



TAKE AWAY

The economy is forcing businesses to take a closer look at how they attract and retain customers.

Ask customers for feedback on service, and adjust accordingly.

Define your competitive advantages clearly.

When the going gets tough . . .

. . . the tough look for ways to stay competitive.

BY HARVEY F. GOLDGLANTZ

IT'S BEEN about a year since the economy began its free fall. Banks, brokerage houses, insurance companies, financial behemoths (such as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac) and automakers all have tanked or been rescued from the brink, at least for the moment.

It's far from over.

Some point to financial indicators and say it's the beginning of the end of the recession. Others insist it's just the end of the beginning of the recession. And there are more than a few who believe we're on the precipice.

Unemployment is expected to top 10% by year's end. People are afraid. The middle class has collided head-on with Wall Street, and the fallout on Main Street hasn't been pretty. Feelings of distrust abound — of government, of financial institutions and, particularly, of big business.

What does this mean for you and *your* business? Well, that depends on how prepared you are to deal with the fallout from this mess.

First, some facts:

- › It's more difficult to attract new customers during recessions.
- › There's greater competition for less discretionary income.
- › Customers are less tolerant of service failures and communication gaffes.
- › Customer cancellations increase during economic downturns.

Protect your customer base

Because new customers and revenue are more challenging and expensive to come by during economic downturns, it makes sense to protect as much of your existing customer base as possible. Here are tips to help you do that:

- › Call customers after each service call and thank them for their business.
- › Mail a thank-you card after the initial visit.
- › Survey customer satisfaction levels annually.
- › Incorporate an “extraordinary service” delivery system as part of your operating strategy.
- › Add scheduled customer service training sessions for staff and laborers.
- › Reward individuals for performing superior service.
- › Insist supervisors perform ride-along quality control audits regularly.

Compete for new customers

Attracting new customers in the current highly competitive environment requires differentiating your company from your competition in a superior way. However, it's been my experience

ADDITIONAL READING

If you'd like to learn more about what you can do in this challenging economy to take control of your businesses future, *Landscape Management* proudly presents Harvey Goldglantz's new book, *Marketing Matters: The Ultimate Reference Guide to Making the Most of Your Marketing Money*. Visit <http://shop.landscapemanagement.net> for details.

“ ... IT MAKES SENSE TO PROTECT AS MUCH OF YOUR EXISTING CUSTOMER BASE AS POSSIBLE.

... PICK ANY EMPLOYEE AND ASK HIM WHY A CUSTOMER SHOULD CHOOSE YOUR COMPANY OVER A COMPETITOR.”

that few companies are adept at this. Don't believe me? Try this simple test:

Pick any employee and ask him why a customer should choose your company over a competitor. Chances are you'll get one of the following answers:

- › We deliver better service.
- › We're more knowledgeable.
- › We're more experienced.
- › We've been in business longer.

These are great answers, but they're the same answers your competitor's employees will give. They're hardly differentiation points.

When differentiation points fail to deliver perceived value, price becomes the central focus. Service differentiation becomes even more critical during depressed economies when the disbursement of discretionary income becomes a focal point. **LM**

The author is president of Pest Control Marketing Co., Inc. an Elkins Park, PA-based marketing and management consulting firm for the lawn care and pest management industries. Contact him at 215/782-1150 or hgpcmcinc@aol.com.

LET HISTORY BE A GUIDE

Even during the Great Depression, there were entrepreneurs who were able to make money. Confidence can be instilled and control of your business will be obtained through the lessons learned about strategic planning and targeted budgeting.

Consider these facts:

- › There will always be a need for lawn and landscape management.
- › When the economy sours, the value delivery system becomes more scrutinized.
- › During depressed economies, customers focus on and prioritize discretionary spending.
- › Companies that excel at delivering a higher level of perceived value will command a larger share of their business segment pie.
- › It's more important to be able to differentiate yourself from your competitors when competing for fewer discretionary dollars in a troubled economy. — *HFG*.