



## Distinguish Yourself From Your Competitors

Here is a fantastic example how a business that is inherently the same as all of its competitors made a difference and stood out from the crowd. As a frequent traveler I prefer to try and consolidate my flights, hotels, and car rentals to one of a few companies only. I believe in rewarding the companies that treat me well and also benefiting from their points programs in a bigger way than having too many memberships and not enough points in any of them to do anything useful.

In my travels I tend to stay at Fairfield Inns or Courtyards by Marriott. Recently I stayed in Miami at a Fairfield Inn. About 3 days after I got back into the office a handwritten envelope arrived by mail to my attention. Naturally being that it was handwritten and personalized to me I opened it first before all the bills and junk mail, only to discover that the manager of the Fairfield Inn in Miami sent me a handwritten thank you for staying at the hotel the week before. The outside of the card said...

"You've Made Our Day!" The inside it said; "Thank You! Customers like you are a pleasure! We appreciate your business and look forward to serving you again. The card was signed by the manager, and it included a "Bounce Back and receive \$10 of your rate on the next visit!" certificate.

Guess what, even if I have to work on the other side of town the next time I am in Miami, I will make a point of staying with the same Fairfield Inn. So the question to you is, when is the last time you personally thanked your customer for their order, when is the last time you wrote a note? Have you ever sent a certificate for a discount on the next order! I am willing to bet that a fair percentage your receivables will be reduced to shorter times because your customers will start to feel guilty if they don't send the payment on time. By the way, the discount certificate is good for anyone I give it to. Now, in this case, \$10 will not make or break my decision to stay at a location but the gesture alone was worth my loyalty and the fact that I can pass it one to someone else helps Mr. Tafur get the best possible advertising he can get. For a small card and a \$10 certificate he gets worth of mouth advertising to literally dozens of people, in this case to several thousand through our newsletter.

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How can I do this?

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First of all, if you haven't yet begun capturing your customers and prospects by name, address, phone number and by designation of their buying interests, please do it now! Once you have a customer list, you can start working it regularly. You can make monthly mailing and/or phone contacts to announce new products, services, pricing and sales. It's not all that hard after the first time, today's e-mail technology makes it simple that it literally takes only minutes each time after the first time you do it. The return is far greater than the investment in time.

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What can I do for my customers?

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Realizing that many of our customers are different and many are from different industries and even professions...

Following are some examples of what you can do, steal one of these ideas or modify it so that it works for your business.

- Airlines offer companies like yours and mine the chance to buy points. For example you could offer American Airlines points on purchases over \$500. The cost of doing this is small percentage of doing business, plus if you don't have to discount it is easy to afford it. People will forgo a small discount in order to get the benefit of more airline miles. Your company can purchase block of certificates and send them out based on purchases or even use them as a bonus for orders that are paid in 30 days or less. This simple technique will help reduce your receivables. It also give you another opportunity to stay in touch with your customer and let them know how man points they have earned or how close they are to a free flight!
- A local hairdresser holds a charity "scotch tasting and cigar night for men only". Most of her customers made their husbands attend and they invited other friends, and half of the guests were referrals invited as guests from previous years. Gift certificate sales are huge and it is a talked about annual event in our town. Plus the money raised for their favorite charity becomes a special feature in the local newspaper the following week.
- A leading clothing store would close for a day but make a special by invitation only sale to preview the incoming fall and spring fashions. The savings are fantastic and because it is exclusive to previous customers only the demand each year to get in grows exponentially.
- I've heard of bankruptcy attorneys play the role of Santa Claus for financially impaired clients and their children.

Ask yourself, what special events or activities can you start sponsoring as a regular,

annual or semi-annual aspect of your business, something that so distinguishes you above your competitors that it becomes no contest?

Trust me, if you'll allow your mind to travel beyond the limit of what you have been doing in the past, you'll come up with some fantastic ways to recognize and distinguish your customers. That's what you really end up doing when you hold any kind of special event for them. You respect and distinguish each and every one of them, their families or businesses, as being truly important and special to you.

Here are some more examples:

- A nursery communicates with its customers or potential customers by post card whenever it's a good time to plant new trees and shrubs, they offer useful tips and advice in a practical way.
- A restaurant offers real-estate agents certificates and organizes a simple welcome wagon package with the local florist to introduce themselves.
- Another restaurant offers specials to the local chamber of commerce members several times a year.

If you have a good mailing list, mail it often, and e-mail in-between the mailings. It doesn't take any great writing ability to make a great offer. All it takes is a simple understanding of what people want. They want a promise of a desired result or benefit to them. That could be an advantage, protection, saving, enjoyment or even prestige. They want to be and feel special, more important, or favored. You accomplish that or them when you address them in letter form, as well as in person, in special, respectfully distinctive way. For instance, "Dear Preferred Customer," or "Valued Friend." Today's basic office software packages allow you to personalize each letter just as we do for the e-mails we send you.

Also, it is very affective to alert them in advance to a buying opportunity, or to give them expanded understanding, or information that they didn't previously possess. When you communicate with your customers, clients or patients, make certain that the information you share helps improve or protect their situation, not yours.

If an offer has value, people will appreciate hearing from you. So if you take the time to put enormous value into each communication you have with your customers or clients, you can't communicate too often.

Did you enjoy this issue? If so I would really appreciate if you would pass this along to your friends and acquaintances.

You are also welcome to post this issue to your website on the condition that the contact info and information stays in tact as it is.

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