



The Bare Necessities of Marketing in Today's Business Environment

No question about it – times are tough. Resources are limited. And for most small to mid-sized B-to-B companies, new business just isn't materializing.

The natural impulse is to cut all “unnecessary” costs which, unfortunately, usually means tossing your already-sparse marketing efforts into the pile of expendables.

Now, you know in your heart that marketing is not a luxury. In fact, it's one of the few things that can actually help to distinguish you from the crowd, get you noticed and bring new customers to your door.

So, which marketing efforts are absolutely necessary, and which can you suspend? What marketing elements can you do without? Where can you cut? And what should you absolutely, positively stick with, despite your need to trim the fat?

We've come up with what we consider the 5 primary marketing must-haves for small to mid-sized companies to enable you to maintain your competitive edge in any market condition.

1. A capabilities brochure that talks about benefits, not specs

Yes, your manufacturing and product specifications are important, but not until someone is giving you their ear. Prior to that, you need to get their attention. Your capabilities brochure should reinforce over and over again why they *should* be doing business with you. Lots of people share your capabilities; what can you provide them the others can't?

2. A brochure in electronic format

This may be your capabilities brochure – honed down into a page or two. Ideally, it's something crafted specifically to send via e-mail that succinctly describes your benefits and capabilities to people asking about you, and formatted specifically to be viewed on a computer screen.

It's rare these days that you find people asking for information to be mailed to them; it's all e-mail. People are now used to scanning their screens for key information, and printing it only if it's worthy of expensive colored ink.

3. A website that touts your benefits – and is visible in searches

Yes, you have a website. But does it set you apart from the crowd? Does it give visitors a reason to call you rather than the dozen-or-so of your closest competitors that they will also find in a search? Does it highlight your unique capabilities? Some 80% of customers with a product need use internet searches to locate new vendors. That represents huge potential for new business – if your website engages their interest.

Does your website appear in a search of your primary keywords? I'm not talking about the top spot, but I am interested in the first two pages. It doesn't have to cost you anything at all, and it's not that hard to achieve.

4. A prospect database. (Any prospect database!)

Companies that do not have a list of companies they want to approach for new business cannot approach anyone for new business! I'm not talking about thousands of company names, titles and personal information. Your database can be small. It can be targeted. It can be geographic. It can be written on the wall. There are many ways to construct a manageable, affordable database to guide you toward some key prospects. Maybe it's your 100 top strategic accounts. A list of customers you've had and lost of the years. Your last trade show contact list. A download of company names in a key geographic area.

5. Some sort of new business outreach program

You should always have some sort of sales and marketing effort that involves contacting prospects directly and asking them for their business. It may be something as small and simple as direct mail a few times a year. Perhaps it's 50 cold calls per week, either by your sales force or an outsourced firm. Maybe you have an e-mailed newsletter, or a series of trade shows around which you can focus your efforts.

The point here is that you are always being proactive in reaching your prospects in some way, no matter how limited.

Just do it

It's a tendency among smaller companies to leave marketing programs to bigger, more "sophisticated" companies – and devote their precious resources to a simple "feet on the street" sales mentality.

While a strong sales presence is crucial, you shouldn't leave them out there in the cold, unarmed! A few simple marketing programs and consistent messaging helps them differentiate your company from the pack.

Leading Edge is a full-service marketing firm specializing in providing small- and mid-sized companies with aggressive, targeted and realistic marketing programs that get results. Visit LeadingEdgePrograms.com for info.