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**Forming relationships  
on the e-commerce  
market as a basis to  
build loyalty and create  
value for the customer.  
Empirical findings**

## 1. Introduction

The existence within the Internet has become a necessity, because as noted by Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders, Wong not to be on the Internet ... is like not to have a phone (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders 2002, p. 21). Along with the development of the Internet the importance of electronic commerce (e-commerce) has grown, which affects the behavior of customers in terms of place, time and conditions of purchasing.

In the literature, e-commerce is defined in a broader and in a narrower sense. In a narrower sense as a way of buying and selling products and services, and therefore form financial transactions by electronic means through the Internet. Whereas, in broader terms, e-commerce is entering a variety of commercial transactions with the networks, without direct contact between the parties, combined with making payments for products and services (Gregor, Stawiszyński 2002, p. 350).

According to the definition of CSO e-commerce (e-commerce) includes transactions carried out

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by networks, IP-based and by other computer networks. Goods and services are ordered by these networks, but the payment and the final delivery of the ordered goods or services may be made in or outside the system. Transactions can be made between businesses, individuals, government agencies and other public and private organizations. Orders received by telephone, fax or e-mails are not part of e-commerce (*Sprawozdanie o wykorzystaniu...* 2013, p. 15).

A. Dejnaka defines e-commerce as efforts to integrate existing operations with new technologies in order to increase the attractiveness of the offer and customer satisfaction with an online shop (Dejnaka 2002, p.9)

Internet access plays an important role in the development of e-commerce. According to the CSO report *Społeczeństwo informacyjne w Polsce w 2014 r.* the percentage of households with computers is steadily increasing. In the analysed year nearly 10 million households (77%) were equipped with a computer, and 74% had Internet access, which is an increase of 2 percentage points compared to 2013 (*Społeczeństwo informacyjne w Polsce ...* 2014, p. 2). The main purpose of using the Internet, in the light of the results of the CSO research (*Społeczeństwo informacyjne w Polsce...* 2012, p. 13; *Społeczeństwo informacyjne w Polsce ...*p. 16) among people aged 16-74 years was to use e-mail (up from 38% in 2008 to 53% in 2014.). A large part of people used the Internet to search for information about goods or services (up from 46% in 2008 to 50% in 2014.). Participation in chat rooms, discussion groups or forums, instant messaging, creating and reading blogs, and use of social networking was declared by 41% respondents in 2014. The report indicated that the Internet is used in a wide range, not only by households but also businesses. In 2014, the ratio of companies with their own website was 65%, and almost two-thirds of companies used the website to showcase products and services catalogues. And the most commonly used social media by enterprises were social networks (18%). It is also worth noting that e-commerce in Poland is one of the fastest growing sectors of the Polish economy. According to calculations by Deloitte Business Consulting Poland the value of the Internet economy in Poland in 2012 amounted to 93 billion zł, which constituted 5.8% of GDP in that year (*A wave of digital change ...* 2013, p. 46). According to data from PMR in 2013 the value of Polish e-commerce market amounted to nearly 24 billion zł, which represents an increase over the previous year by 12% (*Handel detaliczny artykułami...*2014).

The aim of the paper is to present the key aspects in the development of relationships as a basis for building loyalty and creating value for the customer. Attainment of the objective will be aided by presentation of the results

of survey regarding the identification of the measures taken to maintain lasting relationships that allow to build loyalty and create value for the customer. In addition, the study will identify the actions conducive to the growth of customer loyalty, which can be helpful in conducting e-business.

## **2. The importance of relationships with customers in the process of building loyalty and creating value for the customer**

The relationship is to be understood as a relation between two (or more) events, objects or persons, and the nature of the relation can be manifold (Reber, Reber 2005, p. 939). The word comes from the Latin ratio (relatio, - onis) and is a reference, value, contact, respect, attitude to someone else (Rogoziński 2006, p. 14). Thus, the relationship is reciprocal links/dependence and impact on each other.

For the purpose of this study we have defined the relation as the totality of relationships between the customers and e-businesses whose goal is to strive to build relationships, dependencies and relations between them based mainly on trust and loyalty that lead to meeting the needs of each of the parties and contribute to the achievement of the intended objectives of each party.

It is worth noting that it becomes crucial to understand customer behavior, factors influencing their decisions in meeting their needs and expectations. Consumer behavior is a coherent whole of reactions associated with the choices in the process of meeting the needs of individuals in specific social, cultural and economic conditions (Burgiel 2009, p. 29). These include mental and physical activities, including their motives and causes, allowing the consumer to function and achieve their goals and realize values, and thus satisfaction and well-being, taking into account the short-term and long-term effects and individual and social consequences (Antonides, van Raaij 2003, p. 24). They undoubtedly constitute a set of actions and activities to meet the needs. Decisions concerning the place of the consumer's purchasing depend on many factors. In the face of rapidly growing competition in the market today, consumers have a wide choice of place, time and conditions of purchasing.

Therefore, it is necessary for the business to take a more effective action on the acquisition and retention of customers.

Due to the fact that relations do not arise spontaneously, but require action in the sphere of their initiation, maintenance, improvement and development, it is worth to bring closer the stages of their development. The process of creating a relationship with the client takes place in the context of specific

steps and includes (Ioannou, Zolkiewski 2009, p. 263): the stage of attracting the customer with an attractive offer, the initial stage, the stage of development, long-term development stage, decline phase and termination of the relationship phase.

In general, the relationship begins by identifying the needs and expectations of the client, the client's choice of offer. The next step is the flow of knowledge and information, and an increase in customer satisfaction with the purchase. With the development of relationships and increased involvement, uncertainty is reduced and confidence is increased. Undoubtedly, the impact on confidence and thus customer satisfaction has an attractive product range, speed and ease of use of the on-line system, as well as the efficiency and timeliness of transactions made through the Internet. Through a system of incentives and activities in the area of quality of service a relationship may turn into a long term one. Usually accompanied by the development of relations is the obtained value from the relationship. The loss of relationships may be caused by: the weakening capacity of partners, lack of client activity, opportunistic attitude or a loss of trust in relation to the seller. And the completion of existing relationships may be caused by: the expiry of the period for which they have been concluded, also as a result of customer waiver and negative effects of external factors (economic crisis, the activity of the competition). Relationships can be considered as completed in the absence of links between the involved parties.

Creating and maintaining relationships with customers is an important part of achieving a competitive advantage, and through the creation and maintenance the client gains a new value, which leads to obtain benefits for loyal customers.

In the literature, it is generally accepted that loyalty is satisfaction (Gommans, Krishnan, Scheffold 2001, p. 45), but satisfaction does not necessarily lead to loyalty, and to gain the loyalty of customers one first needs to gain their trust (Reichheld, Schefter 2008, p. 85). Oliver noted that among the many possible relationships between customer satisfaction and their loyalty six of them deserve special attention (Oliver 2008, pp. 34-35):

- satisfaction and loyalty are two different manifestations of the same phenomenon,
- satisfaction is an essential and major component of the phenomenon of loyalty and loyalty without it can not occur,
- satisfaction is only one of the necessary factors of loyalty,
- the satisfaction and loyalty as two separate phenomena, which may be only part of the joint,

- strong loyalty, in which a „normal” loyalty and satisfaction are equal components,
- satisfaction may be the beginning of the process by which a separate loyalty phenomenon will be formed.

Loyalty can be defined in the following aspects: behavioral, cognitive and emotional (Wilmańska-Sosnowska 2010, p. 30-31). In behavioral terms loyalty is defined as the behavior of systematically repeated purchases. In emotional terms, as a positive attitude caused by a feeling of sympathy and affection for the product, brand, company or place of purchase. However, in cognitive terms, as a result of the cognitive process during which the buyer makes a conscious decision to buy the product because he/she values it more than competitive products.

Customer satisfaction and customer loyalty are key factors in the development of the company's profit. More and more research and analysis confirms that the cost to acquire a new customer is five times greater than the maintenance of an existing customer (Mazurek-Łopacińska 2005, p. 476). It is also worth noting that having loyal customers has an impact on the formation of a positive image of the company in its environment, because satisfied customers express positive opinions about the company/or its products, which in turn translates into getting another loyal customers. So entrepreneurs should remember the principle 1/250 formulated by the best seller, and indicating that one well served customer will encourage to buy the product the next 250 customers, and vice versa, because if the client has been badly handled, he/she may deter from the list of 250 potential customers (Kotra, Pysz-Radziszewska 2001, p. 23).

### **3. Material and methods of research and the characteristics of the research group**

A survey using a questionnaire sent to respondents in Lubuskie voivodship. The survey was conducted from March to July 2014. The survey was conducted among 349. For a full analysis 277 respondents were taken into account as among the 349 people participating in the study, 72 of the respondents did not buy on the Internet.

The test results are not representative and the indicated research group a deliberate intention. The aim of the authors of the study was to carry out tests on the largest group, but they were limited to 349 people, due to cognitive, organizational and financial limitations.

The aim of the study was to answer a series of questions on the frequency of purchase of products in the online stores, as well as repeating these purchases. In

addition, disclose the reasons for refraining from repeat purchases, identify the most important reasons to return to the store, as well as a way to communicate the identification and recommendation of activity in the field of shopping with friends, family, friends.

The study involved respondents from different age groups. Respondents were grouped into five age groups. The study involved approximately 60% of women and 40% men. In the study the group was dominated by people aged from 19 to 34 years old (44%). The share of people aged from 35 to 44 years accounted for around 40%. About 10 in the range 45-55 years. The smallest group consisted of persons under 19 years of age (4.7%) and over 55 years (1.1) (table 1).

**Table 1. Structure of respondents by gender and age**

Specification	Total number	Share[%]	Age [years]				
			under 19	19-34	35-44	45-55	over 55
Women	165	59,6	0,7	30,0	22,0	6,2	0,7
Men	112	40,4	4,0	14,0	17,7	4,3	0,4
Altogether	277	100,0	4,7	44,0	39,7	10,5	1,1

Source: own study

As can be seen from the data presented in table 1 in all age ranges indicated females dominated over the males.

#### 4. The results of the study

Online stores offer a fast and easy way to make purchases without leaving home, becoming a convenient alternative to stationary stores. They influence the behavior of consumers changing their decision-making processes and the ways to meet their needs and expectations. When choosing an online purchase, consumers have the ability to decide on the time they are made. Undoubtedly, this is a convenient solution for busy people who have limited time. Development of online stores shows that customers are more and more willing to make purchases using a PC, phone and other mobile devices connected to the Internet.

**Table 2. Frequency of purchasing products in an online store**

Specification	Number of answers	The percentage of answers [%]
Once a week	9	3,2
Once a month	47	17,0
Several times a month	13	4,7
Once a year	66	23,8
Several times a year	118	42,6
Less than once a year	24	8,7
<b>Total</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>100,0</b>

**Source:** own study

The conducted study shows that online stores are popular because of 349 people participating in the study, 277 make purchases via the Internet. Other people do not buy on the Internet (ie. 72 people), including 26 women and 46 men. According to the survey, most consumers make purchases via the Internet. It was therefore decided to ask respondents how often they purchase products via the Internet.

On the basis of analysis of information on the frequency of purchase of products in an online shop respondents most frequently shopped several times a year (table 2).

A small number of people (9) purchases once a week, and one in six respondents once a month, once every fourth year, and every other a few times a year. However, approximately 5% of respondents buy products on the Internet several times a month, and over 3% once a month. The survey shows that one in twelve respondents make purchases on the Web at least once a year.

Shoppers' loyalty to online stores is expressed in them making purchases, pronouncing positive feedback about the shop or store, recommending to others. Loyal customers having the choice between comparable alternatives chooses the store where they have done shopping before. Therefore, in the next question, respondents were asked about the frequency of repeated purchases in the shop (table 3).

**Table 3. The frequency of rebuys selected by respondents in an internet shop**

Specification	Number of answers	The percentage of answers [%]
Once a week	2	0,7
Once a month	21	7,6
Several times a month	3	1,1
Once a year	18	6,5
Several times a year	27	9,7
Less than once a year	115	41,5
Not doing repeat purchases in the same store	91	32,9
<b>Total</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: own study

From the empirical material it shows that over 67% of respondents are loyal customers of the shop because respondents who have made previous shopping online returned to the store. The smallest percentage of respondents make purchases in the same shop (almost 1%) once a week. The largest percentage of respondents, that is almost 42% shop at least once a year.

Table 4 shows reasons for refraining from repeated purchases in the online shop. This part of the study involved 91 respondents. Each respondent was able to identify from one to more than on most important reasons from refraining from repeat purchases in the online store.

Whereas table 5 depicts top reasons to return to the store where respondents have made previous purchases.

**Table 4. Reasons for refraining from repeated purchases in the online shop**

Specification	Number of indications	Percentage of indications [%]	Percentage of respondents (n=91)*
Bad experiences with previous purchases	71	34,0	78,0
Damaged goods	12	5,7	13,2

Lack of communication	51	24,4	56,0
A long time to wait for the product	24	11,5	26,4
Lack of the ordered product in the store	8	3,8	8,8
Failure to notify the unexpected delay	43	20,6	47,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>-</b>

\* Percentage of respondents does not add up, the respondent could provide up to 100% more than one answer.

**Source:** own study

According to the study (table 4) the majority of respondents did not make repeat purchases in the shop because of a bad experience with previous purchases (number of responses 71). In contrast, almost every second person (56% of respondents) does not return to the same store because of a lack of communication. The collected data also shows that the reasons for repeat refrain from shopping online is the lack of notification of unexpected delay (number of responses 43), and the long waiting time for product (number of responses 24). Respondents also pointed to other causes, ie. the damaged goods (number of responses 12) and the absence of the ordered product in stock (number of responses 8).

Against this background, we should also refer to a study conducted by M. LeBoeuf, in which the author of the study lists the following reasons why customers stop buying the company's products (LeBoeuf 2005, p. 18-19):

- 3% change the place of residence,
- 5% liaise with other companies,
- 9% of leave due to better offer from competitors,
- 14% are guided by the dissatisfaction with the products offered by the company,
- 69% leave due to indifference of company's employees.

In another study, conducted by the Rockefeller Foundation an attempt has also taken to show the reasons why customers leave (Griffin 2005, p. 19):

- 14% leave due to an unresolved complaint,
- 9% resign from the company due to the activities of competitors,
- 9% leave because of a change of residence,
- 68% make changes without any special reason.

Probably those who depart from the company without any special reason you do not feel that the company is seeking about them, and consequently it translates into a lack of relationship with the company (Rudawska 2005, s. 19).

**Table 5. Top reasons to return to the store where respondents have made previous purchases**

Specification	Number of indications	Percentage of indications [%]	Percentage of respondents (n=186)*
Satisfactory level of service	126	15,5	67,7
Good communication	107	13,2	57,5
Fast and efficient performance of the order	89	11,0	47,8
Loyalty programs	34	4,2	18,3
Competitive price	171	21,1	92,0
A wide range of products	156	19,2	83,9
Good quality products	118	14,6	63,4
Other (expert advice)	10	1,2	5,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>811</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>-</b>

\* Percentage of respondents does not add up, the respondent could provide up to 100% more than one answer.

Source: own study

The research shows that the vast majority of respondents 171 persons, ie. 92% make repeat purchases due to competitive prices. As can be seen the price is one of the key factors to be taken into account when choosing the store as a place to make repeat purchases by the respondents. Apart from the price also for the vast majority of respondents, about 84% of the people in making additional purchases in the same store important was the wide range of products. Important reasons, as it turned out, were also satisfactory level of service (number of responses 126), good quality products (number of responses 118), good communication (number of responses 107). Further included: fast and effective performance of the order, loyalty programs. It should also be noted that every nineteenth respondent pointed to expert advice as a reason to make repeat purchases in an online shop. Respondents who make repeat purchases in the shop were asked if they would recommend the shop to family/friends/acquaintances (table 6).

**Table 6. Recommending an online store to family/friends/acquaintances**

Specification	Number of indications	Percentage of indications [%]
Yes	186	100,0
No	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: own study

Table 6 it shows that the respondents who make repeat purchases in an online store would recommend it to family/friends/acquaintances. This measurement indicates that those who purchase in the e-stores are loyal customers.

Respondents were also asked about the degree of fulfillment of the expectations of the stores. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree of fulfillment of their expectations from the online shop on the scale of five. The first degree meant that the e-store does not adequately satisfy their expectations, and the fifth degree meant that it adequately meets their expectations. In this area, it was observed that the average score rank was 4.2, which means that the degree to meet customer expectations is high.

In building customer loyalty the way to communicate with customers plays an important role. Online stores offer a variety of forms, ranging from telephone, Skype, instant messaging (eg. Gadu-Gadu), online shop, LiveChat, and ending with the communication by e-mail (table 7).

**Table 7. The most common way to communicate between customers and the company**

Specification	Number of answers	The percentage of answers [%]
Contact by phone	96	34,7
Instant Messaging	76	27,4
Question form	49	17,7
E-mail	35	12,6
Forum shop	16	5,8
Skype	4	1,4

Another way to communicate (LiveChat)	1	0,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: own study

The results allow us to conclude that the most common way to communicate with the company is by phone. Studies show that every fourth respondent frequently contacts the company using instant messaging, every sixth sends a question form, every eight chooses form of communication via e-mail. In contrast, the rarest means of communication, as studies show, proved to be the shop's forum, skype, as well as communication with the company via LiveChat.

## 5. Conclusion

Changes taking place in the market are not without influence on the process of management among the leading business. This requires perception of symptoms of these changes and implementation of appropriate adaptation measures. Doing business today, in the era of the information society makes it a significant importance for businesses to be present on the Internet, seeing the opportunities to use the Internet in their functioning. Internet usage in the company provides many opportunities, from reaching a broad group of consumers around the world, through the presentation of goods and services, sales of goods and services, their promotion, to treat the Internet as a new or additional sales channel, as well as by creating and maintaining relationships with customers, to provide them with new values and build the image of the company and products on the Internet. Shopping online provides an alternative to traditional shopping. It saves time to access the store, the energy associated with parking and money by buying cheaper (Bhatnagar, 2007, p. 90).

The research W.-S. Kwon, Moh, (2010, p. 346) conducted on a group of mature consumers in the United States shows that Internet sellers should concentrate their efforts on improving the diversity of their offer and provide cost benefits, as well as the skill to communicate these benefits to their target customers through their internet websites and advertising projects. Appropriately shaped relationships provide benefits in terms of: access to resources, greater flexibility, reduction of transaction costs, better coordination of activities and the growth of innovation (Stańczyk-Hugiet 2013, p. 86).

The results of the presented survey help to identify the most important reasons of returning to the store where respondents have made previous purchases. The analysis of the collected material shows that for the vast majority of the respondents competitive prices were the most important reason. Important reasons were also satisfactory level of service, good quality products, good communication.

R. Connolly, F. Bannister (2008, p. 348) suggest that allowing consumers to communicate with the vendor through the service is one way to reduce anxiety and the risk perceived by the consumer and provides a positive result.

According to the respondents the most important reasons to return to store were also quick and efficient execution of the order, and loyalty programs. The research shows that 100% of respondents who make repeat purchases would recommend the store to others.

Further included: fast and effective performance of the contract, loyalty programs. With regard to recommending an online store in which individuals make repeat purchases, 100% of respondents would recommend it to others. The study indicates that the main reasons why respondents did not make repeat purchases in the shop are: bad experience with previous purchases, lack of communication and failure to notify the unexpected delay. The solution to these problems is particularly important for proper communication and better customer service by allowing the creation of long-term, profitable customer relationships. Companies should strive to build lasting relationships with customers based on trust, which is the basis for effective communication.

The obtained results based on quantitative methods allowed for a fuller explanation of the behavior of individuals and groups surveyed. They were mainly based on the measurement of the frequency of phenomena and the level of severity of studied traits. The test results reflect solely the research issues only in relation to the group participating in the study. The obtained results allow to take a broader research in the future relating to anticipated future purchasing behavior of individuals in the online store.

## Summary

### **Forming relationships on the e-commerce market as a basis to build loyalty and create value for the customer. Empirical findings**

The dynamic development of information technology, especially the Internet, which has taken place in recent years has brought many new opportunities to use the Internet in business

operations. The Internet has created new opportunities for the development of enterprises. It was its dynamic boom that enabled e-commerce to gain in importance, and along with it made the changes in consumer behavior in terms of place, time and purchasing conditions. The aim of the paper is to present the key aspects in the development of relationships as a basis for building loyalty and creating value for the customer. Attainment of the objective will be aided by presentation of the results of survey regarding the identification of the measures taken to maintain lasting relationships that allow to build loyalty and create value for the customer. In addition, the study will identify the actions conducive to the growth of customer loyalty, which can be helpful in conducting e-business. In the research procedure we have used the analysis of the literature, statistical data and the results of the questionnaire study on the presented issues with customers from Lubuskie voivodship.

**Keywords:** *relationships, loyalty, value creation, e-commerce, customer, internet shops.*

### **Streszczenie**

#### **Kształtowanie relacji na rynku e-commerce jako podstawa budowania lojalności i tworzenia wartości dla klienta. Analiza empiryczna**

Dynamiczny rozwój technologii informatycznych, a szczególnie Internetu, jaki dokonał się w ostatnich latach przyniósł wiele nowych możliwości wykorzystania Internetu w działalności przedsiębiorstw. Internet stworzył nowe szanse rozwoju przedsiębiorstw. To właśnie jego dynamiczny rozkwit spowodował, że na znaczeniu zyskał e-commerce, a wraz z nim dokonały się zmiany w zachowaniach konsumentów w zakresie miejsca, czasu i warunków dokonywania zakupów. Celem opracowania jest przedstawienie kluczowych aspektów w procesie kształtowania relacji jako podstawy budowania lojalności i tworzenia wartości dla klienta. Realizacji wskazanego celu sprzyjać będzie prezentacja wyników badania ankietowego dotyczących identyfikacji działań podejmowanych w celu utrzymywania trwałych relacji umożliwiających budowanie lojalności i tworzenie wartości dla klienta. Ponadto w opracowaniu wskazano na działania sprzy-

jające wzrostowi lojalności klientów, które mogą być pomocne w prowadzeniu e-biznesu. W postępowaniu badawczym wykorzystano analizę literatury, danych statystycznych oraz wyniki przeprowadzonego badania ankietowego dotyczącego przedstawianej problematyki z klientami województwa lubuskiego.

### Słowa

**kluczowe:** relacje, lojalność, tworzenie wartości, e-commerce, klient, sklepy internetowe

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