

## Marketing - A Top Ten List

By Carol and Rob Trow

Ever since time in memoriam, we have been drawn to simple solutions and lists as a source of information and advice. Research has shown our attention span is getting shorter and shorter. Even public television's premier educational program, Sesame Street, is based on providing snippets of information with fast changing topics and images to hold a child's attention and increase retention. The same is true today for adults.

Simply put, marketing is a series of activities whose goal is to communicate information about a product or service the purpose of which is to attract the attention of a target audience and translate that interest into a sale. A marketing plan organizes these activities in a coordinated manner, with each initiative building on the last to create a comprehensive strategy.

The target audience for any marketing effort should be directed towards current and prospective clients. Remember, it is more cost effective to keep and grow your current base than attracting new customers.

Society today is primed and ready for professional skin care products and services. A recent survey by the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons found that, for adults over 18, two-thirds favored cosmetic surgery, an 8% increase over last year. The approval of cosmetic procedures is growing across all age groups. The demand for anti-aging products and services is expected to grow at 11.3% annually despite current economic conditions. The market size for anti-aging products alone (excluding services) is now \$5.8 billion and will reach over \$11 billion by 2010 - only three years from now.

To best take advantage of this growing market, you need to have, as a significant component of your business plan, a comprehensive approach to marketing your services and product offerings. Below please find a list of proven techniques and activities that work. There is not a simple, perfect top ten list. What we have written is meant as a catalyst to stir the pot and get you thinking about you, your company, staff and how to enhance each.

Please remember, the devil is in the details and execution. Where practical and affordable, consider the services of a marketing professional to help you achieve your goals. But, never forget, no one knows your business as well as you do, so do not be bullied into any activity that does not feel right. It's your business, your money, and your future.

1. Focus on your most profitable clients and ask them why they use your services and products.

Review your current client list; determine those that are most valuable to you. You will be surprised that a small percentage of your clients actually contribute the majority of your profits. Those that spend very little may be a distraction and even cost you money when you figure in time and effort. Ask those premier clients why they use your services and purchase your products. They may be better able to articulate points that can play a major role in shaping your marketing initiatives. The more you know about your current clients, the more you will learn about yourself and what actually works.

2. Target your first marketing dollars to current clients.

Market to your existing customers first. Offer them programs such as free product with a service or procedure you are looking to introduce or expand; add a free upgrade to an specific service as a special (change the items monthly); create a frequent visitor program (for a specific number of services offer a free service or significant discount on a major service; offer services in series with the last one free if paid in advance).

3. Market through education

Conduct periodic educational seminars for current and prospect clients. Involve your vendors to help structure, provide speakers if necessary and raffle prizes, welcome gifts and the like. If a vendor does not behave as a strategic partner, switch.

Advertise the event to your clients, in local newspapers, on the radio and with zip code specific direct mail. You can often trade advertising with the media for free services that they can give away to their clients, listeners or as employee incentives. Bartering is an accepted practice.

Seek out vendors or an allied service provider to speak as they will benefit from addressing your audience as well. Topics can include the latest advances in non-invasive cosmetic procedures, updates on breast cancer screening and treatment; basically, any issue that would be of interest to your clientele. You will be amazed at how many noted professionals will offer to speak at your event at no direct cost to you.

Present useful, informative and credible information on selected topics. These events should not be commercials for a given product or service.

#### 4. Establish a network of referral sources.

Create cooperative programs with like minded professional practices and businesses. These could include physicians (i.e., OBGYN, plastic surgeons) dentists, chiropractors, gyms, wedding photographers, fitness studios, schools and colleges as well as neighboring businesses. Think out of the box. For example, you can host local networking events at your location. Many professionals would welcome an event to meet other professionals in their neighborhood for business and personal reasons. Why not become a catalyst for bringing people together. The benefits to you will be great.

#### 5. Offer last minute specials

We all know most days there are open appointments. If every open slot is filled, both you and your staff will benefit. After all, what is the cost of having a client occupy an empty treatment room? Not much. Create a last minute special list. Have your front desk staff makes clients aware of these opportunities that carry with them special rates. Make sure that the clients know they will only have a two or three hour window upon which to show up. Communicate that these openings are rare. In essence, you are setting up a cancellation list much as other professionals have done.

#### 6. Contribute to and become active in local charities

First, this is the right thing to do - give back to your community. Adopt an organization to support. Encourage your staff to as well. Being active in an organization, especially one that attracts those that are current or potential clients will spread your good name and result in increased business. Donate services and support plus volunteer as much as is feasible for you and your staff. Givers receive and get back more than they give - be generous in spirit and deed.

#### 7. Collect client information, especially e-mail addresses

Without an accurate data base of client information for communication, you are losing out on a myriad of opportunities. You can not run a service business today by just opening your door and waiting for clients to come to you. E-Mails, periodic newsletters, special incentive communications, colorful post cards, birthday cards containing a certificate for a free gift are just several examples of how you can stay in touch. Call each client after they come in and ask them about their experience and level of satisfaction. If there was an issue - you now know it and can take corrective steps. People like to be asked. It is a good marketing program as well as a quality assurance effort.

Whether you like it or not, your competitors are reaching out to your clients as well. If you need support, advice or even having articles drafted for you, seek help from your strategic partners. If they will not help, find those who will. Do not forget, your suppliers benefit from your growth and success so ask them for support. But, be reasonable as well.

#### 8. Establish your services and products as business incentives.

Contact local companies and branches of large corporations in your area and offer your services, at a special rate, as employee incentives. These can be for sales goals, to be used by real estate agents for referrals and new home buyers, by mortgage companies who look to reward those who refer clients to them. In essence, anyone who looks to find ways to show their appreciation to an employee, client or referral source. What better than to give a wonderful treatment as a special "Thank You". Plus, the individual coming in for that service may well become a new client if you meet or exceed their expectations.

#### 9. Create a One to One Marketing Initiative

Marketing One to One is a simple and no cost imitative that works. The principle is that by emphasizing a person to person interaction with a client, you will create a better relationship which yields client loyalty and referrals. Take the time to learn about those to whom you and your staff provide services. Train your staff to do the same. Remember details about each client such their preferences and family creates a level of familiarity that leads to return visits. Everyone likes to feel they are appreciated and heard. Make a special effort to remember details.

#### 10. Consistently market solutions not problems.

Marketing requires an ongoing commitment. Create familiarity, trust and consistency. This is not a one shot deal. If you are going to market - make your plan and continue it - it is like meeting payroll. One time efforts are a waste of time and money.

Focus on specific market segments as well: new mothers, pregnancy, anti-aging, smoker's skin and the like. Create signature services that create the image of you being the solution and expert and coming to you is special. Create signature treatments and protocols with the help of others.

Ask yourself every day: What have I done to grow my business today? If the answer is nothing, make a resolution that this will not happen again. Any marketing effort would be enhanced by engaging the services of a professional who is knowledgeable and experienced in targeting programs to your specific, desired target market. You can not and should not be all things to all people. Decide who and what you are, what makes you special and tell the world or at least your neighborhood.