



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**

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