

Does Your Business Need A Marketing Makeover?

By Sherryl Dever

Are you wondering where your clients have gone? Do you need to increase sales or want to improve your bottom line? Then you just might need a marketing makeover.

We're inundated with opinion, facts, technology and opportunity through every media. Further, we're bombarded with information and attitudes from employees, customers, clients, suppliers, vendors, family, friends and popular culture.

So how do we make sense of competing in a business world where everything, including our finances, have been turned upside down?

How can we remain focused on what matters to us when the world seems to be going to hell in a hand-basket?

The world is changing. We can't stop it, but we can change our business methods to meet the coming challenges. We must change with the times if we want our businesses to survive and support our families and our community.

The first thing is, people need to know how to find you. When business is down, marketing budgets need to go up. Right now and for the foreseeable future, money is tight. You need simple, more efficient ways to help your clients and customers find you. You need to remember where you've been and what's worked in the recent past. You also need to understand the kinds of strategies and products available to you now that are different than what you've used in the past.

For most business owners, marketing isn't what you do for a living. Fact is, marketing may seem like a bit of a black hole—the endless time and energy drain where money disappears. If that's the case for you, a simple approach is the best approach when it comes to marketing. You don't have to know-it-all—just a few important basics. "Pretty good marketing" can be the best solution given the recent economic slump.

Conducting your own marketing makeover

Thousands of powerful, informative books and articles have been published to assist small business owners with marketing their goods and services. That may be part of the problem: Where do you start?

When building your business, you probably didn't have the time or money to spend on promotions or advertising agencies. In today's saturated marketplace, where clients have so many choices, how do you help clients find you and keep them coming back? The answer is effective marketing—and it's the key to your success.

So what, exactly, is a marketing makeover? It's a process through which you'll ask yourself a few key questions. Take a quick inventory of things you have and need. Then develop a new plan based on the basics.

The basics

Ask yourself these important questions:

- What has my marketing produced for me in the past?
- What is my current marketing activity delivering?
Is it effective?
- Where do I learn more about what types of marketing best suit my business?
- What can I be doing to get better results?
- What am I currently doing to actively deliver a steady stream of prospects to my door?
- What do I need my marketing to include and produce now, and in the future?
- How should I measure the results?

It's very important to identify and understand your ideal clients if you're to make good marketing decisions. You'll find this information in your own financial and customer records. While reviewing your records your goal is to define your "ideal client."

Profile what makes a "best client or customer" for your business, then find out what each needs to choose you more frequently...and then do it. Strengthen relationships and build sales one customer at a time. Be sure to identify your top three sales-generating areas and focus your efforts, energy and money on them.

As small business owners we can make every dollar count by doing a little more legwork online. Take just a little bit of time each week to improve your marketing skill set. Use Google, Yahoo or Bing to search some key phrases starting with: "sales tools," "negotiation techniques," "compelling offer." Choosing to be more well versed on specific marketing topics can help you on your way to becoming even more competitive in the marketplace.

Update your marketing plan

If you have an informal or unwritten plan, take the time to make it official. If you have a plan, update it regularly. Be sure to fund your ideas. Calculate your potential return with each marketing project—before you invest. Without clear substantiation or proper financing, your plan may not generate the rate of return necessary to meet your business needs.

If your existing marketing efforts aren't working, stop now and assess the situation more thoroughly or bring in qualified assistance. You can't afford ideas that don't work in hopes that someday they might. The number one way to maximize marketing impact and stretch your marketing dollars is to consistently capture opportunities.

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Quick Current Marketing Method Inventory

The Basic Tools & Methods

Have/ Need Basics

Short List

- New Logo within the last three to five years
- Current business ID (letterhead, envelope, label, etc.)
- Update Business cards as necessary (at least every year)
- Website is 2.0 compliant (up-to-date web presence)
- Online listings and search rankings tracked and updated
- Appropriate social media participation selected and active
- Soliciting and utilizing regular customer/client feedback
- Compelling offer language to seal the deal
- Letter or postcard of introduction (print and email)
- Regularly scheduled contact with top customers/clients
- Welcome letter current
- Welcome email current
- Note cards/Thank You cards in stock
- Database/contacts list, contact history current
- Email signature current
- Client testimonials
- Results report on file

For Added Impact

- New customer/client orientation
- Elevator speech current
- Schedule of special events, at least twice a year
- Current brochure; print and online
- Reminder post cards in stock
- Coupon or certificate
- Auto-response email for special circumstances
- Announcements (email and regular mail)
- Reminder email
- E-publication or newsletter
- Updated press kit and regular news releases out with photos
- YouTube videos posted relevant key words
- White papers on your technical expertise/personal "story"
- Specialized educational materials in print and on the web
- Photo gallery on the web and in office
- Company clothing or imprinted items