or your biggest liability. Customers who are delighted by your service will keep you in mind and recommend you to neighbors and friends. These word-of-mouth referrals are a highly effective – and completely free – form of advertising. But to get them, you need to meet and exceed your customers' expectations. The numbers prove that plumbing businesses who treat customer service as an afterthought may be making a costly mistake:

15 vs. 11

Americans will tell an average of 15 people about a poor service experience, versus the 11 people they'll tell about a good experience.

7 of 10

7 out of 10 consumers say they've spent more money to do business with a company that delivers great service.

+5%

Increasing customer retention rates by 5% can increase profits by over 25%.

33%

33% of Americans say they'll consider switching companies after just a single instance of poor service.

Great customer service is essential if plumbing companies want to stand out from their competition and earn repeat business. For this reason, smart companies are utilizing GPS-based fleet management technology to create impactful and memorable customer experiences. With the right technology, you can enhance and automate communication touchpoints with your customers, speed up your response time, and improve on areas that are typically a pain point for customers, like long or vague appointment windows.

In this guide, we'll highlight five ways you can deliver customer experiences that your clients will remember, and your competition will struggle to match.

1. MAKE A POSITIVE FIRST IMPRESSION WITH PRECISE ARRIVAL TIMES

Whether your plumbing company uses dedicated CSRs or combines dispatching and customer service into one role, your CSRs are the first point of contact customers have with your company and they set the tone for the entire conversation. They need to be professional, address concerns, and find any way to turn a customer's day around.

With GPS tracking enabled, your dispatchers or dedicated CSRs can provide white glove service from the initial phone call. When a call comes in, your team can look at a real-time map, see exactly where each of your drivers are and provide customers with an accurate arrival times. Not only will this give customers peace of mind knowing the exact time a tech will arrive to help, but there's a certain 'wow' factor by being able to instantly answer your customer's questions.

Fleet tracking software can also help you solve the four-hour, sometimes even eight-hour long appointment window problem that plagues the home service industry. When you give a customer a four-hour appointment window, a big chunk of his day is spent sitting at home waiting for your tech to arrive.

> Schedule accuracy and fleet utilization directly affect appointment window arrival times, and in turn, have a direct impact on customer's perceptions of your company.

With a fleet tracking system in place, you always know where your drivers are, their proximity to the next customer's location, and what the traffic looks like around them. This information allows you to become more granular about scheduling and shorten wait times, which improves the overall customer experience. For instance, if you already know how long a particular job is going to take and how long the travel time is to the next job site, you can use this information to create a more precise appointment window, instead of scheduling in four or eight-hour blocks. While this may seem like a small gesture, it won't be to any customer who has ever had to cancel their plans or take time off work. By solving the notorious appointment window problem, you can enhance your customer service and go a long way in setting yourself apart from the competition.

2. SPEED UP RESPONSE TIMES

Customers don't like to wait, especially plumbing customers suffering from a burst pipe or sewage overflow. As a business that deals with a uniquely impatient clientele, your reputation is based on how quickly you can respond to these calls. To get to jobs as quickly as possible, dispatchers and techs need the ability to share up-to-the-minute location statuses from the field back to the office. Fleet tracking software, like Spireon's FleetLocate, gives your team the insights to speed up response times.

Consider plumbing companies relying on manual dispatching methods. When plumbing operations don't utilize GPS tracking, dispatchers are in the dark, and have to pull off office heroics to figure out which techs are available. Because the clock is ticking, they don't have time to calculate which tech is closest to the job site, and instead, choose whoever picks up the phone first. Dispatching by this method is a time-consuming process that keeps the customer waiting longer than necessary, which can sour the relationship before service has even started.

With fleet tracking systems, managers can pull up the location of their drivers on their desktop or cell phone and determine which drivers are closest to a customer's location. If an emergency call comes in, they can quickly make adjustments on-the-fly, find routes that avoid traffic jams, and prevent long drive times. This helps your team get to jobs quicker and reduces fuel expenses in the process.

3. KEEP CUSTOMERS IN THE LOOP

Your team needs visibility into everything thing that's going on in the field—the good and the bad—so they can manage communications with the customer and earn their trust. Without visibility, your dispatch team won't be aware of issues until they're fielding calls from angry customers demanding to know why their technician is late. At this point, the damage is done, and dispatch must then rush to find a new plumber by calling everyone in the field to see if anyone has time for more jobs. If the customer calls back, dispatch can only provide a rough estimate of arrival based on what the newly scheduled tech has told them, not accounting for traffic conditions or fuel stops. The result: everyone, including the customer, is left in the dark.
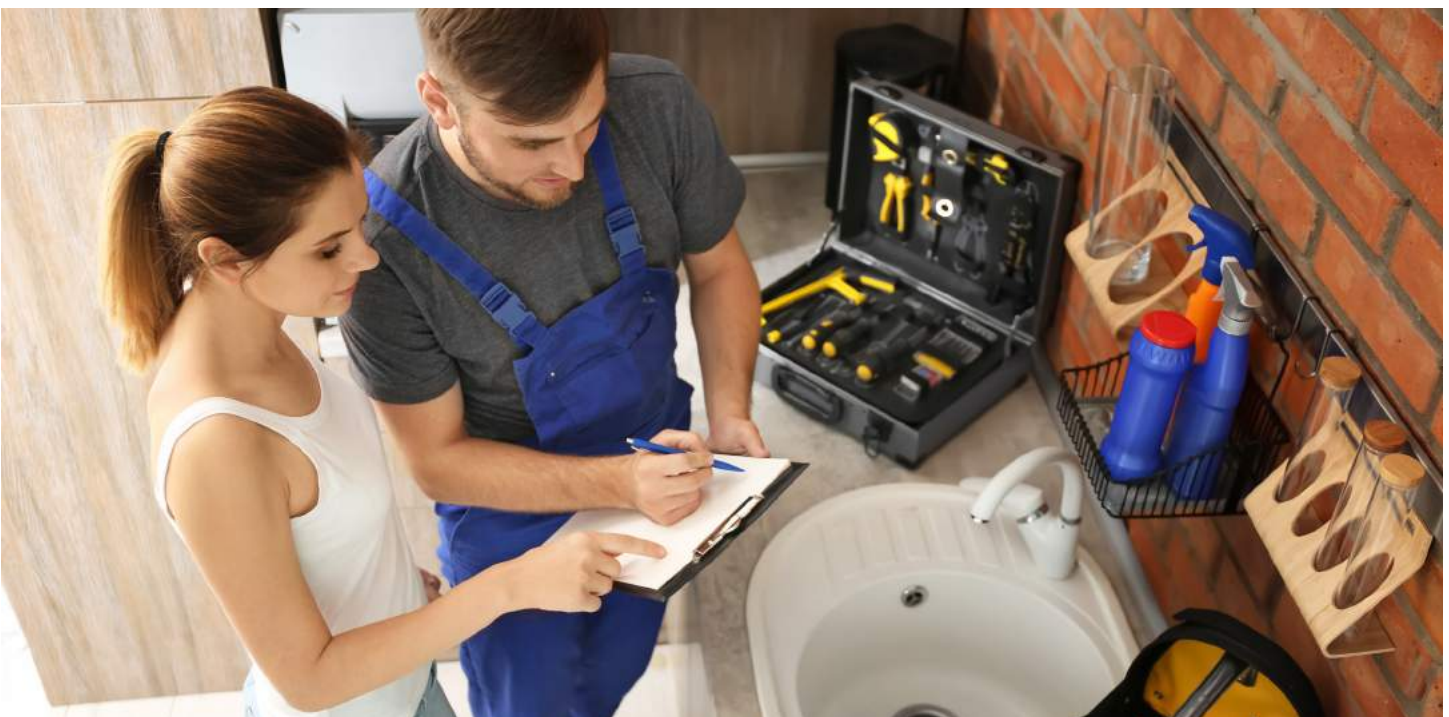
Fleet management software can help bring light to this area. Using GPS tracking, dispatch can see If a technician isn't going to make the agreed upon time arrival window and can adjust accordingly to find the nearest available tech. With access to this information, you can proactively manage customer expectations. If a late arrival is unavoidable, your office or tech can inform the customer of the delay and send them updated arrival times. Keeping them in the loop will show that you seriously value their time and will improve their tolerance for any late arrivals. This extra touch helps you get a better grip on an already delicate situation.

4. IMPROVE FIRST-TIME FIX RATES

A first-time fix rate is the rate at which your technicians resolve customers' problems on the initial visit. When techs fail to resolve the issue the first time around, it means a second call and an unsatisfied customer. These callbacks are costly to your business' reputation and your bottom line.

Callbacks can happen for several reasons. Maybe your techs arrived at the job site only to realize they don't have the necessary tools. Maybe an asset was moved without dispatch communicating that to the tech. Maybe the equipment is malfunctioning or out of power. Whatever the case, it's important to aim for a high first-time fix rate. According to a recent survey by JD Power and Associates, "Customers whose issues are not fixed correctly the first time are more than twice as likely to indicate they will switch providers than those whose issues are fixed during the first technician visit."

> Unprepared staff and failure to fix on the first visit conveys incompetence to a customer, severely reducing any chance of return business or new business from word-of-mouth referrals.

When you have a high first-time fix rate, you're avoiding additional trips and the additional expenses that go along with that—the wasted fuel, the extra labor, and the lost job opportunities. In an effort to improve first-time fix rates, many plumbing companies are investing in asset tracking systems. This allows companies to track heavy machinery that's essential to completing a job, like generators, hydro jetters, compressors, and vacuum pumps. Additionally, dispatch can make sure the right tech is equipped with the right equipment for the job, reducing callbacks and fuel wasted on return trips to the warehouse. With an effective asset tracking system in place, you know your teams will have the equipment and information they need to get the job done right the first time.

5. HANDLE CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS PROFESSIONALLY

Everyone has heard the adage, "the customer is always right". However, anyone in the plumbing industry can tell you that's not always the case. From the customer who wants to start a war over pricing to the customer who wants to micro-manage a project, you're going to hear your fair share of complaints.

Handling customer disputes is a difficult balance. On one hand, you have to defend your work. On the other, you have to address customers concerns before they go to the keyboard and leave you a negative review—something that can turn away prospective clients.

Without access to the right data, plumbing companies have to rely on their techs account of the story, which can result in a "he said, she said situation" come billing time. This puts a strain on customer relationships and the last thing you want to do is risk losing their business to a competitor.

Beyond improving response times and first-time fix rates, fleet tracking software can also help with complaint resolution. For instance, if a customer calls to dispute the actual time an employee spent at their home, you can pull up a report on-the-spot that confirms the exact arrival time and departure from a job site. You can share this report with customers and address their concerns with an accurate response. When you have concrete data to back up your billing, you can take the emotion out of disputes and show customers that you're holding your employees accountable and providing a fair rate.

CONCLUSION

Top tier plumbing companies are those that offer more than quality work, but also stellar customer service. Your service team could use the highest quality materials and provide the best work in your region, but all of this will go unnoticed if you don't treat your customers right.

If you want to stay successful in this competitive market, selling your plumbing services alone or low balling on prices won't cut it. When a competitor is just a click away, you need to do more to stand out from the crowd. The key to coming out on top, earning more of the market share, and differentiating yourself from the competition is by investing in customer service.

Ensuring that your CSRs and field techs have the tools that enable them to effectively respond to customers is central to providing consistently excellent service experiences. For this reason, many plumbing companies are adding fleet tracking software, like Spireon's FleetLocate, to their toolbelt. Beyond reducing fleet expenses, fleet tracking software helps plumbing companies improve their customer service to ensure the repeat business and positive reviews and word-of-mouth referrals that fuel growth.

FleetLocate helps you optimize fleet operations, reduce fuel costs, and keep customers happy. Talk with a fleet management specialist or request a demo at **Spireon.com/fleet-management.**