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# OnSite

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## MARKETING MATTERS

### Four rules for marketing service businesses

Tough economic times are a good time to revisit the marketing basics that keep service businesses afloat.

If you're inclined to cut back on marketing, look instead for ways to reach customers more efficiently and at less cost. Here are some reminders of the basics from Kim Gordon, the marketing coach at Entrepreneur.com:

#### Be sure potential customers know you.

Put information on your website that personalizes the people who make up your company. People like to do business with those they know so going beyond the strictly-business copy will make potential customers feel more comfortable about contacting you. Remember, most shoppers do research on the web before deciding to buy.

Show how well your company delivers on its promises by offering testimonials, case histories or photos of your work.

#### Compete based on value.

Most clients choose the service provider who offers the best value for their money. Rather

than cut prices or rates, look for ways to add products or other extras that enhance the value of your service.

#### Offer incentives to work with you.

Customers with positive experiences will return and recommend you to others. But to draw new customers in, you need to tempt them to investigate you further. Offering free estimates, a reduced-price feature or economical home inspection can be the tipping points to make new customers call.



#### Keep in touch.

Keeping existing customers is cheaper than developing new ones so don't forget about past clients who can tell others about you. Send them a newsletter or email with testimonials. Let them know about changes in your

company or its services. Find any reason to tell them hello.

Set yourself apart from your competition by continuing to follow the basic principles of marketing. Find efficient and effective ways to keep your name in front of potential customers.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Nuts & bolts
- Working smarter

### NIR helps you boost your business

From networking to education to marketing assistance, the NIR supports restoration specialists. **434.973.4200**

### Be careful with teen workers

Construction is a natural industry for teenagers to find summer jobs. That is why OSHA is particularly vigilant about how contractors use younger workers. If you are hiring teenagers to work, here are some pointers to remember:

- The minimum age for construction work is 16 although 14- and 15-year-olds may do work in an office setting. However they may not work in an office trailer at a job site.
  - If you hire workers under 16 for office help, they may not operate any power-driven machinery including lawn and garden equipment. Don't keep them busy with yard work when things in the office are slow.
  - Employees under 16 may not be on construction sites where explosives are used, even if they are employed in other ways.
  - 17-year-olds may be employed as drivers so long as the vehicle does not weigh more than 6,000 pounds, they drive only in daylight hours and within a 30-mile radius of the workplace. They must also have completed driver's ed and have no record of moving violations at the time they are hired.
  - Workers under 18 are prohibited from using battery-operate drills. They may not clean or operate woodworking equipment but they may move material from one piece of equipment to another or place it on a conveyor system.
  - Those under 18 may not work on any roofing sites or to pick up debris from demolition sites.
- There are some exceptions for recognized apprenticeship programs so long as an experienced adult is working with the student at all times. Be sure your frontline supervisors know the rules so they don't allow younger workers to do jobs that will get you in trouble with OSHA.

## MANAGEMENT ISSUES

### Fighting on the job

It starts as an argument that may go on for several days. Moods are bad and tempers flair and suddenly you have two workers on a job site taking swings at each other.

Fighting on the job is a dismissable offense at most places. If you have an employee handbook, you probably have a statement in there to the effect that fighting is a cause for immediate discharge.

In cases where you want to keep one or both employees and the situation is not severe, there are other ways to handle altercations at work.

According to labor attorney John Phillips, managers will have to investigate fights but they should resist the impulse to launch an investigation immediately.

The best approach, according to Phillips, is to



suspend those involved in order to give them a brief cooling off period. Then conduct your investigation.

If you try to get details immediately, you'll inevitably get opposing sides to the story and different view from witnesses, so it's better to let some time and emotions settle before deciding what to do.

Whatever your decision, you will be setting a precedent so be sure you make it clear that fighting at work is simply unacceptable.

## Working Smarter

### Focus is an ability that can be improved

**What one trait do highly successful business leaders share (besides healthy wallets)?** They can focus intently on the task at hand.

Consider Arnold

Schwarzenegger, the guv-ehnat. He mastered body building at age 19 and later became a blockbuster star, millionaire businessman and governor of California. Observers say Schwarzenegger is famous for his ability to focus 100 percent of his attention on what he is doing.

**Focus is one of 12 executive traits every person has to varying degrees.**

Other traits include self-restraint, working memory, emotional control, task initiation, planning/prioritization, organization, time management, defining and achieving goals, flexibility, observation and stress tolerance.



NFI Research measured the focusing abilities of a global sample of business executives and found some predictable results. More than 90 percent of the senior executives ranked medium to very high on their ability to focus while only 8 percent of that top group were poor at focusing. No senior executive in a large company rated low on that skill.

Clearly, the ability to focus correlates highly to business success.

How can you improve your ability to focus?

- **Consciously rein in your wandering mind.**

Consciously let go of any thoughts except about what you are doing now. The future can wait. But don't make the mistake of trying to drive thoughts out of your mind because the more you command yourself not to think about something, the more the thought will creep back in. If you practice gently keeping your mind on one task, your focus will improve significantly in a few short weeks.

- **Remove as many distractions as possible.**

Turn off the radio, close the door and shut

**When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.**

— Samuel Johnson

off your computer's email program. Your mind is like your computer; when you run several programs simultaneously, the overall processing speed slows down.

- **Learn to listen rather than talk.** Active listening is a good way to improve your concentration. Avoid the tendency to think ahead to how you'll respond to what is being said.

- **Take long, deep breaths to clear your mind.**

Deep breathing is an essential activity for those who practice yoga or meditation. If you breathe deeply and listen to the sound of your breath, you will find that the chatter going on in your brain disappears and you can clearly think about the task at hand.

## NUTS AND BOLTS

### Governments having problems with bids for long-term projects

Contractors who are uneasy about materials prices and fuel costs are either overbidding or are not responding to requests for proposals for municipal and other government projects.

The few bids and higher prices are causing many projects to go back to the drawing boards with



new cost estimates and another round of solicitations. Contractors are reluctant to lock in to a long-term contract according

to Chris Runyan, president of the Ohio Contractors Association.

Asphalt and concrete prices are 11 percent higher than in 2007 and steel suppliers will guarantee their prices for no more than 30 days.

### LinkedIn new site for professionals

If you haven't made the leap into social networking yet, check out the fastest-growing site for professionals: [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com).

It's free to register and set up a profile and is rapidly becoming a reference site for those who want more information on the individuals they do business with.

### Changes to ADA under study

Changes being considered to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) could soon impact thousands of businesses that had earlier been exempted. The proposed regulations include access to courthouses, drinking fountains, amusement park rides, stadium and theater seating and other outdoor recreation sites.

Estimated cost to the seven million affected businesses and government agencies could total \$23 billion over the next 40 years according to estimates by the Department of Justice.

The Census Bureau estimates that the 51 million disabled Americans represent 18 percent of the population.

Final regulations could take effect next year after a period for public comment.

### Ebay sellers take note

The IRS is taking a serious look at online auction sites as a source for additional revenue. The regulations which will target businesses that sell on Ebay and other sites, is part of the housing rescue package. It will require PayPal and other processors of online payments to report annual gross receipts to the IRS for all but the smallest online merchants.

The measure is expected to bring in an estimated \$9.5 billion in taxes over the next 10 years.

Those who sell items for less than the original value will not be liable for additional taxes.



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