

Focus on Marketing

For many people, business owners and consumers alike, marketing is defined as “making a sale.

“In reality, making the sale is actually just a small part of the business owner’s marketing effort,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist.

In fact, marketing begins at the moment you think of a product or service and continues through the launch period and, later, customer service. Today, marketing goes on into maintaining customer loyalty, which business owners hope will last through several purchase cycles. Marketing even takes into account the “green” score, or the ability to recycle the product at the end of its lifecycle.

With this broad definition of marketing in mind, business owners often ask for help in focusing on the key elements of marketing. They are busy and want guidance on where to spend their limited time and resources.

“Lots of information on the key marketing fundamentals is available,” says (Insert name and title) of (Insert county). “My suggestion is that they focus on the following: know the audience, it’s about the customer, and marketing is a process.”

These three fundamentals, if done and done correctly, can help the business owner establish an effective marketing campaign or get a sluggish campaign back on track.

Here is a deeper look at these fundamentals:

- * As a business owner, the goal is long-term relationships. Making a sale may bring in revenue one time, but adding a dedicated customer brings in revenue throughout a lifetime. And that customer becomes a walking billboard for your business. So get to know who your customers are and what they want in terms of benefits. Ask what is and is not working with your existing products/services and also with your total business effort, including marketing.

“The bottom line is the old adage: Give your customers what they want and provide it in the way they want it,” says Muske.

- * The idea of providing consumers what they want must be a visible part of your marketing campaign. Your message is the benefits your product or service can offer to solve the customers’ real-world problems.

“The business owner needs to move away from selling the features,” says (Last name). “The consumer wants to know how it will solve a problem.”

- * The entire marketing campaign must look and feel focused and seamless. All of the parts need to come together, with each part reinforcing the others. So often, marketing is just “doing” without planning and coordination.

“The ‘C’ words of consistent, coordinated and congruent come to mind,” Muske adds.

So how do you know if your marketing is “making the grade”? Start with listening. You also need to ask. Obviously, long-term growth in sales is a reflection, but even more importantly, successful marketing is the long-term growth in the number of consumers who become your ambassadors, your walking billboards. Make telling others a goal and measure your success by asking how people heard of you.

For more information, contact your local Extension Service office at [insert phone number and email address]. Also visit NDSU’s small-business support website at www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness and sign up for the monthly newsletter. Information also is provided on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz or Twitter at @gmuske. Another resource is <http://www.extension.org/entrepreneurship>. The Small Business Administration and its related organizations, Small Business Development Centers and the Service Corps of Retired Executives, are also useful resources.

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