

Beware of the Binge

We have all heard about the dangers of bingeing. Sometimes, for absolutely no apparent reason we find ourselves uncontrollably hungry and we go on a wild binge, eating everything in sight. The result is a stomachache and a promise we make to ourselves never to do that again. Most of us do it again though. The business equivalent of the eating binge is the marketing binge. Sometimes we feel an overwhelming need to get our name out there and we go on a completely random and highly uncoordinated spending spree. Sometimes we are aided by PR or Advertising agencies eager for the client and unsophisticated in the need to make certain your efforts are synchronized, so that you can gain some benefit. Instead you suffer the equivalent of the stomachache, which is the walletache, and you vow never to do that again. But without an alternative approach for effective marketing, you probably will.

The urge to splurge is understandable. There are times when business is slow and we get anxious and look toward marketing as the answer. We figure if we run some ads, hire some experts, and make a couple special offers we'll liven things up a bit, and once they're back up and running we can cut back again.

But this is not how marketing is done. It cannot be effective when implemented in desperate spurts. Marketing is an on-going process of conditioning that is achieved through value and presence, identification and dedication.

The anti-binge is remembering that marketing is something you engage in every time you interact with a customer, every time someone buys your product/service, and every time you connect with the market. In fact there are daily, weekly and monthly tasks you should be completing in order to be certain that your marketing is up to the standards you require.

Imagine what your marketing would be like if:

- Every day you made the effort and added one prospective customer to your database. This is done by understanding who your customers are, why they are your customers, and who else fits the profile. Once you have the lead it is important and effective to validate it, making certain the person or company genuinely meets the criteria of your profile.
- Every day you engage in an act of networking to expand your base and meet new people who could serve to drive business your way. This can include attending an event, inviting someone to lunch, speaking with customers about other people they know, etc.
- Every day you review 10 people in your database and make sure the information you have is current, that their buying habits are stable (and if not what are the changes and how they can be further encouraged if buying increased or reversed if buying has decreased), and that they are being communicated with regularly.
- Every day you mail out via email at least 10 messages to customers/clients asking them if their needs are being met and offering to be of service.

The total time daily required to engage in these core activities is about 2 hours. Yet, if you do them daily you will find that you have created the system within which you stay in touch with customers and feed the prospect channel that creates new customers.

These activities are supplemented by dedicating an additional 2 hours weekly to engage in the following:

- Telephone calls to prospects to introduce yourself and let them know the solutions you provide and the dedication you have to serving their needs.
- Emails to the customers you served the past week making certain that they were happy with the service they received and providing them with the opportunity to make suggestions for additional services and improvements. You should use this exchange to check the efficacy and customer friendliness of your processes, procedures and other passages through which your customers must pass.

Once you have your daily and weekly marketing activities worked into your schedule and you are growing more comfortable in engaging in marketing, you can begin to spend an additional 5 hours monthly making sure your communications to the market are constant, coordinated and effective. You should be engaging in some forms of external communications, including:

- Website – it is simple enough to make sure your website is as effective as possible. There is absolutely no excuse for a website that is not excellent in terms of meeting all your needs and communicating the style and quality of your company.
- Business Cards – your business cards need to be effective tools in drawing and maintaining attention. When you give out a business card you need to make sure the recipient will remember it (and you) when they go back to their office and go through the cards in their pockets.
- Brochure – too many companies are confusing website and brochure these days. The brochure is the leave-behind piece that is skillfully designed to communicate your company's products and benefits while saying something about the character and values of your company. The confusion stems from the fact that websites should accomplish these things as well, but the web provides the opportunity to expand on these elements and give the visitor a lot more. Perhaps the best way to view the difference is that the brochure is something you give to your prospect so it does not require any specific action on his/her part. This is an opportunity to make a first impression. If the brochure does its job it will drive people to your website, where you have the chance to expand on the positive first impression you made (through the brochure).
- Market Knowledge – the pity of the marketing binge is that so many companies do it in such a wasteful way. Lacking any intelligence on the market – their competitors and customers – they throw money away with messages that are either repetitive (a competitor is already saying what they now are starting to say) or ineffective (the customer base is unmoved and unimpressed with the message). You need to have some understanding of where your competitors are and what your customers want before you start marketing.
- The Little Things – the little things go a long way when it comes to marketing. For example, you need to make sure your emails have a signature. Not a big deal, but it reinforces the professional nature of your operations and leaves the recipients of your emails with a good impression. Similarly, the messages on your office and cell phones need to be professional and helpful, showing appreciation for the call and a commitment to return the call (which you must do in a timely fashion). All these little things count because cumulatively they create

an impression, and that impression creates a perception, and it is that perception that will drive the success of your business.

Binging is never the answer. When you feel the need to market, whether because your sales are down or a competitor is making noise that you need to counter, the way to go about it is through a carefully planned and properly executed marketing plan. Throwing money at the market will only lead to you having less money. Marketing properly is an investment. Binging is a fruitless exercise in the pursuit of instant gratification. It doesn't work, and it never will.