



NDSU Extension

Small Business Newsletter

Business Owner Tips and Resources

April, 2012

How time flies. This issue marks the beginning of the second year for the newsletter. At the beginning of every month, it seems like such a hurdle to find something to include. Yet by the end of the month the thoughts are how to keep the newsletter from growing too long.

You will notice a new item this month, "Owner Wisdom." The goal is to offer some mentoring tips from existing business owners. This month the topic was, "What one piece of information would you offer to a new business owner?" I asked this to workshop participants at the Pride of Dakota annual meeting. The suggestions included:

Display well

The customer may not always be right but they are always the customer

Need to be knowledgeable about your products and excited (3)

Be sincere

Smile and be interested in their needs so you can meet them

Connect with your customer

Listen to your customer

Listen to what customers actually want and not what you think they want

Be personable and genuine (2)

Have samples – food, candle aromas, sprays – related article (<http://bit.ly/ILM4Tt>)

Identify what makes you unique

Positive attitude

Greet each customer with eye contact and a smile (2)

Love your product

Join Pride of Dakota (2)

As always, remember that I am interested in the questions you have or topics you want covered. Just send me an email. Also I am trying to include information on upcoming programs. Check out the last article on the Entrepreneurs and Their Communities April and May webinars.

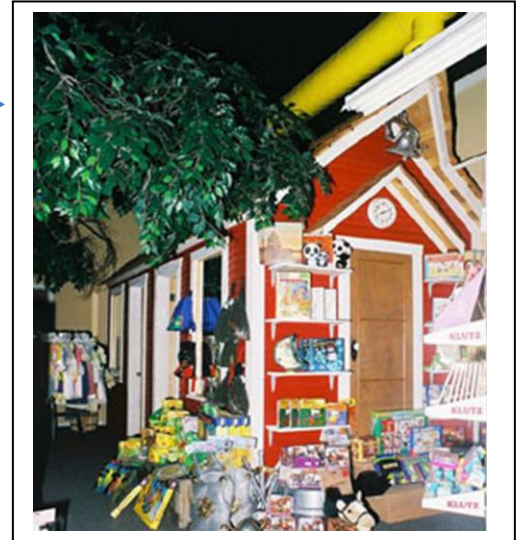
Till next time,
Glenn Muske
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Windshield Time

April found me in Valley City doing a workshop on the importance of visual merchandising. Good visual merchandising can be like adding up to 3 people to your staff. The following photos show just a few visual merchandising ideas.

Visual Merchandising – Design Elements

Business Image – Must be consistent
May want to offer a theme
Color and Texture
Line and Composition
Light and Lighting



Online Marketing: Examining the Possibilities Workshop

Mark your calendars - June 5-6, 2012!

NDSU Extension, United Tribes Technical College and Pride of Dakota are excited to announce an exciting two-day online marketing workshop coming to Bismarck on June 5-6. The workshop will be limited to 50 participants and will allow hands-on training in computer labs at United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck. The program is specialized to help small businesses looking to jump into online marketing and for those looking for a refresher course. There will be information for all levels available throughout the workshop.

Topics covered include: Website, Marketing Your Brand, Using Analytics, Twitter, Video, Facebook and more. The cost for the two-day workshop is \$40 and includes lunch each day.

Sales Tips

Able to lead a presentation recently looking at increasing your sales. Here are some of the things I learned

Next day had this article on my computer -

<http://tweakyourbiz.com/sales/2012/03/07/great-sales-presentations-that-fall-at-the-final-hurdle/>

Why Us?

You have all heard that your business needs a unique marketing position, something that sets you apart from your competitors. Initially it may be that your product or service is the only one on the market but that advantage will not last. So early on, you need to determine your value proposition and include it in all of your marketing?

Developing this unique advantage is difficult. The other day I came across a simple question that makes it much easier to perhaps handle. The question, "Why Us? The article offers some ideas such as: you know us; a better way, one of a kind; access: savings, convenience: and design. Read the entire article and come up with your value proposition - <http://www.ducttapemarketing.com/blog/2012/03/26/7-competition-crushing-value-propositions/>

What are the Risks?

Every small business owner faces risk during start-up and throughout the life of the business. Steps can be taken to minimize these risks but nothing can be done to fully eliminate them. The first step is risk minimization is to recognize what risks you face. Here is a helpful list that puts them into 10 categories - <http://blog.startupprofessionals.com/2012/03/ten-high-risk-drivers-every.html>

Working with the Angry Customer

Have you had to deal with an angry customer? What is your goal? Depending on how you define the term, a "win" might not be the best strategy. INC offers 5 ideas including saying "I'm sorry" and solving the problem together. Check out their article for the rest of the ideas. <http://www.inc.com/ron-burley/the-5-smartest-things-to-say-to-an-angry-customer.html>

Safeguard Your Data

Today we live with our data stored often in bits and bytes. In doing this, new threats abound. While a fire or other natural disaster can be problematic as always, we also face the problem of computer crashes, hackers, magnets (I have been there), and poor or no passwords. And because so often our data is "in the cloud, even more potential problems exist. This article offers a few thoughts and some steps to take - <http://bit.ly/H86Qei>

Writing for the Online Audience (And Elsewhere)

This article offers some helpful tips about the online reader and how to best write for that audience. The thought the tips were useful but might suggest that they work for any audience. Things like using visual content, writing in plain English, and breaking up a story with headings, bullets, etc. Take a look and think about your writing style. I always struggle with mine and find tips like this helpful. http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/best_practices_for_writing_for_online_readers.php

Business Success and Business Confidence: How Men and Women Differ

You may want to take a look at this INC article exploring a recent Hartford survey. Women feel more confident in the success of their business but both men and women are strong believers they will succeed. See more at: <http://wire.inc.com/2012/04/03/whos-more-confident-in-their-business-women-or-men/>

Customer Retention – It is NOT JUST PRICE

Quite often business owners are surprised that customers leave them even though they have the lowest price. A common reaction to that is to lower the price further or offer special deals and sales and maybe increase some aspect of customer service. However as the following article notes, customer retention is more often based on perceived value, trust and affection. If business could retain just 5% more of their customers, their return would increase, on average, per customer from 25 to 100%. Check out how Gallup Poll measures this total attachment including loyalty, confidence, integrity, pride, and passion - <http://gmj.gallup.com/content/745/constant-customer.aspx>.

You Built a Brand, Now Protect It

Building a brand takes time, effort and money. But are you protecting it? The value of your brand can quickly disappear. Yet by taking some proactive steps and using the online world, you can make sure that the perception of your brand reflects your company and its values. This article reminds you to monitor what is being said, respond promptly to comments, and don't let automation take over. <http://www.jeffbullas.com/2012/04/11/how-to-shield-your-brands-social-reputation/>

Brand Blunders

Nice follow up story to the previous one. Do you remember these brand blunders? <http://www.inc.com/ss/geoffrey-james/top-9-brand-blunders-all-time#0>

The Business Card Remains Key – Some Tips in Designing Yours

Ninety-five percent of business owners still value the business card. And in the increasing online world, its importance might be growing. It is important in terms of credibility and legitimacy. It is that tangible tool that helps me remember your business and how to get in contact with you as I may forget your name and where you are located. Check out these 10 tips on making your card stand out - <http://www.networksolutions.com/smallbusiness/2012/04/business-cards-in-the-21st-century-10-tips-to-follow/>

Traditional media versus Online – New Survey Shows Increasing Trust in Online

This report from Nielsen indicates that more consumers are turning to online media as a more trusted source. The article needs to be read carefully though since the online source it discusses are some type of consumer review or word-of-mouth (and those 2 items can be distinctly different) as opposed to general traditional advertising. Still if you own a business, this information and the trend it may suggest are things to watch. <http://wire.inc.com/2012/04/11/consumers-increasingly-distrust-traditional-advertising/>

Customer Service – You Can't Provide Too Much

Do you have regular questions about one of your products or services? Is there a tip you have learned that makes the use of them easier or faster? Do your customers tell others about the great service you provided? Customer service is one way to make your business stand out. This

article provides a good story about customer service and asks some questions you should consider. <http://www.smartcompany.com.au/advertising-and-marketing/049174-going-above-and-beyond-for-your-customers.html>

Help to Design Your Business Logo

How often do you identify a product simply by seeing the logo. Your logo can be an important part of your branding effort. Here are some tips - It doesn't need to be fancy. You do need your business name. A logo by itself does nothing to market your business. Get more help at: <http://www.inc.com/geoffrey-james/create-a-logo-7-smart-design-tips.html>

Working with the Angry Customer

So how do you handle the angry customer? Think the 3 "D's." Defuse, Don't be Defensive, Do Something, Decorate – Put a Cherry on Top. See the details at: http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505143_162-57414344/the-joys-of-slingshotting-unhappy-customers/

Upcoming Event – Improving Your Displays and Direct Marketing

On April 12th an eXtension "Entrepreneurs and Their Communities" webinar was held on product displays for direct markets. The recording and presentation materials are now available at <http://www.extension.org/pages/16076/etc-webinar-archive>.

Our next webinar will be **Thursday, May 10, 2012 at 2:00pm Eastern**. We will pick up the discussion where we left off this month continuing the discussion of the art and science of direct marketing. Be sure to mark your calendar and join us. No pre-registration is required and there is no fee to participate. About 10 minutes prior to the start time simply go the Adobe Connect Pro meeting room at <https://connect.extension.iastate.edu/etc-cop>. You will be presented with a login screen that has an "Enter as Guest" option. Enter your full name then click "Enter Room" to join the conference. You will be able to hear the audio directly from your computer's speakers.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

Customers can't tell you how to exceed their expectations, but they know it when they see it, they remember, and they tell their friends. - Martin Zwilling

MORE INFORMATION

Website: www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness
Facebook: www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz
Twitter: www.twitter.com/gmuske
LinkedIn: [glenn muske](http://glennmuske)