Grow Your Business With Your Competitors Customers

Last week I was chatting with a local small business CEO and she said “Dean, I sometimes feel so isolated running my business and I run out of new ideas. What is a good source for just coming up with ideas and new strategies for my business?” So we talked about several alternatives and the need for the local SCORE chapter to start another small business roundtable where CEOs can do just that…share ideas and issues.

That reminded me of Barry Moltz who has a website that he calls Business Unstuck. He gets business owners growing again by unlocking their long forgotten potential using decades of entrepreneurial experience in his own business ventures as well as consulting countless other entrepreneurs. Barry asked business folks about how they grow their business and then shared what he found out in one of his recent blogs.

For example, one way to grow a small business is to steal customers and market share from your competitors. Moltz suggests that we always start with the customers that are dissatisfied with their current vendor or companies that are struggling with their own profitability. Here are a few gems that he included:

- **Listen to gossip.** J.C. Carleson, former CIA undercover officer and author of *Work Like a Spy*, recommends: “Have an ear to the ground … attend awards dinners. Listen to the gossip; it often has a lot of merit. When you know your competition’s strengths and weaknesses, you can beat or counter their offers.”

- **Outsmart your competition.** Jay Moore, a business consultant, recalls a pizza restaurant placing a large ad in the Yellow Pages. Its competitor then ran a special giving 25 percent off any order if the customer would tear out the competitor’s ad and bring it in.

- **Let the leads come to you.** Mike Michalowicz, author of *The Pumpkin Plan* and an OPEN Forum contributor, suggests doing a little digging. Many times companies that go out of business still have advertising on billboards and bus stops, for example, and in Web listings. Call the listed phone number—if the number is disconnected, you can call your local phone company and get those numbers redirected to your business.

- **FedEx them the bad stuff.** Sometimes it’s beneficial for one company to stick the bad work a competitor is doing for a customer in their face. Marketing specialist Sandy Barris sends a FedEx letter to the potential client saying, “There must be spies, moles or double agents in their organization, because the marketing they are doing is helping the competitors a lot more than it’s helping their organization.” He then talks about how he can help them improve their marketing efforts.
✓ **LinkedIn poaching.** Some organizations are sloppy with their client list, especially in social media. One step is to look at the profile of a competitor and see who they are connected to. Mike Byrnes at Byrnes Consulting suggests that it’s pretty easy to find out which connections are customers that can be targeted. Similarly, Joseph Franklyn McElroy at Corporate Performance Artists forms connections with competitors’ employees on LinkedIn and follows their activities, new connections and lost ones.

✓ **Do small favors.** Michael J. Montgomery at Montgomery Consulting has a willingness to do small favors for the leaders of companies that he would like as clients, but who are currently doing business with other organizations. This puts him in a perfect position to be an alternative when leaders are unhappy with their current provider.

✓ **Romance them.** Most existing customers don’t get as much “love” from their vendors as new ones. Charles E. Gaudet II of Predictable Profits recommends giving customers compelling offers and speaking directly to their needs. “I let them know I feel their pain and I understand why they may be disappointed with who they are currently doing business with,” he says.

✓ **Flood the market with content.** Anyone can buy keywords to get more prospects clicking to a website. Patrick J. Griebel at Albuquerque Business Law, P.C. uses a very specific tactic. His firm produces hundreds of pages of blog content that some firms would charge a fee for in an initial consultation. In fact, Griebel says, “We have had people walk in with printed versions of blog posts in their hands saying, ‘I don’t want this to happen to me.’” He believes that while most small businesses practice guarding their secret sauce, in many cases, it’s a better idea to give it away.

✓ **Show off your strengths.** If you are competing on features and price, create a chart on the Web about how your company compares to the biggest competitor. Ravi Dehar at Seatme.com says his company shows potential clients a “cost comparison since we charge a flat rate, while our competitors charge per seated diner.” Allen Walton at Cheaters Spy Shop uses more thorough product descriptions and images, and says he gets feedback from customers saying “that we provide more detail about the product, leading them to purchase from us rather than competitors.”

✓ **Ask the ultimate question.** If you are the direct type, you may do what Michael Bremmer of Telecomquotes.com does. He asks only one question to a prospect: “Haven’t they been screwing you for the last 20 years, and isn’t that reason I’m actually here?”

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