

Go Forth and Prosper

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At any given moment, there are many opportunities to increase sales. Here are a few suggestions worth thinking about.

After the euphoria of starting a new business has waned and the steady rhythm of day-to-day management has set in, many small-business owners discover revenue growth has stalled. How did this happen? They try more advertising but sales and revenue still do not grow as expected. Then come the moments of panic and cold sweats. What if the business cannot continue to grow? What if there is actual attrition of the client base and the bottom line starts to get smaller and smaller?

Market to the Right Customers

The success of any business is determined by marketing to the right customers. The right customers for your business are going to be determined by gender, age, income, home ownership, employment status, geographic location and a host of other factors. The secret to expanding business is not to be relevant to everybody, but rather to be relevant to an identifiable and well-defined market. As a business owner, you must constantly be ready for changes in the defining factors of your market. If you try to be everything to everyone, you will be overwhelmed by the constant need to modify your products, advertising or services. Choose one or two things you do really well and offer them to well-researched markets. Not only will your life be more manageable, but sales will also be easier and a lot more profitable.

Stay Within Your Zone of Expertise

Expand within your zone of expertise. For example, if you sell flowers and shrubs, it would not take much restructuring to extend your business into landscape design services. The existing customer base that buys your plants would probably welcome a design service from a business they already know and trust.

What Can We Do for You?

If you think you can extend your services but are not quite sure where to focus, ask your salespeople and customers. Salespeople often know more about customer preferences than they tell simply because they are never asked the right questions. A well-designed survey of your existing client base may reveal surprising unrealized opportunities for logical growth. Once a growth opportunity has been identified, do a business analysis to see whether it will be profitable.

Yes, We've Got That

Provide something the big players don't offer. How many times have you heard someone comment that when they go to XYZ Mart it doesn't have replacement hardware or that the sales staff don't know the products? Is this an opportunity for you to provide retrofit products or better customer service through a more knowledgeable and courteous staff who can establish personal relationships with customers?

Catalogues Are Not Dead

Perhaps it is time for your business to set up an online catalogue to give your products better exposure. This doesn't mean your business should forego the traditional hands-on distribution of flyers or catalogues; many larger companies still send out hardcopy. However, you may have to integrate the paper and the online editions so that those who want to browse the traditional way can find what they want in the paper catalogue then order online, by telephone or at your place of business. Over time, paper catalogues will probably be phased out. Adding an online catalogue now will prepare your business for the day when almost everything will be available only online.

Productivity with Technology

We all know that quality and productivity improves with advances in technology. As owner-manager, it is important to ensure that your software is up to date. New software can show you opportunities for cost savings through greater efficiency. Naturally, live demonstrations at trade shows or manufacturers' open houses provide an opportunity to see just what is new and on the horizon.

Outsourcing

The world is at your fingertips through the appropriately named World Wide Web. Measure a customer for a suit in Toronto, send the data to tailors in Hong Kong and your customer has the product within two weeks. If you have a new product design, or need product to keep pace with demand but have limited resources to start production, consider outsourcing. This approach can reduce need for capital expenditures and places the onus on the manufacturer to keep up with the efficiencies of changing technologies and production requirements.

Alignment

Enhancing sales by having your product or service aligned or identified with another product or cause may be an effective means

of increasing sales. If, for instance, your process changes grey water into water that is safe for wetland, is it possible to partner with a non-governmental environmental agency such as Ducks Unlimited to gain additional exposure for the company's process?

Aligning with local merchants or organizations is also an effective means of promoting business. Merchants certainly see the positive impact of having midnight madness sales or participating with clubs that sponsor parades or picnics to raise funds.

Expand Your Territory

Introducing your product or service into a new market requires sales forecasts, cost analysis and operating and capital cash flows. Careful calculation will minimize risk and give you the opportunity to become a recognized name within your community. Consider the number of drug stores, pizza franchises or convenience stores that have become household names simply because they have become strategically entrenched in the mainstream of society and become the "go-to" store for a particular product or service.

Growth Is Always Possible

Even when revenue and profit growth seems to be stuck, there are still untapped growth opportunities for a creative management team. A talk with a good business consultant may even be in order to jump start your thinking. The potential for growth is always there.

This and That

LK Blood Donor Clinic:

On October 21st, LK Staff rolled up their sleeves to give blood to help restore Canada's plummeting blood supply.

JDRF Ride for Diabetes Research:

On October 24th, LK staff will put their metal to the pedal at the JDRF Ride for Diabetes Research. With your support, LK has raised a whopping \$5,770 and we look forward to more!

What's new at LK:

We are very pleased to announce that our very own Stacy Glenn has transitioned to become Internal Financial Controller with LK!