

Expanding the Envelope of Your Marketing Tactics

Choosing your particular mix of marketing weapons becomes easier and easier as you identify the needs of your target market and commit to creating a long-term relationship based on "customer bliss."

Sometimes, unconventional techniques work best--especially when marketing resources are limited. For example, just ask Tim Whelan. Timothy Whelan Photography, sells fine photographic books and prints from a small, eclectic, off-the-beaten-track store in Rockport, Maine. During the summer, his store attracts a seasonal business of upscale tourists from throughout the world attracted by Rockport's art galleries and beautiful sailboat-filled harbor.

Tim understands that his "universe" is limited: not everybody wants to buy expensive photographic books, but those that do are passionate about their hobby and are likely to continue to do so after they return home if they're reminded about the store.

It would be economic folly for Tim to advertise his business in conventional terms. Even the smallest classified ad in a tourist publication like Maine Life would be uneconomical and there's no single, affordable publication targeting the photographic book lover.

Instead, Tim creates customer bliss and, subsequently, repeat business by investing the majority of his marketing resources in high quality canvas bags printed in two colors in which he places customer purchases. The high-quality of the bag is, itself, a tangible "thank you" to his customers. The careful typography and printing of his store's name and the names of the photographers whose books and prints he represents appropriately reflect his quality approach to business. The bags simultaneously protect and package the customer's books and says "Thank you" for your purchase.

Months after a purchase, his customers are using his canvas bags on a daily basis to carry miscellaneous objects from home to office, or SUV to sailboat.

Repeat customers frequently call or visit and thank him for the bag which, they say, "they use daily." More important, since the bags are used for so many purposes, they tend to be left out on counters and desks, where they serve as a high-visibility constant reminder of Tim's business and provide instant access to his address and phone number.

Often, a glance at the bag sitting on a chair across the room is enough to motivate a customer to call and order a book which they might, otherwise, have ordered online or from a local bookstore. (Yes, I speak from experience.)

The morale? Take a new look at your target market and the problems they face, i.e., perhaps carrying books and wine bottles from dinghy to sailboat, and come up with a unique way of satisfying their needs. Then execute your idea with as much quality as possible. It's important to note a cheap, second rate bag would undermine Tim's quality identity. A first-rate bag might cost a bit more, but will send out the right message for years to come.