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Be Sure Your Customers Feel Appreciated

by Carolyn West Price _____

How often have you heard it said that the sales department needs to sell more? Yet, rarely do you hear that everyone in the company needs to keep the clients or customers that the sales department brings in?

Or, better yet, if you're in a small company, in which the owner or managers do the selling and the service, how balanced is your strategy for keeping the customers you worked so hard to get? If you're like many, you probably don't have a proactive client relations plan, let alone a proactive plan for staying in front of referral sources.

Here's the challenge: develop a plan that mechanizes the process of staying in touch with the people who already know of you. In this way, you can still devote time to the prospecting and fishing expedition to continue adding new customers--the traditional marketing efforts, but you will "keep the pantry full" by not losing customers when they perceive you just don't care about them.

So, now you ask, how can I mechanize the process so it doesn't get back-burnered or take away from my regular business efforts?

First, consider what vehicles make sense for your business. Is it a newsletter? bulletin? tip cards, with a tip of the month? case studies, which illustrate your creativity in whatever you do to solve client prob-



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lems? birthday cards? a three-dimensional imprinted specialty gift or mailing? emails? reprints of articles you have written or have pulled and believe will be of interest? referrals to their business? just a phone call to say hello? recall notices.... And the list goes on.

The key is to pick the tactics which are a positive reflection on your business--tactics which allow you to have your name cross in front of them on a consistent, repeated basis, at least 6 times per year. It is okay to mix and match, but avoid starting something that implies "regular," such as a bulletin and then neglect to send it out at the expected interval. If it's monthly, it's monthly. If it's quarterly, it's quarterly. "Periodic" is one way to avoid the commitment, but it lends itself to the "back burner" trap, too.

In addition to the regularly scheduled communications, don't forget the customer service component to retaining clients, securing repeat business, and paving the path toward referrals. Although we've all heard it thousands of times, it remains true: from the way your phone is answered (or not answered) to the handling of customer problems or billing inquiries, the "total customer experience" is what makes or breaks a client relationship and their desire to do business with you.

Further, their entire experience can be fine, but if you don't make them feel appreciated, they can more easily opt to spend their money with someone who does. When was the last time one of your suppliers made you feel like an appreciated customer? Hmmm? Guess we should all think about that one, especially in light of growing trend to de-personalize business via emails, faxes, voice mails, and any other way to avoid dealing with a human being....

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