



Seed to CEO

A practical guide for entrepreneurial people and organizations.

Issue Five

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Getting to Know Your Customers

With increasing competition for new customers and business, keeping your company top-of-mind is an economic necessity. The better you get to know each new customer, the more products and services you can sell over time. And the better your customers know you and remember you, the more trust and loyalty you build, and the more marketing and prospecting dollars you save. How can you go about keeping up with what customers want or need, without spending a lot of time or money? Here are some easy-to-implement techniques that will help you build recognition and customer loyalty.

Develop a company profile.

Write down your company's history, your products and services, your mission and vision, your contact information and your differentiating qualities. Then ensure that this information is available in an attractive printed format — a brochure or a fact sheet — as well as on your website. You'll find you use this information over and over as a prospecting tool and as a reminder to customers about why they are doing business with you.

Develop a customer profile.

You probably know far more about your prospects and customers than you realize. Do your customers tend to fall within the same age range? Do they come from the same town/city/country? Or do you find your customers have very little in common? Write down what your 'typical' customers look like, and what they are usually looking for when they first approach you. If you can keep your customers' needs in mind, you'll naturally provide better service. And if you find your customers fit into certain segments, it's that much easier to target your marketing efforts.

Listen to your customers.

Believing in yourself and your products and services is very important, but success comes when you provide what people or other businesses need. Listen to find out if you are consistently able to provide what customers are looking for. If not, then this may be an important message to help you make adjustments in what you offer or how you deliver it; it may also point out unexplored opportunities to begin development in areas where you are seeing new needs.

Get to know your customers personally.

Selling depends on your excellent product or service, but it also depends on you, and how well you communicate to each customer how important they are to you. Customers are impressed when you remember things about their life or business. Keep notes on your customers — make a note when your customer tells you they're an avid golfer, or that they're planning a tropical vacation next year.

Refer to your notes before you make a customer call or send an email, and introduce these personal touches into your conversation.

Your customers will be impressed that you've made the effort to get to know them, and they will value the individual attention.

Save Money When Travelling!

Finding the best rates for airfare, hotels, and car rentals can seem like rocket science. Two rules of thumb: always ask for the best rate; and you can usually find discounted pricing when you search and book online. Here are a few other simple ways you can save money.

Airfare

- Purchase tickets weeks in advance. Including a Saturday stay normally provides the best rate. And the time of day you travel may impact price significantly, so try different scenarios.

- Ask about current or upcoming seat sales. Some airlines also offer last-minute specials — ask or check their websites for details.

- Check schedules and prices offered by discount airlines. Note, however, that prices may change depending on seat availability.

- Search Internet travel websites for best prices. You may find a better price listed on the Internet, due to the greater number of routes that are searched by the software. (Flight reservation systems used by airline and travel agents are often biased to show certain airlines and/or the more direct routes, regardless of price.)

- If you need to change your ticket during your trip, you can often avoid a change fee by arriving at the airport early and asking to fly standby.

Rental Cars

- Special promotions and corporate rates are not always the lowest price. Ask for the best rate.

- Normally a rental car has to be returned within an hour of the same time of day it was picked up, otherwise extra charges (up to a half-day or full day rental charge) will apply. Choose your pick-up and return times carefully.

- Rental cars that are not located in an airport often have lower rates, but require you to take a shuttle to reach them.

Shoestring Marketing: Using Invoices To Sell

Take advantage of invoices and statements as a point of customer contact.

Invoices are more than just collection vehicles, they are an opportunity for you to promote your company and cross-sell other products and services.

Format your invoices to allow one or two lines of text that can be changed or updated each month, and use the space to offer special discounts, company updates or simply to thank your clients for their business. ✕

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act, but a habit."

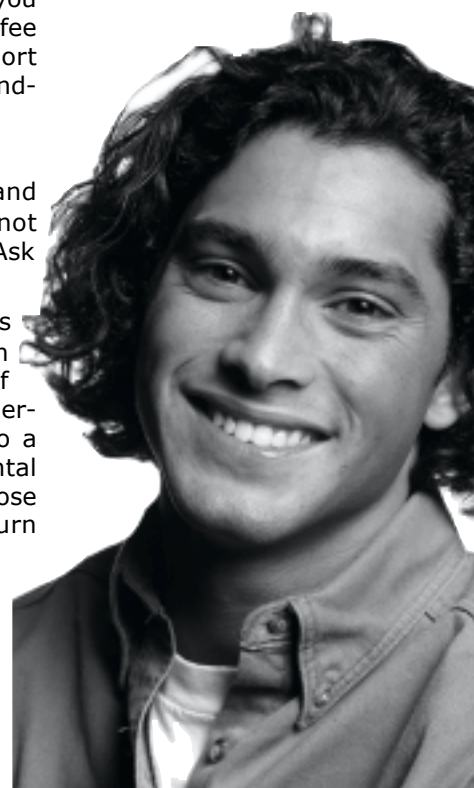
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Seed-to-CEO
Published by

MediaSpark

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Continued from CUSTOMERS

Evaluate your process for staying in touch with your customers.

Do you have a process? Or do you wait until your customers need something and approach you? Referrals are an often untapped source of business.

Contact your customers to remind them of your ability to meet not only their needs, but also the needs of their friends, family and associates. The ongoing contact process needn't be awkward — establish an email list, or a regular mailing list, and contact all of your customers at least one or two times per year.

You can develop regular discount offerings for repeat customers as a reason for the follow-up call, or send holiday greetings, or simply ask if the product or service you provided met their needs.

Keep up with your customers, and work to keep them as your customers. ✕

Continued from TRAVELLING

- When you reserve a small car, you may be upgraded for free.
- Certain credit cards may enable you to save money on insurance.

Hotels

- Event and corporate rates are not always the lowest price. Ask for the best rate.
- Check the hotel website before calling. You can often find even lower rates when booking through discount travel organizations, such as hotels.com, expedia.ca, and others that purchase rooms in bulk. But note that some of these organizations charge in advance and offer limited cancellation refunds.
- Inquire about telephone charges. Some hotels charge for local calls, and others apply a per-minute charge for all calls over 20 minutes.

Miscellaneous

- Currency exchange shops in the airport often charge more than those in town.
- The "Fast Cash" feature in some banking machines may not work when accessing funds outside of Canada.

Use the standard cash withdrawal options presented, and check with your bank if you have any questions or concerns before travelling to another country. ✕

Website Statistics: Facts and Fallacies

Website statistics can be very helpful in monitoring visitors — and visits — to your website. They can help you maintain a record and determine what is of most and least interest to visitors by telling you what is being viewed most often and for the longest periods of time.

Website statistics, however, are often misunderstood. "Hits" for example, are not an accurate representation of visits to a website. In fact, a hit only represents the number of times a file (html, graphic, etc.) has been sent from your web server to a visitor's browser (viewing a single page on a website will often register 10 or more hits). While an increase in hits does represent greater activity on a website, it does not directly equate to the number of visitors.

The reality is that most statistics are not accurate, due to the nature of the Internet. The only way to collect completely accurate statistics is to develop a sophisticated visitor tracking system, and force users to log in to your website each time they visit. Of course, this is far beyond the ability and need of most organizations.

Even though most statistics are not accurate, they are still beneficial in determining trends. For example, if you run a promotion during a certain period of time, you can check to see if there is a corresponding increase in activity on your website.

Here are a few of the most useful statistics:

Unique Visitors

Probably the most relevant statistic, it represents the number of individual visitors to your website.

Returning Visitors

This tells you how often the same visitors return to your website.

Referrers

These are the other websites that include a link to yours, as well as search engines that referenced your website under specific keyword searches.

Page Views

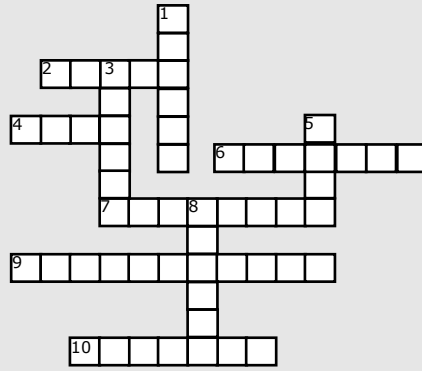
This tells you how often specific web pages were viewed, and enables you to determine most and least popular.

Paths

These are the routes most visitors use to navigate through your website. ✕

Test your knowledge of the information contained in this issue of Seed-to-CEO!

Answers Below



ACROSS

- Routes through a website
- Always ask for the best ___
- Economical marketing tool
- For best travel rates, stay overnight on ___
- Successful selling depends on how well you ___
- Develop a customer contact ___

DOWN

- ___ to your customers
- Website stats help show ___
- Update materials with well-written ___
- Represents individual website visitors

Ask MediaSpark ...

"I know I need to update my company's marketing tools, from our website right down to our business cards, but I simply can't afford the expense. What's your advice on how I can keep my costs down while I update our materials?"

Take it one step at a time. The first and most important step is drafting well-written copy to describe your business and the features and benefits of your product or service.

Then start replacing your old materials with the new, starting with what you use most. For a brochure, laser print a basic black and white or color document. For your website, lay out the new copy well, and include a "coming soon" message.

Remember, "simple and elegant" is often more effective than "bells and whistles." ✕

ACROSS: 2 PATHS | 4 RATE | 6 INVOICE | 7 SATURDAY | 9 COMMUNICATE | 10 PROCESS
DOWN: 1 LISTEN | 3 TRENDS | 5 COPY | 8 UNIQUE

Have a business or technology question? Email us!

Kit Folders: Professional and Versatile

If you have multiple brochures or brochures with content that changes often, consider using a kit folder. A kit folder can hold brochures of all shapes and sizes. If designed properly, it will project an attractive and professional image, without requiring inside pieces to be of equal quality. This allows you to save money on the inside pieces without compromising the overall presentation quality. ✕

About Seed-to-CEO

Contact us to ...

RECEIVE this newsletter by email.

ADD A FRIEND to our mailing list.

BE REMOVED from future mailings.

DISCUSS your software development, eLearning, website, and print design needs.

Coming soon in future issues!

- Search Engines: Find it Fast
- Common Printing Issues
- Will Your Business Survive When You Lose Data?
- Make Your Sales Pitch a Hit

Seed-to-CEO is written and published eight times a year by **MediaSpark Inc.**, an award-winning technology and design company.

Over the years we have helped many organizations achieve business success by providing assistance and guidance on a number of technology, education, and marketing related initiatives. The objective of this newsletter is to extend our experience to a wider community in hopes of helping our clients, associates, friends, and prospective customers to become more successful—and to save them time, money, and stress while doing so!

We welcome your comments. Please contact us to explore how we may assist you on your road to success.

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