

WORD OF MOUTH MARKETING

What's the least expensive, yet most credible form of advertising? Word of mouth.

Every business, either knowingly or unknowingly, generates word of mouth that is either positive - which helps build their business, or negative - which hurts it. There are even some fortunate (but relatively few) businesses that rely entirely on word of mouth to generate more business than they can handle.

How many times have you made a decision to do business with (or avoid doing business with) a certain company based on what someone else told you? Probably more than you realize or can even count.

When someone says good things about your business to someone else, it serves as a real-life testimonial, which is much more believable than when you toot your own horn by saying good things about it.

Studies have shown that the vast majority of dissatisfied customers and prospects won't voice complaints to responsible persons in a business which they've experienced some dissatisfaction with, but will quietly take their business elsewhere. And since they'll likely spread negative word of mouth about their experience to others, not only does the business lose future business from the dissatisfied customer or prospect, but also from others that may be repelled by hearing such negative word of mouth.

Here are some tips on generating positive word of mouth advertising for you and your business:

1) The foundation of generating positive word of mouth is offering quality products and services. If what you offer is shoddy, you'll generate word of mouth, but it will be negative, which will hinder others from doing business with you as word gets around. You'll be shooting yourself in the foot.

Therefore you should aim to make your products and services the best they can be. Realize there is almost always room for improvement and be willing to make such improvements when reasonably possible.

2) Solicit, yes, actively seek feedback in the form of questions, comments, and even complaints from customers and prospects. View these as opportunities to improve your products, services and customer support.

3) Another key is delivering excellent customer service. So many business people treat customers and prospects as though they don't count for anything.

How many times have you been treated rudely by customer service personnel at a place of business? What about business people that tell you they will call you right back, or that they will send the information out to you right away, or that they will do this, that, or another thing, but consistently don't follow through on their word?

Granted, nobody's perfect. But if they practice such things consistently, you tend to believe less and less of what they tell you, like the boy who cried wolf. Will you be eager to continue doing business with them? Not likely.

Especially since repeat business is crucial to most any business, such practices - although common everyday practice - are self defeating.

4) Do your best to follow through with what you say you're going to do. Don't make unreasonable promises you know you can't keep. If something unforeseen comes up that prevents you from living up to your word, try to let the other party know about it in advance.

5) Don't just try to meet your customer's expectations. Try to exceed them.

6) If a customer is not satisfied, take reasonable steps to try to make them happy. You might even convert a disgruntled person into one of your best word of mouth advertisers.

The above things aren't just the right thing to do; they are smart business practices.

If you (and any employees you may have) act differently than the run of the mill standard, you'll stand out from the crowd, be a welcome business associate in a commonly rude and selfish business environment, and your satisfied, loyal customers will be your best form of advertising.