

Five Key Concepts to Improve your Bottom-line Marketing Results

By J.Norman Sussman

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Undeniable fact: Almost everyone tends to do business with people they know and like. That's why one of the most important facets of your marketing program should be developing and using your interpersonal communication skills. If you allow yourself to be shy or antisocial (and we all have those rare moments), then you're undermining your success and creating a severe competitive and financial disadvantage. The other extreme, of course, is coming on too strong. If you're always approaching people with a blatant sales pitch, they'll initially respond with strong sales resistance; and the next time they see you, expect total avoidance! However, if you develop the knack (through practice) of casually mentioning your business in the course of friendly conversation, without trying to close sales or get on-the-spot commitments, then you'll be taking major steps toward cultivating a lucrative new source of customers and customer referrals. Following up at a later time with the prospect is usually necessary, either by mail or phone, but at least you'll have set the stage for contacting them and establishing a potential business relationship in the near future.

Be alert for opportunities to make new business contacts, and don't allow yourself to be caught off guard when opportunities arise. Whether you're at a Chamber of Commerce meeting, a 4th of July parade, or a wedding reception, be prepared to describe what you do, clearly and concisely; and always have a fresh supply of professional-looking business cards on hand. And while we're on the subject of business cards, here's something to think about: Has someone ever handed you a business card that was wrinkled, coffee stained, or had an out-of-date phone number on it that had to be crossed out and corrected by hand? I don't know which is worse: handing out an unprofessional-looking business card or not having any with you at all. Both are stumbling blocks to creating a favorable impression and acquiring new business.

Image is not everything, but it can make the difference between owning a thriving small business and just struggling to get by. You are constantly being judged by appearances, and that can tip the scales in either your direction or that of your competition. Poorly designed brochures, an amateurish logo, an unimaginative trade show booth, run-of-the-mill business cards, a garbled answering machine message, and dozens of other ways you represent yourself and your business can have a cumulative effect on your ability to acquire and retain customers. Focus your attention on quality and continuous improvement, and your image will take care of itself.

Enthusiasm is one of the most powerful antidotes to customer indecision, sales resistance, and the effects of a competitive business environment. Enthusiasm can be extremely contagious, whether it's face to face, over the phone, or even in print. If you act like you really believe in your product or service (and yourself), then your sales prospects will be a lot easier to win over and convert to loyal customers. Enthusiasm is not something you have to be born with; it's a habit you can practice and

cultivate. Remind yourself that when it's conveyed to prospective customers with sincerity and conviction, enthusiasm can literally translate into dollars and cents!

Another vital principle to keep in mind is that advertising and marketing messages that focus on the benefits a product or service provides, rather than just its features, almost always attracts more customers and generates a higher response rate. Features are important selling points, but it's often the anticipation of the benefits, the pleasure, the convenience, the speed, the prestige, the comfort, the savings, the security, the approval of others, the return on investment, or the enjoyment of a product or service that will close the sale and win the customer.

An effective marketing strategy consists of a planned, sustained, targeted, and integrated approach. Know who your prospects are, make sure you're visible to them in a variety of ways, and keep putting your marketing message in front of them on a daily basis.

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