

The ABC of Sales and Marketing Success

Too much to do, not enough time!! It's a pretty common catch-cry when you run a small business. It seems that everyone wants a piece of you, so you run around like a headless chook and end up achieving very little. This is particularly true when it comes to sales and marketing.

Recently a client asked me to drop in for a chat about how to grow her business in the current tough economic climate. Sue felt she was spending so much time working in the business she didn't have time to go out and market; even though she knew it was important. She showed me a client list of more than 300 names and said she knew that there were sales possibilities amongst them but she didn't know where to start and couldn't possibly find the time to see all of them. She had come to the conclusion that it was all too difficult and she would rather invest in advertising or a trade show which was less of a hassle.

If this sounds familiar then let me introduce you to the "ABC" approach to working with existing clients. This approach recognises that not all of your clients are equal and not all clients have the same potential for generating more revenue or referrals for your business.

So, before you get selling, take the time to analyse and rate your client base so you can spend the most time and energy on those clients who are most likely to generate revenue or referral.

The first step is to set up different categories of clients. The first category might be "Existing Clients"; these may be clients who are currently active or those who have used your services or bought products in the last years. Another category may be "Past Clients", those you haven't seen or heard from in the last five or six years. Some businesses may also have what I call "Coma Client", those that you haven't dealt with in six years or more.

The next step is to feed that client list into a spreadsheet and sort them by category! Then go through each category and rate each client as an A, B or C according to their potential for revenue, potential for referral and their desirability. The desirability rating is how much you want to work with this client again; for example there's no point in reigniting a business relationship with a client who you don't like or is a poor payer no matter how good the potential. This also applies to referral; keep in mind that troublesome clients sometimes refer clients that are just like them!! Here's an example of how you might categorise your clients:

- A's might be your top 30 clients who are already generating a significant portion of your revenue and have the potential to grow further or refer you to colleagues, other departments in their organisation or people in their industry.
- B's could be clients with potential to grow over a longer period of time.

These might be smaller businesses that are in a growth phase, or larger clients where you currently only handle a small portion of their work. It could also be a smaller client with great industry connections.

- C's are usually clients with little or no potential for growth and would include businesses that only purchase occasionally or spend small amounts with your company.
- Comas' are those clients who have been dormant for years and you probably have no idea of whether they have potential for your business.

The good news is once you have categorised and prioritised your client lists life gets easier and less hectic as you can develop sales or marketing strategies for each group. Best of all you can then allocate time and budget to where it is most likely to be successful. For instance you may decide to offer all your "A" clients a free review session or take each of them out to lunch to cement your business relationship. You might put together special offer for your "B" clients which your sales team will follow up. You may not target "C" clients at all or send them an email blast with an incentive to purchase. Here are a few typical strategies that might be used to target each group.

- A's
 - A face-to-face meeting
 - A monthly call from business owner
 - An invitation to a social event or seminar
 - An invitation to a boardroom lunch
 - Appoint a client service person to look after their account
 - A VIP Christmas part or end of financial year event
 - A VIP card
 - A needs analysis or diagnostic developed specifically for them
 - Hosting a networking group specifically for A Clients
- B's
 - Send a personalised cross promotion letter or email promoting a service they may not be using
 - Hold an annual meeting with sales manager or owner
 - Have the owner contact them 2 -3 times a year by phone
 - Send an invitation to a Christmas Party or annual social event
 - Send a regular newsletter
 - Hosting an information seminar or mini trade show
- C's
 - Take no action if they are not preferred clients
 - Send the same cross promotion letter as B's but ask them to contact you rather than follow up
 - Send an annual Christmas or greeting card
 - Send a regular newsletter

If you have a large number of "Comas" you can make a decision not to contact them or develop a campaign to reactive them as clients. This may be a call from your office staff to check contact details followed by a special offer. Depending on the response they can be removed from the list or upgraded to one of the other categories.

Using the ABC approach is a great way to get your sales efforts under control; it's a time effective and cost effective way of really maximising the potential of your client base.

Since our meeting Sue has been spending just one morning a week working on her ABC plan. She has been amazed at just how many A & B clients have been delighted to hear from her. One B client has asked her to submit a proposal for a project and she has already received a couple of great referrals from one of her top ten clients. She is now contemplating a campaign for C clients to see how many she can turn into B's or A's.

So remember when you think you don't have the time for sales and marketing, remember your ABC's and take it step-by-step.