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Consistency & Repetition First, Sales Second

by Carolyn West Price

How often have you thought to yourself, "Well, I sent them information or I dropped off a card... but nothing happened," and now you're frustrated?

This is a particularly common complaint of owners of many new businesses, particularly one-person operations. In many cases, you started the business because you were good at doing a particular job while working for someone else and thought that doing it as a solo mission would be "better."



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Suddenly, when you wonder why people aren't responding to your sales effort and aren't beating your door down, you start to wonder if your initial definition of "better" is what it is cracked up to be. Whether your definition of "better" translated to the notion of having more time to do other things since you're in control of your schedule or just making more money than you could working for someone else, life isn't as rosy as you thought it would be.

Don't despair. Realize that you may be good at what you do, but that your experience did not include the sales function—plain and simple. Rather than become frustrated with the time it is taking to build the business, take the bull by the horns and first look at your industry and determine the "sales process."

As you can imagine, selling something new and different or a service everyone needs may be two entirely different sales and marketing processes than that which is effective for a discretionary purchase. If it is a necessity, you need to be better or perceived as the better value for other similar products or services. If your product or service is one that is more discretionary, such as some consulting services, for instance, the sales and marketing process may be much longer and require much more of you personally to build the relationships that will need to be built.

In any case, I will say that two secrets to success are patience and perseverance. That is, don't consider one contact with a company as enough. You know how the day goes, someone drops off literature or a card to you, you go about your day, week, or month, and may even want to use this company but can't easily locate the info so you call your old vendor or use the phone book.

Remember, one touch, two touches, even three are not enough. I am not suggesting you develop a "pain in the neck" strategy, however, the law of repetition is simply this: a person must be "touched" by the average company a minimum of 10 times (a number that is increasing every day as we all suffer through information overload) before he or she will make a purchase decision.

If you're sitting back waiting for the phone to ring after dropping off a card or making a single phone call, your time will be far more effective if you spend it to develop a plan for touching your prospects through a variety of "tactics."

Your plan should not only include multiple and varied contacts, but also facilitate conveying a consistent message to those you contact.

In addition to planning your methodology for data base development and marketing communications efforts, another tip is to expand your definition of "target market" to include other categories of people beyond "prospective customers." Plan how you can "touch" influencers or referral sources, in addition to past and current clients to "stay in their faces" (or your competition will). Are you taking advantage of educating family and friends about your services, too?

A sales training course that elicits behavioral change (versus a rah! rah! session) is also something you should consider, or even working with a professional coach. We all can't be good at what we do and great sales people. Even, if after investing some time in sales training, you decide this just isn't your thing, then look to hire someone to do business development for you.

Remember, working smart is better than working harder, so capitalize on your strengths, complement yours with others' strengths, and convey a great attitude (since you will definitely be smiling more if you're not so frustrated with selling).

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