

PROSPECTING-- Promotional Strategies

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In the sales profession, two effective ways to get business are to go out after it, or have it come to you. The first you do by prospecting; the second through promotional strategies.

Most salespeople agree it's much more pleasant and less time consuming when prospects come to them. The beauty of promotional strategies is: they plant a seed in your prospect's mind. In effect, you've made a "reservation" to be considered for future business. If your prospect has had positive exposure to you in advance, you will more easily establish the relationship, make the appointment and complete the sale. Promotion can give you the name recognition you need.

THE PROMOTIONAL STRATEGY

A successful promotional strategy multiplies the salesperson's presence and increases his effectiveness. A properly executed promotional program can accomplish these objectives:

1. Introduce your product or service to new prospects
2. Smooth the way for setting appointments
3. Encourage more purchases by current clients
4. Stimulate off-season purchases
5. Compete with competitor's promotional efforts
6. Keep present, former and future customers informed of your services
7. Enlarge your market by increasing activity in a wider geographic area

All promotional efforts aim to increase sales. While advertising and sales promotion do this directly; publicity and public relations influence sales indirectly, by encouraging the buyer to think highly of you, your company, and your products. Most people would rather buy from a person or company they "like" even if they don't know them personally.

If your company handles most of its own promotion, you should still think of

yourself as a company within a company. On a smaller scale, promotion is as important to the smaller company, as it is to the larger corporation.

Let's look at the four principal types of promotional strategies: advertising, sales promotion, public relations and publicity.

ADVERTISING

Advertising means a paid, persuasive presentation promoting you, your company, and/or your product/service. No matter how subtle or obvious your ad, the desired outcome can be achieved only through:

1. **Education** - Making prospects aware of yourself or your product and what you can do for them
2. **Preference Formation** - Getting the prospect to like you and prefer your product to the competition
3. **Generating an Inquiry** - Advertising doesn't make a customer, you do. But, you must get people to tell you of their interest

The size and nature of your business will determine which advertising means you will use. If you're a sales consultant, it often doesn't pay for you to advertise on TV or in newspapers. Trade journals can be a more effective medium. In determining which sources would best fill your needs, ask yourself some questions:

1. What message do I want to convey? Should more emphasis be put on my product/service or me?
2. What is my target audience? How can advertising expand it?
3. Where will my target prospects most likely see my message?
4. How much can I afford to spend on advertising this year? Can I afford not to advertise?
5. When is the best time to advertise?

With answers to these basic questions, you can choose the best resources for advertising. The following list is not all-inclusive: TV, radio, newspapers, direct mail, novelties, handbills/flyers, trade magazines, billboards, shopper's guides, consumer magazines, displays, brochures and yellow pages.

Patterns have emerged which show that some sources are better for salespeople than others. The most proven promotional methods in sales are, in this order:

1. Person to person contact
2. Telephone contact
3. Personal letter
4. Form letter
5. General promotional mailing
6. Display advertising

One good strategy combines a personal letter of introduction prior to personal contact. The benefits of personal contact are obvious -- each contact has a high impact. Both methods can be utilized appropriately and successfully.

SALES PROMOTIONS

Sales promotions differ from overall promotion in that they are onetime activities. They involve special sales, demonstrations, and other business stimulators that are temporary. Some common promotions are: demonstrations, novelties/gifts, special events, coupons, exhibit booths, incentives, celebrity appearances, discounts, promotional offers, holiday cards, open houses, and sales.

As an individual salesperson, think up new ways to promote sales, especially when your company does not. Keeping an eye on the calendar and knowing when a product needs to be sold most heavily will help you plan ahead. Begin your sales promotion early so that awareness has been established when the season arrives. If your company is involved in sales promotions, take advantage of them. If your company has a booth at a trade show, volunteer to work it. At the show, exchange business cards with everyone you meet. Try to set appointments while you're at the show rather than calling everyone later. If your company gives out calendars, stamp your name on them.

Whether you're independent or represent a large company, you can generate many promotional ideas. They create an immediate sales impact. Many promotional items have a long life and can remind your clients and prospects about you and your product throughout the year, like wall calendars.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations means relating to the public in a way that wins its appreciation. It involves goodwill and community awareness. Its affect on sales is indirect and more difficult to analyze. Sales do improve, however, because people like to do business with salespeople that take an interest in the community. In determining your best public relations strategies, you should consider:

1. Who are your "publics?" They are groups of people who perceive you as a businessperson. Some publics act on their perceptions and increase your sales; others just appreciate you. It is important to identify each of your publics and develop strategies for improving your image with them. For example, if you sell real estate, your publics could be bankers, mortgage companies, customers, the community at large, other brokers, property managers, etc.
2. How can you reach these publics? Many methods exist. Your choices might include:
 - a. Contributions of time or money to particular groups and activities, such as sponsoring Little League, bowling teams, sporting events, cultural activities, charities, community development programs, and others.
 - b. Public speeches - You can offer your services to a group who would like to hear you speak on your area of expertise.
 - c. Staged events - Your targeted publics may sponsor picnics, anniversary parties, ball games or other events. Your presence at these occasions gives your public a chance to get to know you in a relaxed, non-business setting.
 - d. Trade Associations - Belonging to these and special interest groups provides good PR for individuals and companies. Your membership shows that you care about the industry. You can also develop many prospects from your participation.
3. What image do you want to convey? Public relations can be more important to an individual salesperson than to a company. Your image is an "intangible" asset that affects sales as much as your "tangible" assets (products). The way

people see you on a day-to-day basis is very important. Therefore, public relations should be a way of life as well as a strategy for exposure. Professionalism is the best PR.

PUBLICITY

Publicity means getting exposure through the news media, utilizing announcements prepared by companies or the media of newsworthy stories or events. Publicity also can mean feature articles in magazines. This coverage or "free advertising" can have spectacular results. Publicity often succeeds where advertising fails:

1. **Credibility** - When people read an article in the paper or hear a story on the news, they automatically assume it is authentic and originated by the media.
2. **Subtlety** - Your message reaches many prospects who would otherwise resist contact. Prospects "ingest" your message as news rather than as "advertising."
3. **Dramatization** - Publicity can convey, "we are your neighbors, struggling with you and doing our part to improve life around us." Publicity, especially on a local level, helps create a feeling of community.

Publicity takes many forms. Your company or a public relations firm prepares press releases. These brief, newsworthy stories highlight you or the company in a way that interests the public. The difficulty is getting the media to use the story. To have your press releases published regularly, you must have expertise in publicity as well as good connections with the news media.

Feature Articles make excellent publicity. Written by staff or freelance writers for trade magazines, professional journals, and consumer magazines, they cover you or your business in more depth than a press release. If you're unique in some way, you may provide an interesting subject for a feature article that can be linked to your profession. In time your business will increase due to the publicity.

Photographs are good publicity vehicles. Newspapers often print unusual, humorous and interesting photographs. If you have a photograph that shows you or your company in an interesting light and is appealing from a journalistic viewpoint, send it to your local newspaper or trade journal.

It is rare to find a product or service that "speaks for itself" and doesn't need promotion. As professional salespeople, we must recognize that, and actively

promote products as well as our service or ourselves. Promotional strategies will not only get you in the door, they'll bring the business to your door.