



SUCCESS TACTICS

Business Plan? Marketing Plan?

Part 7

In last months Newsletter I wrote about getting exposure (marketing) at a Gift & Merchandise show. We spoke about dealing with sales reps, catalog companies, and how some of them operate. It would be hard to recap the entire Newsletter so I will just move on. The cost of a Gift & Merchandise show can be very cost prohibitive for a new entrepreneur, so how does one get exposure on a shoe string budget?

This is not easy, but can be accomplished with some Give-To-Get ideas. The giving part also makes it fun! Let's say you are a home-based business. You know that having a store front will help you get exposure, but it is too expensive to start this way. So what can we do to get that exposure? How can I come up with an idea that will get us seen by many people? Where do a lot of people gather each week to socialize, or have fun, or even have a business conversation? Let's explore, in depth, a Give-To-Get method of selling.

The first meeting place that comes to mind is a church. Business owners attend church, school coaches attend church, and leaders of organizations attend church, just to name a few. Exposure at a church might be as good as attending a Gift & Merchandise show. How could you impress on the masses (play on words) what your company can do?

Let me tell you a true story of a sign company who was trying to get their business off the ground. This husband and wife team started their business in a 400 square foot heated area of their garage. The church they attended needed to replace their signage because of a name change and because their signs were worn out and almost unreadable. This incredibly smart, handsome, bald (small hint on who it might be), new sign-company owner told his wife, "Let's meet with the elders of the church and offer to make all of their signs for free." All we ask in exchange is to let the church members know our company made the signs, free of charge, for them and if anybody at the church needed any signs for their business to please give them a chance to bid. This will help them get started in their new sign business.

Here's what happened. Some of the businessmen even helped us with our bids and all gave us a chance. (Oops! The "us" gave away who the handsome intelligent bald guy was! See picture below.) We would tell them being "new to the sign business" meant we wanted everything to be the best quality to ensure they would tell someone else about our great service. Do you know people like to help people!?! Also, business owners like to help others succeed. They remember how hard it was to get started. The business

owners were very grateful for what we did for the church. We even had one tell us our bid was too low for a job we had quoted for them. They really wanted to make sure we would become successful. ☺

Let me list the jobs we got from that church. A fleet of tractor trailers, 20 trucks, and over 40 trailers to be stripped and new vinyl applied. Another job included a 16 foot by 30 foot aluminum sign for the local airport. This was the one we were told we quoted too low. We produced all the signage for two corporations. These were manufacturing plants, and the people who had the authority to order the signage attended that church. We even got the bid on an entire town's street signage to be replaced in accordance with the 911 state mandate. Do you know how much exposure you get when you do something for a whole town? No longer were we just a new company; now we were established.

Do you think we stopped there? No! We went to every church that would allow us to give them free signage for exposure to help our new business. Small churches or large, you never knew who might attend one of these churches that could land you the local mall's signage. Yes, that also happened to us. A \$30,000 a year account, plus all the stores inside were persuaded to use our services to maintain the established colors required throughout the mall. Ever heard of trying to get the snowball rolling for your business (northern expression maybe)? Well we were living in Maine at the time and we quickly started rolling our second snowball. Can you believe one of the franchise stores within the mall had the regional manager questioned us on how much the signage cost them? Soon we were making signs for all his locations stretching to Chicago. The sign company was incorporated and grew to 43 locations before we passed on the reins.



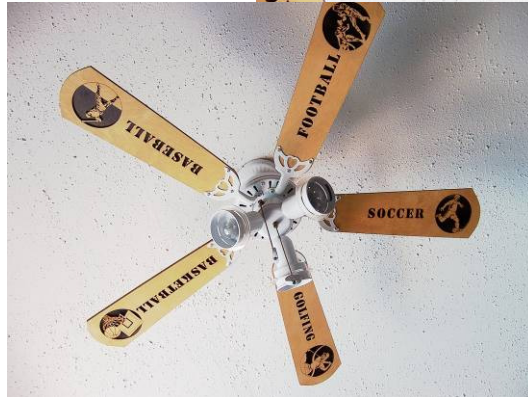
Was this all just luck? Maybe, but if we hadn't spoke up at the time, where would the business be now? Never be scared to get exposure and never hesitate when you have a good idea. The first idea might not be the big one, but where will it lead you and who might be willing to give you a helping hand if they know what you are capable of doing? For those who believe in luck, I say if you keep trying new exposure ideas each week and you land a big account, was that luck or just good business sense? The people who buy a laser (or any machine) and sit there waiting for business to come to them, might feel unlucky when the business doesn't just materialize on its own.

How do we convert this idea of church signage into laser engraved items? Churches have recognition plaques. Churches usually like to give gifts to new members, and your laser will do signage for doors, desktops and such. Groups in our church do something for newborn babies, or a son/daughter going off to the military. What could your business make that would give you exposure so others might say, "Can your company make this or that for our business? I wonder if you could handle our corporation's recognition gifts" or "That product is so nice I would like to sell it in my store." If I was into trophies I might even contribute my services for the church's softball team. Maybe it is something you create for the church youth program? What will be seen by many and shows off your abilities is good exposure!

Giving is fun, but I know you need to make money. Note: Never offer to do things at cost. You never want anyone to know your cost. If you cannot give, in hopes of bigger sales to come, for the exposure, then move on to the next idea. There are some ideas I have tried that did not bring us new business, but the group (usually schools) continued to call on us every year for free stuff. Once you explain the exposure you need in exchange for the giving, most understand your goal is to grow while helping out their cause. They will assist you!

We actually came up with an idea for the school fundraising and it allowed us to get exposure with local businesses. We made up two size banners for business sponsorships. We told the school to go to their local businesses and ask them to support them for a certain dollar amount and they will have a banner hung at the baseball/football/soccer field's fence with their logo and ad on it for the full year. The sponsorship covered the cost of the banner along with a major donation and most schools sold a two year sponsorship. We did not charge for the logo work, but it allowed us to contact the companies to get their artwork. The YMCA heard of this and contacted us with over 100 pole pocket banners to be hung on the ceiling of their swim area. We even got local press on helping the YMCA reach their financial fundraising goals. This was all done before the internet, so now a similar idea can be done easier with referencing a web page.

The point I would like to make is that your store-front exposure would cost you how much in rent? Add in electricity, heat/air, phone and your monthly outlay is what? What if you said, "Since I do not have a store-front expense, I want to make up some products for exposure (marketing) and give it away?" Sometimes rent feels like you're giving your money away. How many items can I give out for a certain dollar amount that could expand my customer base? Each month try new ideas. I gave you one idea in a previous Newsletter for personalized store displays for pet products. What ideas can we come up with when we try to think of where the masses meet, where business people meet, or have power lunches? Remember the theme fan blade idea? Sports bar, golf clubs, or even the local diner. This is an idea to get exposure if they allow you to put your website info so it can be seen. All exposure is good exposure, especially if it doesn't cost you a lot.



Most laser products need to be seen, touched, and admired for their unique beauty. Let's discuss more ideas in the next Newsletter. If you don't keep trying new ways to get exposure, your snowball will stop rolling and begin to melt. So keep your snowballs rolling! I do try to be humorous at times, but it doesn't always work. 😊

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