

Follow up: An Excellent Marketing Tool[®]

By Kathy Ellis, The Business Lab Marketing Coach

It may be that the specific task of following up is truly a sales function not a real marketing activity; however, nothing can ruin a great marketing plan faster than the failure to follow-up on the leads generated by your plan. Having a game plan on how to follow up can help solve this problem.

Follow up is probably one of the biggest challenges small companies face. Part of the challenge arises because there is no system and part of the challenge arises because there aren't enough people to implement the system — any system. Developing the system though is a great first step. If your system is intuitive and quick to implement, you'll notice that the lack of personnel becomes less of a challenge. In order to get to the point where your follow up system is quick and intuitive you'll need to pay some attention to your system and commit the time and research necessary to continually refine it until it becomes as automatic as answering the telephone.

Determine the ideal way to follow up: With your team, create "in-motion" scenarios — scenarios that depict the process from the time your client/prospect discovers something that you offer can help them, to the time they go in-motion and respond to you in some way: telephone call, E-mail, reply card, or walk-in. Imagining, role-playing, or writing out these scenarios will help you get in touch with your clients and prospects — you will essentially be honoring their action by preparing for them, and in so doing become acutely aware of how big a step this is for your client/prospect, you, and your company.

- How does the conversation sound? What is the tone? What words are said? What message is conveyed?
- What will you learn? Who are they? What do they need? Why do they need it?
- What actions are necessary? When will you meet them? When will you call them again? What will you send? How does that look and feel? How do they respond to this?

Create a system: Next, create a checklist or outline of the actual steps involved. For example: Assume that as a result of reading your newsletter a prospect requested your free Services Booklet via E-mail. The follow up steps might go something like this:

- Prospect's Name: _____
 Prospect's Company: _____
 Which marketing effort did they respond to? _____
 Date prospect contacted us? _____
- Respond to E-mail within 24 hours.
 - Response: Thank prospect; include any general or pre-written response.
 - Research prospect by visiting their website.
 - Send out Services Booklet with cover letter addressing this prospect's specific business or industry. Package goes out within 24 hours of receiving E-mail. Package is sent priority mail.

- Tickler follow-up call within three to five business days of package leaving office.
- Call prospect on determined day. Verify that package has been received, answer questions, determine next step.

Add next step to process:

- Schedule appointment (date and time) and add to calendar.
- Schedule follow up call (date) and add to calendar.
- Send additional information (what was sent?)
- When to follow up (date) and add to calendar.
- Determine prospect is not quite ready for our services yet but keep them on the list. Send thank you note and letter letting them know you look forward to staying in touch and doing business with them soon.

While these tracking and follow up activities are time-consuming, a consistent program of tracking marketing efforts is integral in knowing where you stand when you put forth the effort to market to clients/prospects. Doing a great job of marketing your company can actually hurt you if you have poor follow up procedures. This goes back to the essence of congruency and consistency and how they impact trust. If, because of some marketing effort on your part, a prospect contacts your company but you fail to follow up, then that prospect will immediately discount any further marketing effort on your part — they simply will no longer believe you and your message.

Tip from The Business Lab: Creating a top of mind awareness program like a newsletter, article or monthly/quarterly mail out will also be a big help in all of your follow up efforts. While these things should never replace the personal follow up when a prospect makes contact with your company, they will keep your prospects and clients aware of you and your products and services while you are busy producing your products and services. They will work "behind the scenes" for you, keeping you top of mind with all of your prospects/clients. And, one day, when their need crosses the path of your product/service, you will be the company they call.

More Information? If you would like to learn more about this important topic or would like to receive our FREE Service Ideas Booklet, please send an E-mail to kathy@thebusinesslab.com, visit our Web site at www.thebusinesslab.com, or fax a note on your letterhead to 281-374-0569.

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