

■ Want to develop a powerful information-gathering tool for your business at surprisingly low cost?

Implement a system to track and analyze all in-coming telephone calls to your business. These calls, particularly those from customers, are a treasure of data for the owner of any lawn care or landscape maintenance business.

**Not popular, yet**

Not everyone's already doing this. Only a half dozen or so lawn care business people, out of an audience of about 150 at a PLCAA educational session this past November, admitted they routinely log information they receive from in-coming phone calls.

This really surprised session leader Dr. Scott Mason, who described data coming from customer phone contacts as one of several information sources that allows a small company to compete with the big guys.

Mason is with Walker Research, a consulting firm headquartered in Indianapolis.

"If you collect and monitor data on

# Phone logs: cheap but valuable info

✓ may increase their business with your company as you offer new or expanded services.

✓ may recommend your company to others.

The flip side is that customers can, as easily, dump your services and/or bad-mouth your company to family and friends. That is, if you don't have a system to record, analyze and respond to their questions, complaints or concerns.

But by maintaining an accurate and regularly reviewed telephone log, business owners can respond to customers on a more timely and personal basis. They can resolve complaints and answer service calls, and retain customers that might have been lost.

**Marketing tool**

The owner can also use telephone data for marketing purposes.

For example:

- Are contract renewals ahead or behind last year?
- On what day of the week do most new business inquiries in?
- What kinds of services are people

Date	Init	Caller -- Name / Address	Phone	Customer Prospect Other	Action	Action Date	Init

Action Date:	Action by:	Comment:	Other <input type="checkbox"/>
Follow-up Date:	Confirmed by:	Comment:	
Date:	Name:	Phone:	New Customer <input type="checkbox"/>
Taken by:	Address:		Old Customer <input type="checkbox"/>
Action to be Taken:			Prospect <input type="checkbox"/>
			Vendor <input type="checkbox"/>
			Other <input type="checkbox"/>
Action Date:	Action by:	Comment:	
Follow-up Date:	Confirmed by:	Comment:	

transactions, you'll be well ahead of competitors," says Mason.

**Listen!**

Concentrate on listening to your current customers first.

"Most of tomorrow's business comes from retaining today's customers," says Mason. Today's customers:

✓ can continue to do business with you. (Retaining a current customer is more cost effective than generating a new one.)

**Two styles of phone logs are shown above. One is simpler, and could be used by almost any kind of business. The second is more customized and allows room for more comments about follow-up actions and a line to confirm that the customer is satisfied.**

being referred to by customers?

Basic bean counting—particularly when it comes to customer information—is often overlooked or under-estimated by the small business owner.

"Somebody at your phone should record every call that's coming in, who called, when it came in, and all the information that you think you're going to need," says Mason.

—Ron Hall