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Tough Times Require Creativity, Not Cash



By Carolyn West Price

It's that time of year again—fourth quarter is upon us. We've been at war this year, had a slow economy, and some of the strangest business-

stopping weather we've had in decades has hit us. Given these out-of-your-control variables, you may be sitting here in October wondering, "What can I do to salvage my year and even get close to my projections?"

Well, all is not lost. And, even in a down economy, there is no reason to stop marketing. Just re-think the all-too-common definition of marketing (i.e. — "marketing equals advertising") and look at the less expensive forms of marketing that you can do all year long.

Here are three areas, which do not necessarily cost a lot of money, but can be very, very effective in keeping your name in front of the right people: collateral, public relations, and client and referral-source relations.

The first is simple: look at the materials that represent you and objectively evaluate what first impression you are making. Don't forget to look at the pieces that are involved in the client-service side of your business—from customer service materials to invoices. How is your phone answered? How does your website look and function? How are your brochures? Your instructional pieces which you give to clients? Look at it all. Is there consistency of image and message?

Now look at public relations. What can you do in the community to create goodwill and also get media coverage. Write articles. Sponsor a team. Create a scholarship. Host seminars. Serve on a non-profit board of directors. Donate services or product to silent auctions. You get the idea—give and you shall receive. Remember that letters to the editor are one of the most underutilized tools of PR around.

The third area is relationship management. How well organized is your database so you can stay in touch with the people who know you—clients (past and current) and referral sources. What do you send to them? How do you stay in touch? How often? These "touches" can

range from "tip cards" to reprints of your articles that run in the paper or trade publications, to a simple phone call to say hello.

The key to this is to mechanize as much as you can without losing the personal touch. If you commit to touching base with your client database and your referral sources at least 6 times per year, you will overcome the "out of sight, out of mind" problem that plagues businesses, and even take advantage of cross-selling opportunities to get more business from non-active contacts.

Remember, marketing doesn't stop just because times get a little tough. Just re-allocate your money and energy to do the less expensive marketing, but marketing that may prove more effective in the long-run.

Get creative. You have less than 90 days to make those objectives. And, you can do it!

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