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MARKETING MATTERS

Keep your mix of digital and print marketing

With all we hear about digital marketing, social media, electronic newsletters and blogs these days, it's easy to wonder if direct mail marketing has gone the way of the 8-track tape.

Studies show clearly that direct mail is alive and well and is an important part of your marketing campaign.

Despite the fact that internet marketing has to be part of a marketing mix, many people never go online.

Recent surveys of online behavior have found that

- 21 percent of Americans have never visited a website, sent an email or used a search engine.
- Hispanic interest in direct mail has spiked. While 85 percent of Hispanic women read direct mail



Printed materials remain a vital part of your overall marketing efforts as many people are more likely to read brochures than websites.

pieces, only 53 percent read email-marketing messages.

- The most important factor in getting people to read direct-mail pieces is whether or not the customer has a need or potential use for a service.
- More than one in four consumers prefer direct mail marketing to email or internet contacts.

Promote your specialty What do you want your business to be recognized for? You can invest some time (and relatively little money) to remind potential clients of your specialty whether it is water damage clean-up or remodeling houses for senior lifestyles.

Just write an article and have it ready to send.

You can write the article yourself or have someone ghost-write it for you. Be sure you mention the potential problems that can occur when a job is not done properly. Then discuss the expertise your company has in using particular equipment or techniques to address that problem. Remember, however, that this is information – not a hard sell.

Your article should focus on problems that you can solve. Title it *The biggest problems that follow water damage or Ten ways to make your home senior-friendly*. State what doesn't work or what can happen if a job is not done properly. Then highlight your expertise in an informative way.

Have your article attractively formatted with pictures, headings and plenty of white space so that it is inviting and easy to ready.

You can prepare one article or several pieces about different specialties. Your goal is to have further information available when an opportunity arises.

At your first meeting with a prospect, spend your time trying to understand their problems and talk about solutions you can offer.

When a prospect first approaches you, what he or she is interested in is information. If you have an informative article ready to distribute, you can easily call the prospect a few days later and tell them you've written an article pertaining to their problem and ask if you could send it to them.

Once you send the article, contact them a week later and ask for their feedback.

So few businesses have targeted information to use in follow-ups that your company will be remembered when your clients decide they need the service you are offering.

MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Watch for employee fraud

The struggling economy is presenting a new challenge for many small businesses – employee fraud. During tough economic times,

fraud such as check-forgery, petty-cash theft and pilfering company property becomes more attractive to employees facing personal financial pressures. According to the Wall Street Journal, many affected companies attribute their losses to lower sales without ever suspecting foul play.

James Ratley, president of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, says that businesses often

overlook signs of employee theft because they are so focused on the economic downturn.

Employees who control bookkeeping, make bank deposits or have access to company credit cards have the opportunity to steal and avoid detection for months.

You can discourage employee fraud by

- paying attention to employees whose lifestyles seem to be beyond their means.
- reviewing every cancelled check and paying special attention to a signature on the back,
- reviewing bank statements to look for unusual transfers
- requiring all employees to take vacation.
- checking the background of prospective employees
- conducting surprise audits
- installing security cameras.
- encouraging employees to report suspected fraud anonymously.



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**

NUTS AND BOLTS

Construction industry looks for labor law changes

Many in the construction industry expect President Obama to shift the balance between union and nonunion employers because of his support of the Employee

Free Choice Act. The act is often described as a "card check" because it will allow a union to be recognized if 50 percent of the employees sign cards saying they want a union.

Currently an election can be called for if 30 percent of employees sign the cards. But union organizers usually try to get 60 percent.

The Employee Free Choice Act would require companies to recognize a union quickly rather than waiting to call for an election.



Prices for construction materials dropped .3% in January – the fourth consecutive monthly decline. The most significant delinces were for copper ore, aluminum and steel pipe. Forecasters predict that prices may continue to decline during the first half of 2009 before rising again.

Look for recovery in 2010

Every year in the US, about 15 million cars become so old that they can no longer be driven or the owners tire of them. Right now nobody is replacing their cars but eventually they will. And according to the National Association of Business Economists (NABE), that will help turn economic activity around later in 2009.

In its quarterly report, the NABE said that those who have lost jobs will not likely get a break until next year because the 90+ percent of people still working remain unwilling to spend.

Bridges without steel?

Maine researchers have developed a way to build bridges faster, cheaper and without steel. Observers say the technique developed at the University of Maine's Advanced Structures and Composites Center, could revolutionize bridge building.

Engineers have developed a rigid, inflatable arch that can be used to erect and reinforce bridges, temporary shelters and storage facilities.



Dubbed the "Bridge in A Backpack," the arch can be carried by one person. The arch is then inflated, put over a mold and infused with resin. Overnight, it becomes twice the strength of steel. It is then filled with concrete at the site.

The inflatable arches are easily transportable, quick to erect and eliminate the need for heavy equipment as well as for large construction crews to handle the weight.

The process will make stronger bridges that are faster and less costly to construct.

Working Smarter

Get a handle on your to-do list



Have you ever noticed that to-do lists are like rabbits? They seem to breed and multiply at wildfire speed.

There are some ways to tame your list. Here are some ideas from business consultant Pedro Martinez:

- Think in terms of tasks, not hours. We tend to allocate a certain amount of time to our work. If you decide what tasks you will finish without worrying about how much time you have, you'll approach your to-dos more efficiently. Group together those tasks that seem to fit with each other.

- Establish a pool of hours to tackle each project. Be flexible. Some projects may take only 3-4 hours while others might take 15. Estimate the time required to complete you're project and then schedule it, building in a small buffer.
- Begin with a sprint. Getting off to a fast start gives you a psychological boost and the best way to do that is to do a quick, rough outline of a project. Set a time limit for brainstorming – say 30 minutes – and then divide your project into chunks, working on one chunk at a time.
- Reward yourself when a project is completed. The satisfaction of completing one project will keep you from getting panicked about the other to-dos on your list. If you finish a project early, transfer the leftover hours in that pool to another project or just enjoy some bonus time.

Bottom line – become task-oriented rather than time-oriented and you'll be more productive and less stressed.

Have you considered outsourcing?

If you have a small number of employees, you may find yourself stretched for time and resources. Perhaps it's time to consider outsourcing some of your tasks.

You could benefit from this trend by taking a close look at activities you believe only you or your employees could do. Outsourcing can increase your efficiency, reduce labor costs or allow you to start new projects quickly. You have to invest some time up front training an outsourcing partner but the investment could pay rich rewards in terms of saving you time and money.

Vendors or independent contractors may be in your region or across the country. Pricing ranges

from fixed price to time-and-materials or a combination of both. For example, if you need design services for your marketing materials, you may find someone who charged a "fixed price per page" for work.

The best way to start is with one project before you consider outsourcing ongoing processes. Good communication is essential. It's good to establish a regular review schedule or status report for projects to stay on top of progress.

Services that are critical and complex such as legal services, management accounting and employee training are also candidates for outsourcing. Best advice – start small and then add chunks of work as you become more comfortable with the vendor.

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