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MARKETING MATTERS

Who are your ideal customers?

Before you can have an effective marketing plan, you must first know who you are marketing to. Seems simple enough. Yet too many businesses fail to go through the rigorous thought process of defining the audience they wish to reach.

You can't be all things to all people and loyalty to a company is not created overnight. Your prospects have to get to know you and your services before they will do business with you or refer you to others.

You probably have figured out such things as geographical area and age or income levels. But what else do you know about your ideal customer?

While you will provide services to almost any clients who seek them, you need to do a mental checklist about the people who would be the best fit for your company.

- What are their occupations? Where do they work?
- Do they have a long commute do work?
- Are they retired?
- What is their daily routine like?
- What do they do for fun or leisure?
Team sports? Movies? Dinners at home or at a fast food place?
- What about their family life? Are their children at home or do they live alone?
- What do they read and where do they get their news? Are they Internet junkies or parked in front of the TV?
- What groups do they belong to?



Once you go through this exercise and develop an extensive profile on your ideal customers, you will have a clearer idea of what services they care about.

MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Improving your staff meetings

Are your staff meetings more like the sleep lab or the front line? In today's corporate environment, either extreme may be more likely that the intended purpose of meeting to productively share information.

Using the techniques below can keep your staff meetings from being massive time-wasters and get unenthusiastic participants on-board.

Require advance status reports. Have staffers email weekly reports to all attendees prior to your meeting. That will save everybody time and allow people to focus attention on important matters rather than details.

Stick to a time limit. Your meeting should take place at the same time and end after a designated period. That will help people develop a rhythm for the meetings. You can help people conform to

the time limit if you schedule your meeting an hour before lunch or before closing time.

Focus on a major topic. If you dispense with routine staff reports and let people know the major topic ahead of time, you can more efficiently handle complex issues such as expansion of services or a new marketing plan.

Start off upbeat. Ask each member to tell something positive that happened during the past week. That effort helps put everyone in a better frame of mind. Use peer pressure to get the constant complainers to participate.

Ban mobile devices. Nothing is more distracting to a speaker than seeing a group of people gazing at Blackberries half hidden in their laps with their thumbs pumping away. Such behavior is rude and disrespectful, and that you are going to focus on face-to-face communication for one hour.

Snyder joins NIR as Director of Outreach

If you haven't heard from Jeff Snyder yet, you will soon. He is working with NIR to help improve the membership experience by finding new ways to add value. He welcomes your ideas on workshops, publications and other member services.



Jeff is familiar with our industry as an experienced real estate appraiser and small business manager. He managed three restaurants for Viamac, Inc. for 20 years before transitioning into real estate. He's a licensed REALTOR with The Real Estate Group in Salem, Va. and is eager to work with NIR members. Give Jeff a call at 540.537.3489 or email him at jeff@nir-inc.com to introduce yourself.

Let your expertise shine through

People are bombarded with so many messages today that it seems impossible to cut through the clutter. One way to gain attention is to focus on providing expert advice to others. Though most people will tune out repeated messages promoting your service, they will pay attention to helpful advice.

You can promote your expertise in a number of unobtrusive ways.

Package information you give to people every day into a consumable product – a blog, article, brochure or even a DVD. Think about the most common questions you receive and write a quick procedure or set of guidelines that you can post on your website. In doing this, you are promoting your expertise, not your service.

Put a downloadable brochure on your website with information about common questions. Ask for email addresses in exchange for the download and add those to your prospect list. If they live out of your geographic area, you are still positioning yourself as an expert and helping others.

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**

Working Smarter

Taming technology

If you feel overwhelmed by all of the technology linking you to others, you're not alone. A survey of entrepreneurs by Business News Daily found that most occasionally feel overwhelmed by the abundance of technology in their lives. Their major complaint is that with all these ways to be in constant contact, they realize hours go by without accomplishing anything.

Entrepreneurs who have analyzed the problem of digital overload offered their ideas for getting their productivity and focus back.

Exercise. Overuse of technology can cause anxiety and sleep problems because it is difficult for the brain to turn off at night. Exercise can help separate you from the constant call of new communications.

Disconnect. Set periods during the day when you turn off email, phones and other mobile devices. Rarely does something come along that is so urgent it cannot wait for two hours.

Move your work to another location. Sometimes physically going to another room or to the coffee shop on the corner will provide the change you need to meet a pressing deadline. Getting out of your normal environment lets you focus just on your work.

Take a digital vacation. Call it a mental-health day but try to go a day without the internet, your Blackberry or any emails. You might be amazed at what you accomplish.



The new frontier

GROUPON

Groupon -- the latest advertising craze for local markets -- can be a little like the Wild West

The internet coupon service is making waves for businesses that use the tool to promote specials and draw in new customers. Groupons are typically offered in a specific geographical area for a limited time. They are a great way to gain attention for your business among internet-savvy prospect.

Some businesses have learned, that Groupon can be too much of a good thing. A shoe designer in Chicago expected to sell about 50 Groupons when she announced a half-price deal for custom-designed shoes. She sold over 500 and had a 10-fold increase in visits to her website.

Her website traffic has remained high but her company was slammed by more orders than they could possibly fulfill quickly.

Marketing expert Shonali Burke offers these tips for using Groupon to avoid such problems:

Don't look for instant profits. Most Groupon offers are half off the regular price for 24 hours and Groupon then takes half of what is left so you have only a quarter of the actual sale. You should weigh the pros and cons of marketing to a mass audience including the benefits of reaching new customers.

Insist on getting at least a week's notice before the offer runs. If you ignore that detail, Groupon will just give you a call and say your offer is running the next day.

Prepare to provide extra customer service.

Most Groupon offers raise visibility and customer contacts. If you are custom to dealing with 50 customers a week, you may struggle to deal with 500 in a day.

NUTS AND BOLTS

Gift-Giving at the Office

This is a case where it might be a good idea to adopt Nancy Regan's advice when the former first lady was on her campaign to stop drug use among young people: Just say "NO." There are horror stories about office politics and holiday gifts and it's a murky area at best.



If gift exchanges are a custom in your office, you might take a poll and see if people really like the practice or if they just endure it as a rite of the holidays. If you decide to exchange gifts in your workplace, here are a few guidelines from Ask.com.

Keep it simple, low-cost and public. Set a price limit so that it will be affordable for the lowest-paid employee and tell everyone the rules. Let people know that overspending is frowned upon. Also discourage gifts that are belittling even if they are intended as jokes.

Don't give a private gift to the boss. It's in poor taste and will be perceived by co-workers

as an attempt to curry favor. However, if you are the boss, receive the gift graciously and quietly.

Be grateful and show good manners. If it's not something you want, be an adult, suck it up and say thanks. Lack of gratitude is never good.

Never give gifts that could be perceived as intimate.

Consider giving an office gift to a local charity in lieu of gift exchanges. That's a great alternative and avoids the feeling among workers that they are wasting money on an office ritual they would rather do without.

Let NIR Open Doors For You

Keep in touch with your clients by giving them information they can use.

Send NIR's popular newsletter on the insurance industry including business tips to all of your agents and adjusters.



Contact NIR to learn more:
434.973.4200
nir@nir-inc.com