

Prepare Small Businesses for 2013

Being successful in business means always having to be ahead of what is coming. For business owners, a new year means changes.

“As if things weren’t busy enough with many small retailers earning 25 to 40 percent of their yearly revenue during December, small-business owners often operate on a calendar year basis,” says (Insert name and title) of (Insert county). “That means they must be thinking about what they will do in the upcoming year.

“When family and personal tasks are added, it is not uncommon for the business owner to feel there is no time for sleep,” continued (Insert last name).

One obvious chore a business owner must do is end-of-year tax planning. Effective tax planning requires current financial records. Given the amount of revenue coming in, keeping financial records up to date becomes a major undertaking.

Tax planning is an area in which professional help can be of great assistance. The need for tax planning happens every year at the same time, so you already should have met with your accountant and prepared some “what if” scenarios. As you get closer to the end of the year, now is the time to pull out that list and start taking action.

“Another year-end task is to outline your marketing strategy for the upcoming year,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. “People are coming in the door now, but what will bring them back again?”

As you think about how to get repeat customers, consider how to move each shopper into becoming a more active buyer. For example, can you convince the once-a-year customer to stop in once a month, and can the once-a-month buyer become a weekly customer?

The goal is development of regular, repeat customers. This may mean working on offering a broader range of products and services. It also might include cross-selling or developing an awareness of complementary items or even your total offerings. Maybe you can bring customers back after the holiday season by offering classes on how to use their new purchase.

Remember, for many owners, this may be the one time they see a customer for the year. Face-to-face interaction is the best time to build rapport and trust. You always should encourage them to return, as well.

As part of your marketing strategy, this is a great time to think about new tools you want to use. This holiday season is another year with a substantial increase in online shopping and the use of mobile tools. But don’t forget the traditional media. Understanding what works in terms of marketing is the key to planning.

“The final thing I might suggest in terms of planning strategy is to think about personal development you or your staff may need to enhance business success as well as your personal quality of life,” says (Insert last name). “This may include planning when you might take some time off.”

As you think about developing your strategies for 2013 and meeting your professional development needs, consider what is available at 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. Or check out Facebook at www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz or Twitter at @gmuske. Another online resource is 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, and USDA Rural Development, along with many other state agencies, also can be valuable resources.

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