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Put Your Marketing To The "So What?" Test

By Kevin Dervin

Want to get Better at your Marketing today?

For many service business owners, marketing can be a real mystery. We don't really know exactly how it works. We're not real sure about what works best for us. And probably because of some past frustrations, we're not even sure where to start.

Most seem to at least have a notion of what's involved in marketing...a web site, Yellow Pages advertising, brochures, direct mailings, networking, seminars, trade shows, etc.

But if that's all it took, wouldn't we all be attracting enough clients?

I'm sure you've tried one or more of these things at least to some degree. And I'm sure you've had at least some successes now and again. But are you able to make it work consistently for your business?

If not, what could be going on?

First, let's agree to a definition of marketing. Here is my favorite one for small, service-based businesses:

"Marketing is the use of strategies to generate a constant supply of high-quality leads for your service business." Simple to understand and speaks directly to the results we want.

OK, so doesn't this definition take us right back to what we said we already knew about marketing... a web site, Yellow Pages advertising, networking, etc.? Well maybe, but first it's important to understand why your current marketing activities aren't producing consistent results.

Put your message and materials to the "So What?" test.

Start with your core marketing message. Pull out your most frequently used marketing tool and read it out loud. Put it to the "So What?" test.

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After you read it out loud, is it possible that your intended audience could respond with... "So What?"... "Why do I care?"... or "What's in it for me?" If your message doesn't tell your intended audience what solutions you are providing to address their issues/problems/challenges, and how it relates to the benefits they'll receive from your services, then a "So What?" response is exactly what you might expect.

Messages and materials that are all about who you are and the history of your company and what services you offer and why you're so qualified to provide these services and how you partner with your clients to achieve superior results, etc. are likely to fail the "So What?" test.

Challenge all of your current marketing materials. Remember, it's the intended audience that counts. What's in it for them? Why should they care?

Listen, if your marketing is consistently generating all the high-quality leads you can handle, then don't change a thing. But if you haven't quite figured out how to generate a constant supply of leads for your service business, then you owe it to yourself to challenge your current marketing tools by putting them to the "So What?" test.

Try these ideas:

- * Challenge all of your marketing tools that aren't contributing to consistently generate leads for your service business – even the ones that have worked in the past. Could you improve the message and get a higher return? Put it to the "So What?" test.
- * Try the X's and O's test (especially with the last letter you wrote). Mark an X every time your marketing piece mentions your name, company name, or the words "I" or "me". Mark an O every time it mentions the prospects name, company name, or the word "you" or "your". If the X's outnumber the O's, rewrite it before using it again.
- * Try gathering up a group of people you can trust to give you very honest feedback. You're not just looking for proof readers, but individuals who will give you honest feedback on whether your materials pass the "So What?" test.
- * Be prepared for some negative feedback, but more importantly, be prepared to do something about it.
- * Don't just accept opinions, but try to get down to realistic response. For example: "I think this part is too wordy and detailed." (opinion) versus "I got pretty lost and confused with the level of detail in this part." (response)
- * Remember that it is the intended audience that counts. If it's not clear who the message is intended for when it's received, then how can it pass the "So What?" test.

(c) – Kevin Dervin, KPD Marketing

Kevin is focused on helping businesses that are ready to grow, but struggle with how to consistently

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attract more clients. Visit

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information you can use to grow your business. Find Kevin's Kansas City based KPD Marketing practice at

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Alarming Marketing Trend

By M. H. "Mac" McIntosh

One key discipline of successful direct marketing has been to test marketing communications tactics to continually improve results. There is now an alarming trend according to a recent survey that we conducted among business-to-business marketers who are readers of Sales Lead Report.

Only 24% of the marketing professionals surveyed said they usually or always test their marketing communications tactics before rolling them out.

The survey was completed by 280 of 940 subscribers who received and read a special edition of the newsletter Sales Lead Report.

When asked if they test marketing communications tactics before rolling them out: Less than 5% (4.5%) said they always test; Less than 20% (19.5%) said they usually test; 27% reported they occasionally test; Nearly 34% (33.7%) said they seldom test; 15% (15.2%) said they never test.

In other words, nearly half of the survey participants (48.9%) said that they seldom or never test marketing communications tactics before rolling out their campaigns.

When asked about the reasons for not testing: More than 50% (50.7%) said they had no time for testing; Almost a quarter of those surveyed (24.8%) said they had no budget for testing; More than 16% (16.3%) said they had no systems for tracking test results; Just over 8% (8.2%) said they had no need for testing.

The survey further showed that fewer than 5% (4.6%) said they always test and more than 19% (19.5%) said they usually test marketing communications tactics before rolling them out.

Based on those who do test: A little over 41% (41.1%) percent said the audience was the most important thing to test; Nearly 39% (38.7%) said the offer was the most important thing to test; Almost 15% (14.9%) said the copy was the most important thing to test; Just over 5% (5.38%) said the media

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was the most important thing to test.

Successful direct marketers have always touted the value of testing in making the scientific decisions about their campaigns. In today's economy, sadly, testing appears to be considered an optional activity; one that is used only for very large campaigns or when prospecting for new audiences.

This is an alarming trend. Eliminating testing because of cost is like playing Russian Roulette with your marketing campaign. Sometimes you'll be safe, and the campaign will bring results. But you'll never really understand why. And unfortunately, one major marketing failure could put a massive hole in your growth strategy.

Think long term vs. short term to reap the sure-fire benefits that testing will give to your marketing campaign.

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