

## Marketing muscle — Build up your company's awareness and profits

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### BUSINESS BASICS



Marketing is often a misunderstood and incorrectly defined business process. I wish I had a dollar

for each time I have heard green industry folks say that they don't need marketing, or can't afford marketing, because advertising is too expensive. At that point, a discussion about definition and purpose is in order. It is comparable to the misconception that the public has about landscaping.

Most people believe that landscaping means mowing. If you use a

pie chart to explain the components of landscaping, you will see that its many slices include mowing, irrigation, design, arborcare, environmental remediation, and water management, just to name a few. In the marketing pie chart, your company's slices (components) would consist of strategic planning, research, advertising, public relations, competitive analysis, branding, pricing, distribution, promotions, direct mail, design, sales, and events planning.

*Marketing* is the overall process of determining what potential product or service sales and promotion opportunities exist, or may exist, and whether a company can and should pursue those opportunities, how to pursue them effectively, and

what changes within the company are necessary to take advantage of those opportunities. That is a far cry from advertising. As Peter Drucker says, "Marketing is so basic that it cannot be considered a separate function. It is the whole business seen from the point of view of its final result, that is, from the customer's point of view. Business success is NOT determined by the producer, but by the customer."

Landscape contractors, whether a one-man shop or a multimillion-dollar organization need marketing to understand and meet their customers' needs. That means delivering the products and services they want, at the price they want, when they want it. Marketing is a survival

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tool; carry with it you wherever you go! Here are 10 immutable marketing principles that will position you for success:

**1. Identify customers' key needs and develop a cohesive customer profile.**

Don't guess ... ASK. Become an "askoholic." Whether it is face-to-face or over the phone, find out what your customer needs. Customer loyalty comes from being well informed — about the people, company, or residence and their goals. The more you know, the better you can anticipate (be proactive) and service their needs.

**2. Write a marketing plan (or get help if you need it).**

The plan will be your road map, with all of the targets, tasks, timelines, and costs clearly defined. This will guide the direction of your company.

**3. Perform an environmental analysis.**

Known as a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis. Identify strengths and weaknesses internally (your organization's own areas of expertise) and opportunities and threats externally (your niche and gaps that exist in the market as well as competition).

**4. Research your market.**

Surveys and simple focus groups are great for your own market research. But don't forget about all the data out there that other people have already graciously gathered (known as "secondary market research"). Check with your local Department of Economic Development, real estate agents, bankers, and local chambers of commerce. There is a lot of free information for the taking ... take it!

**5. Analyze industry trends.**

Put your market under the microscope. Look at the size, the people moving into the area, and their buying patterns. Then see what your competition is doing. You may discover a whole new set of services or products that customers need.

**6. Perform a competitive analysis.**

Know your competitors, their products, services, and pricing. Understand their strengths and weaknesses. This is critical during the selling and proposal process.

**7. Create TARGETED marketing materials.**

Design a menu of services, simple-yet-detailed proposal books, and have a Web presence. Make sure you always keep a supply of marketing materials in your trucks. Your vehicles should have your name, phone number, and Web address printed in a highly visible location. Your uniforms should have the name and Web site visible. Keep all material updated.

**8. Network and add public relations to your marketing mix.**

Get your name, face, and company services known. Join the professional organizations of your

customers. Get involved ... join an association committee and participate in its trade show. Speak at an event or write an educational piece for the association newsletter. This builds up your word-of-mouth referral system. Your customers will become your biggest advocates.

**9. Stand out.**

Clearly articulate and position your company's unique value proposition.

**10. Don't stretch yourself too thin. Stay focused.**

Do what you do best. As Jack Welch says, "If you're not competitive, don't compete!"

Marketing leads to increased revenue, visibility, and profits. Exercise these principles and your company will grow to be strong and profitable. ☺

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