Marketing Needs to be Consistent with Daily Practice

Marketing is an every day task for the small business. The successful business has a plan which includes strategies that are ongoing and evaluated on a regular basis. In Today's column, I will remind small business owners that marketing touches many aspects of the business. Here are some practical ideas.

When you think of marketing, do you think about “pricing and payment”? How about:

✓ Analyze your fee/pricing structure; look for areas requiring modifications or adjustments.
✓ Establish a credit card payment option for clients, if you don’t offer it now.
✓ Give regular clients a discount.
✓ Learn to barter; offer discounts to members of certain clubs/professional groups/organizations in exchange for promotions in their publications.
✓ Give quick pay or cash discounts.
✓ Offer financing or installment plans.

How do you stay “top of mind” in your customers and potential customer base? What are you doing to stay in touch? How do you expect customers to remember you when they need your product or service? Here are some thoughts on communications:

✓ Publish a newsletter (information piece) for customers and prospects (it doesn't have to be fancy or expensive). Have you considered email marketing for this? For example, Constant Contact.
✓ Consider using one or more of the social media formats. Some can handle coupons.
✓ Develop a brochure of services and get it in the hands of people.
✓ Include a postage-paid survey card with your brochures and other company literature.
✓ Include check-off boxes or other items that will involve the reader and provide valuable feedback to you.
✓ Remember, business cards aren't working for you if they're in the box. Pass them out!
✓ Give prospects two business cards and brochures - one to keep and one to pass along.
✓ Produce separate business cards/sales literature for each of your target market segments (e.g. government and commercial and/or business and consumer).
✓ Create a poster or calendar to give away to customers and prospects.
✓ Print a slogan and/or one-sentence description of your business on letterhead, fax cover sheets, and invoices. Use it on your web site and all other information.
✓ Create a signature file to be used for all your e-mail messages. It should contain contact
details, including your Web site address and key information about your company that will make the reader want to contact you.

- Include testimonials from customers in your literature.
- Test a new contact list. If it produces results, add it to your current direct mail lists or consider replacing a list that's not performing up to expectations.
- Rather than sending direct mail in plain white envelopes, use colored or oversized envelopes to pique recipients' curiosity.
- Announce free or special offers in your direct response pieces. (Direct responses may be direct mail, broadcast faxes, or e-mail messages.) Include the offer in the beginning of the message as well as on the outside of the envelope for direct mail.

Does your customer base see you in the public media? How could you use the public media sources and how do you relate to that option?

- Write a column for the local newspaper, local business journal, or trade publication. Include related information about your business, but, remember this isn’t an ad for your business, it is public information on a topic related to your business.
- List that article on your website.
- Publish an article and circulate reprints.
- Send timely and newsworthy press releases as often as needed.
- Publicize your 500th client of the year (or other notable milestone).
- Update your media list often so that press releases are sent to the right media outlet and person.
- Create an annual award and publicize it.
- Get public relations and media training or read up on it.
- Appear on a radio or TV talk show.
- Create your own TV program on your industry or your specialty. Market the show to your local cable station or public broadcasting station as a regular program, or see if you can air your show on an open access cable channel.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper or trade magazine.
- Take an editor to lunch.
- Get a publicity photo taken and enclose with press releases.
- Consistently review newspapers and magazines for possible PR opportunities.
- Submit tip articles to newsletters and newspapers.
- Conduct industry research and develop a press release or article to announce an important discovery in your field.
- Create a press kit and keep its contents current.

Is your customer service a positive experience for your customers? Does it help or hinder your marketing efforts?

- Ask your clients to come back again.
- Return phone calls promptly.
- Set up a fax-on-demand or email system to easily respond to customer inquiries.
- Answer your phone during business hours and use an answering machine or voice mail system to catch after-hours phone calls. Include basic information in your outgoing messages such a business hours, location, etc.
- Ask clients what you can do the help them.
- Take clients out to a ball game, show, or another special event - just send them two
tickets with a note. Hold a seminar at your office for clients and prospects.
✓ Send handwritten thank you notes.
✓ Send birthday cards and appropriate seasonal greetings.
✓ Photocopy interesting articles and send them to clients and prospects with a hand-written FYI note and your business card.
✓ Create an area on your Web site specifically for your customers and testimonials.
✓ Redecorate your office or location where you meet with your clients.

Remember that you can learn more about marketing your small business, by contacting SCORE, America’s free and confidential source of small business mentoring and coaching.

__________
Dean L. Swanson
South East Minnesota SCORE
c/o Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce
220 South Broadway, Suite 100
Rochester, MN 55904
*Dean is a volunteer SCORE Counselor.