

The Ultimate Marketing Secret

By Jim M. Allen

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Hold on a second! I know you're eager discover this marketing "secret" is, but before we get to that, I'd like you to do a quick exercise. So grab a pen and a piece of paper, this won't take long.

Ready?

Write down every method you currently use for marketing your business. Take your time. Put down every technique you employ. Let me know when you've finished.

All done? Swell.

So, what's on your list? Chances are you have the usual marketing tools: newspaper, radio and television ads; showcase videos; web sites; business cards, etc. You probably have some of the more "advanced" techniques, too: writing a regular column for a newspaper/magazine; vehicle placards/window detailing; regularly attending professional/association meetings; teaching classes; sponsoring community events; referrals agreements; etc.

All are useful tools for marketing your business. But there's another "must have" that you need on your list. I call it the "ultimate marketing secret" because an amazing number of businesses overlook it. So what is this remarkably effective marketing method?

Simple: CUSTOMER SERVICE.

I don't just mean simple customer service. I mean honest-to-goodness, 110% knock-your-socks-off-before-during-and-long-after-the-sale, gotta-love-this customer care. Or, as marketing guru Jay Conrad Levinson says, "customer bliss."

Too easy an answer, you say? Doesn't matter, it's true. Whether you believe it or not, the fact of the matter is, everything you do is marketing! And customer service is the primary "contact point" for the customer. It's what they will remember most about dealing with you and your business. If any aspect of your customer service falls below their needs, you've lost. --Sure, you might have a contract that keeps your from losing their business -- this time. But you won't get it again. And you probably won't get the business of anyone they know, work with, or talk to for the next few years...

Yahoo! executive Tim Sanders says in his new book LOVE IS THE KILLER APP, "At a time when more of us have more options than ever, there's no need to put up with a product or service that doesn't deliver, [or] a company that we don't like." Customers know this instinctively and, as the

saying goes, will “vote with their feet” as they walk away from your business and head over to your competitor.

If you want to attract – and keep – more customers, focus on developing exemplary customer service first and foremost! Even before you spend another dime on advertising. And remember, customers base that decision on THEIR definition of service, not yours. How? Well, start by focusing on the customer.

“The best service that you can give customers is to solve their problems,” says Thomas Proulx, President/CEO of Netpulse Communications. “Even better is to solve a problem for them before they even know they have a problem.” Look at every aspect of your service through the client’s eyes. Examine every interaction with you and your business from their perspective:

- What problems might they have understanding what services you provide?
- What materials need to be clearer? Better defined? Easier to read? Easier to get?
- Are you available at the times they need you most? Are your business hours compatible with their availability?
- How easy is it to contact you (and actually get through to you)? How quickly do you return calls? Answer emails?
- When they call, do they know whom they’re speaking with? Is your answering system clear and easy to navigate?
- Do your marketing materials (business cards, ads, flyers, etc.) all show the same information and contact numbers? Is it easy to find you/your office?
- Do you have ready access to a list of people who can help your clients with ancillary services they may need (notary public, inspectors, insurance, etc.)?
- Do you have systems in place to quickly obtain/retain/access needed client information?

And that’s just the start. You must review EVERYTHING that the client sees, hears, touches, talks to, interacts with in the process of doing business with you and ask yourself: “Is this helpful to my clients? Is this giving them exactly what they need most?”

When you start answering “yes” to those questions 100% of the time, you’ll be on your way to providing that oh-so-desired blissful customer service experience.

So there. The ultimate marketing secret is out of the bag. Who’s gonna use it first? You... or your competition?

Jim Allen is a professional life & business coach, speaker, and writer. He helps small businesses and professionals profit from low- and no-cost guerilla marketing techniques. For more ideas, subscribe to his free biweekly newsletter, THE BIG IDEA, by sending a blank email to: <mailto:SubscribeMS@CoachJim.com> .

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