

10 ^{Killer} marketing strategies

Separate your company from the competition with these simple yet effective marketing tips

BY CHERI JONES

Whether you're a landscape professional or the owner of a billion-dollar sporting goods empire, marketing means the same thing: creating demand for your products. It really doesn't matter whether you sell lawn care services or tennis rackets. You're still trying to position your company to potential and existing customers as a dependable provider of your products or services through market planning and research, advertising, publicity and other marketing efforts.

Marketing is as much an art as it is a science, but the basics are pretty simple. Here's some key advice to help you put together a killer marketing plan:

1 Never underestimate the importance of a professional image. You can separate

your company from its competitors by ensuring that employees, equipment and all correspondence look as professional as possible. Think about it: You want to do business with people who look like they know what they're doing. Don't you think your customers feel the same way? Your company projects its image in many different ways — through its logo, written quotations, the cleanliness of your trucks and equipment, and the "can-do" attitude of employees.

2 Invest in a professionally designed logo. Hiring a graphic artist or ad agency to design a logo may cost some money, but it's worth the investment. Your logo is "you" to your customers. It's the foundation of your image. A well-designed logo can create a positive impression in the minds of your customers and can separate



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your company from its competitors. An ugly or outdated logo is a real turnoff. When you develop a new logo, make sure it's on all business cards, stationery, trucks, company uniforms and your Web site if you have one. A professional logo will tie together your image and is an important part of your overall marketing strategy.

3 Make all quotes look as professional as possible. To market yourself as a top-quality contractor, make sure your presentation of a quote on a job to a customer

comes off professionally, too. There's plenty of software out on the market to help you do this. A nice touch is to present your quote to a customer in a pocket folder emblazoned with your company's logo. It doesn't take much: Just print out your company's logo on computer labels and stick the labels on the folders. You may also want to include references and photos of recent jobs in your quotation folders.

4 Follow up all quotes promptly. You have two important challenges at quotations time. You must market your quotation as a fair price for the work to be done and market your company as a dependable supplier of that service. Part of that marketing is promptly following up on quotations. You don't have to be a pest, but you must show that you want the job.

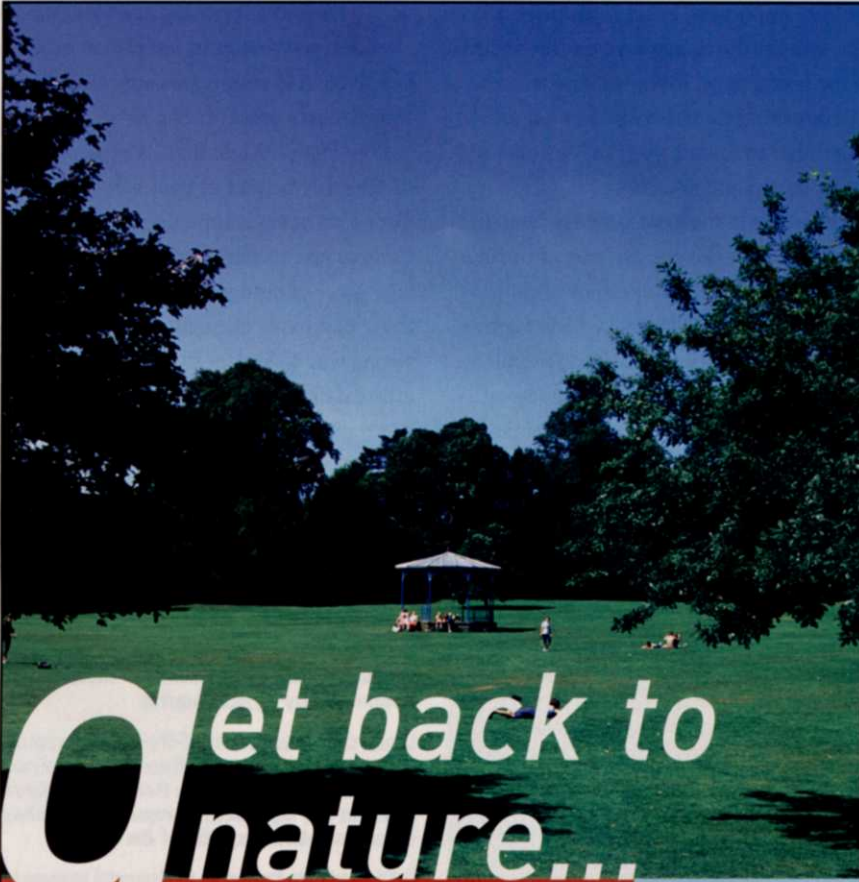
5 Promote your company with customized clothing. Investing in golf shirts, caps, sweaters, jackets, caps or other clothing for your workers that have embroidered company logos can really set your operation apart from the competition.

6 Consider a company newsletter. Promoting yourself as the local expert in your particular line of work is another effective marketing strategy. You can do this fairly inexpensively through a company newsletter that you send to existing and prospective customers. One Kansas City, MO-based lawn service and landscaping company sends out a quarterly newsletter that's chock-full of tips on proper mulching, perennial varieties, spring cleanup and many other interesting topics for homeowners.

7 Don't underestimate the power of a simple "thank you." In this age of mindless junk mail, thoughtless telemarketing and annoying e-mail blasts, a simple handwritten note goes a long way. Consider getting some "thank you" cards printed that you can send to customers to express appreciation for their business. Customer appreci-

ation is at the heart of any good business. Send a card with a discount on one of your services, or team up with a local restaurant to give your customers a free appetizer —

it's free advertising for the restaurant, and it will give your clients a nice treat for choosing you. You may also want to get customized greeting cards for the holidays.



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8 Create a professional-looking Web site. There are many Web site "designers" out there. You should choose a company that actually employs designers. Ask for samples of sites they've developed. Looks are very important, as are load times. Many sites will list the design firm on the bottom of the home page. If you see one you like, try contacting that firm for your site. Also, remember to update your site for each season with tips and images.

9 Be active in the local business community. Networking is also part of the marketing game, and it's important to get to know local business leaders who are active in organizations such as the Lion's Club, Chamber of Commerce and other small business organizations. Along with being a

wonderful resource for jobs, you can also work the grapevine at these meetings to learn about local market conditions, new development in the community, and ideas for running your business more profitably.


10 Look at advertising as an investment in your business, not just an expense. Relatively few contractors advertise their companies beyond placing an ad in the Yellow Pages. While that's a good start, it should only be part of your advertising plan. Too many companies think of advertising as just another expense, like buying a new piece of equipment to replace something that has broken down. That's the wrong way to look at it. Advertising helps create demand for your product and can pay for itself many times over. Think about

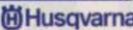
taking a small percentage of the profit you make on any job and putting it aside into an advertising and marketing fund.

You don't have to be a multi-million dollar company to take advantage of what marketing has to offer. The aforementioned marketing tips will help a company of any size grow and prosper. It takes an average of seven exposures for customers to remember your company's name, so try various methods to lead your company in the right direction.

— The author owns YourBiz Greetings, Overland Park, KS, and offers customized greeting cards and other marketing materials to small businesses. E-mail her at yourbizgreetings@kc.rr.com or visit her Web site at www.yourbizgreetings.com.

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