



EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

Contact Marisa at 216/706-3764 or via email at mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net.

On first impressions

Knowing full well that you get what you pay for, I occasionally dabble in Groupon-purchasing. Who doesn't like a good deal? Plus, as someone who writes about small businesses, I'm intrigued with the process.

The draw for most daily deal merchants is less about making money from the deal itself and more about exposure to new customers. After all, Groupon requires offers to be at least 50 percent off the sticker price and it keeps half of the sales, so you can assume the most sellers earn from their deals is a quarter of their product's or service's original price.

When I buy a daily deal I recognize I'm likely buying the merchant's "loss leader," so I maintain relatively low expectations and I expect a hard up-sell.

Recently I bought an offer from a heating, ventilation and air conditioning contractor for an air conditioner/furnace tune-up. I decided to take a chance on a deal of this nature, figuring the cheap tune-up was the contractor's strategy to gain access to many new customers, who he could sign on to his recurring maintenance plan or target in the future for new unit sales.

I was pleasantly surprised when I called the company, a person answered the phone and I had an appointment scheduled within a week. Next, I was happy when the technician arrived for the appointment promptly. He was friendly, did his work efficiently inside and out and was on his way.

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Check marks all around.

I thought it was odd he didn't try to sell me anything else. That's when I went downstairs to inspect the furnace and uncovered the crux of the company's strategy. Slapped to the side of the unit was a sticker with its logo, phone number and website. The contractor's concept was to take a hit on the tune-up to plaster contact information to the place homeowners will look when something goes wrong: the furnace itself.

Although I would have preferred a magnet to a sticker, I was OK with the tactic. In fact, I thought it was clever. Then I went outside to see if the same sticker appeared on my air conditioning unit, but before I could get there I was stopped in my tracks. Stretching down the driveway, across the deck and half of the yard was my garden hose, which the technician used to spray down the unit's exterior. "C'mon!" I thought. I have no problem with him using the hose, but everyone knows rolling up a hose is one of life's least desirable tasks. Why would you leave that for your customer to deal with?

With that, the contractor confirmed my suspicions about the quality of service you get when you buy a daily deal. I know it sounds like a minor misstep, but the company had an opportunity to blow me away with great service. Instead, it blew its chance to earn a repeat customer. (By the way, I'd hope merchants know that only 22 percent of Groupon buyers turn into repeat customers, by the site's own estimates.)

But this column really isn't about my experience with the HVAC company. It's about you—all Green Industry professionals—and the opportunities you may be blowing with customers due to "little things," whether it's lack of training, a rude receptionist, shoddy-looking equipment or the like.

It's expensive to acquire customers, no matter how you do it. Don't blow your opportunity to make a good first impression on a client you invested to get in front of. You only get one chance.