

Are You Marketing With a Deaf Ear?

By Charlie Cook

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Can you imagine having a phone conversation where you couldn't hear what the person at the other end was saying? You would have difficulty getting much done and you certainly couldn't tailor your response to their needs and interests. Yet this is the way many people market their products and services.

Most people make the mistake of thinking that marketing is one-way communication. The tendency is to create marketing materials and push them out to your target market and hope for a response. Marketing monologues, whether in person, in a brochure or on a web site are a sure way to scare prospects and clients away.

If you want to grow your business your objective should be to create a dialogue with prospects and help them become clients. Starting your marketing efforts by creating a two-way conversation with prospects can help you target your marketing efforts and open the door to future business.

- * Is your marketing communication two-way?
- * How often do you ask your prospects to identify their biggest problem, relative to the service or product you offer?
- * How often do you survey your target market to find out what they are worried about?
- * Can you list their most pressing concerns?
- * Do you use this information to regularly improve your marketing strategy and materials?

Large corporations provide annual job performance reviews and conduct annual customer satisfaction surveys. While annual feedback like this may be useful to you and is better

than nothing, your goal is to create an ongoing dialogue with your prospects and clients so that you can regularly improve how you market your services.

You won't want to rush back to the office after every client meeting to revise your marketing strategy, but the more often you ask questions to understand client and prospect concerns and then shape your marketing to match, the more new clients you'll attract.

Improve your marketing by listening to prospects and clients. Get them talking by asking the right questions and then hear what they have to say. Fortune 500 companies use marketing firms, charging tens of thousands of dollars to conduct customer satisfaction surveys. If you're an independent professional or small business owner, you can do it on your own provided you are a good listener.

Good general questions to ask include:

- What's the biggest obstacle to growing your company?

- What problems are your biggest concerns?

- What are your three most important objectives for the next month?

- What's the decision making process in your organization?

The specific questions you use will depend on the problems you solve for clients. If you install phone systems, you'll want to know what your prospects' biggest concern is about their phone system and its installation. If you're an accountant your questions will be about financial objectives. If you provide conflict management you'll want to find out the most common sources of discord.

The objective is to understand your prospects needs and then you can use this information to position your products and services. Let your target market tell you what they want to see and read. Good times to fine tune your marketing include; before you develop your marketing materials, when you talk with prospects and in your conversations with clients.

- List 3-5 questions you could ask a prospect or client to identify their biggest concerns relative to your service or products.

If you want to attract more clients, find ways to ensure your communication is two-way. Frequent surveys, in-person conversations and even watching how your clients use your products are all good ways to get feedback. When your communication is two-way you'll know what prospects and clients are concerned about and you can target your

marketing to increase your business.

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The author, Charlie Cook, helps independent professionals and small business owners who are struggling to attract more clients and grow their businesses. To get the free marketing guide, '7 Steps to Get More Clients and Grow Your Business' visit www.charliecook.net or write ccook@charliecook.net

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