



*A Monthly Update and Forum for Restoration Contractor Specialists*

## Marketing Matters

### Making connections with customers

Barry Feig, author of *Hot Button Marketing*, says marketers must appreciate the complex psychological needs people have in order to effectively reach them.

Last month, we listed the hot buttons that affect buying decisions. This month, we'll explore Feig's analysis of the link between the marketing messages and the desire to belong.

People are social animals who want to connect with others, even if they are not consciously aware of this need. Evidence of this tendency is everywhere. Consider all the logos, colors, decals, mascots, slogans, clothing and code words you come across that identify some type of brand, product or association.

More than any other people in the world, Americans demonstrate a need to connect with others. Consider the number of organizations and associations that exist, the clothing we wear representing an alma mater or athletic team and even the Gold Card or Platinum Card we carry identifying us as someone deserving premium credit.

Marketers can take advantage of this tendency by making connections in as many circles as possible. Connections help you learn the preferences people have and understand their frame of reference for making buying decisions. Once you begin to pay attention to this phenomenon, it is easy to spot marketers who use the need for connection to promote their products.

How can you apply this need to belong to your marketing strategy?

- **Develop your own affinity group** of customers and those interested in the services you offer. Perhaps hold quarterly gatherings with speakers who can talk about new home products, designing a room or ways to deal with common maintenance or remodeling problems.
- **Find well-respected people to offer testimonials** about your services. Promote those celebrity testimonials that come with products or services you offer.

## Highlights

- **Nuts & bolts**
- **Working smarter**
- **Hints to make you more efficient**

## Management Issues

### Difficult conversations with employees

The most distasteful part of being a manager is dealing with employees who are underperforming, seeking undeserved privileges or being targeted for layoffs. Unfortunately, such situations are part of the job description. Michael Maslanka, who writes for the *Texas Employment Law Letter*, offers suggestions on dealing with those dreaded negative conversations.

#### First, say what the conversation is not about.

If the situation requires guidance or a reprimand but not termination, say that up front. By being forthright about the goal of the conversation, you will calm worries and allow the employee to focus on your message.

#### Speak in a language people can understand.

If you are forced to do layoffs, say so. Don't be like the HR executive who insisted that a company was not downsizing but really rightsizing. That kind of word play makes juries mad.

#### Communicate fairness.

Statistics show that only one percent of ex-employees who feel they were treated fairly will sue compared with 17 percent who find a lawyer if they believe they were treated unfairly. To ensure a sense of fairness, get employee input into decisions and processes.

#### Communicate intent

This is a military technique that businesses would do well to adopt. Tell employees the goal of your action and let them decide how to carry it out. As soon as people know the intent of a directive, they can begin generating their own solutions.

#### Ask questions.

Questions clarify the situation and the reactions. By asking "How will our actions affect employees?" you are seeking information in a way that is not judgmental.

#### Use the word *No*.

*No* is a powerful word that managers are reluctant to use. But if you are thinking about saying *No*, do not dance around the inevitable. *No* clarifies the situation and gives everyone power to take the next step.

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## Working Smarter

### Advice on working and living

Regina Brett, a columnist for *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland, said that she listed some life lessons that have become the most requested column she has ever written. Since working smarter is about living better, her recommendations bear repeating.

- Life isn't fair but it is still good.
- When in doubt, just take the next small step.
- Life is too short to waste time hating anyone.
- Don't take yourself so seriously. No one else does.
- Pay off your credit cards every month.
- You don't have to win every argument. Agree to disagree.
- Cry with someone. It's more healing than crying alone.
- Save for retirement starting with your first paycheck.
- Make peace with your past so it won't screw up the present.
- It's okay to let your children see you cry.
- Do not compare your life to other people's lives. You have no idea what their journey is all about.
- If a relationship has to be secret, you shouldn't be in it.
- Everything can change in the blink of an eye. But don't worry; God never blinks.
- Life is too short for long pity parties. Get busy living, or get busy dying.
- You can get through anything if you stay put in today.
- A writer writes. If you want to be a writer, write.
- When it comes to going after what you love in life, don't take *No* for an answer.
- Over-prepare, then go with the flow.
- No one is in charge of your happiness except you.
- Frame every so-called disaster with these words: "In five years, will this matter?"
- Forgive everyone everything.
- What other people think of you is none of your business.
- Time heals almost everything. Give time time.
- However good or bad a situation is, it will change.
- Your job won't take care of you when you are sick. Your friends will.
- Stay in touch.
- Believe in miracles.
- God loves you because of who God is, not because of anything you did or didn't do.

## Nuts and Bolts

### Workers wasting less time

According to the third annual Wasting Time Survey conducted by the website salary.com, American workers waste just 1 hour 42 minutes per day compared with 1 hour 53 minutes last year and 2 hours 5 minutes in 2005.

More than 2000 workers took part in the survey. The top time-wasters? Internet use and socializing with co-workers. Respondents said the two main reasons they wasted time was not enough work to do and too much time to do it..

The results reflect the tight labor market and even tighter company budgets that give employees less time to waste.

### Construction jobs lost

About 7.7 million Americans are employed by construction companies – about 75,000 fewer than were employed a year ago. According to the National Association of Home Builders, strength in non-residential construction may continue to offset a downturn in housing unless recent difficulties in the credit market offset positive trends in other sectors.

Construction has a 5.9 percent unemployment rate compared to 4.6 percent for the overall labor force. For the past four months, construction jobs have lagged behind figures for the same month in 2006. Analysts predict that the next four months may show a surge in job losses as projects are completed and new projects are slow to come online.

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