

Sales, Marketing, and Playing the



BY JOHN GREENE

BACK in the day, AT&T made an impact with its slogan “Reach out and touch someone.” They should have also tacked on at the end “... and close the deal,” because that’s what sales and marketing is all about.

To be honest, it really should be called marketing and sales. As I see it, the marketing gets you the contact with the prospect, and then the sales part is closing the deal. But “sales and marketing” does flow better off the tongue, unlike say, Gamble & Proctor, or Hutch & Starsky.

Regardless of how you say it, sales and marketing drives the success of our industry, especially if done correctly and with some original and unique strategies. Back in the day, getting in touch with someone meant nothing more than simply picking up the phone, but today that’s just one method. If that’s the only way you are trying to reach new customers in 2014, then you are definitely dialing a number that has been disconnected.

It’s true that back in 1988 when I started my first company an important part of my business was to have a pocketful of dimes and close proximity to a pay phone at all times, not only to call prospects but to check in with the home office. Lots of phone calls, a slew of dinners, and numerous late nights stuffing envelopes later, I was working to get my name in front of potential customers. But people are busier these days, more standoffish, and are selective about who they’ll answer the phone for. It’s all done by email, which isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Today I can e-blast 1,000 prospects with the push of a send button. How long would it take me to call 1,000 people? By the by, an email may attract customers, but it’s still that personal phone call or face-to-face meeting that closes the sale. It’s about what works for you.

Today’s sales and marketing—unique to your company—needs to be a product of out-of-the-box thinking. But if you believe out-of-the-box marketing is just limited to Facebook, LinkedIn, a small ad in the local penny saver, and passing out business cards at your daughter’s soccer game, then you are indeed working with a very small box. Today more is more.

Truth be told, I do use both Facebook and LinkedIn for a portion of my marketing, but it shouldn’t be the only tool in your marketing toolbox. If you are waiting for Bill Gates to friend you on Facebook, don’t hold your breath. According to several industry marketing experts, only three percent of company owners have said they have ever sold anything on Facebook. But if used correctly, and with a splash of persistence and ingenuity, you can achieve the results you want through social media.

For instance, each month we do two blogs and one e-blast that are generated through our website and social media. Then our sales team, each of whom belong to at least 50 social media groups (e.g., corporate travel planners, wedding planners, travel associations, etc.), send it to their contacts, and so on and so on. Since we implemented inbound marketing, we have already seen the number of contacts who entered our company website through LinkedIn alone jump 35 percent. It’s obviously something that has worked for us and the people we target.

When it comes to a strong sales and marketing strategy, there are three areas that I feel should not be overlooked:

● **Outside sales:** Emails, phone calls, LinkedIn messages, even Skype meetings all serve a purpose in our not-enough-hours-in-the-day busy business lives. But don’t ignore that rare opportunity to shake a hand, pass out a business card, or look someone straight in an eye not filtered through a computer monitor. Build your brand by talking to people face to face; people still like to feel as though they are doing business with other people, not just a brand. It’s something no fancy, high-tech, graphics-loaded website can ever compete with.

● **Outbound marketing:** There are a number of key ways to reach potential clients, starting with good PR. Never think of yourself as being in the witness protection program—you want as many people to know about you as possible. Send out press releases to local publications and trade and association magazines about the good you do in the community, charitable endeavors, new hires, acquisitions, bumps in your technology prowess, your

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green initiatives, etc. Send them your company newsletter, put them on your e-blast or e-bulletin list, or drop them a postcard. These days with online printing companies like Vista Print, the cost for postcards is nominal—and they’ll even do a targeted mailing for you. This requires consistency so that your company is on their minds even if they don’t require your services at the moment.

● **Inbound marketing:** For our company, inbound marketing has been a virtual GPS in navigating from marketing to sales, and a tool we feel is the best opportunity to add new business. The sales process has changed dramatically over the past 30 years, when all it took to get in to see a client was a phone call and a briefcase. You could walk in any downtown office building, look at the directory, and pretty much know who the decision maker was for any company. In the good old days, that person would have been the president’s executive assistant or the company’s travel manager, where you could build a relationship. But in the era of company downsizing, a lot of travel decisions are being made in the procurement department, which means they probably have very little understanding of the industry, don’t care, and/or are likely focused on price. That’s why you need to keep your strategies fresh and relevant to the times.

Okay, so you have put all these marketing plans into place and have a list of thousands of names of potential clients ... now what? Start cold calling? Leave fliers under windshield wipers in the company garage? Absolutely, but only if you want to waste your time. Maybe it will work, but there are better ways.

What you want to do now is to use what an old friend once called "magnet marketing," which is to bring the customer to you instead of you going to them. The best way to do this is to let potential customers know a little about your company right off the bat. For example, send them your company newsletter, put them on your e-blast or e-bulletin list, drop them a postcard, link them to articles you have written for magazines—or to articles magazines have written about your company. But don't "overload" the prospect with too much information. He probably doesn't care that your favorite color is blue and you enjoy long walks on the beach. And never, ever, badmouth the competition, even if you know you are better than they are.

When it comes to effective sales and marketing, sometimes the best avenues drive right through your own neighborhood. For example, we have found partnering with professional sports teams to be very beneficial. Not only does it give us the opportunity to pick up a sure client (the team), but also gain access to thousands of potential clients (sponsors and fans). Most sponsorships come with "perks" in the form of tickets, signage on scoreboards, program ads, and select

nights when you can "woo" your top and potential clients, often in private suites.

Other means we found to be effective include joining large regional organizations, as well as remembering not to ignore the smaller business universe that's all around us, like the local chambers of commerce. It's easy to think that only the large regional associations have clout while the local business groups are populated with the likes of the manager for a nearby Target. But you need to keep the mindset that if the CEO of Target ever



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flies in from Minnesota and visits that store, he's probably not going to take a cab from the airport.

And sometimes the best marketing opportunity is closer to home than you think, like right down the hall in your company lunchroom. Maybe one of your prospects is ABC Pharmaceuticals. But if you don't ask, you'll never find out that Brenda in your accounting department is married to the brother of the CEO of ABC Pharmaceuticals.

You should also avoid obvious marketing mistakes, like branding your business with a

name that is too long to remember and too hard to type as a URL. ABC Worldwide Global Chauffeured Ground Transportation International is not only redundant, it's frustrating for anyone and everyone who has to answer the phone with it or type it into a browser. And when it comes to having people email you, lose the Hotmail or Gmail account. Nothing screams "small company" more than a search engine email address. You can easily—and often cheaply—purchase an email domain.

Effective sales and marketing has one goal: to land customers and increase your bottom line, and it's all a numbers game. You want your customers to get to know you and your company, because sales and marketing isn't and shouldn't be a sneak attack. Use the opportunities that present themselves to you in order to increase your name recognition, but know the tipping point between red with anger and parting with their green for your services. [CD]



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