

Marketing on a Small Scale

We all think of marketing and we think of wasted dollars. The locksmith will consider it a huge quantity of wasted dollars with no visible or fast direct return. Very rarely does marketing result in fast results. It is like a reputation. It takes time to develop your niche. The nice thing about marketing is that it can be done on a small yet effective scale. To do it on a small scale one must accept the fact that it must be done constantly to be effective. Therefore, you simply want to “Think Small.”

With only a few exceptions, marketing is one of those areas where you get what you pay for. Some folks think that they will go to the inexpensive consultant with the thought that this person is on their way up and may be the next guru of marketing. Usually, this is not the case. Therefore, if you are going to hire a firm that is experienced (and who usually hires the inexpensive or inexperienced people), you are going to pay for it. With small concerns, like a locksmith, this is extravagant and not a good way to spend your hard earned monies. All you need are some creative ideas and yourself. That is all you really need to be effective. A quick note here before it is forgotten – It is also important to remember that free exposure is generally of little benefit for it usually will have little impact on your targeted market.

Let us start with what your target market may be. One locksmith’s undesirable customer may be another locksmith’s treasure. Some locksmiths prefer quick market experiences such as the auto industry of our business. You get a call, run to the location, do the job, collect the money, and move on. Always polite and cleanly dressed, of course! Many locksmiths take this approach in their business and for many reasons. Some are older locksmiths who are taking on the locksmith experience as a second or a minor income and wish not to be any more involved than what may be necessary. Others are just entering the profession and have no other way to get work other than the call that comes from the yellow page advertising. Then there are those who either specialize in large geographic areas or are in an economic tourist area where their expertise carries a high demand. Their marketing is easy to understand. Be clean, polite, well educated, and a large ad in the yellow pages. If they are in a high tourist area then the market plan may also have links to the local economy where there greatest number of calls are derived. An example would be befriending the local association of motel/hotel owners or managers. They are the one’s who will send the distressed motorist.

It seems however, that most locksmiths are either working in a mixed medium of auto, commercial, and residential while others do strictly commercial. It is difficult for any locksmith to advertise on the local television and for the most part this is applicable for the local radio stations or newspapers as well. Admittedly, the local publicly owned radio station has fund raising periods where for a free meal they will give you several spots where your business is highlighted in their programming. This would be a good thing to take advantage of if they will let you in the door. Generally, many businesses will try to take advantage of such events and due to its popularity; it is very tough to be accepted. A tip to secure this avenue is to remember most businesses that do this will produce a meal of cold burgers from the local fast food eatery. Promise a full-blown homemade meal with all the trimmings and dessert. You will probably have little difficulty in getting a shot for “free” promotions.

What is effective marketing for such a small business owner? What is generally considered a locksmith’s effort at marketing? Generally, it is a free give-a-way. Maybe it is a calendar, a cheap ink pen, or being extravagant with baseball caps with the business logo on it. Unless you are a kiosk in the mall, key fobs and key rings are not one of your big selling items. You will sell some on impulse sales but generally, very few will be sold. Why would a locksmith not consider a free key fob? There is a very good story to tell here. It happened to this locksmith. On a residential job, the lady of the house turned out to be a very good client as we worked through the security problems of the house. In the entry, a key rack was displayed in full view. The suggestion was for her to do away with such a board since a break-in might result in all of her keys going out with the bad guy. Anyone could very easily lift a ring from the board resulting in grief. Most of the suggestions on the security issues were accepted but on this key rack, she flatly refused. Seeing a ring made of thin wire on the rack, a request was made that she allow me to replace the wire with one of my better brass key fobs so the keys will not fall apart and become lost. It was free, she accepted. The shop received ten service calls from that free fob. Five of them were

new commercial soon-to-be permanent clients. That Christmas a very nice gilded card was sent to her thanking her for all of the business that she had sent our way. She wrote back expressing how happy she was that we had been prosperous but said that she was reluctantly removing the key rack never realizing that everyone paid so much attention to such a thing. She said that she would use the story to tell her friends and that we would have to settle for good word-of-mouth advertising.

A good uniform along with proper manners are another way to get the attention of people that you may meet. In an elevator that was descending in our local hospital, a short conversation took place. In uniform with a tool belt carrying the needed tools for a particular lock job, the question was asked by one of the passengers, "Do you work here?" The reply was, "Yes, as a contractor." The next question was "Do you have a business card?" The reply was "Yes" and the card was given to the inquirer. "If you are good enough to take care of this place, then you can handle my company's needs. I'll call you this evening." Everyone else in the elevator put out their hand and more cards were given out. It was a lovely moment!

Greeting cards are another way of saying thank you for a customer's business. It is also a way of staying in touch with a customer base. With your outstanding repeat customers, a Christmas card and even a birthday card would be a good idea. Any time you can make it personal, it will mean much more to the client. If you are not into postage and cards then try a phone call to help make a difference. Mix it up, if you wish, with a phone call after the job and a card at Christmas. If you use a phone call, be careful that the message is not lost in the conversation or voice mail. If you do get a voice mail then ask for a return call to give your greeting personally to the client. Keep it personal and keep the electronics out of it. What would you like best? Would you want a voice mail message, or an email, or the actual person giving you the thank you or birthday wish? Some would refer to the phone call after the job as a quality assurance call. Just remember to thank the client for their business and for the opportunity to serve. If it happens to be their birthday, then wish them a happy one.

While gifts would not be an avenue of approach for everyone, a give-a-way gift is another way to get good publicity. Many school systems have an auction during a spring or fall festival. You can offer an inexpensive home safe for the auction where the high bidder gets the safe and a free security survey. At least you will be able to get in the door of a possible client and make a sale to regroup your donation costs. Everyone at the auction will hear your company name mentioned and the auctioneer will give out details of your business as a means to increasing the bids. No matter what avenue you may take, marketing can be accomplished inexpensively. As with the auction, it may require a little creativity and a little bit of risk taking. An example would be to invite the local newspaper reporter to do an exposé of the event. They may even mention your donation!

Being creative has a large part to play in successful marketing. Let us say that you would like to produce a two or four-page newsletter that you send out to your repeat clientele. If you had such a letter, you could boost to your readership that you are now carrying the new high-tech biometric safe locks and you could talk about them and what they will do for anyone who owns such a wonderful piece of technology. This is telling everyone who reads your newsletter that you are on the cutting edge of technology and security. The newsletter could also be a good platform to announce specials that you are trying to sell. Newsletters are not as daunting a project as it once was. A digital camera (using the macro lense setting for close-up work) with a full program of Microsoft Word or MS Publisher will give you the copy you need to take to your local copy-making company. It just requires a little bit of planning and effort as well as postage costs. It could also be handed out as you meet your customer base. Personally, it was a way for an impromptu visit to all of the major accounts once every four months. It kept the company in the forefront of the customers mind. Copies were also handed out at the shop.

Before, it is forgotten, the business card needs to be considered as candy. Get them professional done. The computer-generated card is just not a good product to represent the way you make a living. Once you have the card design that you want, have a lot of them made up. Everyone you meet, and I mean everyone, gets a card. Even if it is a casual moment in mall store shopping and a casual greeting, hand out a card. Everyone who has a key made, give them a card. Like candy, the business card draws flies.

Unbelievably, planning is the one thing that even the large major business concerns fail to do with any accuracy or effort. Generally, money left in the budget gets used for marketing unless something else needs it first. This is one of the major reasons why so many businesses reach a certain level and then begin to decline. That makes planning the least well-planned activity of most businesses! When it comes time to plan, most businesses will pick the old things that have been in place since the business began and will call it the “new” plan. The old brochures will be reprinted and the old contracts will be simply renewed with hardly a glance being given to the cost or outcome of past performances. Poor selling products will be reordered, and the norm of what happened in 1977 will once again rule and happen in 2008. If you want economical and cost-effective marketing then spend some time developing the effort. It will save you money and give a huge directional boost to your company or individual effort.

Yellow page advertising has been the locksmith’s stay for as long as the locksmith has been using the telephone. They are effective but only for certain locksmiths and only to a point. If you do nothing but emergency service then your ad efforts in the yellow page section needs to be enormous. It will be expensive. You have to be in front of those who need you and when they need you. Once your business in your community begins to reach an established nature, generally around three to five years, and you have been active with your marketing efforts, your efforts with the yellow pages needs to be reduced. This is unless you are really dependent on emergency service. Once you are established, cut your yellow pages back. You can spend your money much more effectively by all of the suggestions mentioned above and allow a few dollars to go to being more creative with activities you think you wish to risk.

So what is marketing? Is it advertising? Advertising is part of it but not all of it. Marketing is attracting customers. Marketing is getting the potential customer to buy your product or services. Marketing is about making the customer happy with their purchases. Marketing is about getting the customer to repeat their purchasing power with your company. It is advertising, public relations, selling and selling strategy. It might be database strategies, to product design, or product packaging. It is everything that your customer sees and hears from your company. If you are a sole proprietor, marketing is you. If you decided to incorporate and the board is invisible in the daily routine of your work, then marketing is still you. It is all about how you will be seen by the buying public. How important is your community perception? Within walking distant of a new customer’s house was a locksmith shop. Upon arriving, it was stated that the competition could have easily solved this problem and done so at a much cheaper cost. The customer stated that the competition was great as a drinking buddy but that he would not trust the locksmith to mend his boots! This is how reputations are made or destroyed. The moral of the story is to do well in your community if you wish for their support. You need to be proper is all aspect as it relates to the times you are living. Twenty years ago, you could smoke in your customer’s office as you talked about their security needs. If you try it now, you would be tossed out onto the street. Stay within the acceptable standards of your community.

Therefore, to draw a conclusion, marketing is your presentation to the public. It is the way you look. It is the way your service vehicle looks. It is your manners. It is your expertise. It is your sensitivity to the customer’s needs. It is your level of performance. It is your fairness in pricing. In short, it is everything you do in front of the client. Good luck!