

Five lessons in customer service from Action Gear

By  Lauren Hartzenberg

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According to online retailer Action Gear, their passion for outdoor technical products is second only to their love for delivering stellar customer service.



Warrick Kernes

The business started its life in 2010 as Action Cameras SA, becoming the first local company to import GoPro and other action cam brands. In 2013 it evolved into Action Gear, stocking a wider range of products and becoming a leader in the drone market.

In recognition of Action Gear's commitment to customer service, the Johannesburg company scooped first place for Best Customer Service in the 2015 SA eCommerce Awards, going up against industry bigwigs like Takealot.

Founder and managing director Warrick Kernes shared his wisdom on providing authentic customer service at the [Seamless Africa](#) conference in Cape Town this week, summarising all he's learnt into the following five steps.

1. Hire staff with the right potential

Kernes said that when starting out in an e-commerce environment, delivering superior customer service is easy when you're a one- or two-person team, and it's *your* passion and belief in the business that's driving the engagement. But the challenge occurs at scale-up phase, when your team grows and new employees step in to fulfil the supportive roles.

Customer service can then get diluted – perhaps because your employee isn't as passionate about your brand as you are, or they're simply there for the paycheck. Kernes works around this challenge by constantly scouting around for talent and hiring staff who have the right "customer service genes" to begin with.

"We've found the majority of our sales staff by simply keeping our eyes open at all times. You could either hire people and train them, or find the right potential in the beginning," he said.

"If the person serving you coffee downstairs gave you an impressive experience, or you go shopping and you're blown away by the sales person's level of enthusiasm and product knowledge, perhaps you should think about hiring them."

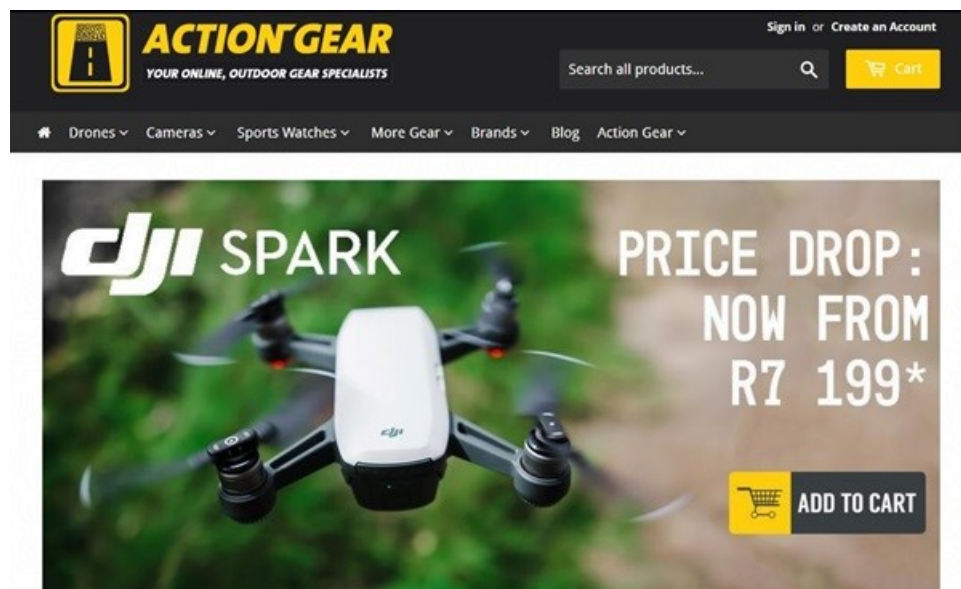
2. Share your team's personality through your website

Kernes noted that in e-commerce, there's a disconnect between the customer and the retail experience. In a physical store, it's simpler for consumers to build relationships with retail staff and have an understanding of who they're buying from, especially in the case of a small business.

To bridge this divide, he suggests showcasing your own personality, and that of your team's, through your website. "A small business with no personality on their site is not one that's going to get sales. It's important to have 'about us' and 'meet the team' areas on your site so that shoppers can get a feel of who they're talking to. It helps them put a face to the name."

He also touched on the importance of a live chat function. "Live chat also helps to bridge the divide, especially when customers are struggling to decide between products. Also, a lot of people shopping during the day are sitting in corporate

offices and can't spend much time on the phone. Live chat is more important than you imagine.”



3. Reward and empower your staff to go above and beyond

“In the first step, we hired people that give good customer service. Now unleash them,” stated Kernes.

Action Gear staff have the freedom to interact with customers in an informal manner. Conversations are genuine and easy-going, which helps to provide shoppers with a more human experience.

He also pointed out that commission structure is important. “Your staff who are offering great customer service are inherently driven to be successful in their own right, and offering commission allows them to push themselves even harder.”

Positive reinforcement is also vital. Give credit where it's due and publicly appreciate the work your employees are doing.

“Our Monday team meetings are started by pinpointing internal examples of customer experiences that went above and beyond. It's positive reinforcement for the person being recognised, but also shows others in the room the kind of service you desire from them.”



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4. Under promise and overdeliver

Kernes spoke about the importance of managing customer expectations and how this can work to one's advantage. “When we deal with our customers, instead of promising the world and then potentially failing, we always undersell our own services and then try to impress them later.”

He referenced Takealot, which many times gives its shoppers a delivery estimate for five days, even if they know they can complete delivery the very next day. “It leaves leeway for mistakes and allows you to impress the customer every time.”

5. Make a fuss about positive experience

Encourage people to give you feedback and then make a fuss about it. “When we receive good feedback, we alert the

team and then we request permission to share it on social media. We print good reviews out, frame them and place them on the 'raving fan wall' in our office. Not only does it make people feel good about themselves, but it encourages a culture of quality customer service."

To discover more about what Action Gear is all about, visit the [online store](#).

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