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[SALES & MARKETING]

E-newsletter marketing

MOST COMPANIES HAVE exciting news to share with their customers. Great deals, special pricing and informative articles can turn readers from casual customers to product evangelists. Finding the right method to deliver your message can make all of the difference. E-newsletters, if done correctly, can deliver the right message, to the right people, at the right time. If done incorrectly, they can ruin your business.

So hopefully, your traditional and online search marketing efforts have met some level of success — and you now find potential customers hitting your website to learn more about your services. What's the next step? Web traffic can be a fickle friend. You typically have a few fleeting moments to capture potential customers' interests and motivate them to action. First and foremost, that action should be to buy.

But what about customers who need more information or a higher comfort level before doing business with you? You can't count on them returning to your website, so motivating them to opt in to your e-mail marketing campaigns ensures you have several more chances to convert them into customers.

Just about every large online retailer offers e-newsletters of one sort or another. The online shoes and clothing retailer Zappos.com, known for its customer service, offers a weekly e-newsletter listing special deals and new products. But e-newsletters don't need to be strictly sales related to be useful. You may want to consider an e-newsletter with helpful "how-to" articles that are informative and help position your company as an expert in your industry. Building credibility can lead to great word-of-mouth advertising and sales.

The key to a good e-newsletter is consistency. Carefully describe what type of publication you are offering on the web signup page, and then stick to it.

Dos and Don'ts

When it comes to e-newsletters, there are a couple of rules to follow. I'm referring to the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003. The Federal Trade Commission has a great compliance guide (online at FTC.gov), which can result in penalties of up to \$16,000 if not followed. In essence, these guide-

Using the right technology, following the law and providing customers with relevant and engaging content can significantly improve your business and build great word-of-mouth advertising and sales.

BY TYLER WHITAKER

lines can be characterized by the ideas of not being deceptive, being forthcoming on who you are and your location, and allowing people to easily opt out of future e-mail — all things a normal company, looking to grow, would do by default. But it's surprising how often companies stumble by not paying attention.

The best way to handle the details involved with successful e-newsletter campaigns is to use the right technology. There are several online services that can turn your ideas and content into professional marketing pieces that conform to the law and deliver the results you want. Look for a solution that offers e-mail templates, signup forms, list management tools and, most importantly, reporting analytics for tracking who reads and clicks through to your website. Vendors such as VerticalResponse.com, ConstantContact.com and iContact.com have spent years perfecting the art of e-mail marketing. Pricing is typically based on the number of subscribers you have, which makes it easy to get started and test things out. Most have plans that start around \$10 to \$15 per month.

One tried-and-true method for reaching your customers on a regular basis is through e-newsletters. If your business doesn't have something to share, you've got other problems. But if you've been doing direct mail, consider making a small shift to e-newsletters — and start building your business. **LM**

WHITAKER is a freelance technologist. Contact him at 800-592-2810 or visit his blog at www.tylerwhitaker.com.



GROWTH GOALS

1. Use e-newsletters to reach your customers on a regular basis. 2. Use sharp and relevant content to keep customers interested and continually checking your website. 3. Once you start, be consistent.





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[PEOPLE POWER]

“Account” ability = success

Account managers can make or break your business. BY **BRUCE WILSON**

THERE ARE FIVE things that are somewhat consistent in successful account managers (AMs):

1 The ability to communicate with customers in a way that builds trust. The key factor here is honesty in communication and behavior. A team that can deliver the expected service in support of the AM helps the AM to earn trust.

2 The ability to avoid things that are traditionally known as “trust busters.” (See “Common Trust Busters” below.)

3 The ability to bring value to the customer proactively. Successful AMs know what value the customer places on the service. The proactive AM brings things to the attention of the client that are important before the client brings the issue to him or her. The AM makes the client look good. The AM does not waste the client’s time.

5 The ability to build a relationship that goes beyond the job. Effective AMs understand that clients have a hard time firing someone they like or respect. These AMs earn respect and business friendships by building relationships that go beyond the day-to-day business transactions. Good AMs know about their customers’ hobbies, interests and family life. They connect in a personal way.

If an AM works at honing the above five traits, they are certain to be more successful. **LM**

COMMON TRUST BUSTERS

- ▶ **Over-promising:** Sometimes, in an attempt to keep the customer happy, an account manager (AM) overpromises and then cannot deliver.
- ▶ **Being reactive:** Usually when a customer has to bring something problematic in nature to the AM’s attention, the tendency is for the AM to either get defensive or make a lame excuse.
- ▶ **Failing to check their work:** This often inadvertently leads to the AM telling a customer that something has been taken care of when, in fact, it has not.
- ▶ **Not accepting responsibility:** A team member made the mistake, but the customer sees it as a company error, not an individual error. The AM must approach it in this way and realize the entire company’s reputation is on the line.

4 The ability to manage time wisely. AMs that fall into “firefighting mode” instead of working proactively are prevented from doing things on a timely basis. They get themselves into situations where they lose trust. Clients see them as reactive, and commitments are often not met. Successful AMs are usually very organized and keep lists, which allow them to prioritize the importance of their tasks.

All too often, AMs end up doing menial tasks that are within their comfort zone, while really important things that are not in that zone are put off. These issues then mushroom into larger problems.

WILSON is a partner with entrepreneur Tom Oyler in the Wilson-Oyler Group, which offers consulting services. Contact him at bwilson@questex.com or www.wilson-oyler.com.



ILLUSTRATION BY: ISTOCK INTERNATIONAL, INC.

\$ GROWTH GOALS 1. Look for account managers who are good communicators and enjoy building relationships with people.
2. Make sure account managers are proactive, follow-through and accept responsibility for their customers.

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[PEOPLE POWER]

Using the suggestion box

Encourage ideas from your team to build morale and the bottom line. BY **GREGORY P. SMITH**

GETTING EMPLOYEES' IDEAS and involvement is critical in our rapidly changing world. If your company is going to be competitive, it's mandatory to involve not just hands, but ideas from everyone in your organization.

Why is it important to capture ideas and suggestions? For starters, the process improves individual motivation and morale. Involvement programs help capture the creativity, energy and ideas many people have. They also allow departments and individuals to work cross-functionally and create an environment of learning and constant renewal.

They improve work methods and processes continually, reduce the costs of doing business, improve safety and reduce accidents. Exchanging ideas always improves communication, and the knowledge that top management is open and willing to act on the ideas improves trust.

Good idea boards

Georgia's Buckhead Ritz-Carlton Hotel promotes employee involvement by letting

employees write their ideas on an "easy wipe" board in their department. Instead of passing untested ideas up the chain of command, the employee who originates an idea has responsibility for its achievement. They follow a three-step work process: "Study it, pilot it and adopt it."

A quality coach helps each department and its employees with the process. Once an idea is piloted and found worth-

while, it is adopted. Each month the department forwards the best idea to the division and then on to

the Quality Office for special recognition. The department awards cash for the best idea of the month. The best idea of the division gets a higher amount of money or brunch in the hotel's restaurant. At the hotel level, the best idea receives an even higher amount or dinner for two.

In addition, the winners receive letters of appreciation and an invitation to a quarterly reception courtesy of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel.

Bright idea campaigns

Most suggestion programs fail. Suggestion boxes sit and collect dust and approved suggestions are few and far between. An effective variation to the suggestion program is the Idea Campaign. Over and done with in three weeks, this steroid-enriched campaign generates hundreds of ideas.

The goal is to get at least one idea from everyone in the organization. For the first idea, each person receives a small token of appreciation, such as a coffee cup. A second idea is acknowledged with another form of appreciation. At the end of each week, a special award ceremony recognizes everyone who turned in ideas or suggestions. Names drawn from a basket receive other prizes and gifts.

Because the program only lasts three weeks, it generates a tremendous amount of focused energy and motivation from employees.

No one wants to be left out of the program – everyone participates. All ideas have to be considered and all employees suggesting ideas receive instantaneous recognition. For participants, the most powerful force is not the awards, but the feeling that management is listening to their ideas.



Idea expositions

The Sony Corp. is well known for its ability to create and manufacture new and innovative products.

Each year Sony generates approximately 1,000 new products and product innovations. Founder Masaru Ibuka's philosophy for success is "never follow others."

In order to foster the exchange of ideas within departments, Sony's Corporate Research sponsors an annual Idea Exposition. Scientists and engineers display projects and ideas they are working on. Open only to Sony's employees, the exposition lets individuals share ideas otherwise protected by departmental walls. **LM**

SMITH is a nationally recognized speaker, author and business performance consultant. He is the president of management-consulting firm Chart Your Course International, located in Atlanta, GA. Contact him at 770-860-9464.



GROWTH GOALS

1. Create an environment of learning and constant renewal.
2. Develop a program where all employee ideas are encouraged.
3. Inspire future ideas with instantaneous recognition.

WEB EXTRA

For another method of finding ideas visit www.landscapemanagement.net/mini-kaizen

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ROI in *One* Year

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Situation at Top Care

Top Care provides a wide range of lawn care services for commercial, institutional and office locations in a three-state area in the Midwest. Top Care's story reveals an enduring pursuit of managing costs to control their business. Rusty White, Top Care's Executive VP and COO, sees this as a straightforward, yet crucial, principle if you want your landscape services business to thrive.

Driven by a discipline of excellent customer service and consistent profitability, Top Care experienced steady growth. As the business grew, Top Care found that they were unable to manage their business with the same degree of control and certainty. Rusty became very aggravated due to the frustration of "...not having the information I needed to make day-to-day decisions." Stretching their current systems and methods exposed a reliance on duplicate data entry and extensive manual processes.

A New Perspective on Software

If they were going to meet their goals of control and profitability, Rusty knew they needed to abandon individual tools and find a better way. BOSS[®] LM was the solution to his vision of a fully-integrated system, and for the past five years, BOSS[®] LM has helped Top Care reach new levels of success.

With BOSS[®] LM's single database that seamlessly integrated with Top Care's accounting system, they were able to eliminate costs and redundant data entry. More importantly, since BOSS[®] LM was specifically designed for the typical characteristics of a landscape services business, Top Care no longer needed to tediously maintain complex spreadsheets to understand what was really happening to their business.

“ I now have the visibility to see the profitability of any job or service at the click of a button. ”

Expense or Investment?

Adding the BOSS[®] LM software system at Top Care was really like adding another profit-producing asset to the business. Rusty considered the software purchase exactly the same as buying a piece of capital equipment, "...treating the BOSS[®] LM software purchase like buying a mower or mulch blower makes you change your view from an expense to an investment and opens up a whole new way of thinking as you implement and evaluate results."

At Top Care, ROI Also Means... Return on Information

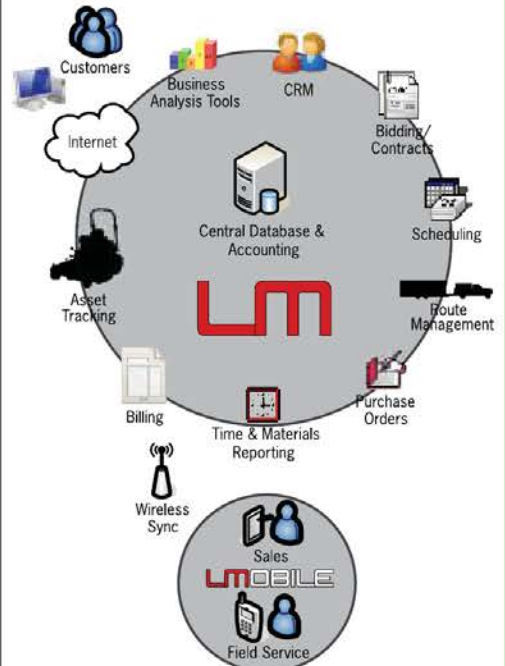
Was the investment worth it? Rusty says, "...we got our return in the first year." Top Care now has a clearer view for their business decisions. Rusty confidently emphasizes, with BOSS[®] LM "I now have the visibility to see the profitability of any job or service at the click of a button."

Rusty contends when purchasing any asset, whether it's a piece of equipment or software, you need to use all of its features if you are really going to get your biggest return. For Top Care this meant looking at every business decision and process to see how BOSS[®] LM's integrated information solution could help them. As the Top Care Team methodically selected the next process to implement, the entire business was quickly transformed into an efficient, timely operation. All aspects of the business were touched and brought under control: sales, bidding, scheduling, purchasing, payroll and invoicing.

Rusty says his biggest ROI comes from the information he receives using BOSS[®] LM. "If the only value you are considering is reducing overhead, you're missing it. Sure, we were able to reduce overhead, but the real value is having information to make better decisions...today, I can't see how I could run the business without BOSS[®] LM."

BOSS[®] LM

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Case studies on growth



Maintaining current revenue and growing business — these are contractors top two priorities for the next six months, according to *Landscape Management* research. In addition to providing expert advice on how to grow now, *Landscape Management* talked to 12 contractors with 2010 growth success stories to unlock the details on how they did it so you could steal an idea or two from their playbooks. Here are their stories. >> >> >>

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Kale Christman // The Ground Specialists // Valparaiso, IN

"The best thing about the WIDE-OUT is that beginners are more efficient right from the start. Especially when it comes to containing snow between cars in busy parking lots. According to our numbers, we're 35% more efficient, so for every three trucks we outfit with a WIDE-OUT, it's like getting a fourth truck and driver free. And that makes us more profitable. Period."

Shannon Shaw // Pinnacle Property Maintenance // Columbus, OH

"Since I upgraded my old V-Plow to a WIDE-OUT, I'm able to finish my jobs at least 20% faster. When you can use 80% of the blade versus half, and angle the blade to carry snow around corners without spilling off, it makes a big difference. Next year I plan to upgrade another truck with a WIDE-OUT."

Paul Kiedrowski // Oconomowoc Lawn // Oconomowoc, WI



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[CASE STUDIES ON GROWTH]

Competitive pricing

IN 2009, NOVATO, Calif.-based Cagwin & Dorward was down around 14% in lost revenue.

Like so many other companies, they were hit hard by the economy, and experienced lost accounts and lots of scaling back. Since then, the company has rebounded greatly and is currently looking at a little more than 4% growth for 2010.

What that difficult year has allowed the company to do, says Steve Glennon, vice president and COO, is to become more competitive on pricing. “We were a little slow to react to the economic situation,” he says. “We’ve never typically been a company with a reputation of being a low-price leader. In fact, we have a reputation of being on the higher side. However, we do provide a lot of value with that price. But in this economy we’re finding people are no longer looking for the ‘Mercedes Benz’ level of service anymore. They want good work, but price has become critical. So we’ve gotten a lot more competitive.”

This solution was born out of one of the company’s biggest challenges — losing customers solely on price. “We were getting termination letters in which they told us we’d done an outstanding job for a decade or more, but they were hiring someone who charged much less,”

Glennon says. “It’s difficult to lose a contract when we were doing a good job — they just couldn’t afford us anymore. So we’re work-

Working with customers on their biggest pain point — price — brings renewed growth for Cagwin & Dorward. BY **LINDSEY GETZ**

ing closer with our customers on pricing now.”

In addition to scaling back pricing, the company, whose two biggest areas are maintenance (61.5%) and installation (23.2%), has also put more emphasis on what they call “customer centricity.” “It’s about staying connected to the customer,” Glennon says. “Customer retention is probably one of the most important elements of our business and we put a lot of emphasis on it. One of the things we implemented last year was going out to our top 25 customers and just talking with them. Asking how the economy is affecting their business and letting them know that we understand.”

Of the company’s growing areas, tree care (which accounts for about 8.8% of overall services) has been strong with about 25% growth over last year’s numbers. Glennon says that’s one area where customers are willing to spend their dollars — particularly when it comes to safety and liability issues — so he’s put some more focus there. “We are making more of an effort to address safety issues and hazards with our clients,” he says. “When you bring those types of things to the client’s attention, they’re willing to spend the money.”

The company has also put an emphasis on water conservation education, which is a growing need for Northern California, an area that’s dealt with many drought issues. “We pulled a lot of new contracts simply based on the premise that we felt confident we could reduce their water consumption and their overall cost,” Glennon says.

The combination of several key strategies — namely competitive pricing, customer centricity, and a focus on growth areas like water conservation — has helped grow Cagwin & Dorward in 2010. “We knew when we were budgeting that this would be another tough year,” says Glennon, who originally put growth around 6%. “We felt if we could have a conservative goal and grow despite the economy that we’d be happy with that success.” **LM**

GROWTH PROFILE

Cagwin & Dorward
Novato, CA
2010 Growth: 4%



The Cagwin & Dorward management team.

GETZ is a freelance writer with experience covering the lawn care and landscape industry.