

Got the Follow-Up Blues?

By Carolyn West-Price Touhey

“We met some great prospects and potential referral sources at the expo, but then we came back to work...”

You and I know the rest of the story. Despite all the great intentions to follow-up with these contacts, the daily “to do” list gets in the way and the stack of business cards eventually ends up in the back of a desk drawer. As a result of not contacting these people (or not getting in touch beyond the first contact), revenue is lost, and you can’t even measure the loss because the potential was never fully calculated.

Sound all-too-familiar?

It doesn’t have to be that way.

Devising a contact management system that is as mechanized as you can possibly make it is the key to stopping this viscous cycle. Whether you use a system as fundamental as the old file box tickler system, a software such as Outlook, or prefer to outsource your database entry and updating to a virtual assistant, the first step in this “system” is to put the people whose names you collect into categories.

Are they prospects, and if so, how serious? A list...B list? If they are potential strategic allies or referral sources, put them in the appropriate categories so you can tailor messages to them in a group communication. Remember vendors, too.

The next step is to work with a marketing person to determine how often and by what means will you contact these people. In this info-overload world, figure you need to make repetitive, well-planned impressions on everyone in your database; don’t forget special contacts with clients and past clients, making them feel appreciated in addition to reminding them of your existence.

Determine if you want those touches to be via email—maybe an email bulletin each quarter, a personal invitation to attend an event with you, and two seasonal post cards that promote a seminar or event you are hosting. You can even pre-plan your piece and pre-write them during a slower period—keeping them in the can until you are ready to implement them based on the schedule.

And, consider delegating or outsourcing the implementation as much as you can, so you can simply approve proofs and then focus on what you do best. From the writing and design, to the database maintenance, to a mail house, keep this vital marketing process as far away from your desk as you can, so it is one less responsibility that is way too easy to back-burner.

As another note, it is important to recognize that not all “touches” will be appropriate for everyone in your database; you can target your message depending upon the audience (vendors and referral sources may need a different message than clients, in some cases; yet the email bulletin or tip card could be appropriate for all to receive.) Just make sure each person hears from you six to eight times during the year at a minimum, and that will complement any indirect, more public “touches” they may see (such as advertising and press releases).

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If you set a goal that you will have your company (even if it's not you) contact the top 10 or top 20 prospects you meet at a networking event or show within 5 days of returning from the show, stick to it. At the very least, buy yourself a few extra days by writing "it was a pleasure to meet you...will follow-up with you next week" notes while you're in front of the tv or on the plane or as soon as you get back. Then, put those follow-up calls on someone's "to do" list and make sure they happen.

There is nothing worse than telling people (who took their time to talk with you) that you will contact them and then not. Your credibility and dependability are already shot before you even get a chance to work with them. It's a shame when our society forces us to be so busy that we are stunned when someone who promises to do something actually does it. Hmmm—seems like good manners equals good marketing.

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