

"Business Menu Planning"- Satisfy Your Customers, Don't Stuff

Them!

By Anne M. Obarski

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Be careful what you have on your business "menu" because someone might just want it!

I remember when hair salons offered very basic services. They cut hair, styled hair, permed hair and colored hair and occasionally they did a manicure or even a pedicure for their select clientele. I am a creature of habit. I have been going to the same salon, with the same stylist for 19 years. Nancy knows everything about me and my family and she does a fabulous job on my hair. She's just like family!

I also like her business sense. She is not a college graduate but her entrepreneurial skills could rival any Harvard grad. She has learned by the seat of her pants, so to speak. I am always amazed when she pulls out a big black book that has a listing of all of her clients and dates and descriptions of exactly the services she provided them. This "book" is 20 years old and has a history to go with it. She has built a business on offering the basics of the hair styling industry with personality, professionalism and confidentiality! I have told things to my hair stylist that my husband doesn't even know!

Recently, Nancy sold the salon to her partner. Nancy wanted more time to spend with her college age son and with her husband. The business consumed most of Nancy's life until she finally decided there were other things in life that needed her attention.

The new owner has lots of new ideas. In our area, hair salons are passé, day spas are in! Not only does the owner of a day spa need to offer all of the hair styling services but they must offer massages, skin treatments, nail services, and a "menu" of pampering experiences that only the rich and famous used to be able to afford! The funny thing is that our little community has about a dozen of these "spas"!

Along with offering these extra services comes the need to have employees who are certified and can provide these services. So the interviewing process begins again to find the right people, with the right skills that will fit into the business and help to increase the number of new clients.

Sometimes employees have to stretch, which means possibly providing a "service" that they have had little training on. Unfortunately for the client, that could have disastrous results as well as for the business owner. Make sure you can provide the service you offer with knowledgeable and professional employees. If not, it could cost you and your business dearly.

I like doing business with people in my community. Whenever I need something done around or in my home I try to use local businesses, as I would hope they would do the same for me.

Last summer, I was told by the man who cleans my gutters that my roofing tiles were disintegrating on one side of my roof. He told me to get it taken care of before winter.

We must have called a dozen "roofers" and not one even had the decency to call us back. Business must be very good in the roofing industry!

Then I ran across a postcard from a painter I had used years ago who had done a great job painting our house. I carefully read it to see what other services he offered. There was a list of things at the bottom of the card and one was "roofing". I called him immediately.

He answered the phone on the first ring! He told me he had call forwarding for the business because the person that calls his office wants something "now" and if he didn't answer right away, they would go on to the next person on their list. I liked his customer service rules immediately.

John came over to look at the roof and get the information he needed to give me an estimate. He came back the next day to present it and to set up a day to start working. Was I impressed! His estimate seemed a little high but I was SURE that the job would be worth it because I had built a trust with him and his company based on a prior "painting" experience.

A few day's later one of his employees showed up to work on the roof. I knew he must have been experienced because he was done by noon. I went out to take a look at the completed job, hoping that I wouldn't be able to see where he "patched" the roof. That was not the case!

The tiles went in straight rows, up and down the roof. They did not match the pattern of the other tiles and as I found out, they were merely nailed onto the existing "disintegrating" tiles.

It looked like a giant puzzle piece that wouldn't squeeze into the puzzle.

Then the spring rains came, and you guessed it, my ceilings are now leaking.

One small project has lead to a disaster.

I remember on his business card it said, "_____ Painting - A beautiful job every time!"

Well, I had him out the other day and asked him to look way up on my three story roof and ask me if "that was a beautiful job??" His answer was "No". His only comment was, "I thought my guy was out here three days?" That answers the question about his management skills!

You see, John is a great painter and has a great staff of painters. That's what John should stick to until he has professional, knowledgeable, and credible people working for him in the areas that aren't his forte.

I am noticing more and more businesses adding services so that they appear bigger and can increase their revenue streams. If those added services are a direct fit with the other segments of the business, great. If you have people that can provide those services with expertise, even better. If those items are merely "on the menu" and you have no idea who or how you would ever actually offer those services to a client, you better think twice.

Here are my 3 Suggestions for Business Menu Planning!

1. Meat and Potatoes- Start with the basics! What is it that you do best? What do people remember you for? When they hear your business name, what is the first thing that pops into their heads? If they had to recommend your business to their best friend, would they say; "You really need to see _____ they are absolutely the best at _____!"

2. A La Carte- What are some extra services or products that can be added when needed that you have the knowledge and the employees to be able to provide? If you have to say to yourself, "Gosh, we've never done that before", then don't offer it.

3. Dessert- What do you do that is so special that very few people do? Will your offering of that one item or service that is so different or unusual set you apart in the marketplace? Will people start to remember you for it? Is it really worth it to offer it or is it just a "hook"?

4. Critique- Are your customers satisfied with your products and your services, every time? Would they recommend you? Could they do a 30 second commercial about your business? It comes down to trust. Trust is so hard to build and so easy to lose. People want to do business with people they trust. People like to recommend people they trust. I won't be recommending my painter for any roofing jobs soon. I still believe his painting is superb. Stick with what you do best, and your clients will become your cheerleaders.

As you take a closer look at what you offer on your "business menu" make sure that it will satisfy your clients needs by offering them professional, knowledgeable and a credible product or service. Customers are picky. So pass the potatoes!

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