



This article first appeared in the February issue of *My Business*  
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## RETAILING TONY GATTARI

# Religious attention to customers

**IMAGINE A TAKE AWAY** shop around the corner that makes the most amazing hamburgers. The buns are so big they can carry a large meat patty, lashings of bacon, melted cheese, salad and condiments. The meat is always fresh – the owner scoops out a ball of mince mixed that morning with special spices and onions.

He flattens it and cooks it right before your eyes. The chips you get with the burger are a massive serving covered in a generous amount of salt and wrapped in big sheets of butcher's paper. When you take the food home, what you ordered for yourself is enough to feed an entire family!

However, you never go to this take away shop on weekends, because the owner doesn't work weekends. Generally, the weekend workers make the patties smaller, give you burnt pieces of bacon, and buns that are dry from being under the grill too long. The shop's trade on weekends is not as good as on weekdays, but the owner is blind to this, thinking that people aren't around in the suburb on weekends.

Let's consider the case of McDonalds, which has more than 30,000 outlets across the world and serves nearly fifty million customers every day. The secret behind McDonalds' success is not how good their food tastes, but in the consistency of their products and service.

A Big Mac tastes the same in Sydney as it does in London, as it does in Toronto. With only small local variations, every burger is offered in a bundle of the same options, the world over. McDonalds created a burger, systemised the whole process – from ordering produce, to what goes in that burger, to what that burger is cooked on, to how it is packaged and sold.

Let's revisit our local friend who owns the take away shop around the corner. He may have a far better tasting product than the McDonalds burger, but can't grow his business beyond his own grill. He makes an exceptional product, but has failed to systemise processes so that others in his business can make burgers like his.

Yes, he achieves some measure of customer loyalty, but only to his individual ability to make a great burger. He might feel good about that, but it doesn't make a healthy business. Real loyalty comes about when a perfectly refined system delivers an exceptional product or service consistently, every time that product is sold.

### Treat them like family

But you don't have to be big to be beautiful. I know of a wonderful Chinese Malay restaurant in the eastern suburbs of Sydney. It's been operating for 25 years in an area that's experienced massive demographic change, huge infrastructure developments and increasing competition. Yet people travel from all over Sydney to dine there, including rich and famous politicians and celebrities.

There's nothing extraordinary about the furnishing or aesthetics in this restaurant. It uses simple round tables covered with heavily starched white tablecloths. It's had only one refurbishment in a quarter of a century.

The owner often asks his visitors, "Why do you travel all this way to dine? Don't you have a good Chinese restaurant near your home?" Customers tell him that it's the warmth, honesty and passionate service that makes them feel relaxed and content when dining there. It's a comfortable experience. When other Chinese restaurants are too big, too fast,

or too Westernised to give any feeling of empathy, this tiny restaurant in the eastern suburbs of Sydney creates the feeling that every customer is a close relative who's come over for a family meal.

The owner probably hasn't read any books on how to win customers and keep them for life – his secret is simple. He treats customers as if they were in his own home. This is the amazingly simple truth about his success: he treats others how they'd like to be treated. Sound familiar? It should.

In all of the business jargon, systems, procedures, and fancy marketing, we sometimes lose focus of the fact that our customers want simple things. They want to eat at McDonalds because it's predictable and consistent. They may not love the food, but they go back for more (especially if they have young children).

To build true customer loyalty, like the Chinese Malay restaurant has, the key is to love and embrace customers as if they were family, not just another transaction. The Chinese Malay restaurant has a massive support base of customers who tell others and bring their friends, who also get hooked on the love and passion that the restaurant brings. That's how to make customers become evangelists! ●

■ The author, Tony Gattari was the General Manager of the computers and communications division of Harvey Norman and oversaw the growth of this business from \$12 million to \$565 million in nine years. He is now founder and Chief Energy Officer of Achievers group. He is a much in demand passionate professional speaker, business educator, author and corporate, business advisor. Tony has worked with over 110 businesses around the world.

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