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Starting the new year on the right foot

by Carolyn West Price

In keeping with the spirit of "the 12 Days of Christmas," here are "12 Tips of Smart Marketing" to incorporate into your 2000 marketing plan.

1. Client & Referral Source Relations. If you do no other outreach marketing, this is a must. You need to maintain your "share of mind" with your customers and your key referral sources (or someone else will). What this means is to develop a plan to get in touch with them a minimum of six times per year—whether it's a birthday card, invitation to a VIP sale, or simply a "hi, how are you?" call. It is paramount that you make a commitment to not only service your customers well...but that you make them feel appreciated.

2. Frequency & Repetition. If you don't have enough money to run more than an ad here and an ad there, don't bother. Specifically, if in any given radio or television campaign, your "buy" doesn't achieve a frequency of three or better, consider spending your money elsewhere. (Of course, this is a rule of thumb...but an important one.) I'd also suggest you avoid "image" ads that don't allow you to track them because there's no offer or event.

3. Invest in your image. If your marketing materials are simply run through a laser printer or printed on colored copy paper, reassess the image you're projecting. Being penny-wise and dollar-foolish may haunt you for a long time. Do you really want to look "mom & pop"?

4. Don't forget about public relations. If you think "marketing" is synonymous with "advertising," you're missing opportunities to increase your visibility and credibility for a lot less money. Explore media relations—press releases, contributed articles and interviews. They're usually free...and even if you don't like to write, get a professional to "ghost write" your articles; it is usually a modest investment. Send copies of your article to people who matter to reinforce your credibility. Remember, anyone can buy an ad...not everyone is considered a media resource.

5. Invest in good creative. Similar to the "mom and pop" tendency to design logos, stationery, and brochures on pre-loaded graphics software, many people attempt to design their own ads (or simply



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let publications set them because they're free). Remember, if your ad doesn't "pop" and your benefits aren't apparent, you may be wasting those ad dollars because of inferior creative.

6. Create goodwill. Wouldn't you prefer to do business with a company you think "gives back to the community"? Well, your clients probably feel that way, too. Think about your "policy" and "strategy" for community giving. Whether you serve on a board of directors or sponsor a charity golf tournament, make sure it's compatible with your image, fits into your personal agenda (a cause you believe in)...and don't forget to let people know about your charitable efforts.

7. Postcards make cents. Whether you buy a mailing list or simply stay in touch with your own customer data base, remember that postcards not only cost less to send, but they often get read even while people stand over the circular file. Impressions count!

8. Cooperation works. No matter how large the company, budgets are limited. Why not join forces with a complementary business to provide services or products that you do not...rather than trying to be all things to all people? In so doing, you may benefit from exposure to each others' clients...and save money by splitting costs of marketing materials and ads.

9. Want to look like an expert? Seminars work. But also consider design-

ing "tip cards" with useful information. Make them available for free to those who respond to your press releases, post cards or ads...and be sure to build that data base.

10. Newsletters = targeting. Think about your own stack of mail. Don't you read the newsletters from groups to which you belong with more interest than "junk mail"?

Reverse the thinking. Look for newsletters that accept ads or articles and hit your target market. Newsletter editors are happy for well-written articles to fill space and ads are usually very affordable.

11. Do your homework when hiring a pro. If you consider hiring a professional to assist you with your marketing, do your research. If you want an artist, hire an artist; if you want a market research specialist, hire a researcher. If, however, you want a marketing consultant with a broader spectrum of services and experience, hire one. Regardless of the specialty, assess his/her/their experience and training, ask for references, and compare more than just fees... As you well know, all consultants are not created equal...and may not actually cost you more money than the trial-and-error marketing, which may be costing you more than you realize.

12. Don't forget that work is a means to an end. We all need to make a new year's resolution to make time today for ourselves and the ones we love...there's no guarantee that tomorrow will ever get here.

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