



E-Newsletters: Nice Talking to You!

In the past year, we've heard a fair amount of things that businesses can do to help themselves and their customers during these challenging economic times. But with all of the sales strategies, market analysis, customer profiles, and service procedures, sometimes we lose sight of the importance of simply talking with our customers and prospects.

Building relationships remains the strongest way to recession-proof your business. Wouldn't it be great to be able to take each of your customers and prospects out for a one-on-one lunch, or even a cup of coffee? In a perfect world, you would have the time, energy, and financial resources to do just that.

And what would you talk about? You certainly wouldn't want to be a boorish blabbermouth, and simply prattle on about yourself and all the wonderful things you are up to. Instead, you would want to first engage your customers, and get them talking about themselves and their interests, whether it's about their business or about their personal lives. How would you do this? By asking some intelligent, sincere, and relevant questions, that's how. Or by sharing some information that you've recently read or heard, that would be pertinent to them, and asking their opinion about it. Bottom line, you would want to keep the conversation light and interesting, and flowing back and forth.

Since most of us in business have to actually do some work, we don't typically have the time, energy, and financial resources to take each of our customers and prospects out for a meal or a coffee break on a regular basis. But we can still get the benefits of a pleasant, no-pressure chat by visiting the people whom our business serves via the wonders of technology; specifically, through regular email newsletters. If your business has customers or clients, then it can make an impact with an e-newsletter.

Using the same approach that you would use in person over a latte and muffin, you can pose questions and share information with your target audience, seeking to learn more about their world, and sharing bits of yours. The benefits of an e-newsletter are many. They:

- **Encourage interactivity.** Pose a question to your reader, and he/she can instantaneously respond directly to you simply by hitting the “reply” button and keying in an answer. Just as easily, you can respond back to the reader. Thus, a dialogue is started, and not just with one reader, but maybe hundreds, perhaps even thousands.
- **Position you as an expert in your industry.** If you know your stuff, and are not afraid to share that knowledge with your clients and prospects, you will soon build a reputation as a thought leader in your field. Sharing information is not “giving away the store.” You cannot possibly, in the space of one newsletter, give away so much information as to make yourself obsolete. To the contrary, you only serve to build the foundation of your expertise in your readers’ eyes.
- **Generate leads and referrals.** If your content is relevant and useful to your readers, the chances are good that sooner or later, they will either do business with you, or pass your name along to a friend or colleague who is need of your products or services. Your e-newsletter can serve as your certificate of credibility.
- **Provide measurements.** Most e-newsletter services provide reports on the delivery of the mailing, such as how many messages were opened, and how many bounced (i.e., were not successfully delivered) and to whom. If you link your newsletter to your web site, you can learn which articles were read by how many people, and specifically, by whom. This helps you tailor your newsletter to your readers’ interest.
- **Allow for easy cost management.** You don’t have to worry about increasing printing costs, especially when you want to use multiple colors and graphics. You don’t have to worry about rising postage cost, especially as your mailing list grows, or when you want to send additional updates, advisories, or, heaven forbid, corrections. The difference in cost between emailing 100 newsletters and 1000 is negligible.

Perhaps the e-newsletter’s greatest benefit of all is its function as a relationship-builder. If your customers and prospects hear from you regularly each month, they will come to expect and look forward to your regular “visits.” They will trust your opinions

and your knowledge. Each newsletter that you send to them, each newsletter of yours that they read, serves only to solidify the relationship between your company and the reader. Your competitors may offer similar products or services and similar prices, but it is *your* company that provides customers with a relationship, giving them a “friend” in the industry.

By all means, you should make every effort to take your best customers out for a meal or a cup of coffee – there is no substitute for face-to-face visits between businesses and their customers. However, as you strive to build and sustain your business, you seek to cultivate as many relationships as possible. An e-newsletter allows you maximize the connection to your customers and prospects, and gives them easy access to you. It’s like muffins for everybody!

-- Charles Dennis

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