



## Win at First Impressions



You've heard the old saying "You never get a second chance at a first impression." For businesses, that isn't just a cliché, it's reality. Customers size up a business long before they make a purchase and often before anyone on your team even says hello. Those first 10 seconds set expectations, shape decisions, and influence how people feel about doing business with you.

No matter what industry you're in, your business is constantly sending signals about what customers can expect. The good news is that with a few intentional tweaks, you can make those signals work in your favor.

### Your Curb Appeal

No matter what your product or service is, customers start forming an opinion the moment they approach your building. They're asking themselves an unspoken question: Does this place look like it knows what it's doing? Curb appeal can also speak to how professional your business comes across and how successful. People will decide whether your business is for them or not by looks alone (that goes for your website too).

A few simple checks go a long way:

- Are your signs clean and readable from the street?
- Is your entry area clutter-free and welcoming?
- Do your posted hours match your online hours?
- Can customers tell which door to use or where to park?

If someone has to guess how to enter or what to expect, tension rises before they step inside. A polished exterior tells customers they're in good hands.

## The Digital First Impression

Long before customers show up in person, many have already “visited” you online. Your website, Google Business profile, and social media pages create the first impression for a large portion of your audience. They’re looking for clarity, accuracy, and ease (even if they’re not conscious of it).

A strong digital first impression includes:

- Updated hours and services
- Clear photos that reflect what customers will see in person
- A short, friendly description of what you do in real language that your audience uses
- Quick access to booking, ordering, or calling
- The kind of design that resonates with who your audience is (or wants to be)

When your online footprint is clean, current, and helpful, customers show up confident rather than confused.

## The Welcome

This one seems painfully obvious, but we’ve all walked into a business where the employee is on an obviously personal call or simply doesn’t recognize our existence. How did that feel? Doesn’t make you interested in buying, that’s for sure.

Once a customer walks through the door, the clock starts again. Those opening seconds inside your space shape how long they’ll stay and how much they’ll trust you. No matter your industry, these moments matter.

One of the fastest ways to earn trust is through a genuine welcome. A simple smile or greeting sets the tone for the visit. Customers want to feel seen and valued, not like an interruption or inconvenience.

Encourage your team to greet customers in whatever way feels natural to your brand. It doesn’t need to be formal or robotic. Even a quick “Hi there, we’ll be right with you” works wonders. When customers feel acknowledged early, they’re more patient, more open to suggestions, and more comfortable asking questions.

Consider:

- Are customers greeted promptly or at least acknowledged with eye contact (and an “I’ll be right with you,” if you’re in the middle of something)?
- Does the space feel organized and intentional?
- Can customers easily understand where to go or what to do next?
- Are staff members engaged or absorbed in side conversations?

You don’t need to rush over and follow them around your business. You simply need to make people feel acknowledged and appreciated when they come in.

## The Sensory Experience

First impressions aren’t just visual. Customers respond to the full environment, even when they can’t articulate why something feels “off.”

Pay attention to:

- Lighting that feels warm rather than dim or harsh.

- Music that fits your brand and isn't too loud.
- Temperature that's comfortable for customers, not just employees.
- Clean, pleasant scents or, more importantly, no unpleasant ones but keep them subtle, too much may drive people away.

Small adjustments make customers feel at ease, which makes them more likely to stay longer and return more often.

## Why First Impressions Shape Customer Loyalty

First impressions influence today's visit AND shape whether customers will come back, how likely they are to recommend you, and how much they trust your business.

A positive experience in the first ten seconds:

- Lowers customer stress
- Builds confidence
- Increases perceived value
- Reduces complaints
- Boosts loyalty and spending

And the best part is that improving first impressions doesn't usually require a big budget. It requires awareness and consistency.

## A Simple First Impression Checklist

Here's an easy way to evaluate your business:

- Walk up to your location from the customer's point of view
- Step inside and pause for five seconds
- Look around with fresh eyes
- Note anything that feels confusing, cluttered, or outdated
- Ask a friend or fellow business owner to do the same
- Make quick fixes where possible and plan larger improvements over time

These small shifts add up quickly to create a strong competitive advantage.

*[Christina Metcalf](#) is a ghostwriter and women's speaker who believes in the power of story. She works with small businesses, chambers of commerce, and business professionals who want to make an impression and grow a loyal customer/member base. She is the author of [The Glinda Principle](#), rediscovering the magic within.*

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