

ROD OSTHUS TEACHES

How to Ensure 100% Customer Retention by Riding Harvesters

What Does it Take to Keep Customers from
Leaving You During Harvest?



*“Never let the fear of striking out
keep you from playing the game.”*

—Babe Ruth

The biggest reason sales reps don't ride with customers when their
varieties are being harvested is fear of getting beaten.

Introduction

Harvest is the most anticipated time of the year for both farmers and seed sellers. It's when all the time, money, and hard work invested into growing the best crop possible by both parties culminate into final yield. When the crop is good, customers are excited and more than happy to take credit for the success. When the crop is not so good, farmers look for reasons why the yields they wanted and expected weren't there, and those reasons seldom focus on what they did or didn't do. That's where problems usually start. Rather than blame themselves, they almost always target your variety. That's why you need to be there when your customers are harvesting your products. It's seldom, if ever, your variety's fault, and you need to help them make the right decisions.

Harvest is a time of learning for both you and your customers. It also presents many teaching opportunities for you, the seed advisor.

To maximize customer satisfaction at harvest, they need to learn:

- They have _____ they get except in the rare case where Mother Nature is particularly brutal.
- Most of the impact _____ has is not related to the variety itself.
- The positive impact of doing next year's cropping plan _____ has on yield.
- How planting a portfolio of products increases _____ faster than trying to pick a favorite variety.
- Yield monitors can't be used to measure the performance of individual varieties, only the _____.
- How important it is to _____ to keep them on point and solve problems on the spot.

To Keep Customers from Leaving During Harvest, You Must:

- _____ during field visits with each customer, showing what they can expect at harvest.
- Show them _____ with them at harvest.
- Focus the conversation on how closely the _____.
- Keep the focus off the yield monitor and on the _____ for each field.
- _____ to address any issues and reward successes.

You must show farmers what they're seeing through the front window of their combine cab during harvest.

Do You Ride Harvesters Survey

1. The biggest reason(s) I don't ride harvesters in the fall:
 - a. Fear
 - b. Lack of time
 - c. I don't see the need
 - d. Customers don't want me there

2. In question one, if you selected, fear, what are you afraid of?

3. In question one, if you selected lack of time, what are you too busy doing?

4. In question one, if you selected I don't see the need, why not?

5. In question one, if you selected customers don't want me there, why not?

6. 6. The biggest reason(s) I DO ride harvesters in the fall is:
 - a. Finalize crop plans
 - b. Survey performance
 - c. Gather info
 - d. Check attitude

7. What percentage of your customers will receive harvester rides from you? _____

8. What do your customers believe is the purpose of a yield monitor at harvest?

9. What do you want your customers to believe the purpose of a yield monitor is at harvest?

10. Which harvesters do you ride first, those of new customers or those of current customers?

Prior to Riding Harvesters Survey

Take the following survey prior to riding each customer's harvester.

- YES | NO 1. I decided which varieties were planted on this customer's farm.
- YES | NO 2. This customer knows a yield monitor or any other scale can't be used to measure performance of individual varieties.
- YES | NO 3. I sold a new variety to this new customer.
- YES | NO 4. This customer has a portfolio of my varieties that can be measured with his yield monitor.
- YES | NO 5. This customer is planting more than half of his acres to my varieties.
- YES | NO 6. This farmer is a new customer. He is trying my varieties for the first time.
- YES | NO 7. I have a slightly different harvester riding story for each of the 3 groups of buyers, new buyers, current buyers, and current customers.
- YES | NO 8. I was at this customer's planter last spring, so he knows what I will be looking for.
- YES | NO 9. I have a goal for riding this customer's harvester.
- YES | NO 10. I will ride the harvester of every one of my customers this fall to increase my chances of keeping those customers.

It's not complicated – stop making it so tough to keep customers.

How to Ensure 100% Customer Retention by Riding Harvesters

Manage the DESTINATION When Maximizing Customer Retention

You must be in control of the destination of your seed, that is, which group of customers is harvesting your varieties. Are they new buyers, current buyers, or current customers?

Managing the destination of your varieties is the no.1 factor affecting customer retention.

a. This destination was new buyers, which means they:

- Have developed opinions on my varieties that _____:
- Are busy comparing my varieties to competitors, which means I need to _____, or I may lose.
- Have me in a _____ on their farms so I need to overcome their desire to have me lose.
- Start the relationship with the variety rather than with me so I need to _____ to get a repeat customer.

b. This destination was current buyers, which means they:

- Possess all the traits new buyers possess so I need to get them to _____ as fast as possible.
- Are still buying less than half of their needs from me so they are still in comparison mode and _____.
- Are not seeing the value I offer so I need to follow the _____ more closely.
- Are the most likely to get bored and lose interest if the experience is not enhanced.

c. This destination was current customers, which means they:

- Have a strong relationship with me so they're buying me, _____.
- Are on my side so they are _____.
- Expect more than just good seed so I must follow every _____.
- Buy more from me than they do from my competitors so this group is more loyal to me and a _____ of my competitors.

Avoid GAMBLING When Maximizing Customer Retention

Gambling means you're not there when customers are harvesting your varieties.

To avoid gambling, be with customers during the life of your varieties so you're always in control of the outcome.

Gambling means: _____ :

- _____, especially if they're new.
- Treated your varieties the same as your competitors.
- Tell you the truth about performance if you're not there during harvest.
- Followed your plan.
- Raised their perceptions of you and your company if you're not there.

Gambling means: You're not _____ showing growers:

- The crop coming into the header is based on _____.
- What can we change next year to increase _____ even more?
- Their next year's _____.
- How to solve _____.
- They need to _____.
- The need to stay focused on their _____.
- _____ from all other seed reps.

Gambling means allowing growers to create their own perceptions by:

- Purchasing small, trial size orders
- Planting your seed anywhere they want
- Planting your seed anytime they want
- Planting your seed in any soil conditions they want
- Treating your varieties anyway they want
- Not planting portfolios

Gambling with your _____ means:

- Not being at every customer's planter in the spring
- Allowing growers to not follow the Top 5 Factors
- Allowing growers to split their planters
- Allowing growers to plant more than one variety in a field
- Allowing growers to focus on plant population instead of bushels per 1000

Get Customers to Want You to Win When Maximizing Customer Retention

You win on farms where customers want you to win.

When riding harvesters:

- Measure _____ toward their bu/1000 plant goal on the harvester.
- Define each _____ made during the growing season.
- Ask every customer _____ about each progressive change.
- Ask every customer _____ during the growing season.
- Focus on _____ for the next season.
- Remind them that each field has its own _____.
- Review _____ for each field.
- Tell every customer _____.
- Keep the customer focused on increasing production, not _____.
- Show every customer how _____ from other reps.
- Remind the grower how well he did _____ all season.
- Review the importance of following the _____.
- Review the advantages of _____.

Sample Dialogue for a New Prospect

Rep: Good morning, my name is Rod, Rod Osthus. I'm a High Yield Specialist with the RC Thomas Company, you are?

Prospect: John Smith.

Rep: Nice to meet you, John. I'm out riding combines to see how the crops are looking and had a cold drink and a subway sandwich in my cooler here for you if you're hungry. Do you want to take a minute and look at your crop with me?

Prospect: Sure, sounds good. I didn't have much breakfast. *We climb down off the combine and stop to look at the field.*

Rep: Wow, what a clean field. When was this planted?

Prospect: Not until May 20.

Rep: I've just started visiting growers during harvest this year, but I'll bet this will be one of the cleanest fields I see all fall. How thick is it planted?

Prospect: I planted it at 35,000, but I bet I don't have 28.

Rep: Planted a little wet, huh!

Prospect: Yep, and the ground was awfully cold. It laid there for 2 ½ weeks before it came up. There was really nothing I could do about it. Who did you say you are?

Rep: My name is Rod, Rod Osthus. I specialize in helping farmers increase yields by 30% to 50% in 2-3 years. How long have you been raising corn?

Prospect: 20 years.

Rep: Have you calculated your bushels per 1000 plants?

Prospect: What do you mean?

Rep: Well, we don't use plant population or row spacing anymore to increase yields. We use a new concept called bushels per 1000 plants. Let me show you how it works. *I explain it and show him what he has. He is at 6 bu/1000.* If you were taking advantage of your full population, you would be at 8 bushels per 1000. So right now, due to lost plants and unevenness, you're going to harvest about 170 acre. If you had 34,000 living out of the 35,000 you planted, your yield would be 272 by only changing how you planted your crop – 100 bushel difference.

Prospect: Are you serious? That can't be right.

Rep: I bet you were thinking of increasing your population so you could get more yield, weren't you.

Prospect: Actually, that's what my seed guy told me to do.

Rep: That would be a big mistake. You have plenty of plants out there. You just need to follow the Top 5 Factors to Produce a Top Crop and raise your bushels per 1000 to where it belongs.

Prospect: What are the Top 5 Factors?

Rep: Those are the key strategies we developed in our High Yield System that are the secret to taking farmers' yields to levels they never thought possible.

Prospect: Really?

Rep: Yes. We can help you a lot. Where do you want to take your corn yields next year?

Prospect: Up. I'd love to break 200.

Rep: What's your plan to get there?

Prospect: Well, it was, increase my population. Now I don't know for sure.

Rep: Have you ever done a high-yield cropping plan?

Prospect: No, I haven't.

Rep: Most of our guys have them done prior to harvest, so if we're going to work together, we need to get started. I'm not sure if we are a fit, but if we are, I think we can do some great things on your farm. By the way, we won't be talking about varieties until I get more information on your fields and start the plan for each field.

Rep: But the first problem we would need to fix is your yield goal. It's way too low. It needs to be 272. That should be no problem if you follow our system. We'll talk more about that.

Rep: Nice combine. How long have you had it?

Prospect: Thanks. This is my second year with it, and I really like it.

Rep: Do you mind if I ride a couple of rounds with you?

Prospect: No, come on up. *We are now in the cab heading down the field.*

Rep: I bet you're thinking about making changes in your mind right now for next year's crop, aren't you!

Prospect: Well, yes, but they are a lot different now that I'm talking to you. I want to raise my per 1000 bushels.

Rep: You mean bushels per 1000 plants.

Prospect: Yeah, what do we need to do to get started?

Rep: Well, I will give you two requirements growers have to meet for us to work together. I can help you so much, but nothing works unless the grower is fully committed. First, we would need to start your high-yield cropping plan right away. We are already late, but next year we will start earlier. The second thing is, you don't have to plant all of your acres to my seed this first year. But you do need to plant $\frac{1}{3}$ of your acres to my seed the first year. Do you have any problem with either one of those?

Prospect: Gosh, $\frac{1}{3}$ of my acres. I've never planted your seed before. That is a big risk. How about a couple of bulk boxes.

Rep: That's no problem. I understand. If you aren't comfortable with what I need, we will just wait a year or so until you are ready to take those yields up. I think you saw in the short time we are together what you need to do. Now you need me to help you execute those Top 5 Factors.

Prospect: What are those Top 5 Factors?

Rep: If we decide to work together, the first thing we will do is visit the fields. I will be working with and we will cover those things at that time. Right now, I have to get going. I have a lot of new prospects to meet and talk with. I sure appreciate your time. If you change your mind, here is my card. Give me a call.

Rep: Let me get your cell number too, so when you call, it will come up in my contacts, and I will answer it.

Prospect: So how expensive is your seed?

Rep: Your goal is to lower the cost per bushel of every bushel you produce, isn't it.

Prospect: Yes.

Rep: My customers never ask price because for what I help them with, they would be willing to pay double if they needed to just to get the results we get. Our price will not be an issue. Maybe I will check with you next year to see how you are doing.

Prospect: Let's do it. I can't afford to wait.

Rep: Do you have your calendar handy? Let's set a date for me to ride your combine in more fields so we can start the plan.

Harvester rides are one of the most important contacts of the year because they measure how far the customer's thinking has come toward your way of thinking since seed delivery. Any change in mindset is progress, and that's the main reason why you are riding harvesters to measure that level of progress. When growers think like you, they do what you ask them to do, and they make real progress in their fields and in their lives.

LIVE STREAM

**“We don’t rise to the level of our expectations,
we fall to the level of our training.”**

-ARCHILOCHUS

