Distinguishing Your Rental Business with Customer Service

An e-Book by **Zillow Rentals**

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Distinguishing Your Rental Business with Customer Service

Rentals are in demand. Not only does this bring in more business, but it also creates competition. As more rental properties are developed, it becomes increasingly important for you to have a distinguishable business.

When tenants start comparing properties line-by-line, many of them start to look similar. Tenants prioritize customer service during their apartment search because it's an indicator of the experience the tenant will have living in the property. You can help distinguish and position your business as desirable among tenants by providing high-quality customer service to improve tenant experience.

We're all customers. We all know what happens when we receive poor service: we leave. Tenants are no exception. According to a study by the National Apartment Association, 32.6 percent of tenants leave their current rental property for controllable reasons. Customer service was one of the top reasons for a resident's relocation. Property management companies and landlords that choose to skimp on customer service will have a high turnover rate or struggle to fill vacancies.

In contrast, excellent customer service results in tenant satisfaction. In this guide, we're going to discuss how you can maximize profits, retain tenants, and separate your business from competitors using customer service.

Be approachable and personable.

If you don't seem friendly, tenants won't want to have a relationship with you. Tenants avoid signing leases with property managers or landlords

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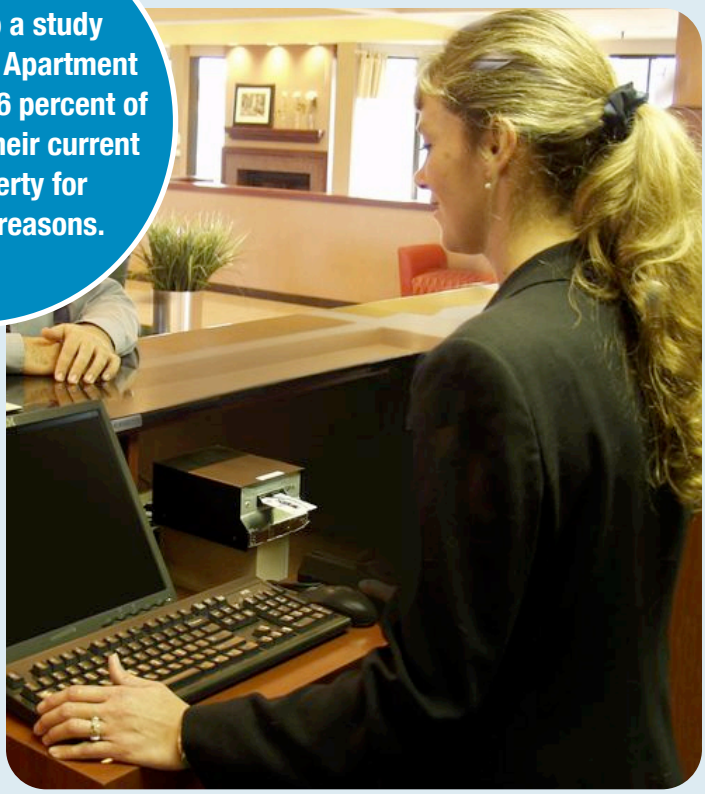

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who are unapproachable or unfriendly because it's an indicator of a negative relationship with the property management in the future.

Communication demeanor as an indicator. Tenants want approachable property managers and landlords because they want to know they're going to receive help when needed. One tenant said, "We started to look at the response time and analyze their demeanor when they were on the phone. We wanted someone who would help us if we had situations like noise. We wanted someone we think is going to be fair to us." This means that tenants are using your communication style to judge whether they want to work with you, so be sure you sound warm and welcoming every time you talk to tenants.

Watch your non-verbal communication. When talking to tenants, communicate your attentiveness and interest in them through both verbal and non-verbal communication. This means, your posture and body language must indicate your interest in them. Give them good eye contact to give them your full attention. Most importantly, make sure that you smile. Smiling impacts your tone of voice and shows tenants you're happy to help them.

Use communication etiquette. Tenants are easily offended if you're rude. Don't interrupt tenants mid-sentence. This only shows that you have no patience and you're a lousy listener. Let your tenants speak first, listen, and then respond.

Listen to your tenants.

Nothing is more frustrating than telling a property manager about your needs or problems only to find out that they weren't listening to you. Failing to listen shows tenants that you're not paying attention or even worse: you don't care.

Don't tune out or rush them. Although it may be difficult to listen to one concern after another from

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tenants, tuning them out or rushing them through their story can be dangerous. They're trying to tell you what they feel is important information, and if you miss something, you'll risk offending them. Instead, listen to what your tenants are saying and patiently let tenants finish their statements. This will help you avoid asking redundant questions that will annoy your tenants.

Repeat what you heard to show understanding. To show that you understand what your tenants are telling you, repeat what they said in your own words. For example, if a tenant complains about the noisy tenants next door, say, "So to my understanding, you're having difficulties sleeping at night because your neighbors are loud during quiet hours." Retelling your tenant's stories lets tenants know that you understand what they're telling you.

Empathize. When tenants raise concerns, they'll feel comforted knowing that you understand what they're going through. Sincerely acknowledging how a tenant feels can diffuse emotions. This can help when your have an upset, angry, or emotional tenant on your hands. You can do this by starting what you say with, "I understand you feel…" This affirms the tenant's feelings and shows that you're on the same page.

Be responsible and accountable.

When tenants have a problem or issue, they're not coming to you to receive blame. You need to be accountable, which is taking responsibility for your company's actions and decisions. Accountability is key to providing outstanding customer service and customer satisfaction.

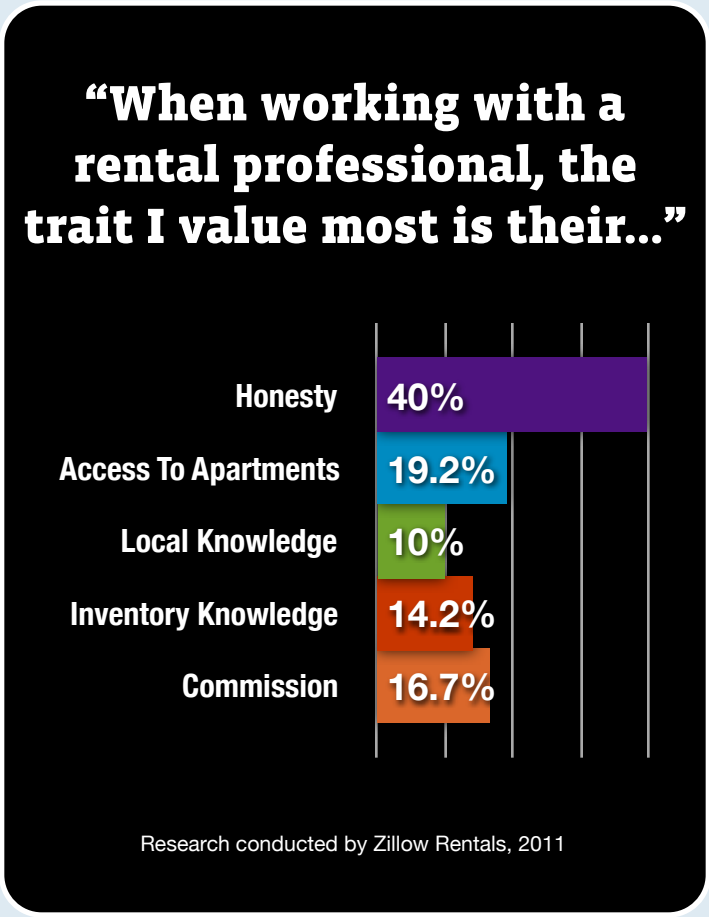
Don't lie. No matter what, do not lie to your tenants. Lying and dishonesty is one of the most undesirable qualities of property managers. According to a RentJuice study of tenants, 40 percent of tenants said honesty was the most important quality in rental professionals. Lying to tenants breaks their trust in you, giving them reason to not trust you with anything. Unless you're willing to risk ruining your relationship with tenants, don't do it.

Take responsibility. One of the worst things you could say to a tenant when they have an issue is to tell them it's their fault, give an excuse, or blame others, causing tenants to feel they cannot trust you. Although nobody likes to be blamed for anything, be willing to admit mistakes when something goes wrong with the property or service.

Create a culture for accountability. As a professional rental business, you and your employees are expected to carry out your responsibilities. People choose to not be accountable for their actions largely because they're afraid of failure. Set expectations and business goals for your property managing company and employees. Encourage open communication with employees and provide feedback as needed. Don't hone in only on negative feedback, discouraging accountability, but also provide positive feedback to boost company morale and to advocate taking ownership of one's actions.

Be responsive and follow through.

When tenants turn to you with their needs, they don't want to be brushed off. They want to be heard, and action to be taken. In a RentJuice survey of tenants, when asked what they felt was the most important quality when



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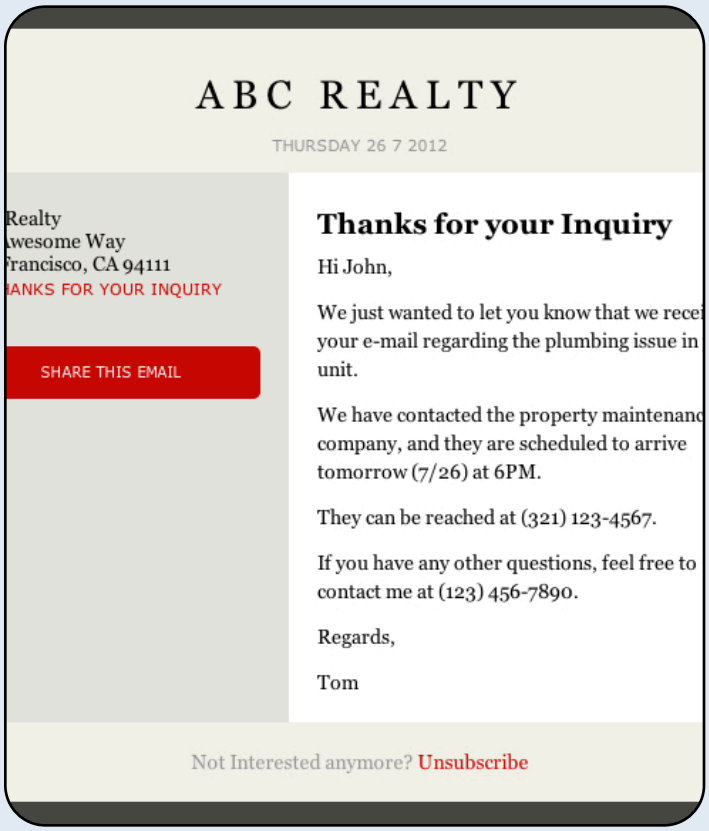


working with a property management company, 30 percent said "responsive customer service." Tenants want to know that they're going to receive prompt, some response should concerns ever arise.

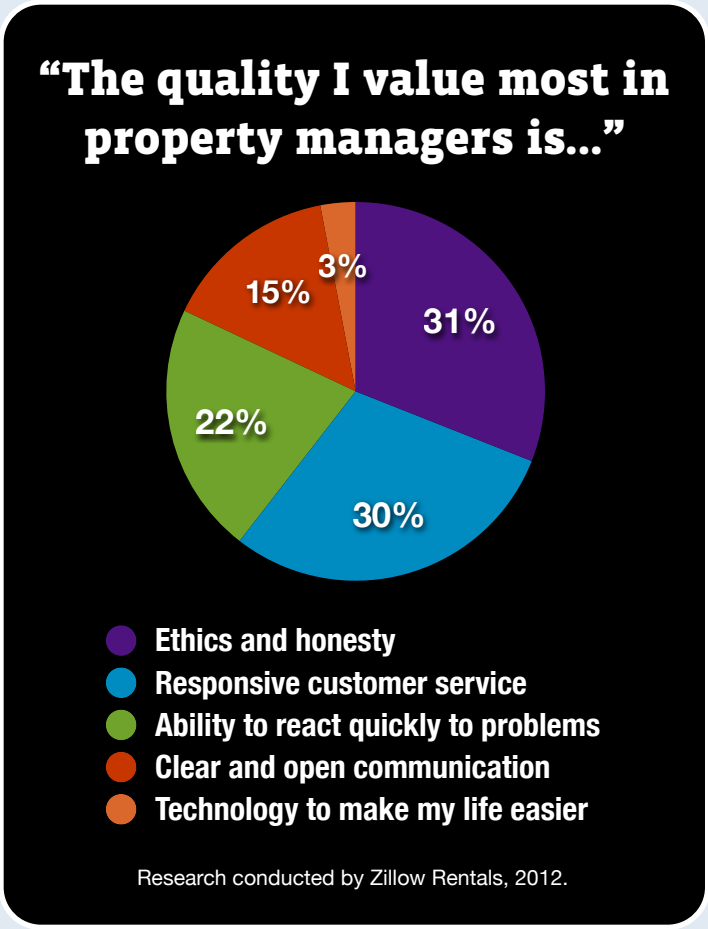
Respond even if you don't have answers. Tenants who don't receive answers or a response within the expected time quickly become unhappy and sometimes angry. Even if you don't have all the answers for them right away, it's important for you to acknowledge your tenant's concerns to show that you're not ignoring them.

Send professional e-mails. Tenants that e-mail questions or requests expect professional responses, so your e-mails should look that way. Use a template e-mail that uses your company's branding colors that syncs to your property management software. E-mails sent from you will align with your brand, so tenants know that they're working with a professional rental business.

Set response time expectations. If your tenants expect repairs to be made in 3 hours after their request, this may seem unreasonable. Make sure that both parties are on the same page by establishing response time expectations. Set standards for your rental business by committing to respond within 24 or 48 hours after a concern is addressed. This time should be shorter for emergencies. That way, tenants will know how long to wait for a response, and so that your business is held to reasonable response time standards.

Respond faster than expected. Every rental company responds to complaints and questions. To make your business more competitive to other businesses, respond faster than what is expected of you. Respond to inquiries within a few hours of receiving it. You can do this by investing in a smartphone to be able to respond to e-mail inquiries as soon as they are sent. You don't even need to provide a solution at this time, but simply acknowledge the call and tell them you will get back to them shortly.

Follow through. A property management company or landlord cannot be successful if they simply hand out empty promises. Tenants hate it when you make commitments and don't actually do it. It disappoints tenants and causes them to drastically lose trust in you. When you commit yourself to completing an action, make sure you follow through and do it.



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Send handwritten greeting cards. Sending handwritten cards are a great personal way to connect with tenants. Send a “welcome” card when the tenants move into the unit. You could even send a card on your tenant’s birthday or for the holidays. Handwritten cards add a strong personal touch, especially in the day and age where e-mails are so much faster and convenient.

Set reminders to alert you. When you have dozens or hundreds of tenants, it’s easy to lose track of all the special events that must be acknowledged. Use your rental marketing software to schedule reminders so you’ll never miss a beat.

Keep it up. It’s worth offering excellent customer service because it keeps tenants happy. When tenants have a great experience from renting from you and are happy with your services, they won’t hesitate to recommend you to their friends and family.

Connect on a personal level.

You don’t need to be best friends with your tenants. Simply acknowledging your tenants and making small, nice gestures will help tenants feel more connected with you. Connecting with tenants on a personal level doesn’t mean you have to take them out to dinner or know their favorite color.

Remember who your tenants are. This one may seem obvious, but is frequently overlooked. Nothing is more embarrassing than talking to a tenant who you don’t know. You can avoid awkward situations like this by getting to know your tenants and develop a real, personal relationship with them. If possible, address your tenants by first name. This makes conversations more personal and makes tenants feel less like a number.

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About Zillow Rentals

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Zillow Rentals connects rental marketers to availabilities being shared by property managers in realtime.

Thousands of leasing agents use Zillow Rentals daily to track and market their vacancies to prospective tenants.

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