

# HOWARD COUNTY BUSINESS MONTHLY

VOL. 1 NO. 12

The Monthly Business Newspaper of Howard County and Columbia, MD

January 1994



## Marketing Your Business

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It's Time For A Marketing Audit

Okay. The holidays are over, and we're all getting back into the swing of things.

Even if you're not writing or revising a marketing plan and are just looking for ways to improve and refine the marketing you're doing, a marketing audit is a good way to kick off the new year (or to begin a situational analysis for that plan).

If audit is a term that makes you nervous, just consider it taking inventory and cleaning house.

Begin your inventory by looking at the health of your data base (If you don't have one, it's time to start).

Remember, if a name is in your data base it usually means one of two things: The person is in your target market (even vendors and referral sources count here) or the person is a current customer.

In either case, these people are very important and should be the recipients of regular, targeted, and well-written communications.

Ask yourself if your present system for keeping names is adequate? Does it allow you to easily pull segments of your data base so mailings can be very well targeted?

If the answer is no, there are several user-friendly software programs on the market that make it easy to build and maintain a marketing-friendly data base.

Specifically, ACT for Windows and TeleMagic are two geared to contact management. They're extremely versatile, allowing you to segment as little or as much as you may want.

Next, look at what you send to these people, asking yourself several questions:

-- Are the materials representative of the image you want to project and the message you want to deliver in terms of the benefits you offer customers?

If they're not, out with the old and in with the new.

-- Are the materials you use complementary, in that they have a consistent message and look?

If that means you need to update your letterhead, moving beyond the computer-generated version on white paper you're using now, do so.

Remember, first impressions can say a lot.

And home-based or small are not necessarily bad, because they can be turned into competitive advantages. However, simply lacking a professional image, justified by being small or home-based, is bad.

In a bigger company, marketing materials are often created by different people during moments of panic. The styles are often different, as are the messages.

-- Do your letters and materials clearly reflect your benefits (not what you do, but what you provide) and your competitive advantage—why both your existing customers and prospects should do business with you.

Not only should you examine the look and content of what you have in your marketing system, but you should look to see that you have all you need.

Consider these for starters:

-- A note or letter that tells a new acquaintance it was nice meeting him/her.

-- A note to thank someone for the opportunity to submit a proposal or to begin work.

-- A survey of clients.

-- A note to thank someone for a referral

-- A thank you for using your services.

Of course, every business is different, but these are a few that almost every business should keep current.

Remember, a client should hear

from you at least four times a year in a non-sales manner.

And frankly, that communication is simply an investment, because to quote another statistic, it is five times more expensive to get a new client than to keep an existing one happy.

Whether that's through letters, in combination with an invitation to an open house or seminar, a newsletter or a reprint of an article you saw that might be of particular interest, the key is to position yourself as the authority in your field—the best at what you do—by flighting different mailings to your different target markets.

Do it on a specified schedule so you can maintain share of mind among the various audiences in your data base.

Your pieces should look like you have thought about your image and the benefits you provide, and that you care about what the recipient thinks about you, plain and simple.

If you've spent the time to at least look good—and consistent—you'll be one step ahead in this communication game.

If you have refined the message that communicates the benefits you provide (from your customers' perspective), you'll be right on track.

Your marketing audit should also include evaluating how you sell your services, the organizations to which you belong for networking, how your internal operations (from the way the phone is answered to the ways invoices are mailed and customer inquiries are handled) affect your image and more.

Keep this in mind: When I'm asked what marketing really is, I always reply, 'It's everything a business does, whether it realizes it or not.'

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