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Letter from the Executive

By Tom Wessner,

Hello Friends,

Fall is in the air and I can't help but remember that as the seasons change, there's still so much to do!

Preparations for the Fall allergy season are in full swing, and I trust that you're busy serving your customers.

I wanted you to know that we're busy here at ACCA-WPA as well, working hard for *you*.

You'll read about some of the new programs and changes – such as the DSIRE tool – in this issue of ACCAdemics.

Remember, we're never too busy to hear from you. Whether you have a suggestion or just want to keep in touch with us, ACCA-WPA is always available to you!

Tom Wessner
ACCA-WPA
President

Marketing

How to Create Customers Out of Thin Air

By Adams Hudson

Quiz Time: Who do you think is more important to your business: a) someone who is your customer, or b) someone who is *not* your customer? Give up? Here's a hint: the answer is "a". (I'm not big on subtle hints.)

Certainly, you couldn't exist without customers. Strangely, however, a lot of contractors seem to be trying their best to *lose* their customers. How?

By not contacting them. By forgetting about them. By letting them wander the Yellow Pages searching for another contractor when it's time for their next service call. Contact isn't some kind of big marketing mystery. It's easy things, like follow-up phone calls after repair or service calls, thank you letters, holiday cards and customer newsletters.

The newsletter is, of course, where you have the most print space and the best opportunity to build your relationship with customers. You can use a traditional four-page format to send helpful, home care information – at no obligation to the recipients. With a quality design and useful content, it forges a far better image than plain "advertising," thus strengthening the relationship between you and customers (check out the ACCA member exclusive newsletter *HomeWords* at www.acca.org). Plus, it gets your name into their homes two to four times a year. That's a huge point.

For those who do it right, customer retention newsletters are among the most cost-efficient marketing methods around. Think of it. A good customer retention newsletter can cost less than \$3 a year per customer (including postage) for four issues! Not a bad return on investment, especially since it involves returning customers.

When creating your newsletter mailing list, you should include every customer who has written you a check in the last 48 months. That's a paltry expense when you consider all you've just read.

Build a fence around your customers with a solid customer retention campaign. Invest in a good, regular customer newsletter that keeps your name and your services in customers' minds all year long. In time, your customers become "un-switchable." You'll get more referrals, greater loyalty, and more sales.

Adams Hudson is ACCA's National Marketing Partner. You can request his free marketing ezine and free marketing reports by emailing FreeACCAstuff@hudsonink.com.

Know What You're Selling

What are you really selling? Before you answer, let's talk about what you're *not* selling. You're not selling air conditioning and heating.

Can you imagine coming across a customer in a Southern state who asks, "Why would I need air conditioning?" Can you imagine any customer in a Northern state asking, "Why would I need a heating unit in my home?"

Do you think just because you're selling a "necessity" your job should be easy? Do you think since air conditioning and heating needs are here to stay, your business is too? The simple answer is: only if you know what you're selling.

Since HVAC units have become a requirement for nearly every building, the consumer does not just demand a unit. They demand and buy:

1. Trustworthy service from a reliable dealer (46% cite as their primary purchasing reason.)
2. Features *that translate into* benefits to them (23%)
3. Excellent quality, brand-name products (15%)
4. Price (11%)
5. Other (5%)

You should be encouraged reading that list – especially notice how "price" was #4 on the list. Yes, it's the little number that all weak salespeople claim is the reason "all my customers are buying from so-and-so..."

The point is, maybe "so-and-so" explains his products better, sounds more credible, gives better guarantees AND has a price that translates into higher value.

Worse than this is that "so-and-so" is seeing the same prospects you are, and unless some things change, he'll beat you every time with any customer who has even half a brain.

If you don't believe me (or my half brain), then I'd be willing to bet your company is in for some rocky times. If you *do* believe this, then you must do one or more of the following:

- Change your marketing to target more customers who are less price-resistant.
- Increase your *product benefits* to increase your competitive advantage.
- Learn how to clearly communicate your superiority in value-oriented terms to the customer.

Do all three and you win – and win big. No competition can withstand this "triple threat" except for the weak-kneed response to lower prices. Believe me, customers do want to save money, but they don't want cheap. Sell them value – not cheapness – and they'll buy.

Contracting Week 2011 (October 18-21, 2011) in Nashville, TN will show you the path to innovation and success in your business and career.

Join ACCA and *The ACHR News* in Nashville for a new series of learning events guaranteed to propel your contracting business, and your personal career, farther ahead than ever. Learn more about Contracting Week 2011 at www.acca.org/education/contractingweek.

Yeah. ACCA has that for you.

SmartWords

"As a small businessperson, you have no greater leverage than the truth."

John Greenleaf Whittier

Product Spotlight

Manual J: Residential Load Calculations

MJ8 produces equipment sizing loads for many structures. This new version incorporates the complete MJ8-AE volume in a user friendly format. It provides quick supplemental details and advanced topics as well as supporting reference tables and appendices.

Get your new Manual J right now at www.acca.org/store.

ACCA Benefit Highlight

ComforTools™ Consumer Education Brochures

ComforTools™ are a series of brochures and other materials designed to assist both you and your technicians in aiding customers and "upselling" products and services. Each brochure covers a specific topic, such as the value of duct testing and repair, energy savings, and other product-supporting issues.

ComforTools™ are easy to understand, and are not connected to any specific manufacturer or product. Also, the ACCA logo – representing an association with an objective, non-profit third party – puts customers at ease.

The Art of Management

5 Great Management Insights

People skills. This one element of management can make or break your company. From interactions with employees and other businesses to furthering relationships with customers, nothing is more certain to stop you in your tracks than poor interpersonal communication. America's top CEO's understand that and have ranked the most important skills for managers below:

1. **Give or share importance.** The number 1 *failure* of managers is "ego driven, self-centered directive". Promote team strength, not your importance.
2. **Share your vision.** If they don't know where you're going, how do you expect them to follow?
3. **Admit your mistakes.** Since I presume you're human, it's okay to goof. It's more okay to admit it. If you hide mistakes, why wouldn't employees?
4. **Stay connected.** Many owners and managers look forward to the day when they can sit back, detached. Don't be tempted. Even if you've earned the right to pull back, have weekly phone-ins, mini-meetings, or regular on-site appearances.
5. **Make your job and competition *fun*.** Sound impossible? Then you've gotten too serious. Have fun with team goals, individual goals, collective team goals. If you can't think of a way to make your job fun, you're in the wrong job.

Without people, you have no customers, sales, or business. So make enhancing your people skills a management priority. But remember – they won't do any good until you put them into practice.

Rule Breaking 101

"Being good at what you do means you will be successful."

False: That is the greatest myth in all of contracting. If you're great at what you do and no one knows, how does your talent translate into profits? You *must* get your name out there through any means necessary – including advertising, testimonials, and publicity.

News Flash

The Latest from ACCA National Finding Energy Efficiency Incentives

ACCA is very excited to announce a new HVACR specific Database of State Incentives for Renewables and Efficiency (DSIRE) webpage at www.acca.org.

The new DSIRE tool allows contractors and consumers to locate HVACR energy efficiency incentives in their local area. Unlike the National DSIRE website, ACCA's DSIRE tool allows users to search incentives by zip code, sector, or technology.

"This new HVACR specific DSIRE tool is a great way for ACCA to help its members and their consumers find available energy efficiency incentives in their area without a lot of effort," said Paul T. Stalknecht, ACCA president and CEO.

Contractors and consumers can use the ACCA's HVACR DSIRE tool by going to:

www.acca.org/consumer/dsire.

For more information on this new feature, send an email to Emily Rogers at emily.rogers@acca.org.