



WHAT SHOULD I BE DOING TO GROW MY BUSINESS?

BY JEFF KORHAN

A Talk to your customers to develop more intimate relationships with them, teach them what you know about your business and work together to create what hasn't been done. There was a time when a business could grow on the merits of quality products and service alone, but that's not nearly enough these days. In this trust economy, every business has to innovate to be relevant to the communities it serves.

There are many qualified landscape companies in every community offering consumers what they want—often at an equal or lower price. To differentiate your business, give your customers more. While you can't read their minds about what they want, you can implement practices to better understand their desires.

Develop more intimate relationships with your customers. How well do you know your customers—not

just their needs but what really influences their buying behaviors? Most of us have to admit it's not as well as when our businesses were much younger. Remember the early days when you were an aspiring entrepreneur? Recapture that freewheeling energy and excitement because that's what will fuel your growth.

Your first customers likely were friends who trusted you. Take the time to build those kinds of relationships with your current customers, meaning as friends instead of buyers. This approach honors your customers at an emotional level from which they tend to make their buying decisions. Unfortunately, when business conditions are more challenging, there's a tendency to take relationships for granted and focus on transactions—making the next sale. This shortsighted approach erodes the relationships that advanced your business to where it is today. So focus more on relationships and less on selling and marketing products. In a socially connected business environment, it's no longer about selling to buyers. It's about working together to give them more.

Teach customers what you know about your business. The more your customers know, the better they'll be able to make the correct decisions to improve their condition. There's a lot of information online. More than half of all consumers are using the web to make buying decisions, so it makes sense for your business to contribute. People are searching the web for answers, which is why you want to think about your company and provide answers. You already know the common questions and problems that never seem to go away, so use your expertise to address them.



There always will be companies taking shortcuts. In the Green Industry, poorly designed structures built without proper foundations and irrigation systems that stretch beyond capacity always will be problematic. Be the one who teaches your community better practices. But why would you want to give away your best practices? This concept is difficult for some business owners to grasp. They believe if they give away too much information customers will no longer need them. The opposite is true. When you provide enough value, your business becomes invaluable by creating a desire for more. When a teacher does his job well, he fills the classroom the next day and every day thereafter. This should be the role of all your marketing.

Viable methods for accomplishing this are:

- › email newsletters that teach instead of sell;
- › blogs that inspire by sharing relatable stories;
- › managers in the field to reconnect with customers;
- › social media channels for community engagement; and
- › periodic surveys to learn what's being discussed.

Consumers are addicted to searching online because people, by nature, are curious. Learn to feed that curiosity to align them closely with your business. After that, you'll have their undivided attention to accomplish something special.

Collaborate with your customers to create what hasn't been done.

Small business owners often think they have to be experts, but your customers are the experts of what they want. That's why it's important to ask questions and share stories to help them understand how your business can be a solution. My favorite questions are the ones customers are afraid to ask, such as those about price. It's an opportunity to share how cost-cutting measures that reduce prices often undermine the integrity of projects. Answering these questions acknowledges you understand your business and your clients' mindset.

Traditional selling can be demoralizing work with many dead ends, but building relationships results in favorable returns. You may not know when that will happen, so persist. This lesson applies to social media marketing. You have to prime the pump continuously until it delivers the expected result. When you help customers achieve what they've only imagined, you've progressed from a transaction-based to relationship-based business. This is the secret for growing a business in the trust economy. **LMI**

Korban is a small business marketing trainer, coach and author of Built-In Social: Essential Social Marketing Practices for Every Small Business. Reach him via jeffkorban.com.



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HOW DO I AVOID COMPETING ON PRICE?

BY **JULIE GUEST**

A You send one of your employees to give a potential customer a quote. He thanks him for coming but says he'll think about it. In less than half an hour, you receive a call saying he has found someone who'll do the exact same job for less. Unless you're willing to sharpen your pencil, you just lost the job. How many times has this situation happened to you?

We all know price warfare doesn't just occur with prospective customers. Jobs you've had for years can be pulled away from you suddenly—all because the customer was contacted by a competitor who was hungrier and more desperate for his business than you were.

COMPETING ON PRICE IS ENTIRELY OPTIONAL, AS LONG AS YOU HAVE THE PROPER MARKETING AND MESSAGING IN PLACE. NOT ALL BUYERS ARE DRIVEN BY PRICE. IN FACT, THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE AREN'T DRIVEN BY PRICE.

When one of your customers asks you to lower your price, you're in a pickle. Do you price match that lower quote and leave them with the bad taste in their mouth that they've been overpaying all those years? Or do you try to justify your higher price and hope the strength of your relationship will win them over? The real truth is you don't ever want to get into these price negotiations in the first place because it puts you in a lose-lose situation. You're going to lose precious revenue or a job.

Here's the great news: Competing on price is entirely optional, as long as you have the proper marketing and messaging in place. Not all buyers are driven by price. In fact, the majority of people aren't driven by price. If they were, Wal-Mart would likely

be a hundred times bigger than it is and companies such as Apple, which charges \$3,000 for a new computer, wouldn't exist.

The simple and game-changing fact for your business is people only revert to buying on price when they have no other information available. There's a segment of the market that only buys on price. It doesn't matter how good you say your services are or how great the quality of your workmanship is, they're never going to choose your company because you're a smidge more expensive than the other guy. Frankly, you don't want these bottom feeders as your clients anyway. They're usually the most demanding customers, the least appreciative and the least likely to refer your services. Let the other guys in your market provide services to the extremely price-sensitive crowd. They can slash their prices and fight among each other to see who's most desperate for business.

In almost any industry, the bottom feeders account for 40 percent of the market. The rest of the market, which accounts for more than half, can afford and will pay more for your services, if you can provide them compelling reasons to. This is why having the right marketing becomes so important. But don't make the mistake of thinking you can just hike your prices and expect to achieve a similar result. You must have a solid marketing program to back it up. Here's how to do it in three easy steps:



1 Find something uniquely yours, something your business does better than your competitors that can create a distinct competitive advantage. An example of this is Domino's Pizza's original tagline: "Fresh, hot pizza in 30 minutes or less, or it's free."

2 Educate your customers and prospective customers about why your services are better than the competition. Help them make an informed decision about who to choose. Create a special report, booklet or mini magazine that explains this. Educated customers make the best customers, and they're the kind who will happily pay more for your services.

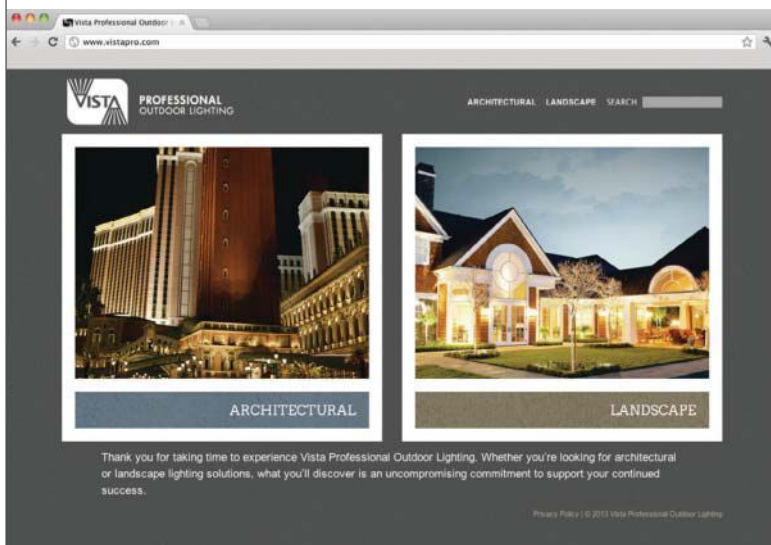
3 Take your key messaging in your special report or mini magazine and integrate it across all your marketing efforts. Eliminate any of your old marketing that refers to price and help your customers recognize your value. Don't forget to use direct mail, display ads, street signs, flyers and your website with this important messaging. Your website is the most important because it's where people will look and judge your value first.

If you still need convincing the majority of people don't buy on price, take a look around your home. What

have you bought recently that commanded a premium price—a brand-new TV, truck, piece of fishing or hunting equipment? Now think about what made you decide to buy that. It was the marketing. **LM**

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Take your key messaging in your special report or mini magazine and integrate it across all your marketing efforts. Eliminate any of your old marketing that refers to price and help your customers recognize your value.

Q HOW DO I MARKET TO PRODUCE A RAINFALL OF LEADS?

BY JONATHAN GOLDHILL

A To produce a rainfall of leads in the landscaping business, reengineer your mindset about marketing first; otherwise, you'll never consistently produce enough high-quality leads to grow. Until marketing becomes a process in your business, adding new customers always will be a problem. When marketing becomes a process, it will cease to be a problem because marketing, prospecting and selling aren't any different from accounting, bookkeeping, designing, installing, mowing or providing maintenance services. Each requires a process or a systematic approach to executing it. To produce a virtual rainfall of prospective customers, think like a marketer.

Stop thinking you're a landscaper. If you think you're in the landscaping business, hit yourself over the head with a shovel. Think like a marketer and seller of landscape services. You're in the sales and marketing business. The service you market, sell and deliver is landscaping.

Marketing is like politicking, so start campaigning. Too many small-business owners market haphazardly. Their marketing is event driven or a short-run campaign. Strategize like you're running a political campaign, only this campaign has no end date, unless you want to go dark during the offseason. Effective marketing requires the mindset of a political strategist. Test, measure and evaluate.

Marketing is much more analytical than you think. Management theorists agree you can't manage what you don't measure. If you want to produce a rainfall of leads, experiment, measure and when successful, add water. Your successful marketing programs



should be treated like a sponge. Expand them by spending more, adding more geographical coverage and trying other marketing channels. Above all, measure what's working and what's not by asking your customers when they first call how they heard about you or by putting telephone-tracking software on your pay-per-click and organic search web pages. It's all about return on investment.

Plug the holes in your bucket. It's difficult to expand your business if you're losing customers. Calculate

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your attrition rate (the number of customers you lost the past 12 months) and set a goal to reduce that rate by half. Landscape contractors lose customers usually because of poor service relative to price, lack of communication with customers or both. As the old AT&T commercial and slogan read, “Reach out and touch someone.” Don’t let your customers get away. Call, survey or visit them more.

Think outside the box. If you’re going to grow larger, faster or be more profitable, think outside the box. Like the Apple slogan says, “Think different.” Peter Drucker, the father of modern management said, “Marketing and innovation produce results. All the rest are costs.” If everyone is doing the same thing and communicating the same message, it’s difficult to determine how to stand out.

When landscape contractors are asked what sets them apart from everyone else, their answers are typically vague. Fewer than one in eight people say something different or infectiously exciting. It may not be true that the other seven don’t have something exciting to say, perhaps they just haven’t honed in on their marketing message with any real differentiation. That’s why contractors should identify and define what’s unique about their business and then embed that message into all their marketing.

Never the pest, always the “welcome guest.” Salespeople calling on commercial accounts are usually trying to determine how to get past gatekeepers. I’m often asked to answer that question when speaking to salespeople, but I avoid answering it because it’s the wrong question. Instead, salespeople should be asking: “How can I get sought after and invited in by decision makers?” The answer is to engineer a situation in which you’re invited and welcomed as

an expert. Marketing campaigns that let prospects know you can fix their problems will open up conversations with them more easily.

Here’s the “welcome guest” process briefly: 1). Provide information that grabs their attention, raises their interest level and presells the value of the appointment. 2). Only schedule an appointment after you’ve gained mind-share. This changes the entire sales process if successfully implemented and religiously adhered to. Your time isn’t wasted, administrative time is replaced with valuable face time, closing rates increase and you can

be more selective about who becomes your client.

A similar approach for landscape companies selling to residential accounts is a “pardon our dirt” or “pardon our trucks” letter. This type of mailing, sent to residents in neighborhoods where the company does work, invites neighbors to call the company if the dirt or trucks are in their way. It’s a low-cost method that creates awareness and can land new appointments and new customers.

Be discovered online. It’s unbelievable how bad some company’s websites are. When people look for lawn care or landscape services, there’s a solid chance they’re going to search for you online, in the local newspaper or the Yellow Pages. With more people jettisoning the Yellow Pages for the Internet, contractors have to be savvy about online marketing, making their website easily searchable and frequently found. By focusing on this strategy, contractors can rapidly multiply the number of leads streaming into their business every month. If you want to be discovered online, find a reputable or trustworthy marketing company to help you.

Use testimonials to get referrals and add octane to your marketing. Testimonials provide a powerful asset in your marketing tool kit. When your customers tell others about the benefits of choosing your company, it makes your sales and marketing efforts more effective. Gather testimonials from customers, and leverage the power of testimonials to get other customers.

The bottom line is that selling is the lifeblood of any business. Along with a properly sustained marketing program, your opportunities for success are much improved. **LM**

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LANDSCAPING BUSINESS, HIT YOURSELF
OVER THE HEAD WITH A SHOVEL. **THINK
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Strategize like you’re running a political campaign, only this campaign has no end date, unless you want to go dark during the offseason. Effective marketing requires the mindset of a political strategist. Test, measure and evaluate.

Goldhill, head coach of The Goldhill Group, provides strategic business, marketing and sales coaching to owners, managers and salespeople of growing companies in the Green Industry. Reach him or download his free e-book, “The Six Silver Bullets to Growing Any Business Fast,” at TheGoldhillGroup.com.



WHAT SHOULD BE PART OF MY **BRANDING** REPOSITORY?

BY LARA MOFFAT

A One of the more frequent questions I hear is, “What *really* should be a part of a marketing plan?” Effective branding and marketing starts with a communications strategy suitable to a company’s business model. Only after distinguishing a business’s culture, clientele and services, can a company develop a fitting communications strategy—and one including messaging, content and platforms (traditional or digital).

Another question I frequently receive is, “What’s the difference between marketing and branding?” Marketing is tactical, a process identifying target consumers, effectively communicating with said audience and initially retaining them. Branding is strategic. It expresses characteristics, values and attributes that create engagement, loyalty and referrals. I advocate brand marketing focusing on communicating the brand message to drive awareness and encourage engagement.

So what should be a part of a branding repository? A repository is a collection of content, including copy (verbal and written) and imagery.

Depending on the medium, a communication may be timeless or have a shelf life. Once you’ve created effective content, file it where it’s easily retrievable. Don’t be afraid to

revisit past campaigns. Just because imagery is outdated doesn’t mean the message is irrelevant. The following are components of a rich branding repository.

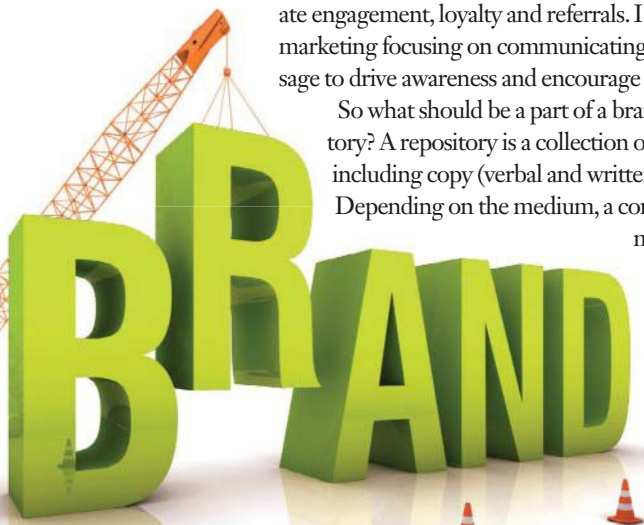
CONSISTENT MESSAGING

First, define your personality. Specify the services you offer, the demographic of your target audience, what differentiates your company and what matters to you as a professional. Being as specific as possible enables you to create messaging that resonates with and engages prospects, clients and industry colleagues. Remember, though, people buy a service based on the benefits of the service, not because of the service. Consistent and clear communications that place the consumers’ needs first will keep you top of mind and build brand loyalty.

Complementary collateral. Your letterhead, business cards, proposals and contracts need to be complementary. The look and feel of each must have a unified appearance because it reflects the professional nature of your business and, in some cases, is a deal breaker for whether you’re awarded the project. Beyond appearance, especially in legally binding forms, review them for consistent copy.

Professional promotional materials. Invest in quality graphic design and professional printing. Just because you know how to use a desktop publishing program doesn’t mean you should. Your office printer is fine for certain applications, but a professional printer is the best option. As with complementary collateral, professional promotional materials often sway a prospect.

Interactive website. A website is a company’s online communications specialist, though many sites remain



BEING VISIBLE, WHETHER THROUGH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT OR NETWORKING, IS PARAMOUNT IN TODAY'S MARKETPLACE.

static. If you haven't added a blog, don't delay. A blog allows you to further engage visitors, showcase your companies' personality, highlight your interests and helps with search engine optimization. You have only two or three seconds to make a good first impression online. Be sure your website mirrors your promotional materials and is streamlined for easy content navigation and intuitive user engagement.

Suitable social media. Look to your target audience when deciding which social media platforms are right for your business. The big three are Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, followed closely by Houzz and Pinterest in the residential market. Each platform has its own advantages and a different way to engage. LinkedIn can be an amazing tool for consultants and managers, if used properly.

Purposeful public relations. Support the community that supports you. Being involved in the community benefits your company image, but it's also important for your employees. Psychologically, helping others strengthens the bonds of a group and develops employee loyalty. Fulfilled employees are typically your best marketers, so share your stories online and in press releases (locally and nationally) before, during and after events.

Effective networking. Being visible, whether through community involvement or networking, is paramount in today's marketplace. With active lifestyles, it's imperative to be involved and reachable. Your target audience, however, determines how often and in what capacity. Even as time is limited, networking is effective only if you take a sincere interest in the person and enrich the relationship. Supplementing face-to-face interactions, LinkedIn allows you to engage your audience even when you're unable to meet in person.

Where you invest your branding efforts will differ depending on the market sector, consumer and community. Start small and focused so you allow time to direct your initiatives effectively. Consistency and professionalism should be your guiding principles. As time and staff

permit, add another strategy and continue to review what's resonating with your prospects, clients and industry colleagues. Through effective brand marketing, you'll build awareness, encourage engagement and create lasting relationships. **LM**

Moffat, ASLA, who owns LM Creative Consulting, is the former director of marketing for a nationally recognized design/build/maintenance firm. Reach her at LM@LMCreativeConsulting.com.




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HOW DO I BUILD A WORLD-CLASS SALES TEAM?

BY JUDY GUIDO

A The one point all Green Industry folks agree on is the importance of sales. Let's face it, sales is the engine that drives your business and your salespeople are the drivers. As the competitive landscape continues to grow more fierce and becomes increasingly more difficult to create a competitive advantage, it's imperative you have a strategic sales plan in place to attract, grow and retain a world-class sales team. That team is your competitive advantage.

IT'S IMPERATIVE TO CREATE A SALES CULTURE THAT'S UNDERSTOOD AND RESPECTED BY THE ENTIRE ORGANIZATION. TOO OFTEN, SALES IS SEEN AS THE ENEMY, ESPECIALLY BY OPERATIONS.

How does a company develop a world-class sales force? Successful sales organizations focus on four key areas:

- › strategy and process;
- › talent and training;
- › customer relationship management; and
- › sales management.

The first steps to success begin with the owner (who's often the sales manager and is generally unqualified and unhappy doing so), sales team and key field personnel collaboratively designing a sales strategy based on an accurate analysis of their market dynamics and skill sets.

The next step is ensuring the sales strategy is communicated accurately to the entire team. It sounds

simple, but this important step is overlooked more than 80 percent of the time. Professional sales and operational talent are attracted to companies that can prove they've done their homework and have a road map for success. Everybody wants to feel they're a part of a winning team with an intelligent vision.

It's imperative to create a sales culture that's understood and respected by the entire organization. Too often, sales is seen as the enemy, especially by operations. Those companies that have a sales-centric culture and collaboration between sales and operations are market leaders. Aligning sales and operations is a key component in world-class sales organizations. Make sure your plan includes tactics fostering both groups working together while sharing accountability and rewards. The Green Industry is competitive enough, why make it any more difficult by creating internal challenges and obstacles that may sabotage the company's success?

Next, match your core competencies and unique value proposition with your customers' needs. This is called customer segmentation and qualification. It seems like common sense, but aligning customer needs with your offering and qualifying and assessing the potential value of customers happen much less than you think.

Account planning is another important step. It includes identifying your geographic footprint (the areas where you'll conduct business) and the specific industries and market segments poised for growth (or that are underserved) within your geographic locale. Then you must assign your sales

team accordingly. Will you assign them geographic territories or specific industries to grow? Will you assign them to markets where they have experience and a network of contacts? For example, stating your market segment is commercial maintenance isn't a good example of account planning. Stating that multifamily, specifically high-end residential apartments and condominiums within a 20-mile radius of your headquarters, is your market segment is much more predictive and focused. Assigning somebody with experience and contacts in the multifamily market is even smarter.

Once you've completed your companywide account planning, develop specific, clear and customized action plans for each account the salespeople are serving or new customers they've acquired. Sales isn't a one-size-fits-all game, so it's a must to have a strategic account selling methodology with specific tactics identified for each customer. Customers demand you understand them and only them.

Next, focus on sales-channel management. Make it easy for your customers to buy from you by providing them with the most accessible, efficient and convenient sales channels available. Sales channels may include external independent sales reps, web-based sales channels—such as social media networks—or strategic sales partnerships with people who share the same customer targets (think janitorial, pest management or security companies).

Develop a replicable, sales process (mirror your high-performer methodologies and processes) focusing on winning opportunities. Have your salespeople shadow your best performers and make sure those stars share best practices regularly. Ensure your salespeople know how to work their sales

funnel and focus on high-value activities, such as identifying and qualifying leads, conducting site audits and reviews, performing competitive analyses, setting up meetings with decision makers, presenting solutions and asking for the sale. Identify drivers of high sales performance.

Just as your field operators need their equipment to be successful, your salespeople need their tools. Provide them with the most effective mobile sales force automation and customer relationship management technologies possible. Many low-cost smartphones, sales force automation and customer relationship management software packages, templates and dashboards are available.

One of the primal keys for sales success is providing your staff with an experienced sales manager who's capable of aligning the company's sales goal with important metrics, such as:

- › revenue;
- › retention;
- › increased wallet share;
- › market share;
- › gross margin;
- › referrals;
- › win ratio; and
- › sales cycle time.

An effective sales manager also helps set strategy, coaches the staff, manages the numbers, provides leadership, conducts training and assists with presentations when necessary. Less than 9 percent of Green Industry professionals conduct sufficient sales training and 93 percent of sales forces are managed by owners who, as aforementioned, are unqualified and unhappy in their roles as sales manager. Sales training saves time and money and increases revenue, retention and value.

Additionally, provide salespeople with the necessary administrative resources they need. Salespeople should be selling, not spending the majority of their time performing administrative tasks. Hiring efficient administrative help, even part time, is paramount in building an excellent team. It also saves money while increasing the sales usefulness and revenue.

Don't forget to clearly align your marketing with your sales goals. Effective marketing makes it easier for your sales staff to sell. If you plainly spell out your sales goals, roles, responsibilities and metrics, and you hire, train and reward your staff based on those success metrics, you'll build and retain a world-class sales team. **LM**

Planning pointer

The four building blocks of sales success are: strategy and process, talent and training, customer relationship management and sales management.



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HOW CAN I GET MORE SALES?

BY **ANDREW POTOTSCHNIK**

A In describing the process companies go through to generate new customers, I refer to a big old sales funnel. You pour leads in the top and sales come out the bottom. All sales funnels leak leads, though, letting them escape before you can turn them into sales. By patching your funnel, you can improve marketing effectiveness and boost sales. And in any funnel, it takes four steps to gently nudge prospects to a sale.

Each step is a potential lost sale waiting to happen, so the goal should be to improve your ability to move prospects through the steps.

Sadly, most companies put all their effort into getting attention and very little into the rest. You won't make a sale if you never guide them through the other steps.

With every hole you patch, you'll exponentially increase the percentage of leads that become sales because improvements throughout the funnel have a multiplying effect on the sales coming out the bottom. For example, increasing the attention your company receives allows more chance for prospects to become interested.

More interested prospects increases the number of them engaging with your company; and the more engaging, the more opportunities you have to sell.

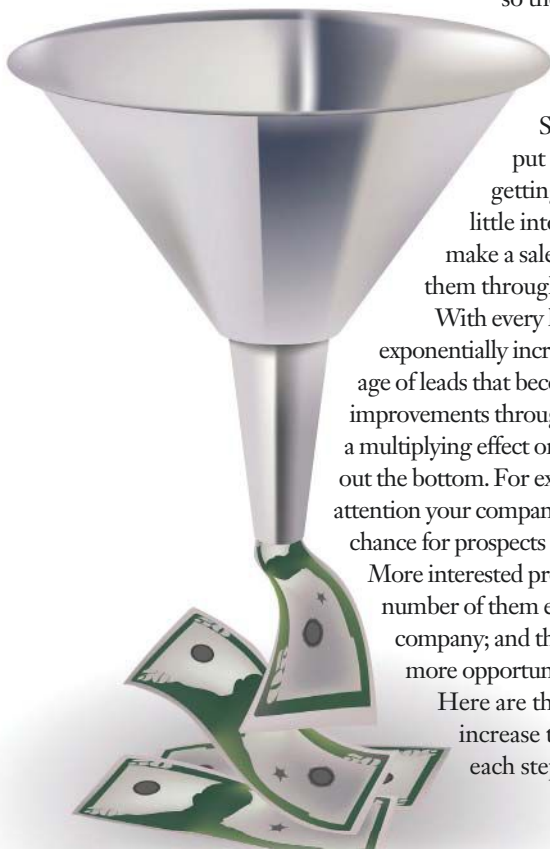
Here are the ways you can increase the effectiveness of each step.

STEP 1: Get their attention.

If you can't get a prospect's attention, you've already lost the sale. Do you have fanatical referrers? Are you everywhere prospects are looking for your services? Does your business appear in search results, pay-per-click ads, their door, their mailbox or on your truck in their area? Most leaks occurring in this stage are a result of nonexistent or poorly executed marketing. Your prospective customers simply don't know you exist or choose a company they think is larger because it's more visible in the marketplace.

It seems every landscape company uses the same tired fleet of generic white trucks with little green lettering on the door; however, companies could turn their fleets into attention-grabbing, mobile billboards with the use of neon colors, graphics and a bold, easy-to-remember phone number and website. Get noticed, then listen to prospects say, "I see your trucks everywhere," even when your fleet is only two trucks. Most online marketing programs lack similar market exposure.

Many companies have an old website that naturally shows up somewhere on the first page of Google for one key phrase. And that's it. They think they have the web thing covered. They don't, though. Prospects search thousands of key phrases to find you or your competitors. A high-ranking, properly optimized, content-rich site, supplemented by pay-per-click advertising and a presence on all of the most popular local search sites—such as Google+ Local and Yelp—will give you the largest online presence possible. This allows you to be everywhere online potential customers are looking for your services.



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STEP 2: Get them interested.

If you don't look or sound different from other companies, you probably aren't. Try this quick exercise: Collect several competitors' direct mail pieces or door hangers. Cover the names, logos and any other identifying information, then compare your own marketing piece. Chances are your message is identical to everyone else's: "We cut lawns. We cut trees. We do beautiful landscapes. We're the best. We're professional. Call us for a free estimate."

This is a big problem. If you look and sound the same as everyone else, the only difference left is your price. Start by determining the unique selling points that set you apart from your competitors. Highlight the ones prospects care about. Saying you do great work is meaningless when everyone else says the same thing. Do you have 50 letters from ecstatic customers prospects can read online? Do you have before-and-after videos demonstrating without a doubt you do the most beautiful landscape lighting installs in Midland, Texas? Don't be the company saying, "Just take our word for it." Marketing is all about distinguishing yourself from your competitors. Look different, sound different and be better. After that, you can charge more.

STEP 3: Get them to engage with you.

Now that potential customers are interested, how easy have you made it for them to raise their hand and say, "Yes, I am interested! Tell me more! Sign me up!"? Merely answering your phone instead of letting calls go to voicemail will increase your sales. Sounds crazy, right? Sadly, this is normal for our industry and it's what you're competing against. If you're more responsive than your competitors, you'll sell more.

Most prospects visit your website before they call, so a lead-generating website should be at the center of any landscape marketing campaign to support and increase the effectiveness of all other marketing efforts. Some designers are great at making pretty websites. Pretty on its own doesn't sell, though. A website exists for two reasons: to get visitors to call or email you. Your website design determines this outcome. The images and text, where forms and contact info are positioned and even the color of buttons affects the percent of visitors who will contact you. If prospects don't know exactly what you do and in what service area, they're hitting the back button in 20 seconds or less. And they're not going to call if your website looks like you're about to go out of business. This is where companies shoot themselves in the foot.

Invest in a professional, lead-generating website engineered to convert visitors into paying customers. Spend more than \$5. Stop using crummy free sites, generic templates or Facebook to save money because you'll end up costing yourself money in lost sales. A website designed by a conversion

expert pays for itself multiple times over. Test it and engineer it to get new customers. You can spend nothing on a poorly designed, free site that converts one of 1,000 visitors into a customer, or you can spend \$5,000 on a website that converts 100 of 1,000 visitors.

STEP 4: Get them to act.

At some point, a prospect has to speak with you or your staff face to face or over the phone to make a sale. All that time and money you've spent leading up to this moment is thrown away in an instant if you can't close the sale. Your staff should be fully trained on how to sell. It's shocking how many business owners can't list 10 unique selling points about their own company. If you don't know why someone should buy from you, why would they?

The same is true with your staff members. They must be able to highlight your strengths and overcome every objection a prospect has to signing up for your service, especially your higher prices. You'll never have a 100-percent close rate, but you can capture a sale with one simple thing: following up. Ninety percent of companies never do this. They don't call, they don't email, they don't put prospects on a special mailing list. They quote a price and let them disappear to buy from competitors. Why not give them a second-chance offer? Why not send them a personal note the next day? Extra effort lets prospects know you care about having them as a customer. And if you care about doing business with them, you'll probably do a better job than the competitors who let their calls go to voicemail. A follow-up can capture an additional 20 percent of residential lawn care business that would've been lost otherwise.

It's easy for business owners to get caught up chasing a never-ending procession of buzzwords to generate more business. Stop chasing the buzzwords and become really good at what you're already doing. Instead of adding more halfhearted marketing, make your existing sales and marketing perform at the highest level possible. Then anything else you add to the mix will be much more effective and profitable. **L.M.**

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pointer

Marketing is all about distinguishing yourself from your competitors. Look different, sound different and be better. After that, you can charge more.

Pototschnik is owner of Lawn Care Marketing Expert. Reach him at andrew@lawncaresmarketingexpert.com or download a free report at GetMoreLawnClientsNow.com.



HOW CAN I GENERATE BUZZ?

BY JON GOLDMAN

A How can we get prospects to chase us instead of us chasing them? For most landscaping companies, marketing is difficult. You need to get noticed, but you can't afford to break the bank on big-name celebrity endorsements and Super Bowl ads. It is possible, however, to promote your company without a big-time budget and generate powerful marketing buzz.

YOU CAN USE YOUR **BACKGROUND, PROFESSIONALISM AND EXPERTISE TO TURN YOURSELF FROM "ANOTHER COMPANY" INTO A TRUSTED RESOURCE YOUR CUSTOMERS TURN TO.**

No matter the size of your company, you can use your background, professionalism and expertise to turn yourself from "another company" into a trusted resource your customers turn to. Do this by transforming from a design/build, landscape maintenance, snow removal or whatever kind of vendor into a design/build, landscape maintenance or snow removal expert. The key is vendor to expert.

Generating leads is one of the most difficult challenges any business faces, so any strategy that accomplishes lead generation is a competitive advantage you don't want to ignore. Positioning yourself as an expert accomplishes that.

MAKING THE SHIFT

Here's the secret to becoming an expert: You probably already are an expert. Think about it. Do you know much more than your customers about their lawns, irrigation systems, weeds or the pool, patio or fire pit of their dreams? Chances are, you know an

enormous amount your customers would love to know.

As an aside, this underscores the need to stay on top of the ever-changing trends and best practices in the industry. Whatever your niche is, stay current. That's why participating in your local landscape association, attending national events, and reading constantly is mission critical to the success of your business.

PUBLISH OR PERISH

The first step to becoming an expert is being published. The phrase "publish or perish" comes from academia, but it's not just stuffy professors who stand to benefit from being published. Whether it's a book, e-book or article, being published shows you know what you're talking about. Being published creates a level of credibility that attracts potential clients to you. That's especially true if you offer specific solutions to prospects with specific problems.

Most businesses chase prospects, but when you chase prospects, they often run in the opposite direction. Becoming an authority makes potential clients seek you. Suddenly, instead of chasing customers, you have customers chasing you.



USING VENDOR TO EXPERT

Often, you'll face competitors ready to undercut and underbid you. Becoming the expert can help you avoid impossible-to-win bid situations. Take a page out of the book of Chris and Craig Zeigler, owners of Agronomic Lawn Management (ALM) in Virginia Beach, Va.

They were competing with a national player who could beat anybody's price. ALM needed a way to position itself with prospects in a way that was more than just about a lower price.

The Zeiglers used their personal and professional activities to create a compelling story. They published an advertorial (see image, above right) that positioned the company

as a local hero. The first paragraph describes their involvement with a local organization. Autism is a cause personally meaningful to the Zeiglers because they have a nephew diagnosed with it. They give a portion of their company's profits to a nonprofit organization called F.A.C.T. (Families of Autistic Children of Tidewater). The Zeiglers' write-up showed how ALM wasn't just another landscaping company, but a devoted part of the community that takes from its bottom line to help neighborhood children in need.

The Zeiglers went on to share their expertise, talking about Craig's background—N.C. State and Penn State University with a degree in turfgrass management—and discussing landscaping topics such as agronomy, weed control and turf fertility. By sharing their knowledge, they positioned themselves as experts. The transition from vendor to expert worked. This small landscaping company experienced dramatic results. In four months, it increased the number of customers from 864 to 1,050, and ALM's annual projected sales rose from \$426,000 to \$612,000.

CLAIMING YOUR EXPERTISE

The first step to becoming an expert is identifying your audience, which I call your hungry fish. Go deep and narrow and focus on the prospects your business targets. Where do they live? What kinds of homes do they have? Which outdoor living problems do they face?

Agronomic Lawn Management Creating lush, healthy lawns and giving back to the community

BY JOHN DOWNS SR.

The fight against autism has gained a new champion in Hampton Roads. Agronomic Lawn Management will be donating a percentage of its profits to help fund research and treatment for the life-threatening condition. The fight against autism is a cause that has captured the hearts of many in the Hampton Roads area. It's a cause that has inspired many to get involved and make a difference. Agronomic Lawn Management is proud to be a part of this effort.



This lawn has been mowed all the way behind with Agronomic Lawn Management's crew.

Craig Zeigler, owner of Agronomic Lawn Management, is a professional landscaper with over 20 years of experience. He has a degree in turfgrass management from Penn State University and has worked for some of the best landscaping companies in the industry. He is passionate about his work and about giving back to the community.

"There's a big difference between being a vendor and being an expert," says Craig. "When you're a vendor, you're just about price. When you're an expert, you're about value. You're about the quality of your work and the care you put into it. You're about the results you can deliver for your customers."

"I really appreciate the fact that they're giving back to the community. It's not just about the money. It's about the heart behind the work. It's about the passion for the job. It's about the commitment to excellence."

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Visit brandlauncher.com/ALMadvertorial to see a full-size version of the advertorial.

The next step is to create what I call irresistible bait—the published material you'll be offering. Your materials should help prospective customers gain a deeper understanding of the problems they face and the available solutions. The ideas don't have to

be new or original. The key is that they're available to your audience in a clear, useful format.

Once you've decided what you want to publish, determine how you'll present the material. Once again, think about your audience. What format do they prefer? Can you give a seminar to a local group? Are you able to publish an article in a local paper? Should you offer audio or video material on your website? One of my favorite formats, when appropriate, is an e-book. It's long enough to deal satisfactorily with a specific subject but short enough to write and self-publish quickly. The format isn't as critical as getting your irresistible bait created and in the hands of your prospects. You can always start with one format and then repurpose the material into others.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Your customers are less trusting, have more choices and have access to more information than ever. But much of your competition is still stuck in the model of limited choice and information. Using the vendor-to-expert approach will elevate you above the other choices and position you right where you need to be: top of mind for your customers and prospects. LM

Goldman is a marketing expert, entrepreneur and president of the business strategy company Brand Launcher. Reach him or download his free e-book, "The Secret of the Watermelon," via brandlauncher.com.

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The first step to becoming an expert is being published. Whether it's a book, e-book or article, being published shows you know what you're talking about. Being published creates a level of credibility that attracts potential clients to you.