

## Being in Control Helps Keep Customers Loyal

By MARTHA WILSON - Thriving in tough times  
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Trihedral Engineering develops and retails software that helps companies monitor patterns and fluctuations in water consumption, electricity use, chemical levels and much more. Are the pumps running? Is the radar working right? These are the questions their software answers.

Such software is part of the field called SCADA for "supervisory control and data acquisition" and the clients who use it are understandably picky about getting the correct information.

Patrick Cooke is director of marketing at the Bedford-based company, and he spends a great deal of time making himself available to clients and making sure the rest of the company is, as well. Tech support is an important part of the company's brand and identity.

Cooke tells of a customer in North Carolina who keeps three phone numbers pinned by his desk: Trihedral's tech support number; the tech support person's home phone number; and the number for Trihedral's president.

Partly as a result of their unswerving focus on delivering customer service and customer support, Cooke believes Trihedral enjoys significant client loyalty. (Or, in Cooke's words, "Our customers love the company.")

And the company strives to make tech support a way to love the customers right back. Cooke notes that he once tracked down a tech support person on vacation at Disney World when a customer needed to talk to him.

Cooke says, "The element of customer service is critical. When someone calls in, the phone is answered by a person. The idea is that if you call in, you get an answer that's really important."

Organizations that have less of an ongoing conversation with their customers may not feel the need for that kind of personal touch. Still, all entrepreneurs need to pay attention to their engagement with their customers.

Meeting in person is also key.

Cooke sees trade shows as a great way to deepen relationships with existing clients, partly because they efficiently allow chances for personal interaction with a variety of people; the company is represented at 18 to 20 shows a year, he estimates. Preparation begins well ahead of time, in order to maximize the impact of the days spent at the event itself.

"We send out emails to existing customers and future customers, saying that we're going to be at the show and what we're going to be showing," Cooke explains. Typically these emails will describe new features and new benefits of their software.

Eric Crowell, director of the Saint Mary's University Business Development Centre, says, "At the (centre), we often talk about the importance of seeking out and attending trade shows in your field. There's nothing else you can do that confers quite the same benefits.

"After all, it's an industry event that's going to bring you face to face with existing and potential clients, as well as vendors, competitors and various newsmakers. And what is everyone there to talk and learn about? Succeeding in your field. That's a golden opportunity and one all business people need to take advantage of."

Trihedral also uses social media like YouTube to reach the people they're selling to. "A YouTube video puts a very human face on what we do," says Cooke. It's one more way to connect with people.

That's critical, says Crowell. "As a business owner, you want to connect with people in as many meaningful ways as possible. The more ways you find to do it, and the more meaningful the connections, the more positive the effect"

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