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Hard Times Are No Time to Stop Marketing

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Marketing is essential to the growth and success of any business, yet it seems to be the first part of the operating budget that managers slash when revenues dwindle and the economy gets unpredictable. Understanding and appreciating the role of marketing can prevent business owners from making the mistake of viewing this type of outreach as a dispensable luxury.

Whether you conduct business in a small, rural area or the global market, some principles are universal:

Marketing is all about the customer. To meet your customers' needs you have to know those needs and know how your products or services will help them. Figure out ways to communicate with customers and persuade them to choose your services or products through creative marketing.

Standing out amid the information-overload din. On any given day, people are exposed to thousands of marketing messages through advertisements on TV, radio, billboards, newspapers, magazines and the Internet. To win the competition for your customers' overtaxed eyes, ears and wallets, your message has to stand out amid all these appeals, and that requires creativity, a marketing budget and careful consideration of your target market and the best media channels to reach it.

A marketing manager recruits customers. Most businesses focus on everything but marketing, which is equivalent to opening your store but forgetting to let people know you're open. Having a marketing manager on your payroll means someone is accountable for considering your business from the customer's perspective and thinking about how to keep past customers while attracting new ones. A marketing manager can come up with a solid marketing plan that measures and tracks your progress so you don't have to rely on blind marketing and risk losing customers.

Marketing is everyone's job. The best marketing manager in the world can't execute a marketing plan without the rest of the organization contributing. Communicate the marketing plan to employees so they can participate; the best will become walking billboards. You can't control everything a customer experiences after entering your business, but you can make the visit as positive and profitable as possible by getting all employees onboard as in-house marketing representatives.

The more you give, the more you get. One object of marketing is to give your customers as much service or quality as possible without hurting your revenues. Giving customers samples, demos or generous coupon offers is a form of marketing. But you have to be a visionary as well as a number cruncher. Creative marketing requires you to be part artist and part scientist so you can reach several goals: meeting customers' needs, exceeding sales projections and achieving measurable results from your marketing dollars.

Everything you do is marketing. Being good is not good enough in today's marketplace; survival requires the incessant pursuit of excellence. Winning the rivalry for attention, money and customer loyalty requires businesses to continue perfecting services or products. Those that sit still are likely to fail. Make the most of marketing resources by understanding that everything you do has the potential to influence customers and either increase or dampen sales.

For more help, visit the Small Business Development Center Web site at www.nmsbdc.org.

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