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## INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY

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### Retailers Cater To Holiday Shoppers, Deliver Top Service

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Let the gobbling begin. Turkey Day signals tasty sales, and service with a smile sticks to shoppers' ribs.

**Wine and dine.** Capturing consumer interest isn't enough. Businesses must offer a great experience to keep them coming back.

That's one takeaway from a recent survey by Tenet Partners, a brand innovation and marketing consultancy. "More than half of consumers surveyed said they stopped using a brand because of poor service," Tenet CEO Hampton Bridwell told IBD.

**Be gracious.** The study looked at brand performance for Apple (NASDAQ:AAPL) Best Buy (NYSE:BBY), J.C. Penney (NYSE:JCP), McDonald's (NYSE:MCD), Starbucks (NASDAQ:SBUX), Target (NYSE:TGT), Verizon (NYSE:VZ) and Wendy's (NASDAQ:WEN).

It takes time, money and effort to build a good name, "but it's all wasted whenever a customer encounters bad service," Bridwell said.

Being helpful, knowledgeable and caring increases a brand's value to consumers. "This is especially important to keep in mind during the holiday season, as employees and customers are stressed and impatient," Bridwell said.

**Serve it up.** There's no more harried day than Black Friday.

"Many shoppers set up their day as a mission," said Kevin Leifer, vice president with customer service consultancy ICC/Decision Services. Make it easier by putting deals front and center, instead of burying them in the store's back.

**Fill the table.** More retailers are slashing prices beyond Black Friday. Those planning door-buster specials are wise to offer alternatives for items in short supply. Some big boxes like Wal-Mart (NYSE:WMT) guarantee product availability during specific sale times, and offer to ship the product for free when on-site supplies run out. Not every retailer can follow through like that, but "let's have a prepared list of options," Leifer said.

**Manage expectations.** If quantities are limited, say so in ads.

You might make a few customers happy with a rare deal, but "you're disappointing far more than you're satisfying," Leifer said.

**Make it clear.** Be precise about pricing. Customers get annoyed trying to guess what the deal is — or finding out the

numbers are different at the register. "You want to be completely transparent for your customers," Leifer said.

**Mind manners.** Teach employees — especially newbies helping out at holidays time — how to treat shoppers. "You can't forget the basics of customer interaction," Leifer said. "Every one of those touch points, that is the brand."

**Keep good company.** Smart retailers employ the cream of the crop. "You're hiring for attitude, not skills. If an applicant doesn't smile during the job interview, don't hire him." So advised John Tschohl, customer service expert and author of "Moving Up."

**Chat them up.** "This is your chance to make a hell of a first impression," said Tschohl.

Teach workers to introduce themselves and address customers by name. Doing so makes the experience more personable.

"You cannot own the customer only on price. There are too many options out there," he said. "People buy relationships."

**Solve sticky situations.** Give frontline workers tools to keep cool when tempers flare. "Most employees have never been trained to handle irate customers," Tschohl said. Empower staff to make decisions in the moment.

Then back them up.

"The number one reason people will not use empowerment is because they know in their hearts they will lose their jobs," Tschohl said.

**End with gratitude.** "It does not take extra time," said Tschohl, "to smile and say: 'Thank you for coming.'"

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