

METROWEST BUSINESS

[WRITE ON THE MONEY]

Content today can lead to sales tomorrow

"I waited 5 years to buy a bedroom set. So glad I did!"

This was a comment left by a happy customer on the Facebook page of one of our clients, a handcraft-



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ed, hardwood furniture seller. It reminded me, first, that this company's target audience is not made up of impulse shoppers, but rather more thoughtful buyers who want to invest in something lasting.

It also reminded me of the importance of staying in front of your target audience over time, with relevant, meaningful content. That way, when they're ready to buy, they will think of you.

This strategy also pertains to individuals as they move through their careers and potentially move from job to job. When a firm you want to work for is hiring, you want them to think of you. Consistent, strategic content marketing can help make that happen.

Regardless of which tools you use to communicate to stakeholders, make sure you approach it the right way. I like to boil it down to (1) give something (information, tips, insights), (2) share something (resources, referrals) or (3) say something (put forth an opinion, start a discussion).

Notice I said nothing about selling?

People will tune you out quickly – toss your direct mail, delete your email, ignore your posts – if all you ever give is self-promotion or a hard sell. You'll be more effective if you become known as a thoughtful, generous expert who wants to build and sustain relationships.

Here are three ways to be top of mind when it counts.

Make it easy to get found online

One of the most important things a company can do to attract target prospects is to optimize its website with the right keywords.

Before making any big or occasional purchase – think cars, financial planning, insurance, furniture, homes – most of us will do some online searches to get information. The companies that have taken the time to strategize which keywords or key phrases people will punch into Google, Bing, Yahoo or other search engines will be more visible to these people.

Individuals can also optimize their online profiles and resumes so that hiring companies and recruiters can find them when seeking certain qualifications.

Tip: Think about the five words or phrases you want to be known for and optimize your online presence for them.

Leverage social media

LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter are three of the most common social networking sites that individuals and professionals are using to market themselves.

We are working with a Milford limousine company which saw bookings between January and April rise by 300 over the same period last year and it credits much of the increase to its Facebook company page. By attracting fans and then enticing them with interesting, fun posts, the company is staying in front of its prospects consistently so they will remember it for their occasional limo services.

Individuals can build important career connections through LinkedIn by viewing the connections of their own connections and then requesting introductions where it makes sense.

Tip: Decide which social media sites you will use, create a presence on them and then remember to keep them updated with fresh posts. This will keep you visible when it counts.

Consider a regular newsletter

Many companies are hesitant to commit to publishing a regular newsletter because of, well, the commitment. But investing in ongoing communications to your target audience is always worth it, whether you choose print or online. We have seen newslet-

ters pay off big for several clients and even for ourselves.

One of our clients had been receiving our newsletter for almost 10 years before he reached out earlier this year. He told us that it was finally the right time to hire a marketing firm. Would he have thought of us if he hadn't heard from us regularly all those years?

The furniture company we work with recently sent out an email newsletter guaranteeing Thanksgiving deliveries for all dining room purchases made before Oct. 1. It got a call from one of the recipients saying that the newsletter inspired her to finally make the call to get her custom kitchen done. This was an even better result financially than selling five dining sets.

Tip: Consider a regular correspondence to your target prospects and customers, and follow the 80-20 rule. Eighty percent of the content should be educational, informative or educational, and 20 percent should be promotional.

The key to success for creating and maintaining the right kind of visibility with your stakeholders is to give and share first. That will always sell you more effectively than even the slickest sales pitch.

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