

Marketing: Know Your Seasons

By Joan Friedlander

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Like many capable business owners and professionals, you are probably great at what you do and not so great at – nor thrilled about – marketing your services. It seems we sometimes spend more time marketing than actually conducting business. I have met more than one entrepreneur so turned off by their conceptions of marketing and what it takes, that they find themselves completely stumped and floundering.

There are many great ideas about how to effectively market yourself and your service-based business, and as many rules as there are marketing experts. Consider these:

- * You should be out networking three or four nights a week
- * Public speaking is the key to marketing success
- * You need a 30-second commercial that will attract attention
- * You need a user-friendly, interesting, information-filled Web site
- * You need to write (brilliant) articles
- * Tell everyone you meet what you do – even at the grocery store!
- * Follow-up is key, etc.

The list goes on. All are true, yet in their entirety can be overwhelming. After all, you have your own style, strengths and talents, an aversion to certain activities, and you have limited time and resources.

If you are not going to market 24/7, then what amount of time should you spend? If there are at least 100 marketing activities from which to choose, which are best for you? And just when should you be doing what?

Identifying and leveraging seasonal cycles

If you've been in business for two or three years, you've probably observed a rhythm to your business. You may have noticed times when interest in your products or services seems to pick up, without much effort on your part. If you look more closely, it's likely that some of this ebb and flow coincides with the seasons and artificial markers in life.

For example, let's look at the impact of the winter holidays on business.

For retailers and gift and/or product-based businesses: Most retailers generate as much as 80% of their business revenue between Thanksgiving and New Year's, so this is the time they pour on the

advertising dollars – buying bigger newspaper ads, running more promotions, and buying more TV time. Some companies advertise on TV only at this time of year. These companies are leveraging the natural cycles of their business opportunities and don't expend time and resources to the same degree at other times.

For service-based businesses: If you offer services that cater to individuals, the winter holidays are probably not a prime time for new business. People are too busy with other things. Vacation, family and holiday commitments virtually derail them from normal business. People may meet with you in November and December, but more than likely they won't commit to anything until January.

For me, there is a natural fall-off to my business between October and December when some clients are ready to take a break or wrap up their coaching. This provides an opportunity for me to prepare for new business in January, and to take time off. It's also an ideal time to meet prospective clients, to schedule speaking engagements, to prepare new programs, and so on. Then when people are ready to get back to work in January – to set goals for the new year and to focus on business again – I am ready for them.

Other seasonal markers

Spring breeds increased action for people. The sun is coming out and people are ready to emerge from the sluggishness of winter. It's time for spring-cleaning and a great time to focus your marketing efforts if your services support people in clearing out the cobwebs.

September marks the time when children return to school, people return from vacations, and the world is ready to get back to work – if only for a short period. Clients who start with you at this time either will be short-term clients or move easily through the holidays.

Summer can go both ways, and seems to be more individually based. I have had clients begin coaching in July, and July has been good for new memberships in an association to which I belong. If you are a product-based business impacted by the winter holidays, summer is a very important time for marketing and selling.

Relief from the 24/7 marketing compulsion.

By thinking about when and how to focus your marketing activities at different times of the year, you can corral the marketing "beast" and gain relief from the 24/7 marketing compulsion. Check out fuel cells for practical tips on how to better focus marketing activities within your own business.

Track your business seasons

Once you understand the "seasons" of your business, you can better plan for and know when to focus on certain marketing activities. This can help you avoid a great deal of frustration and needless expenditure of time and resources.

Step 1: Answer the following to evaluate the life cycle and value of your clients and customers

1. Do my customers purchase services from me over a long period, or do they buy once?
2. How many products does one customer buy?
3. How long does the average customer stay with me?
4. How much does the average customer spend with me?
5. How much money do I make per gig?
6. What is my monthly income and how does it change from month to month?

The shorter the cycle, the more frequently you need to focus on marketing activities that generate new prospects. The less money you make per client, the more clients you need. The results can be a real eye-opener – potentially affecting how and when you market your services, as well as how you decide to do business in the future.

Step 2: Plot your monthly revenue on a spreadsheet (If you hire someone to track your income and expenses, ask for his/her help).

Start your spreadsheet by listing clients or customers with whom you contract over time in the left-most column. Then, plot your monthly income for each client across the page. Do this for the last two calendar years for best results. This will help you determine the average life cycle of your clients. (If you have been in business less than a year, this is a great way to get to know your business. Consider this a head start.)

If you offer different products or services, list them out separately down the left-hand side of your chart and then show the months going across. Again, in this way, you can evaluate the value of your different products, programs, and/or clients and customers, which will help you know when you need to focus on marketing.

Is this a good time

If this is a good time to market your business, if you know clients await, check out Get Clients Now!™, a 6-week teleclass that helps you determine the best marketing strategies for you and provides support as you implement your marketing campaign over a 28-day period.

RESOURCES

Cycles, Trends and Turning Points: Practical Marketing & Sales Forecasting Techniques by John V. Crosby

If you are the kind of person who likes to know a lot about a subject, this may be the right resource for you. A little more technical than some books, it nonetheless contains a lot of narrative for those who are interested in the broad strokes.

Marketing for Dummies by Alexander Haim

Many positive reviews were given to this book on Amazon.com. The opposite of the Cycles, Trends and Turning Points, this book will provide a good overview of marketing basics.

Get Clients Now!: A 28-Day Marketing... by CJ Hayden

This is an excellent resource for the service-based professional. This book provides a great deal of information about the effectiveness and usefulness of different marketing strategies, and a full menu from which to design your own focused 28-day marketing plan. Once you've worked with the program once, you can use the book over and over to help you design new 28-day strategies as you grow your business and move through the different cycles.

JobShift: How to Prosper in a Workplace Without Jobs by William Bridges

While this may seem like an irrelevant book, it isn't. Bridges wrote about the changing world of work in the mid-1990's. He does an excellent job of describing the global trends, shifts and cycles that are impacting the way we do business and the new ways we need to think to be successful in business. This book will give you that global view and is easy to read.

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