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Letter from the Executive

By Tom Wessner

Hello Friends,

Can you believe that it's September? Kids are back in school, football is just around the corner, and fall will be in full swing soon.

With the end of the year looming, there's no time to take a break during what for some is their "slow" season. Whether it's performing all the maintenance and check-ups you scheduled during the summer season, or preparing your customer retention push for the fall, there's always something you can do to better your business.

And here at ACCA Western PA, we hope we can help. It's our pleasure to help your business go to the next level. Let us know what we can do.

Tom Wessner
ACCA-WPA President

Marketing

Generating Team Spirit

By Adams Hudson

Kids are headed back to school across the country, and from kindergarten to college, students have one thing in common – school loyalty. You can see their allegiances in logos on t-shirts and ball caps, decals on car windows, flags flapping in the breeze... and then, of course, there's a fair bit of obnoxious behavior during televised football games.

Well, maybe your customers won't paint their faces in your company's colors, but, after all you do, is a little loyalty too much to ask for you too? Of course not. So ask already.

Ask every time you're in the home, by making sure every service call includes an offer to upgrade for big savings with a maintenance agreement. Ask every time you complete a job well done, by letting your customers know how important referrals are to you. And ask every time you send news and information to your customers, by reminding them of who you are and how you can help them.

When customers are on your team, they'll help you spread your word. But, first, you have to make sure they're on your team. Customers who act as referral sources must believe that your company offers a superior value than other companies – whether that's in service, product quality, benefits, all of the above, or other areas where you shine alone. They must feel good about their relationship with the company – and that the company values *them*.

Remember the basics: Be reliable in meeting your customers' needs, be consistent with your communication with them, be loyal to your employees and train them to work with customers. And, finally, if you want loyalty *from* your customers, be loyal *to* your customers. Deep discounts for "new customers only" could turn off your bread and butter, for example. The best value of all should always be reserved for maintenance agreement customers.

Adams Hudson is ACCA's National Marketing Partner, winner of the Dan Kennedy National Sales Letter Contest, and author of Contractor Marketing Secrets. He is also available to speak at local and Chapter events.

End of Season is Last Chance For Sales

There are still a number of days on the calendar to mark off – and in most areas, quite a few digits on the thermometer to drop – before the season changes. But there's not much time to figure out what to do next – because that non-ending cycle just keeps rolling along.

In fact, "limited time" is one of the points you'll want to convey to customers and prospects. The sense of urgency needed for direct response to be effective is at its most natural during an end-of-season offer.

No one can argue with "remaining stock" from a season coming to a close or "before September 30th" from a contractor preparing to shift from cooling to heating. This can be especially true when you're sending a letter to a non-closed sale, with the end of season serving as just the push needed to make the final decision. Direct response is the ad type of choice, and this year you can add the "tax credit" incentive to prompt more calls.

An Option in Closes

A variation of the "last chance close" could be a good choice here. This is where a sale or special price will soon end – based on time, quantity, price or a combination of same. After all, a sale doesn't last forever and neither does equipment that has been acquired through a special purchase. Certainly, the government's tax credit offers have to be acted on this year before they end in December.

So, in your "one more time around" effort, get back in touch and let prospects know about limiting factors, such as:

- "We have 6 months same as cash running through this Friday."
- "There are only 7 or so of these systems at last year's price."
- "This is the last shipment we're getting until <DATE>"
- "There are no more in your size at this price."
- "Free 10 year parts and labor ends this week"

Similarly, you can use the Price Adjustment "Freeze," like so: "Hi, this is Bill with ABC Heating and Cooling. Since I noticed in our files that we had given you a quote on a new system in <month> and you haven't bought one, I wanted to let you know that we've been alerted to a price increase (or "are planning a price increase" whichever is completely truthful). I'm just calling people to say that I still can replace your system at the *old price*." (Pause for response.)

"I can gladly schedule your replacement (time) and will be glad to upgrade the thermometer to the (brand) for allowing me to intrude on you with this phone call. I felt like you deserved to know though..."

Remember, no matter what the season, you've always got a solution for a customer's problem. And there's always a buyer who can be persuaded to action, thanks to a persuasive offer.

"I Wonder if ACCA Has That for Me?"

One of the most effective, cost-efficient ways to communicate with your customers is through a newsletter program. *HomeWords* is designed with informative, entertaining, and sales-building articles that customers read and enjoy. It is "season specific" and contains specially created ads for you to insert, along with your company logo and contact info for a custom look.

HomeWords is exclusively for ACCA members from the expert marketers at Hudson Ink. To order a free sample issue of HomeWords, submit your request at www.acca.org/homewords/.

Yeah. ACCA has that for you.

SmartWords

"In the realm of ideas everything depends on enthusiasm...in the real world all rests on perseverance."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Techno Tidbit

Did you know that the building project, "Discovery Green", in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada is the first large scale use of variable refrigerant flow in North America? It's a technology already in use in Asia and Europe, and is now making an appearance here. You can learn more at: <http://www.goodway.com/hvac-blog/?p=718>.

ACCA Benefit Highlight

New ACCA Financing Program with GE Money

GE Money, the consumer lending Unit of General Electric Company, announced a multi-year agreement to provide the GE Money Home Design consumer financing program through ACCA. The program, managed by GE Money's Sales Finance Unit, is available through ACCA and can be used to finance HVAC-related purchases and repairs. Consumers can find ACCA contractors in their area via GE Money's online Business Locator.

ACCA members can learn more, including how to enroll in the program, by logging in at www.acca.org/financing.

The Art of Management

How S.M.A.R.T. Are Your Company Goals?

In order for a company to grow, you must set goals. Why? Because without them, you're never reaching toward the next level – wherever you are now is good enough, because you have no idea where you want to be. But unrealistic goals can be just as damaging as having no goals at all. That's why all of your company goals should be S.M.A.R.T.:

- **Specific.** Goals should be clear and concise: "This month technicians are to gain at minimum of three upsells." This allows you to quantify a goal and make it...
- **Measurable.** If you can't measure a goal, how are you supposed to know when you're making progress? How will you know even when it's achieved? Make goals with measurable metrics. It makes them more...
- **Attainable.** Goals should help your employees stretch their abilities – not be so far out of reach that it's un-motivating and demoralizing. Make sure a goal is reachable, or you'll end up behind rather than ahead.
- **Relevant.** In the big picture for your business, your goals should have a clear place. Ambiguous goals or goals with no clearly defined impact on the company often remain undone. Especially when they are not...
- **Time-based.** All of your goals should have clearly defined milestones and completion dates. If you set a "whenever we get to it" deadline, chances are you'll *never* get around to it.

Rule Breaking 101

"Customer retention is optional."

FALSE: If you want to dominate your market, be the contractor that *other* contractors envy, and make more money with less effort, then the way to do that is by keeping the customers you've already paid for. They spend more, accept the upsell more readily, and are already convinced of your value and credibility.

News Flash

The Latest from
ACCA National

Identifying and Controlling the
Five Profit Killers in Your
Service Department!

ComfortU
September 20, 2010
2pm Eastern

This session will uncover five profit killers, allowing your service profitability to soar! We will review many of the Key Performance Indicators that need to be tracked in your service department in order to maintain consistent profits. Don't miss this session.

Specific learning Objectives: Many contractors treat service as a stepchild to be tolerated when in fact it should be the most profitable department within your company. Profitable service begins with proper pricing followed by proper management.

Session Outline: Being priced right is step one. However, five profit killers exist in every service department. Any of the five areas has the ability to suck all the profit out of the department even though the pricing is correct. Each "killer" will be identified with specifics of how to be sure it is not happening in your company.

About the Presenter: Tom Grandy is the founder and president of Grandy & Associates. The vision of Grandy & Associates is to "teach contractors how to run profitable businesses".

You can learn more about this *ComfortU* seminar at www.acca.org.