

Top Tips - attracting new customers

Despite the recession seemingly dragging on, now is the time to think about future company growth and how best to go about winning new business in the year ahead. There is no denying that budgets are tight so here are some top tips for attracting new customers, that won't cost a fortune.

1. Know your target market

Niche marketing is a successful strategy in the current economic climate for differentiating your business from the competition. Start by surveying your customer base to find areas of specialism:

- Analyse your customer base by industry, sales value, number, profitability, growth trends and how they became customers.
- Look at the competition, are they strong in a particular niche?
- Appoint a niche champion, someone with knowledge of the industry you are targeting.
- Build the profile of your champion.

2. Provide what your market wants

Keep in tune with what your customers want and your market produces. An essential part of this is to understand what drives and sustains their business, and then providing the products or services that can help them to enable their business to grow.

This may present a good opportunity to review your product range or service and its' pricing. The "value" of your product or service must match the common image you portray about the business.

3. Give incentives to customers for testimonials

Third party recommendations are more likely to result in a sale so set up a programme that rewards your customers for speaking highly about your company and its services or products. Remember that customers can now comment on social networking sites.

4. Maintain your company's reputation

Your company's reputation is now recognised as one of the primary considerations when customers choose who to buy from. PR is especially important in influencing the target audience and for creating a positive perception of the business. A powerful presence in the market can be achieved through:

- Writing specialist articles that appear in local papers and business magazines.
- Sourcing speaking opportunities to talk about your products and services.
- Working with local organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce or Business Networks.
- Speaking to your local radio station to provide comment on business stories relevant to your industry.
- Supporting your chosen niche at industry forums.

5. Make use of social media

Despite the fact that the UK business world is still divided about the benefits of social media, some 'trail-blazing' companies are finding that their use of Facebook and Twitter is helping to drive traffic to their web sites.

For example, you can create a Facebook page and start posting 'tweets' on topical issues on Twitter. You should place great emphasis on building strong relationships with existing customers and although referrals may still bring in most new business, by offering factsheets and advice on your Facebook page you can help the business increase the level of traffic back to your website.

6. Make attracting new clients an all year round priority

Don't 'dip in and out' of marketing activity, make it an all year round priority for the business and show commitment by forming a team that has that responsibility. Many companies only think about marketing when they have to or when the number of sales leads coming in trickles to nothing. Consider these points:

- Develop a marketing plan, as research shows that competitive companies are 15 times more likely to follow a written plan.
- Create a small team with good people skills with responsibility for executing the plan.
- Make the marketing plan the basis for all key strategic decisions that the business makes.
- Allocate time for all key staff in the company to further the marketing of the business. Don't be one of those companies that knows what to do and how to do it but doesn't get round to it.

7.) Add value to customers own business

What do you think your customers want from you? What is essential to one client is all but irrelevant to the next so it is essential to monitor closely the business news and look for useful snippets of information. There is no reason why you can't pick up the phone and tell a customer that you were thinking about how "X" might impact on their business and offer to help.

8. Keep it personal

Experience shows that personal relationships do matter and time spent cultivating strong relations with key contacts within your customers business is time well spent. You may have more than one contact in a business so ensure the image you portray to each of them is consistent.

9. Keep tabs on all your customers with one database

It is a common mistake for more than one person in the business to have their own customer lists and priorities with no common sharing capability. This results in data duplication and inefficiencies. In the long run, it can be more cost effective to invest in a Customer Relationship Management system where the process is automated to track prospects, leads and proposals.

Trackers can be set up to issue automated reminders on screen when follow up action is required, and status reports allow the business to see exactly what contact has been made.

10. Be straight with customers

Don't be frightened in the early customer meetings to ask the question 'Can we work with you?' The worst that can happen is that the answer is 'no'. Always aim to have a clear agenda if you are presenting to a customer, explain what you will be showing them and advise them that at the end of the meeting, you will be asking whether you can work together.

11. Raise awareness of your business

Launching a new advertising campaign can raise the profile of your business. Even a simple leaflet drop could be effective if correctly targeted. Now may be a good time to take out a new advert in a local paper. Try to get some free publicity by getting journalist to write good things about your business. Write something newsworthy about your business, a donation to charity or some local environmental work sponsored by you are good attention grabbing headlines.

REMEMBER!!

It is becoming more important for companies to attend local networking events but don't expect miraculous results overnight, you have to keep going along and let everyone get to know you. Developing trust takes time but it is worth the investment. Speaking at local events on topical issues that affect your customers is an excellent way of attracting new customers.