

The YEBDC Small Business Information Column

by Sue Gingerich, Business Advisor

"Marketing Isn't Just A Big City Concept"

For many rural small businesses the term "marketing" is a big city concept. It has a big city connotation, which conjures up images of gimmicks and cutthroat advertising campaigns. What should "market" really mean to a rural or small town business? Is it needed? Sure it is, in fact the basis for marketing in rural Canada is very similar to that of the city, the major difference, however, is it's not always done using the same media as our big city counterparts.

What is at the basis of a marketing strategy? Simple, the needs of the customer. Marketing starts with a clear concept of the business and a clear definition of who the customers of this business are. The marketing strategy includes the pricing strategy. What price is the customer willing to pay? How should that pricing be presented? Product (or service) strategy is also part of marketing. What quality is this customer looking for? The two other components in the marketing mix besides pricing and product offering are location (and/or distribution) and promotion.

If one of these four elements does not fit with the others it can throw the balance of the whole marketing mix off. For example, if you are offering medium to high quality jewellery, and pricing in that range and you're advertising and promotion reflects this, you are off to a great start. However, when the customer visits the location of your business he is surprised to see that it is in run down building that is in need of repairs. Does the location fit the rest of the concept? What impression or feeling might it have left with the customer? So, it is important to have a well-balanced marketing mix. From that also comes the mission statement of the business and "slogan," and yes, even rural businesses should have a slogan.

So what about the promotional strategy? How do you get the word out about your business? One of the strongest advertisers that rural businesses have is word of mouth. Therefore, it pays to make every experience, with every customer, a positive one. The power of even one dissatisfied customer in a rural community is unmeasurable. Because most of our customers know each other and trust each other, they rely heavily on each other's opinions. This is very unlike many of our city business counterparts, whose customers may not know each other. These businesses have the ability to reach out to new customers constantly and thus can bare a higher amount of turnover in customers due to the mass markets within their proximity.

As important as it for rural businesses to keep existing customers happy they usually do need to start out by attracting new customers. How a rural business can do this depends very much on the type of business and the type of customers they are trying to attract. Some ideas for attracting new customers are: direct mail letters to potentials customers, radio, sampling, open houses, demonstrations, invitational events, hosting community events, attention getting print ads, the internet, and flyers, just to name a few.

Marketing is important for all businesses, even rural businesses. It doesn't have to be high pressure or gimmicky, it just has to work.

If you have a small business and have a question or problem that you think The YEBDC could help you with please call or write to: The Yellowhead East Business Development Corporation, Box 249, Sangudo, Alberta, T0E 2A0
1-800-556-0328 or 1-780-785-2900, e mail: yebdc@yebdc.ab.ca, or access our Website at: www.yebdc.ab.ca

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