

Idea Exchange October 2002 - Budget Marketing

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Budget Marketing

Don't underestimate the money you could make through effective advertising. Successful marketing is affordable when done right. Many marketing techniques cost little or nothing.

Good Impression: Even the greatest installation won't result in referrals if you neglected to make a good impression. Show up when you tell the client you will. Build a cushion into the time you quote so you get done on schedule. Keep the job site clean at all times. Have employees dress in clean, non-printed tees. Return all client calls promptly. Don't make promises you can't or won't keep.

When you are done with the job, leave the client with a pond care guide. Some distributors provide pond care guides that you can personalize with your company name and information. It gives you the full color, slick look of an established company without the expense.

Follow up with your client a week to two weeks after the job is completed and promptly return any question calls, even after you've collected your last payment.

You will be amazed at how pleased clients are from this simple courtesy and how much more willing they will be to give referrals.

Referrals: Establish a relationship with local water garden centers, drip irrigation companies and nurseries. If they are not doing pond installations, they will be grateful to know someone who is. Sell yourself to referral businesses the same way you would an end client. Instill confidence in them and they are more likely to pass that confidence on when directing clients to your business.

Yellow pages: Even a small ad under "ponds" can generate a surprising amount of business for a small monthly fee. If your phone book does not have a pond heading, request one.

Seminars: Offer free seminars to prospects interested in having a pond built. This saves you time by gathering prospects in a group and allows for a more formal presentation of pond ecology. Clients that understand how beneficial bacteria maintains pond health will then understand the need for filtration, good circulation and proper pond care. Clients with ponds can be offered seminars on pond maintenance, fish care or aquatic plants.

Newspapers: Newspapers are always looking for local stories. Show the newspaper editors your portfolio and tell them how hot water gardening is. There's nothing better than free press coverage to attract new clients.

Business Cards: Something as inexpensive as a business card helps provide tangible proof that you are a professional. Indicate on the card that you specialize in water features. Provide a stack of business cards to clients for passing along to friends and guests who ask for a referral.

Flyers: Many of our landscape contractor clients generate all of their client leads from flyers and word of mouth alone. Nice color copy flyers can be posted in high-end local restaurants, gyms, spas, nurseries and more. Try to post a flyer anywhere that your clients frequent.

—Contributed by Tavo Holloway. She is president of International Pond Supply Inc., Santa Fe, N.M.; 888-646-5474; www.pondsource.com.

Code Red

Most anyone can make a to-do list, but actually doing what's on the list is another matter. Staying on track can sometimes be difficult with all of life's surprises.

One idea to help manage the list is color coding, according to bcentral.com, a Microsoft website for business advice. Code

the list with colors by order of importance. For example, a task with the color red could be a “must do today,” the color yellow could be a “should do,” and blue could be used for “could do today” tasks.

Then work through the list starting with the code reds. Try to prioritize your day so certain chores are bundled together, such as reserving an hour after lunch for making phone calls. Finally, play to your strengths. If you are a morning person, mark the morning hours for more mentally demanding activities.

The 10-Year Cocoon

Americans are staying at home more and will likely keep staying home for the next ten years, says futurist Faith Popcorn, quoted in Tetra’s News Splash.

She sees the September 11 attacks as magnifying the cocooning trend. “We’re staying at home and it’s going to stick,” Popcorn said. “When a trend is impacted by trauma, it bangs it in, and this (September 11) is trauma. I see a ten-year effect.... We’re pulling up the drawbridges of our lives.”

By extension, home entertainment activities, including pond and aquarium keeping, should benefit by this lengthy cocooning cycle.

“As people spend more time cocooning at home, the aquarium and pond businesses have a great opportunity to fill the consumer need to make their home a tranquil, relaxing refuge for themselves and their family—ultimately improving their quality of life,” said Carol Huntley-Weber, Tetra’s manager for trade marketing in the Americas.

She recommends that businesses promote how these activities can enhance a home’s tranquility.

Ham Radio

If planning a special event at a garden center, consider hosting a live local radio broadcast at the event, suggests Rolf Nelson of Nelson Water Gardens & Nursery Inc. in Katy, Texas.

At Nelson’s annual Garden Party, the nursery invites plenty of vendors and guest speakers, who can also double as radio guests.

Best of all, radio hosts have egos, Nelson says, so they will promote events they will be appearing at for free. Of course, the Nelsons also offer catered lunches and celebrity cookbook signings at their event. That might help draw the radio folks as well.

Schmooze Or Lose

Marketing and advertising are becoming increasingly important to retail businesses as competition heats up. Insight into your customer base is critical to maximize these promotional efforts.

In a recent newsletter, the Independent Nursery Group, a buying group of more than 400 garden centers, nurseries and landscape contractors in North America, offered four ideas on cultivating customer insight.

- 1) Designate times for employees to walk around and interact with customers. Have them share any patterns they observe with you.
- 2) Subscribe to magazines your customers subscribe to. Discover what is influencing them.
- 3) Observe customer behavior. Pay particularly close attention to the displays that attract them and how the products they buy are grouped together.
- 4) Build and use a mailing list. Frequent correspondence with your existing companies will ensure your business is a household name in their home. E-mail addresses are especially cost effective.

For information about the Independent Nursery Group, call 800-458-6946 or visit www.inurserygroup.com.

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