

How to keep a customer in the tech space

By [Andre van der Merwe](#)

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Just 10% of tech startups survive, and the average lifespan of a tech company is six years. In 2018, 190 tech companies are expected to close their doors. Andre van der Merwe advises on how to keep your customers.



Andre van der Merwe is co-founder at Eiffel Corp.

Being at the helm of a tech company for over 20 years, I have surprisingly beaten these odds by 14 years and believe that building an ecosystem of support around customer success has kept Eiffel Corp in business for the last two decades.

Some might call it timing, but I believe that our seasoned and talented team, who understand education and nurture deep relationships with institutions in Africa should take the kudos.

I launched my edtech startup, Eiffel Corp in the 1990s and had a vision for online and blended learning. I think I was ahead of the pack.

Just keeping up with the latest, or greatest products is not going to keep you in business.

Eiffel Corp has a deep heritage of making our client's business needs our priority. I handpicked Ian Light, the current CEO in 2014 to take over the reigns from me. He says that our holistic approach to supporting enterprise software across an institution, with uptime exceeding 99%, is a complex endeavour.

Look after customers

In 20 years we have always been committed to the long-haul. A decade ago when one of our clients had been left in the lurch due to a merger by product suppliers in the industry, we stayed on hand, plugging the gaps. It's important to understand that it requires an ecosystem of services to support enterprise-wide products.

"On the flip side, should a client consider taking their business elsewhere, they are not just leaving us for another product. They would be leaving an entire ecosystem we have built around them, " said Light.

Beyond the contract

A decade ago, African Virtual University invested in one of our e-learning software products, but due to funding allocations between two sponsors, they had no income for a year to support the vision of rolling out e-learning to campuses across Africa. We took the responsibility and funded the software and support for a year. We are fanatical about learning and we would never drop the students.

Sneaky competitors

Sneaky competitors might send in lone rangers with cheaper products, but what they don't realise is customers don't just require technical widgets to deliver education online. Replacing a product is one thing, but removing oneself from a vibrant community of practice, is a much larger risk.

Growth to the horizon

I believe that growth needs to be tempered with long-term vision. A sustainable business is more than short terms sales that achieve a target. This must be balanced with the creative tension of where customers are going to be in 5-10 years time. Anticipate gaps and be there for the customer. They already have an appetite for a new product as they trust you and you share history. It's insanity to lose one customer and then take a year or two to find another one.

Lead by example

I have always tried my best to lead by example. Making calls, being in front of customers regularly, proactively building a community immune system within organisations that can deflect potential competitors are all part of a tactical game.

Customer success isn't about a customer services manager – it's about an integrated approach in looking after the customer. Together, create a client retention strategy (not only a sales strategy). Develop clients who feel safe in the immune system, enjoy your clients and build good relationships.

Coach, reward and resource your organisation - this is the holistic nature of client success we have come to develop our entire culture around.