

# Focus on Your Strengths and Grow

By Debbie Graham

As small business owners continue to tighten their belts, minimize discretionary spending, and watch as friends and family lose their businesses, their jobs, their homes and suffer personal challenges during this recessive economy, it is critical to focus your energies on your business strengths. For those companies who have weathered seasons of the highs and lows of the business cycle, times are tough. But, for new business owners, this time of slowing sales strips cash flow causing a financial crisis, and forces companies to close their doors at great loss to the owners. Success in business is complex. Many factors come in to play in a network of location, customers, employees, vendors, traffic, signage, and personalities. You must focus on your strengths for continued business growth.

Loyal customers are worth their weight in gold—literally. Paying attention to your customers and catering to their wants and needs contributes to the bottom line. Restaurants can quiz customers on their favorite dishes and then email or fax weekly specials to an existing customer base that has favorite wait staff that call them by name. Taking time to ask customers how you can

provide additional services, products, information or resources is easy—you just have to do it, capture the information and use it to your advantage. Letting your customers know that you appreciate their patronage is so simple, but few business owners take the time for the common courtesy to say “thank you.” Thank you calls, post cards and notes are inexpensive, quick and very personal. Customers don’t get appreciation from the big box stores—but small business owners can easily express their appreciation for loyal customers. You want your customers and clients to be so pleased with your service that they return often and tell friends and family of their experience. And if you learn of a referral that garnered you another customer, reward that referral because people usually repeat their deed when they are rewarded. If your strength is a strong base of loyal customers, focus your energy on staying in touch and showing your appreciation of their support.

Marketing your goods and services in the din of millions of messages we all receive every day requires smart business owners to use their advertising dollars wisely, niche market, and direct their mes-

sages to a focused clientele for maximum impact. A web site is a great tool to convey information, but if customers don’t know it exists or can’t find it with simple search terms, a web site isn’t going to do your business much good. A small local restaurant can send weekly lunch specials via postcards, fax or email, and a large restaurant can send monthly specials targeted to their customers and take reservations online. Rather than having a file folder of takeout menus, customers can link to restaurant web menus, order online and pickup dinner on the way home—again, targeting the loyal customers who frequent your business. Communicating with your customers via the web and email is a valuable tool and easily managed.

If your company has stale merchandise, possibly a strategic diversification is an option to improve sales. A bakery can diversify their offerings to another niche, such as gluten-free, sugar-free or nut-free to appeal to a new market and identify new customers. Movers can add a higher level of service, targeting the wealthy with premium services including taking photos of each item in place, then transporting everything, then putting those items in a similar

place in the new location. Paying attention to similar businesses in other areas can give you tips to expand your services, product lines, or help you focus on your strengths and grow!

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*Business Sense*

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