

FALL MARKETING

Some companies have had great success marketing services in the fall. Before you start up such a program, here are some tips to follow.

by Rudd McGary and Ed Wandtke

For most green industry companies, spring is the most active marketing time. Opportunities exist for a fall marketing system that could be helpful to green industry companies, whether they be lawn care, tree or landscape services.

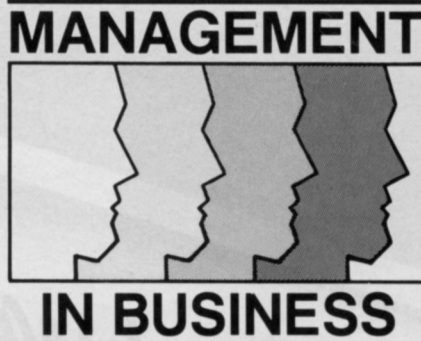
In the North, tree services can generate revenue for the winter months, and marketing can reflect the possibility of pruning at this time.

Southern areas have various opportunities for landscape and maintenance services in the winter months. But for the most part, fall marketing doesn't deal with raising revenue for the winter; rather it is done for both fall and next-season purposes.

Given the fact that fall marketing has been successful for some companies in various parts of the country, here are some of the keys to helping put together a strong fall marketing program:

1. Define the marketing's objective. If it is for extra sales in the fall, then you will approach it one way. If it is for generating fall revenue and for next-season customers, you'll approach it differently. (Examples later.)

2. Don't use the same materials for fall marketing that you used for your regular spring marketing. Some companies simply take the same mailing materials and telemarketing scripts and use the ones left over from spring in the fall. It doesn't work very well, if at all. You should include something



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that points out the benefits of your service over the winter months. If what you are doing in the fall doesn't help, why are you doing it?

3. Define your current customer base. This means that you need to know their geographical location as well as their income and their home values. By assessing these three simple pieces of information, you will be able to go the next step.

Information such as this is found in two places. For the location, check your own routing cards. For the demographic materials, look either to the library or mailing list companies. Both have the information. At the library it's free but time-consuming. With the mailing list companies, it's fast but costly.

4. Use your current customer list as a model for your fall marketing. Generally, people with similar buying patterns use such services. The best way to profile your next customer is to define your current customer base. This is especially true in the fall, when you have been servicing the next-door neighbors or people who are demographically the same, for the entire season. In the fall they can evaluate your work visually and get referrals from people who have been serviced.

If you've done your job well, these people will generally help you get new customers. If you haven't, you've

got more troubles than worrying about fall marketing anyway.

5. Be more liberal with incentives in the fall. But this statement is true only if you are trying to get people who will take both the fall and next-year services. If you are simply trying to generate a few fall sales, you shouldn't do anything out of the ordinary. If, however, you can get these people to become next-season customers, you can afford to be a little more generous with your offers. Then you won't have to spend time in the busy spring season to attract them, and you will have some extra revenue in the fall.

6. Start the marketing activity right after Labor Day. You want people who are going to be next-season customers to have a chance to work with your company this year. If you wait until October to do your marketing, you may be unable to actually provide them with your service. It is always better if a consumer has had previous service. And starting after Labor Day will help you provide them with a sample of how you operate your business.

Fall marketing should be focused not only on raising some extra revenue in the fall time window, but also on getting the customers to remain the next season. The keys are knowing your own current customer base, and using that knowledge to help target your customers for fall marketing. Most people buy services because someone else they know does also. This should be a key in the green industry marketing plans, but it's often overlooked. Don't do that in the fall marketing.

Finally, make sure that you use different materials from those used in the previous spring. Just because you have some brochures left over, a little free radio time from a barter arrangement, or an old telemarketing script, doesn't mean that you should use them in the fall. Planning to do your fall marketing early (as opposed to a rush of activity in September or October when you want a little more revenue) will help you design a marketing program to fit your company and help you be more profitable in the upcoming year.

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