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## Don't let your marketing take a vacation

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Every summer it seems as if business takes a hiatus. Associations don't have their usual monthly meetings, business publications are noticeably thinner and it seems everyone is otherwise occupied.

However, this can be the best time to begin thinking about your marketing strategy for the upcoming season, or year. While the office is quieter and you have fewer meetings and distractions, you can spend more time thinking about what you can do now to plan for a better season later.

With little exception, the fall and winter are the high-revenue producing months for most businesses. In order to make the most of this time you must have a solid plan for how you will approach your marketing efficiently and effectively.

### Getting started

Some key questions to be answered to begin the process are:

- What did I do this year that worked? What didn't work?
- Are there any new media I can try?
- Did I make good use of my customer data?
- What are others in my industry doing?

- What are my direct competitors doing?

Then begin to put together a rough marketing budget. Some companies use a percent of revenue; others use a hard dollar amount. However you put it together, be sure that you have money set aside for the purpose of marketing.

Another way to check what is appropriate for your business is to look at the industry as a whole. Almost every industry has at least one trade journal that speaks to that industry. You can search around the Internet to find one or two that you can begin reading.

There are also associations for each industry. Again, search around the Internet to find one that is right for your business. You would be pleasantly surprised to have access to the data that these associations procure on behalf of their member organizations.

### The right fit

Once you know roughly the size of your marketing budget, consider that there are many ways to go about creating marketing that works and not all of them are going to be right for your business.

The following are some guidelines you may want to consider:

### Retail businesses

Take advantage of the fact that you get to meet your customers face to face. Engage them whenever you can and be sure any employees you have are well trained in customer service and know how to treat those customers.

Campaigns for retail can include creating a "member" club for high-spending customers then having special sales or shopping hours just for them. Collect their email addresses and use them to promote new campaigns. Ask for referrals using "bring a friend" and get special discounts.

### Service businesses

If you have face-to-face contact with your clients, you have a much easier route to establishing a relationship with them – such as a service person coming to a business or home to perform a task.

Use the customer's name and address information to keep in touch with him or her during the year. Always follow up with a thank you of some kind (phone or postcard) to promote good will and increase the chances of a referral.

Seek out any online referral search engine that is targeted to your business. These are often high volume and relatively inexpensive year-round efforts that can help smooth out season peaks and valleys.

### Online businesses

Establishing a relationship here can be a bit more difficult to do, but not impossible. The best example of this is vistaprint.com – experts at the online relationship.

Use existing customer data such as e-mail addresses to promote add-ons, upsells and "special sales" to your frequent buyers. Consider a one-day sale e-mail. Create online downloadable coupons.

Always have a "save to favorites" link on your site and if appropriate "send to a friend" link as well.

The whole process becomes easier if you create a monthly plan of goals and then back into when each campaign has to begin to reach those goals. This is especially true if you are thinking of doing any kind of print advertising since deadlines for ad submissions are often two months ahead of the print date for monthly publications.

So, while you're relaxing in the sun, have a pad and pen at the ready to jot down any creative ideas that inspire you so you're ready to hit the ground running when you return to the office.

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