



Recently *Cleaner Times* invited a number of industry professionals to share their “best practice” tips with our readers. We asked for ideas that would benefit distributors or manufacturers in the areas of marketing or management. We hope the following responses will be helpful.—Ed.

“We continually look for opportunities to add value to the relationship with our customers, so that the products and service from our company become a natural extension of their needs and our capabilities.

“Discover people’s real talents and desires and let them be free to achieve their goals and those of the organization. The company is only as good as its people. Develop a vision and mission for the organization. Make sure that core values are followed. Make sure each person agrees and takes steps to achieve his/her objectives, while maintaining accountability for their actions. Tie their goals to that of the organization. If individuals or the company achieve their goals, rewards should be immediate.”

*Ed Simon
Giant Industries Inc.
Toledo, OH*

“We use *Cleaner Times* exclusively for our advertisement to reach new potential customers. We have done this for years and feel that our money for advertising would be wasted if not used thru *Cleaner Times*, as I consider that publication to be the voice of our industry.

“It’s really a simple formula, ‘Marketing, servicing, competitive pricing, promotion and tight management.’”

*Ben Benefield
Etowah Chemicals Sales and Service
Gadsden, AL*

“I thought you might enjoy this article written by Harvey Mackay. This article is posted on my office wall so I can easily go back and read it to remind myself the importance of my customers.”

Retaining and cultivating repeat customers is the key to any successful business.

There’s one thing no business has enough of: customers. Take care of the customers you’ve got and they’ll take care of you.

The sale begins when the customer says yes. Good salespeople make sure the job gets done on time—and done right. They must be fanatics about detail.

Companies and sales reps that understand this do extremely well. They understand the 80/20 rule: that 80% of their business comes from 20% of their customers. It's trending toward 90/10.

That's why you must cultivate the people who have done business with you in the past. Much of your strategy should be based on expanding your share of existing customers business. How? Here are some of the lessons I've learned about customer loyalty in 40-plus years in business.

Pricing should not be the primary issue. A business built on price alone would be a business only as long as no other business offers a lower price. Price is important, but it's just one feature of the sale. Don't price yourself out of the market, but don't price yourself out of business...

Service alone won't guarantee a repeat customer. I think great service is probably more important than either price or quality. But if you don't combine all three, your customers will be shopping around before your next courtesy call.

How a complaint is handled is what determines your relationship with the customer. Your response must be fast and more than fair. When someone is counting on you, it's often because someone is counting on them. So it's not just you who looks bad! Fix it quick and fix it right. It might cost a lot, but it will pay off.

No matter how many people there are in this world, there will always be a finite number of customers. I don't care whether you're selling computers, cars, cell phones, or even envelopes. They're just so many people you can sell to. Develop relationships with as many as you can realistically serve. Put yourself in the customer's role: what if you had to go to a different grocery store every time you shopped? Would you save time if you had to switch suppliers every time your company needed print cartridges? I once figured it cost my company around \$5,000 to put a new customer on the books. I won't let that kind of investment go bad.

MacKay's moral: a wise old salesman once told me, "a cup of water can keep you going for a day. Find a well and you can go back to it year after year."

Harvey Mackay is a Minneapolis businessman and author. Call his message, line at the *Star Tribune* at 612-673-9031, or send e-mail to Harvey@mackay.com. His column is distributed by United Feature Syndicate.

Kyle R. Notch

*Director of Sales & Marketing
A.R. North America, Inc.*

"Successful dealers know that value added is a tactic that wins sales. We all compete with the "Big Box" stores more and more, so you can't overlook their presence. Box stores and mass merchants siphon away sales and profits that used to be yours by default! Box stores are a great place to buy mulch and light bulbs, but professional grade pressure washers? I don't think so. This is your real competition. Having high quality equipment with local support and service is a real plus in the war against the enemy.

"Discuss your service and warranty program with prospects. Ask the customer how often he plans on having his equipment serviced and where he will take a Box store unit when it needs service. Offer your customers expedited service and repair. Buy from us and we place your repair in front of the line for service! Lead the customer in a direction that makes sense and you will win more than you lose.

"It is also important to have a broad customer niche to take advantage of your competition. Industrial, commercial, contractor, and even retail sales can make for a solid customer base. Professional contractors rely on service and quality. Pressure washers are an important tool which is their livelihood. You can't be the cheapest and the best too. This makes sense and has value.

"Today's consumers can purchase pressure washers almost anywhere. Mass merchants can't offer expert advice, service, or a wide selection of product. A well-stocked dealer is also



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more able to compete with price pressures by offering service after the sale. There is no substitute for a knowledgeable, service-oriented dealer. Try and get pressure washer advice about your needs and applications from a Box store. Full-service dealers look beyond the quick sale approach and understand that developing a relationship with the customer is the key to their success. Let's face it; quality comes at a premium price. You can compete with anyone when you go the extra mile and earn their business.

"In today's fierce marketplace, offering customers a choice is a powerful tool. Many have loyalty to a certain brand of pump. By offering a selection of pump brands and model choices, you will increase the odds of winning over a customer. Some customers prefer belt-drive over direct-drive. What about gear-drive? Will hot water do it faster? You bet it will, and the "Box stores" don't even offer hot water. Stand out among the competition in a positive way!

"It's important to have some differential in product offering too. If your

product looks like theirs, why would they pay more? Look for features and benefits that the other guys don't have, especially if their price is more competitive. Upgraded aluminum frames have been a big selling feature for many dealers. Aircraft aluminum frames are lightweight, rustproof, and chemical resistant, with no welds to fail. Aluminum also acts as a heat sync to help dissipate heat exchanged from the engine to the pump. The Box store equipment has painted steel frames, why is your painted steel frame better? Steel will rust and is extremely heavy. Competition is actually another opportunity to sell yourself as well as your product's features and benefits. The fact is, it does take a lot of hard work and dedication to your customers and our industry to win customers over."

Jack Bond

Pressure-Pro, Inc.

Ft. Pierce, FL



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1. **Marketing Tips:** how we promote our business, how we attract new business, and retain old business.

Offer Diversified Products. For example, Mi-T-M manufactures hot and cold pressure washers, water treatment systems, air compressors, generators, industrial wet/dry vacuums, metal cutting saws, etc.—all products that can be marketed to similar, if not the same, target audience, providing additional sales opportunity.

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*Karl Loeffelholz
Juli Ikononopoulos
Mi-T-M Corporation*

"Making cold calls is the way almost every cleaning business starts out. The trick is knowing who and when to call. Cold calls typically are by telephone or in person. Always ask for the opportunity to send or leave a brochure and business card. These items will get filed for later reference when needed. I have had several customers who have saved my business cards for over 20 years. This also emphasizes the importance of being in business in the same location for a long period of time. Some companies achieve these results by buying out long established companies.

"When cold calling always collect names, addresses, phone numbers, fax numbers, and email addresses for future contact. This information needs to be put into a data base for continued sales effort. Secretaries typically are in charge of keeping prospecting phone calls from their bosses (Palace Guards). You may be able to reach him by email or fax.

"The secret to making advertising work is consistency. You should set daily, weekly, or monthly goals for telemarketing and direct mail pieces. For Contract Cleaners just getting started, 30 to 40 mailings per week is reasonable along with 10 to 20 phone calls per day. What normally happens is that you get some jobs and stop your marketing efforts until the work is finished. If you would prospect at least 30 minutes to one

hour per day by telephone, you can keep a better flow of work.

"The goal of your marketing effort is to build name recognition and trust. When the customer needs your services you want him to call you. Trust is equal to honesty over time. You start out by delivering on small promises then building upon them over time. Small promises may be as simple as keeping your appointments on time.

"Everyone should have an album of before and after pictures to show the quality of their work. One picture

is worth a 1,000 words when establishing the quality and credibility of your work.

"Home and Garden Shows offer an opportunity to obtain many leads and display your work. If you give away a "Free Deck Cleaning and Sealing" by filling out a questionnaire you will probably get more than enough leads to keep you busy for several months."

*Robert M. Hinderliter
Delco Cleaning Systems of Fort Worth
Fort Worth, TX*

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