

Are You Educating Your Customers?

By Ed King - Corporate Rejuvenation Specialist, Turning Point Strategies

Prospects and customers expect you to educate them about your product and industry, not just sell to them. You know your industry inside and out. You know why your product is better than everyone else's- but does your prospect know? It may take some convincing to turn a prospect into a customer.

This generally cannot be accomplished through a single ad or a message on the back of a business card. So, how do you convince the prospect to take precious time to understand why yours is the best widget around?

Give them free information. Three effective communication vehicles include person-to-person communication (seminars), through the mail (direct mail), or on the Internet (website or email newsletters).

Seminars - Credibility and a sales pitch disguised as FREE information

People love to learn, especially if the subject really interests them. The key to a successful seminar is the title-and, of course, the content. It's probably best not to mention your company name or product in the course title. Make the name as informational and beneficial as possible. For instance, if you're in the permanent staffing industry and your target market is HR directors, you might call your seminar, "12 Easy Steps to Hiring the Right Candidate."

Presenting high-quality, helpful information during the seminar builds credibility using your industry knowledge. Using effective visual aids-for example, presenting clear, concise points via an interactive PowerPoint presentation - helps position you as a true expert. As an added bonus, the seminar provides an opportunity to weave in pertinent bits of information about your business.



Direct Mail - More than direct response

Contrary to popular belief, not all direct mail invokes an immediate call to action. "Response rate" is a popular term in our industry, and numbers like 1% and 2% are tossed around. An information-based direct mail campaign, however, isn't concerned with "response rate." Its goal is to educate the prospect over a period of time, so that when the individual is ready to buy, s/he would turn to only one place - the company that was nice enough to explain the industry and describe product differences in a non-hard-sell way.

So, instead of targeting a 1-2% response rate, consider an education-based direct mail campaign. The mailings themselves are typically (from 3 to 6) different articles or white papers about a specific subject, mailed out biweekly or monthly.

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The Internet - Information with ease

Similar to postal mail, e-mail campaigns — often in the form of a monthly newsletter — are education-based. The cost of delivery is significantly less because the information is transmitted electronically and not through the Post Office. Be sure to abide by state and government SPAM regulations.

E-Mail newsletters can include top stories of the month, questions and answers from a past newsletter, or lead-ins to informational articles housed on your website. Including only the lead-in (introduction) of an in a newsletter enables a shorter e-mail (less scrolling) and motivates the prospect to visit your website. After reading the information-based article, the individual is just one click away from the rest of your web site.

Submitting your web site to different search engines or purchasing certain key terms on Yahoo or Google is a good way to attract prospects. People look to Internet search engines to solve their problems. The industry knowledge housed on your web site just might provide the answers they are seeking — and they'll remember where they found it.

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