

PRINTtips

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Growing in Tough Times: Marketing Activities that Work

To stay viable, all businesses and organizations must grow, and that means continually attracting and retaining new customers. This is especially important in difficult economic times when core customers may be working with smaller budgets or implementing cutbacks. Rather than being overcome by a downturn in customer buying patterns, in lean times experienced marketers put forth more effort to stay in touch with existing customers and prospect for new ones.

For most small and medium-sized businesses and organizations, marketing means engaging in activities that provide significant value for customers, promote customer satisfaction, and result in customer retention. Seen this way, marketing is much more of an operational than strategic function and is centered on the customer and his needs rather than the company and its products or services.

Marketing activity #1: leverage customer good will

Satisfied customers have an important role to play in attracting new business. As a group, they provide a demographic profile that can be used to identify prospects. As individuals, they represent a source of leads and word-of-mouth advertising.

Part of creating satisfied customers is to stay in touch and check in periodically. During a check-in, ask about their business and encourage them to talk about their challenges and opportunities. At a minimum you'll be building a relationship, and you might discover an unknown need that your company's product or services can meet.

Another marketing activity during a check-in is to ask for referrals. Be prepared with a form or checklist so you can get all the necessary contact information and background. If your customer is willing to phone or e-mail in advance of your contacting the referral, so much the better. But don't wait for your customer to act before you do. Promptly contact the referral, and let your customer know you've made the contact.

Yet another marketing activity during a check-in is to ask for a testimonial. While a satisfied customer may be willing



and even enthusiastic about providing a testimonial, don't place the burden of actually writing it on the customer. Have wording in mind (especially if you want the testimonial to address a particular point), perhaps even written out, so your customer can quickly and easily complete the task. You may even be able to walk away from the check-in with the signed testimonial in hand.

Marketing activity #2: refresh your marketing message

When presented to your customers and prospects, your marketing message should succinctly state what your business or organization does and why it matters to your customers. Further, everyone in your organization should understand and be able to articulate the marketing message from memory.

Tough economic times, while challenging, also present a marketing opportunity. Listen carefully to your customers to find out how your product or service is helping them cope with the current conditions, and if there is some new pain point.

Then look at your current marketing message and if needed, adjust it to address those concerns – the “why it matters to your customer” part of the marketing message. In difficult times, customers seek products and services that provide an obvious benefit or value. Be sure your marketing message clearly articulates yours.

Marketing activity #3: be consistent

There are a few items that should be part of every business or organization’s marketing material:

- *business stationery* consisting of well-designed and printed business cards, letterheads, envelopes, and mailing labels;
- *a company brochure*, also well designed and printed, that provides an overview of the company or organization and its products and services; and
- *a direct mail marketing piece* that introduces your business or organization drives prospects to your web site.

All these items need to be visually consistent and recognizable as belonging to your business or organization. This is accomplished by consistently using the same typeface and color palette, and by having the materials professionally printed.

The familiar concept of *branding* – a statement of what a businesses and organization is and what it does – can be translated graphically into a consistent look and feel in all marketing materials. If you haven’t had your marketing material reviewed for consistency and branding, contact us to arrange for an analysis. And if you are missing an element (such as a direct mail marketing piece), we can help create and print it.

Marketing, selling and promoting

If marketing is finding out what your customers want and providing it, then selling is getting those customers to buy from you instead of someone else. And promotion is the educational vehicle that makes it all happen.

An effective promotional effort informs customers and prospects about your products and services; builds awareness of your brand; and creates an interest in buying. For most small and medium-sized businesses and organizations, direct mail marketing – periodically sending a mail piece to a target audience – is the #1 promotional method.

The strengths of direct mail marketing are:

- results are measurable – the response rate and ratio of costs to new sales can be easily calculated.
- a campaign can be tailored to any budget and expanded or contracted as needed.
- after the campaign is developed, the mail piece can be scheduled for mailing at the same time every month.

The effectiveness of direct mail advertising, as measured in response rate, increases with each subsequent mailing. By carefully selecting a mailing list and consistently mailing at regular intervals, over time you will gradually reach the people who are in the market for what you sell and want to buy now.

For best results, we recommend that you mail every month. What should you mail? We can think of two things: a post card directing customers and prospects to your web site where they can find product and service

information, alternating with useful information such as a tip based on your expertise in your industry.

Let us help you compile a mailing list and design a series of 12 post cards. By designing and printing everything you need for a year’s campaign you’ll enjoy some pricing benefits and be ready to mail on time every month.

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Advertising: the promotion of goods, services, companies or ideas, usually by an identified sponsor. Advertising in the United States dates back to Colonial America when classified ads were prominent in newspapers. The first advertising agency in the United States was established in Philadelphia in 1843 by Volney Palmer.

AIDA: acronym for attention, interest, desire, action – the four parts of a successful advertisement.

Call to action: the part of an advertisement that tells the reader who is interested what to do next. Often includes instructions to call, click, or return a response device.

Press release: a message sent to media outlets containing relevant, newsworthy information about a company, its products and services, or its employees.

Public relations: the art and science of managing communication between an organization and its key audiences to build, manage and sustain its positive image. The earliest public relations were practiced by publicists who specialized in promoting circuses, theatrical performances and other public spectacles. Public relations has its origins in the United States; many practices were developed to support the expansion of the railroads.

Urgency: a means of motivating a reader to take action quickly. Common techniques for creating urgency include limiting time for response or limiting the number of premiums available to respondents.

URL: acronym for uniform resource locator, the address of web pages on the World Wide Web.

Convenience. It is such an important part of the sales process. Make it convenient for your customers to do business with you, and they will. Here are a few ideas to help make things convenient for customers.

- *Idea 1: Make it easy for customers to use the means they like best to reach you.* How will you know what mode the customer prefers? You'll have to ask! As part of the initial contact, determine whether your customer prefers personal visits, phone, FAX or e-mail as the usual means of contact. Then make sure the customer has your phone, FAX and e-mail information.
- *Idea 2: Conform to your customer's accounts payable practices.* Find out what the purchasing and accounts payable departments require to facilitate payment of your invoices and how they like to receive invoices. Find out what payment policies are so you don't waste time and annoy the accounts payable department by unnecessary followup.

T H E I D E A

- *Idea 3: Be sure your business or organization is easy to find.* Review signage to be sure it is visible and in good repair. If your location is off the beaten path, consider having directions printed on the back of your business card. Add a map to your web site.
- *Idea 4: Provide a way for customers to contact you 24/7.* For many customers, the traditional 40-hour work week is a fiction. Give customers a way to contact you when they are thinking about you – e-mail is an excellent method for back-and-forth communication.
- *Idea 5: Keep your web site useful and interesting.* Provide relevant content on your web site so customers will think of it as a reference tool. Repeat visits by your customers for technical information, tips and tricks, frequently-asked questions and other useful material give you additional opportunities for contact.

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TRICKS & tips

Sometimes you may find yourself giving a presentation or speaking in public as a way to promote your business or organization. Here are a few tips for making the presentation effective:

- **Be yourself.** Let your personality be a part of the presentation and establish a connection with the audience. Share something about yourself as part of the presentation, or use a delivery style that is professional but distinctive. When you become one with the audience, you will increase their understanding and comprehension.
- **Be prepared.** A polished delivery comes from familiarity, which comes from rehearsing. Practice speaking your presentation and rewrite as necessary to accommodate your presentation style. Practice will also help you overcome any jitters you may have.
- **Keep your slides simple so you aren't tempted to read them.** During your presentation, elaborate on the information that appears on the slides. Remember that they capture the essence of your presentation, not the details. Too much information on the slides may cause people to tune out.
- **Add something memorable.** Give the audience something they won't be able to find on their own – an anecdote, an example from your personal experience, or an analysis based on your expertise.
- **Be a good teacher.** The purpose of most presentations is to inform or entertain. Use the time to teach your audience something new or improve their understanding.
- **Respect the audience's time.** Begin and end your presentation promptly. If answering questions, factor in that time and control the Q&A period so you can end on time.

Q. *I've heard that it is important to profile my top customers. How is that done?*

A. The benefit of profiling your best customers is to help you understand where your customers are coming from. Profiling will determine their common characteristics such as geographic location, sales volume, number of employees, years in business or age, income, gender, ethnicity, household income, etc.

If you are profiling a small number of customers, you may want to conduct a brief survey by phone or e-mail and ask the appropriate questions. For larger customer lists, we can arrange for *data append* that will add characteristics, when available, from publicly-available sources. Call us and we'll explain the process in more detail.

questions and answers