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Staying in Touch Means Smart (Cost-Effective) Marketing



By Carolyn West Price

It's really not rocket science, but you would think it is since so many companies do not even bother to pursue it.

The "it," to which I am referring, is client relations.

But I am not referring to client service. Companies make their money by servicing clients, and to a greater or lesser degree, build their success on how well they meet those clients' needs. What I am referring to in this case is ongoing communications and marketing with clients—staying in their faces long after the transaction or engagement is complete so you maintain their attention.

Assuming they were happy with your service, your communications efforts will simply remind them of you for future needs or at least to keep your name fresh should they be in a conversation when it might be appropriate to refer you.

We've all been there—the conversation when a company or person's name we wish to recommend is "on the tip of the tongue," but just escapes us. Why is that? The company and/or person has not done an adequate job of staying in touch with us...of reinforcing their value...or of even updating us of new services or changes to their existing

ones that might be of interest to us (or someone we could refer.)

Why is this such an overlooked area of marketing?

It seems that we all spend so much time servicing the clients we have in hand with the "lean and mean" mentality of small businesses, and the extra time is spent to get new ones, that we never take time out to mechanize the process of staying in touch with those who have paid for our services (or even inquired about them). This effort simply is not even considered by many or gets back-burnered by others.

It need not be complicated, however, so here are three easy steps to get you started.

First, develop a database. If you don't have the skills or manpower to input the contacts, outsource it to a virtual assistant. They're quick, accurate, and very affordable. Determine how you will want to sort this database—by type of client, service, volume, date, age, etc. This may be worth discussing with a marketing pro who will help you consider the most strategic ways to communicate targeted messages to the right people (versus more generic contacts).

Second, identify your tactics for staying in touch-- at least 6-8 "touches" that you can make, especially with your "A" list (and fewer for the others, but at least 4 per year). Whether you develop your "A" list based on personal rapport (people you like and just hope you can

service again) or by a quantifiable method (profitable clients), you decide.

These touches should be varied throughout the year, but can include: personal phone calls, invitations to events (join you at a networking event, for instance), handwritten notes, bulletins, email newsletters, a post card campaign with "tip of the quarter or month" on them, clips of articles you have written which prove your credibility, nominations for awards, a birthday club (great for restaurants and retailers), etc.

Third, delegate the fulfillment of the program to an employee or find a firm that can make the process turn-key to keep it on track with minimal brain-power required on your part once the process is in full swing.

Remember to structure your plan so it evolves to include new contacts (once you're done working with a client) and criteria for purging old blood if you haven't heard from them after a specific period of time.

If you think about the statistic previously quoted in this column—it costs 5 times more to get a new client than to keep an old one—isn't it worth investing some time and money before year-end to get your client relations-contact maintenance program in place for the new year?

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