

EBay shows how to serve thanks to sellers

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Today is one of the busiest shopping days of the year. It's the day after Christmas. Huge crowds. Harried sales clerks. Customer service? Forget about it. You don't expect good service today, do you?

But you should!

Here's my advice to brick-and-mortar retailers. Treat your customers well today. If you do, they'll become evangelists who will sing your praises throughout the year. Borrow a page from Meg Whitman, CEO of eBay, which is known for listening to its customers. Consider how Whitman's company is treating 34-year-old Wes Shepherd. EBay is serving him breakfast in bed. He's more than a loyal eBay customer. He's a committed eBay evangelist.

Shepherd is CEO of Evanston-based ChannelVelocity. His two-year-old startup just raised \$750,000 in a Series A round. His business is red hot. ChannelVelocity helps companies such as Netherlands-based Royal Philips Electronics, with some \$41 billion a year in revenue, figure out their strategy for selling products on eBay. According to Shepherd, Philips sells through traditional retailers, but wasn't sure how to sell on eBay.

Virtual outlet store

"Philips' product was selling on eBay and it was creating a channel conflict" with its brick-and-mortar clientele, Shepherd says. The solution was simple. Shepherd and ChannelVelocity built a virtual outlet store for Philips on eBay, just like the outlet stores in the distant suburban malls. Only this one is on-line.

"We supplied everything to retail their product on eBay -- the warehouse, the fulfillment, the customer support, auction management, everything," Shepherd says.

Creating online outlet stores on eBay is big business for Shepherd. He's doing the same for Milwaukee Power Tools, Belkin (the computer accessories company), Oreck vacuums and Nestle's Nespresso line of espresso products.

Shepherd is a big deal to eBay. The eBay execs don't take him for granted. Even though it's a busy season, they called him. Shepherd says, "They wanted to send something special. They picked several of the largest sellers on eBay to receive gifts.

"A gentleman shows up in my office saying, 'I'm from eBay.' He's carrying a black tray, an eBay mug, a juice glass, a rose and some pastries. He says, 'We're delivering you breakfast in bed because you are too busy to have it at home.'"

Shepherd can't stop talking about how impressed he is with eBay. He's out there evangelizing right now.

I hope *your* business partners treat *you* as well today.