

Five Marketing Tactics Every Company Should Use NOW!

By Lawrence Kirsch

Too many companies are not marketing to their potential. Yours might be one of them.

Are you capturing prospects' contact information and keeping them informed of your activities? Are you implementing marketing tactics to convert these prospects into customers? Are your past and current customers aware of all the new products and services you offer? Are you inviting these folks back to do more business with you?

This article discusses five important marketing tactics designed to convert prospects into customers, and boost your sales with past and current customers.

Tactic Number 1 - Capturing Prospect Information:

Develop a process whereby you capture contact information for any and all prospects that connect with you, your staff, or your website. With technology on your side, keeping these prospects informed can cost pennies, instead of dollars, as it was not long ago. And by keeping these folks up to date on your interesting goings on, you will have a greater chance of converting a number of these prospects into paying customers.

Via The Phone:

Whenever a prospect calls your company, capture their email address (and first & last name). That's all you need. Don't bother with the mailing address or a phone number; if they become a hot lead or a true customer, you'll get the rest of the contact information later. At this point, you're simply going to keep it simple.

It shouldn't be too difficult to get their email address. Companies are sending out estimates, company literature, etc. to prospects and an email address is provided. If not, offer them your monthly or quarterly newsletter (that's another tactic we'll be discussing shortly) as a "fair trade" for this email information. Explain to them the newsletter is short and sweet and, from time to time, provides special offers and great deals – besides good information.

Build a simple Excel Spreadsheet with a column for each field, one for the email address, one for the person's first name, and one for their last name. Make it your master Prospect Database.

Via The Website:

Are you capturing email addresses from your Website visitors? Why not? By the very fact these folks are visiting your site, they are pre-qualified as potential customers (prospects). If you are already offering them a chance to be enlightened by your newsletter in exchange for an email address, that's a good

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start. But better to offer specific, targeted information that further segments these visitors based on the information they download from you site. This information can be delivered in the form of a “White Paper.” You can have a bunch of these educational White Papers in the form of “.pdf” files discussing all sorts of things. This article you are now reading is one of my White Papers available on my website. In case a thoughtful friend forwarded this to you – go to www.LawrenceKirsch.com for additional “White Papers” or to sign up for my newsletter.

Tactic Number 2 - Emailing Newsletters:

I would bet good money many of your current customers are not aware of all the goods and services you offer today. And why don't they know? Aren't you telling them?

A prospect comes to you and discovers something they wish to purchase from your organization. You sell it to them. Unfortunately, that may be all they know about your company. And if you haven't been keeping them abreast of your incredible advances and latest additions to your product and service line, how will they know to come back and buy some more of this great stuff from you? They won't know. And that's a big shame. It's also your fault.

Newsletters, if utilized appropriately, can be an effective tool in communicating to both customers and prospects. It keeps your audience aware of your existence, informed of your progress, updated on new products and services offered, and knowledgeable regarding the benefits you provide.

The most effective Newsletters are short and to the point—and sent via the Internet.

Sadly, many companies send longwinded pieces discussing nearly everything under the sun. Try to avoid doing this – it's usually an enormous waste of time and resources.

The most effective Newsletters are short and to the point – and sent via the Internet. Just a few short paragraphs, with some compelling images, can do the job.

Know Your Objectives:

The key to an effective Newsletter is to understand your objectives – what, specifically, do you want to get out of this newsletter.

Below is a list of possible objectives:

1. Updating your database regarding recent projects.
2. Updating your database regarding new products or services.
3. Informing your database about a recent award or honor your company received.
4. Providing your database ongoing information about something of value within the industry or a particular segment.
5. Providing your database with a special promotional offer valid for a specific time. Simply keeping your name in front of them.

Of course, there are probably a number of other objectives you might wish to consider for your situation. The important thing is to have a clear understanding of what those objectives are prior to writing your newsletter.

Short and Sweet:

For most companies, the Internet is the method of delivery for a newsletter. Some companies develop a 4-color piece and attach it as a .pdf file. The problem is actually getting the recipient to download and

open it – let alone read it. Other companies will send newsletters that, once opened, require the reader to scroll down and down and down.

A better way is to have your content not to exceed the space on the average desktop screen – without having to scroll further to read additional content. That's really all you will need – and about all your recipient will take the time to read.

Content Is King:

It is important that whatever you write, it should be of interest to your audience. In addition to the news generated from your company's activities, you can gather content from other sources and incorporate it into your newsletters. For example:

Collect Appropriate Content* from other email newsletters you receive, and / or Blog posts. Remember to give credit where credit is due and note from where the information came.

Articles for Reprint* written by area experts are also available to you (often, at no cost). Take a look at these two sources in the Internet:

<http://www.ezinearticles.com>

<http://www.ideamarketers.com>

If you decide to use an article from a site like the two identified above, you will need to publish the entire article and include the author's name – often the author will provide a short paragraph promoting his or her business along with a link to their website. Be sure to check out the site so you know what content your readers will see.

Hire a Ghostwriter* – Sounds scarier than it really is. In this case you simply hire someone to write the articles for you. And it's not as expensive as you might think. You retain the rights to the article and you can even place your name on the piece as the author. Ask for writing samples and when you're ready to move forward, give them the subject (or subjects), word count, an example of what you feel is good writing, and your deadline.

Here are some websites where you can search for a strong writer.

<http://www.LawrenceKirsch.com> This is my marketing and management consulting website. In addition to strategic planning, I am involved in developing the specific marketing tactics for my various clients.

<http://www.elance.com>

<http://www.guru.com>

* Tips from Lisa Sparks, Regional Development Director—Constant Contact (<http://www.constantcontact.com/>).

Third Party Email Providers:

There are a number of Internet-based websites providing services designed to help you develop your message, format the page, and deliver the email. These companies also track whether your email was opened, how many of your emails bounced back, and who wanted to be removed from your email list.

One provider I like in particular is Vertical Response (<http://www.verticalresponse.com>). They don't charge a monthly fee for a basic account and you only pay for the number of emails you plan to send. They also provide postcards (for a fee) for your direct mail campaigns, if needed. Recently they added a feature where you can track your tactical marketing activities from your account on their website.

Another popular third party provider is Constant Contact. They offer many of the same services as Vertical Response, except they charge a monthly fee that covers a fix number of emails. Visit the website for more information: (<http://www.constantcontact.com>).

Frequency Of Contact:

The newsletter will serve as another touch point from you to your prospect or customer. It is all about frequency of contact – and building a relationship that is meaningful and strong. Once you have that established, no matter when your customer needs your type of services or products, they will have only you to think about - and to call.

Schedule It And Do It:

The biggest challenge for most companies is not creating the first newsletter, but producing the second one. Remember, keep it simple, short, and to the point, and you should have no problem creating a few interesting paragraphs on a monthly or quarterly basis.

Tactic Number 3 - Emailing Press Releases:

A press release is a primary means of communicating news about your company to the media. Reporters, editors, and producers are hungry for fresh news, and they often depend on releases to tip them off to new and unusual products, industry trends, tips and hints, and other developments.

In fact, much of what you read in newspapers, magazines, or trade publications, hear on the radio, or see on the television news originated in press release form. Unfortunately, many editors receive dozens -- even hundreds -- of press releases each week, the vast majority of which end up getting "filed." Your challenge is to create a release that will spike the journalist's interest to discover more about the story you want told.

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Identify Appropriate Publications:

The first step to getting your news into print is to identify the trade publications and other media where you wish to communicate your company's activities. There are a number of directories available online and at your local library where you can gather important contact information, including the name of the editor or journalist

One important source of media contact information is the *Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media*. This publication can often be found in the reference sections of Colleges and Universities. Call ahead and speak with a Reference Desk Librarian to discuss your needs.

There are a number of online sources for information. One source is TradePub.com. (<http://www.tradepub.com/>). This source provides an extensive list of trade publications and technical documents by industry and geographic eligibility.

Publications can be selected based on the *industry* they target or by the *functional* responsibility of the individual with whom you wish to connect. For example, if you are interested in marketing to companies in the advertising industry, you could select the publication *Advertising Age*. However, if you wanted to reach those individuals working as Chief Financial Officers (in a wide variety of industries), you might select the publication: *CFO*.

Press Release Distribution:

Once you have developed your list of potential media contacts and your press release is done, you have a number of options available to you regarding the delivery of the release.

One simple way is to email your release to the targeted editors and journalists. It's efficient and low cost. Please see the above discussion of Third Party Email Providers under Tactic Number 2 - Emailing Newsletters.

There are a number of services providing mass distribution of your press release via various wire services and other methods. Some of these companies offer limited distribution for free. The organizations that charge you a fee provide you with extensive lists of potential target media for selection and eventual delivery.

Below is a short list of companies:

<http://home.businesswire.com/portal/site/home/index.jsp>

Business Wire is a leading source for full-text breaking news releases, multimedia and regulatory filings for companies and groups throughout the world.

<http://www.24-7pressrelease.com/>

24-7PressRelease.com provides mass media press release distribution.

<http://i-newswire.com/>

I-Newswire.com provides free press release distribution.

<http://www.prwebdirect.com/>

PR Web™ distributes press releases for many Fortune 500 companies and is the largest Newswire catering to small and medium-sized companies and organizations.

Tactic Number 4 - Sending Direct Mail Using Postcards:

Targeted direct mail can be effective in generating awareness of, and interest in, your company's products and services. Direct mail can also be used to lead prospects to your Website or telephone number. Combining a follow-up telephone call with the direct mail piece can be a potent one-two punch greatly increasing your rate of response to your message.

Post Cards:

As far as direct mail pieces go, post cards are one of the most effective methods to generate awareness and stimulate action out there. A letter is hidden by the envelope in which it resides. Often, the "bulk-rate" indicia or the return address signals the presence of "junk" and into the wastebasket it goes – before it is even opened. Not so with a postcard. When a prospect reviews their incoming mail, they have to look at the postcard in order to determine if it is of value. Whether they like it or not, the prospect is being exposed to your message.

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Of course, the price point of your product will greatly impact the success of the mailing piece. Generally speaking, the more expensive an item is, the more content and "selling language" is needed to drive the message home and to close the sale. However, if your goal is to build awareness of your products and services, or to drive traffic to your informative and "sales closing" website, or to motivate prospects to pick up the phone and call your toll-free number, then postcards can and often do the job – and do it

nicely.

Today, there are many printing organizations that will print four-color postcards (the front side is in four-colors – the backside is printed in one color - usually black) for a reasonable fee – even for low volume runs.

One organization is the United States Postal Service. Their NetPost® Print & Mail Service offers a convenient way for customers to create and send postcards and letters from a home or office computer. For more information, visit this link: (<http://www.usps.com/netpost/welcome.htm>).

Test – Test – And Test Some More:

The beauty of direct mail is your ability to test the relative strength of your message, price point, list selection, or any number of elements within the campaign. For example, let's say you are not sure which price might be the best price for your product. One way to find out is to do what we call in the business a "split-run" test. This is where you take two statistically significant groups within your mailing list and send one price to one group and another price to the other group. Everything else remains the same – the colors, the graphics, the message, everything. "Statistically significant" means the number of names to which you send a direct mail piece is large enough to provide you with "meaningful" results for the test. A couple of hundred names might not be enough to tell you if that price you selected really is the best price to use. A couple of thousand names would be better.

The Mailing List:

The list can be generated in a number of ways. If you simply want to inform your current customers of a new product or service introduction, then the list can be created from your own internal database. If you do not currently have a viable list of customers, then it will be important for you to begin capturing certain information. This information may include the contact name, title, company name, mailing address, email address, phone numbers, what and when they buy from you, their current and future needs, etc.

If you are trying to identify new prospects, information on these folks can be gotten from a number of sources. Often online and printed trade publications will rent their mailing lists for a fee. You can determine exactly the type of information you will need for your campaign and the publication will quote you a price.

There are also List Brokers whose job it is to provide their clients with direct mail lists appropriate to their campaign. The owners of the lists pay these brokers based on the size of the project so using them can be cost effective.

With the advent of the Internet, there are companies providing quality lists through subscription services to their customers. One such company is Salesgenie.com (<http://www.salesgenie.com/>). This company is a division of INFO USA (a popular database containing contact information for literally millions of companies and individuals) and generates targeted lists for a fee from this enormous database.

A less expensive way to generate a list is to create it yourself by mining the various publications available to you at your local library or on the Internet. Many libraries subscribe to the INFO USA database providing you free access with your library card (keep in mind it won't be as accommodating as Salesgenie in providing easily formatted, targeted lists). So, this process can be quite time consuming. If your goal is a relative short list of prospects, then this might be the best way to go. If you wish to create a larger targeted list, you may want to consider using one of the other sources discussed above.

The Message:

Often, the strength of a direct mail piece will be the message. This is what you are trying to sell and how you communicate it. Your campaign objectives will affect the message. Companies trying to sell a high-

ticket item might produce a lengthy direct mail piece, complete with photos, in-depth information on the features and benefits, along with a few testimonials from happy customers. If all you want to do is drive traffic to your website, a simple postcard or one-page letter might do the trick. As mentioned above, testing will help you to identify the most effective message for your purposes.

Valid Until – Expiration Date:

If you are sending a mailing piece that offers some sort of discount, or special offer, try to incorporate a “valid until” expiration date on your direct mail piece. Without it you lose the opportunity to create a sense of urgency. It is a proven fact whenever a “valid until” date is used, a burst of activity and additional sales take place just before the promotion expires. This is due to simple human nature. When a promotion is received in the mail without a “valid until” date, it is often placed aside and forgotten. When a “valid until” date is provided, this encourages the prospect to act on their intention before the promotion “expires.”

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Telemarketing:

Telemarketing is often associated with the worst aspects of marketing to customers and prospects. However, if done correctly and appropriately, it can be a most effective tool in building awareness and generating incremental revenue.

One of the most effective ways to utilize telemarketing activities is in conjunction with a direct mail campaign – as mentioned above. The number of pieces mailed will determine whether telemarketing is used. For large, mass mailings, telemarketing might not be appropriate as a method for following-up after delivery of the materials. The best situation is with a relatively small direct mail campaign where a certain number of pieces are mailed each week and a telephone follow-up is conducted the following week. This approach greatly increases the response rates and generates greater sales. Plus, it allows you to answer any questions the prospects might have about the product or service.

Take time to develop a telephone script that quickly provides the person on the other end of the phone information about why they should consider using your products and/or services. Talk about “benefits” to the customer. And be sure to get to the point – you’ll have 10 to 15 seconds at most to hook them.

Do Not Call Lists:

Be aware if you are attempting to contact residences you could be in violation of the Do Not Call statutes now on the books. Take time to learn the laws governing telemarketing to consumers in their homes. Not understanding these regulations could cost you. It’s simply not worth it.

Tactic Number 5 - Working With Strategic Partners:

One of my favorite marketing tactics is working with Strategic Partners. Not only can this tactic greatly increase your revenue, it often costs you and your partner very little. The key to this tactic is to identify non-competing companies sharing the same or similar target markets as you. The goal is to expand the reach of each company. This is accomplished by providing each partner’s customers with information about the other strategic partner.

For example, a marketing consulting firm providing services to small manufacturing companies might strike up a strategic partnership with an operations consulting company seeking the same market. Same target audience, non-competing goods and services – that’s the ticket. They might decide to add each other’s URL link to their websites – or a specific webpage providing further information.

They might develop a seminar combining information on manufacturing operations and marketing strategies and promote it to each other's email list of customers and prospects. In this way, they will have greatly increased their reach and potential audience.

Strategic partnerships may also be found in relationships with key suppliers, customers, and even with selected competitors. For example, there are many small printing shops receiving worthwhile projects that were deemed "too small" by larger print operations.

I realize this last tactic may not be as obvious as the others. It requires some creative thinking. But keep in mind you are simply trying to expand your reach using another company's resources, just as your strategic partner is trying to expand their reach using your resources.

The challenge is to discover an approach that will benefit each partner and meets the needs of your mutual target audience.

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