

Marketing – Pizzazz for Peanuts

By Lee Silber

Marketing is a four-letter word—it's all about T-H-E-M. It is this premise that drives promotion. You must (yes, must) make others understand what you will do for them.

Promotion is all about meeting the needs of others with your products and services. Don't make them wonder why they should hire you, tell them – as clearly, concisely and cleverly as possible. But most of all, tell them how you will solve their problems, make their lives easier and help them in some big or small way. It's all about THEM.

1. Make THEM understand what you do. Word of mouth is the best way to build your business. People will have a hard time spreading the word if they can't wrap their minds around what you do. This is why almost every successful business has both a tag line (a sentence that sums up what they do) and a brief description of what they do. They make these statements interesting, intriguing, informative and insightful. Most of all they explain in just a few words what they can do for a potential customer. Many tag lines start out with, "We help (blank) to (blank) by (blank)." For instance, "We help home owners associations keep their trees trimmed with our proactive approach to maintenance and manicuring using clean and quiet equipment." (Or something like that.)

2. Know and show what you do for THEM. As author Zig Ziglar says, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care – about them." It helps to know who your best customers are and how and where to reach them but until you start talking about benefits people will say, "Who cares?" You have to be ready to answer that question. Who cares about what you do? Why do they need you and what you do? If I were my customer, where would I go to look for my service? What would I want? Who are my best customers



Keep in touch – This is one of the thank-you cards used by Arborwell of Castro Valley, Calif., to keep in communication with its customers.

now? Why do they use my services? If someone isn't using you, who are they hiring and why?

3. Keep in touch with THEM. The best way to follow-up, stay in touch and stay on top of people is with thank-you cards. You should buy them by the case and send a personal thank-you card for anything and everything.

Another way to follow up and stay in front of your customers is by creating a newsletter that is INFORMATIVE and packed with useful information. Better yet, make a booklet or write a book about what you do. An informed and educated customer is a better customer. Through education you may (in a soft-sell way) show them what else you can do for them and other services they may need. You could create and host your own how-to workshops, demonstrations, walking tours of properties you are proud of followed by a picnic and so on.

Another way to stay in the forefront is to appear on radio, TV and in print. Offer your services as an expert to the local

media. Write articles, host a show, appear as a guest or simply create your own magazine or e-zine. Finally, there is something said for persistence. If it is a customer you really want or one you want to make sure is happy, nothing beats a personal visit—and one where you show up with small gifts is even better (a small banzai tree for their office, a coffee mug or a T-shirt.)

4. Make THEM say "Wow!" It is far easier to keep customers than it is to get new ones. It is also easier to make existing customers into better ones. How do you do this? At every point of contact they have with your company (phone, billing, e-mail, in person, on the job, etc.) you make them say "Wow!" by exceeding their expectations. You finish ahead of schedule, do a little something extra, hire friendly and knowledgeable people who take the time to talk to customers and most of all, you do what you say, when you say you will.

5. Impress THEM with marketing materials. Pull out your business card. Is it all you want it to be? Is it better than your competitors? Is it unique? Is it professional? Your business card is two-sided, did you use the back for a testimonial or tree care tips? Maybe the back could be a coupon or discount for first-time customers. The possibilities are endless. Other marketing materials will include a brochure (show before and after photos), your letterhead (would your customers want you to use recycled paper), your e-mail (do you always include a signature/brief description of what you do/monthly special at the bottom?) and a Web site. (Web sites are a whole workshop by themselves.)

6. Reach THEM through positive publicity. The best way to get the word out about who you are and what you do is by using the media – newspapers, magazines, newsletters, e-zines, radio talk-shows, TV news and interview shows. Start by pitching story ideas to your local media outlets as well as industry specific publications and shows.

7. Find creative ways to market to THEM. (Below are several examples of how to promote your business without a big budget.)

Real-life creative self-promotion

a. One consultant sent blank paper and crayons and asked customers to write, draw, and color what they thought of his work.

b. The owner of a small business sent Valentine's Day cards to all of her clients that said, "I love working with you, thanks for your business." She figured everyone sends Christmas cards, but nobody sends Valentine's Day cards.

c. One obscure sculptor started doing wood carvings with a chain saw to garner more media attention.

d. A make-up artist who donates her time at burn centers touched the doctors so deeply they bankrolled her own line of cosmetics.

e. An appliance store owner tired of people saying they wanted to shop nearby stores before buying gave potential customers a free gallon of gourmet ice cream – that they had to take with them that day.

f. A psychologist's business card also includes a stress test.

g. A self-publisher made his trade show booth interactive. He started a story and allowed attendees to add to it. The final version was read at the industry dinner to the delight of all.

h. A hairstylist created flyers that included examples of what kind of cut goes with what shape of face and what the latest trends are. It also included a blank face where you could draw in what kind of cut you wanted.

i. To be more memorable, one small business owner hands out flowers at networking meetings.

j. One dry cleaner has their best customers' pictures printed on the paper that covers the hanger.

k. This author keeps a marketing "tool-box" in the trunk of his car to make sure he is prepared for ANY promotional opportunity that may arise.

l. A band performed in the parking lots of large companies as workers got off and sold CDs and promoted their club dates.

m. A graphic artist sends back poorly

designed forms along with her brochure and a rough sketch of how she could improve it.

n. A struggling wedding photographer began looking up birth announcements in the paper and approached new parents about portraits. Business is booming.

o. An aspiring filmmaker showed his documentary about sharks at night in hotel pools. The media loved it.

p. One author includes recipes in her mysteries and was able to attract the attention of food editors who gave her books more attention than book reviewers.

q. When this author visits bookstores, he inserts postcards featuring his book into competing titles.

r. One consultant answers help-wanted ads to get freelance work. He convinces corporations that it's cheaper to hire him than it is to bring in a full-time employee with benefits.

s. A clever glassblower had his workshop included in the tourist information handed out by hotel concierges.


t. A couple of actors in an off-Broadway play got on the subway and performed part of the play. They left off with a cliff-hanger and then handed out flyers for the play.

u. A clothing company in the lifestyle industry bought a bunch of die-cast metallic VW vans, put a sticker on the door of each van, and gave them away as a gimmick.


v. Here are a couple of creative mailings I have seen. One said, "No more accounting headaches with Berger Accounting" and included a mini pack of Tylenol. Others have included candy like Hot Tamales, Lifesavers, Good and Plenty and Runtts. They tied these in with their message and they worked, too!

w. One consultant calls into radio talk shows and writes letters to the editor to get his name (and message) out there. He is usually able to weave what he does into what he has to say.

x. A massage therapist got a company to pay \$10 per employee for a 10 minute message. Some of these employees became regular customers.

Lee Silber is an entrepreneur, author and speaker. This article was taken from a presentation made at TCI EXPO Spring in Long Beach in March 2005. 

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