

## Have a Living & Breathing Marketing Plan Don't Just have One – USE It!

By George Scott

Frequently, a marketing plan sits on a shelf, getting dusty. And, yet, you may be wondering why your marketing plan isn't working.

Grab that marketing plan. Open it on your desk. And check to see if it has the following components ... at least the components that make the most sense for your business.

- **Competitive edge** – Besides the difference of you being you, what is that distinct difference that separates you from the crowd?
- **Proper pricing** – An alarming number of small business owners don't charge enough for their respective product or service. Learn about the "Market Tolerant Pricing Corridor" that fits your business.
- **Effective paid advertising** – Using the medium that makes the most sense for your business is the way to go. Keep in mind that, before you get to place your ad, there are production costs.
- **Effective public relations** – PR is a low-cost, no-cost version of paid advertising ... without the production and placement expenses.
- **Appropriately sturdy packing** – The last customer touchpoint is the opening of the protective container to remove the product purchased. If it can't be easily opened, it will be returned.
- **Reasonable "ease of use"** – Technicians invented the product and/or computer wizards created the new program – they know how everything works. The rest of us don't – but we're willing to learn.

Once unpacked, with *'some assembly required,'* make the directions reasonably sequential with the written directions consistent with pictures shown.

- **Distribution channel selection** – If you are a service business, can you do what you do over the

Internet? If your service has to be rendered in person, what is the extent of geography you are willing to travel to render that service??

If you are a manufacturer, will you be shipping your item via one of the traditional delivery services like UPS, FedEx, or even the US Postal Service? Or will you drop ship your product?

- **Well trained customer service reps** – Your CSRs should be people who are not easily rattled. Assuming you hire only that type of person for your customer service department, collectively, they can turn unhappy customers into intensely loyal ones.
- **Fair return policy** – Occasionally, your product or service will not please someone. A reasonable and easy to administer return policy helps the CSRs do their job more easily all while increasing the chances of customer retention.
- **Well trained sales force** – There are two things that will increase the chances of an effective sales force: the ability to sell and product/service knowledge.
- **Manage your social media properly** – This includes your customer comments section of your website. Not all available social media outlets should be used by every business.

Knowing what your customers are saying about your product is critically important.

Use common sense as you determine which components best fit your business. For example, with a service business, a return policy isn't needed but having well-trained customer service representatives is.

And remember to use your marketing plan as a guide, *NOT* a dust collector on the shelf.

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