

Marketing in the 21st Century: 5 Must-Haves

By Scott Campbell / Impact Marketing

Since the beginning of time, business development has primarily focused on who a person knew. The same is true of organizations...the ones that performed well were largely made successful by number and quality of the relationships developed. And that hasn't changed. The market still operates largely that way.

But as demand has continued to slump, competition gotten downright vicious and technology improved, we've seen a fundamental shift of how companies are attracting business. The old marketing methodologies and those that continue to employ them are seeing their competition make significant gains on them. For those, the strategy of avoidance has become destructive.

Marketing in the 21st Century is about better organization and the use of influence through new approaches, namely technology and new media. Those who accept this fundamental shift will be better off in the short and long-term to compete well into the future. Here are five suggestions to help bring any organization up to speed-

1. New Mindset

There's no doubt about it, relationships are the most valuable aspect of any business. This simply won't change. What has changed though is the manner in which relationships are formed and maintained. Emailing, texting, websites and even blogs are now the accepted way of doing businesses. Each of these communication types have inherent advantages in the way information is passed. Face to face communication with a hand shake is important, no doubt. But in terms of documented history, how can you beat a simple email?

The first important step is a realization that just as there have been developments in any specific industry, so have there been developments in marketing. Picking up the phone is still important...but just as important (perhaps more so?) is a letter or informative website. And these things require writing. If you're not a writer who can shape and creatively package your services to the public, then you need to find someone who can.

Further, I encourage you to shed the "honest-but-do-good-work-so people-should-use-us" mentality and enter the world of creativity and promotion. Once you take that step, I think you'll be in a more effective frame of mind.

2. Marketing Kit

What is a marketing kit? A marketing kit is the communications foundation of your business. It's been used by the big ad agencies for their clients for decades and in its basic form, is a series of documents that explains your organization in a number of different ways. Examples include your logo (yes, you should have one), letterhead, case

statement (why the public should do business with you), difference statement (you need to present yourself as unique), your story, your services, etc. The purpose of a marketing kit is for branding and for use in all the marketing tactics you use as a cohesive communications strategy.

The benefits of developing a marketing kit are numerous. Some of the more obvious ones include: a resource to draw from for any tactic you'd like to use, cohesiveness so that future messages are similar, and an avoidance of the "marketing event of the week" syndrome that so many organizations fall into.

3. Dynamic, robust website

Your company's website allows you to do many things that traditional marketing and advertising cannot. Websites in general have become powerful brick-and-mortar office extensions as they have the ability to provide valuable information 24 by 7. Information can be directed to prospects, developers, investors and even employees in a continuous stream.

The customer might want to know how long you've been around and your passion for what you do. They might want details and specifications of your high-quality, superior design, products and/or services. Maybe they want to read through the testimonials to gain confidence and see that your reputation is impeccable. Websites make all of these things possible and easy to get.

I'm amazed that some companies still do not have websites. Those avoiding "flashy graphics" are missing out on an opportunity to "virtually" meet with prospects and share valuable information when they want it. I can't think of a simpler tool for communications and promotion than a website. And for those who have one...I suggest you start looking into a social media strategy now.

4. Referral marketing system

We all know how important a referral is. And we ask our clients for them (if you're not, then start doing that). But what would happen if we organized this important area of the business?

What I'm talking about is that instead of hoping a referral comes your way...you spend time to develop important relationships - from people who can really help. So who's "important"? Well, a strategic partner is important. A strategic partner is someone who serves the same target market that you do yet is not in direct competition. An example of a good strategic partner to a roofer is an electrician...or a plumber...or an HVAC contractor. Who would you consider to be a natural strategic partner to your business? I recommend that you identify them and make contact.

5. Public relations program

I'm shocked by how many organizations ignore this marketing tactic. Your business is probably very newsworthy. Technology has made this process relatively simple. The bottom line is that third party endorsements (i.e. news) are more powerful than any advertisement. An article written about your company by someone else, whether newspaper, magazine, or in an online blog creates credibility that even the best written advertisement cannot generate.

But marketing in the new millennium isn't easy. As with creating any product or services, there are a number of activities around any promotional effort. My suggestion is to learn what these are...and don't get left behind.