

NDSU Extension Offers Small-business Marketing Tips

Have you tasted something, then told the cook, “You should sell that.”? Or maybe someone has said that to you. This simple comment might just be the idea for a new business.

“Individuals who make good food often are encouraged to start a business selling that product,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. “These businesses may have a strong start, but once local demand is met, the business owner has no other market. He or she may have some luck with word-of-mouth, but that only goes so far in developing a solid, ongoing business.”

In his “Guerrilla Marketing” book series, Jay Levinson discusses the thought that every successful business has marketing at its core. And yet a business owner’s common marketing mistake is having no marketing plan and doing little or no marketing.

“It is not unusual for business owners to think marketing means they just need to have a business card they can leave in various places or pin to a bulletin board,” says (Insert name) of (Insert title and county). “When they do have the chance to discuss their business with someone, often the only information they provide is the business name and where it is located.”

“Rarely do these conversations truly market the product,” continues (Insert last name). “The business owner misses two elements. The first element is discussing the benefits of the product. The second element is asking if the customer has a need for the product or if he or she knows other people who might need such a product.”

Talking about the benefits of a product is different than talking about the features. The features include the tangible product parts; for example, the product contains antioxidants or is made from whole grain. Customers are looking for benefits. Words that describe benefits include heart-healthy or contains 8 grams of fiber. Or you might say a product “brings back memories” or “tastes like grandma used to make,” thus suggesting it’s a comfort food.

Two additional marketing mistakes are advertising only locally and using the wrong method to reach your market. To reach your market, you need to have an understanding of who your market is, according to Muske.

“Children’s cereal is a good example,” he says. “Who uses the product, who are the influencers for buying the product and who actually buys the product?. These three questions may not have the same answer. If the answers are different, you might need a marketing campaign with a different message for each group.”

Visual marketing may be another missed marketing opportunity. Visual marketing could include your window display as well as your Web page. Visual marketing is a powerful tool often considered to be as effective as hiring another salesperson.

Some marketing campaigns get lost because the consumer is bombarded with marketing messages. If your message does not stand out or if you just do what everyone else does, your campaign might be ineffective.

When working face-to-face with a customer or potential customer, one simple marketing tool is to ask the person to buy your product. Every piece of marketing material should ask the potential customer to take action.

And for those who buy, ask them to tell others. A referral from a friend goes a long way in making another sale.

“Marketing is a broad concept,” says Muske. “In terms of product development, it starts at the idea stage and carries right on through customer service and support. It probably includes both traditional and online methods. The effective marketer is always evaluating what works best. Finally, the effective marketer never stops marketing.”

For more information on marketing, visit NDSU’s small-business support website at www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness. Sign up for the monthly newsletter. You also can contact your local Extension Service office at [insert phone number and email address] or visit www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship. Federal and state resources such as the Small Business Administration and Small Business Development Centers also are prepared to help.

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