

Small-business Savvy: Avoid Being the Best-kept Secret

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You are finishing a sale when your customer comments on how great your place is and how he wishes he had known about it before.

Is your business the “best-kept secret?”

While that question should make you smile, it also should raise a concern. Reaching your full potential will not happen if people don’t know your business exists.

Do you wonder if your marketing plan is working? Or have you even put a marketing plan together?

You want the name of your business and what it does on the mind of your entire target audience and more. You want them to have a positive view of your reputation and the service you offer.

However, building a customer base doesn’t just happen. It takes a great deal of work. In this example, you could have asked the customer how he learned of your business. You also might ask more about his experience and what would have made it even better.

Finally, tell the customer you are trying to build your audience and ask for his help by:

- * Telling his friends
- * Letting you use him as a reference
- * Completing online reviews. This means knowing which sites - Yelp, TripAdvisor, Google Places, etc. - list reviews for your business. If you don’t have any reviews, now is the time to change that.

Those are some steps you can take with that customer. Now think about how you can work some of these same requests into your conversation with every customer you see today, tomorrow and next week.

Keep track of the answers you get. Compile them. Then look at these comments to update your marketing plan. What efforts are working? Where are you getting a return for your investment?

Marketing is not a “one and done” effort. You need to get your name in front of someone three to four times before he or she will remember it. And getting people to come in your door may take five to seven exposures. Furthermore, customers don’t remember. More than 50 percent of customers will forget your business within 30 days if you stop marketing.

None of this look at marketing addresses what media to use, whether it's traditional or online/social. You need both, but the level and type of each need to be customer-driven.

Plus your marketing plan needs to address the future. In marketing today, much of the future looks to be in the mobile arena.

So what's the goal? It's to never hear a customer say your business is the best-kept secret!

More information is available at your local Extension office, as well as at <http://powerofbusiness.net> and www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship.

The Small Business Administration and its related organizations, such as the Small Business Development Centers and Service Corps of Retired Executives, along with many other state agencies, also can be valuable resources.

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