

Marketing to the affluent



Reaching the rich requires a consistent and trustworthy message.

BY CASEY PAYTON

The affluent are one of the few population groups that still has money to spend. However, that's not to say they haven't become more selective about what they spend it on. Landscape business owners who want to get ahead will need to learn the best ways to market to the affluent. Succeeding in this niche will not happen overnight.

If you want to reach the affluent, business coach and Green Industry consultant Jeffrey Scott, founder of The Leader's Edge (peer groups for landscape business owners), says to be prepared to have a five-year marketing plan. "You're not going to market yourself to the affluent and get them to hire you right away," says Scott. "You have to prove yourself. There are three key ways to do that — involvement in the community, building a reputation, and showing staying power."

Community involvement

Getting involved in the community will

help you get noticed by a lot of different groups, but Scott says it's particularly important for reaching the affluent. "The affluent are community-minded and therefore like to be affiliated with companies that are active in the community," he says. "The wealthy like to give back. Think of Bill Gates. It makes them feel good, they can afford to do it, and there's also social pressure to do so."

Scott says that when you choose your community projects, consider picking a school or an organization within the same town as the affluent you're trying to reach — this will produce positive PR for you. "Schools have a built-in PR network. A school is always sending flyers out to parents informing them of what is going on; their next flyer could be about you," says Scott. "You should also get involved with the key charities within the towns you're targeting, and donate your services to those charities in the form of auction items. Ask your affluent clients what boards they sit on, and get involved with those boards first. There's a lot of value there because you'll have an opportunity to meet potential clients and get introduced to the friends of your clientele. Start small and focus on the charities that your clients are heavily involved in."

Building a reputation

Community involvement of course plays into building a reputation but there are other ways to make sure you

are a company that the affluent will respect. One of these ways is your branding. The affluent population pays close attention to branding and signage, says Scott, so it is important to have a professionally designed, attractive logo, and truck signage that stands out yet in a classy way. Your employees' uniforms should match your branding — think UPS. This will support your marketing and reputation building.

Direct mail marketing will help you build a reputation but Scott says this has to be done over time and is not going to work after a one-time hit. "People think the affluent don't read their own mail but that's not true," says Scott. "If they're repeatedly getting mail from you, they will see it and pay attention to it. The affluent are all about results. I suggest using 'results words' in the body copy of your mailers, but use 'aspiration words' in the headlines, like 'Imagine' or 'Dream.' These are words that will capture the affluent clients' attention. Above all else, you have to use drop-dead gorgeous photos showing outdoor living spaces that are professionally stylized."

The affluent rely heavily on recommendations of their peers so once you get in with one affluent property it could be your "in" for the whole neighborhood. "It's true the affluent surf the Internet, but it is more for research. They're more interested in whom their rich neighbors are using so that they can keep up with the Joneses," says Scott.

Staying power

It's not enough to be "here and there" involved in the community, you have to have staying power, says Scott. "That's why gaining entrée with the affluent can't be done overnight — it takes at least five years to build a stable, trustworthy reputation," he adds. "The affluent are planners and once you've caught their attention they're going to watch you and your marketing communication, to see if you are trustworthy. This segment cares about protecting their family, home, and investments."

Scott says that landscape companies that want to reach this population need to work their way into the affluent social circles and show consistency in those circles. "You can't plan to join a board for a few months or do one community project — the affluent are looking for long-term commitments," says Scott. "You have to build the relationship and prove you are in it for the long haul without looking for quick payback."

What they're all about

In order to reach the affluent, it helps to know what drives them, and what services they find most important. For example, the affluent tend to travel a lot and often have multiple properties so they're looking for someone they can count on while they are out of town, says Scott.

"They want a company that they can call up and say 'It's freezing and I forgot to shut my water off — can you do it?'" Scott adds.

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"They want someone they can trust inside their house, in their intimate surroundings, near their family and valuables. That's where building a strong reputation and staying power is critical to gaining access to this market.

Upselling is a "requirement" in marketing to the affluent — although that's certainly not what they'd call it, says Scott. To the affluent, it's about doing new projects and solving problems — even the ones they didn't know they had. "It's your job to present them with ideas that inspire them and to prevent or even reveal problems that you can fix," says Scott. "That's how you service the affluent. If you don't upsell to the affluent you can lose them. The idea is to create value by both taking work off their plate and giving them fun projects to be involved in."

Keep your feelings in check

If you decide to go after this population segment, it's important to keep your personal feelings in check. Scott says it's not uncommon for the average landscape professional to have some issues with the affluent. He calls it a "comfort gap" and says that some of it has to do with money.

"We may have a subconscious mixed attitude towards money — and towards those who have it," says Scott. "It's important to recognize your own attitudes and values and make sure that your staff and your company are taught to respect the affluent as hard working, successful, deserving people. Affluent people can act snobby, and you have to be willing to see yourself as a servant that is helping make their dreams come true."

But that's not to say that you can't have confidence in yourself. In fact, that's a necessity. You need to find the right blend between making yourself available and helpful to the affluent and showing that you are an expert at what you do. "The right attitude is important," says Scott. "You need to think of yourself as a unique problem solver and a specialist in what you do. You have knowledge that your clients don't have and that other vendors don't have. That's how you become a unique resource to the affluent." **\$\$**

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