

don't just sell: market

by Julie Olthoff, President, VIA Marketing, Inc.

If your company's marketing plan consists of increasing this year's annual sales over the previous year, then you're missing the distinction between selling and marketing.

To successfully market your services or products, you need to find out what your customers want and need and then do a better job than your competitors to supply it. The first step, finding out what your customers and prospective customers need, cannot be accomplished unless you ask them. Don't rely on your staff or your intuition.

After you find out what customers want, the next step is to put together an effective marketing mix of product, price, promotion and distribution. A great product won't sell if it's overpriced. If a customer desperately needs widgets but doesn't know about yours, you'll never make a sale. And if you have a hot item at a reasonable price, but an inappropriate distribution system, that item will likely fail to sell.

It's also crucial to target your customers with an effective promotional mix that includes ads, promotions, publicity, and the personal sales pitch. Each has an important function. Rebates and coupons supplement direct mail and ads; publicity is powerful because of perceived third party endorsements; and face-to-face selling will never be outdated.

So, don't just put your product or service out into the marketplace and expect success. The secret is to know your customers, offer them what they want at a fair price, give them the information and motivation to buy your goods, and promote your product and business with some old-fashioned publicity. And, whether you sell cars or financial advice, don't forget the personal touch.

For some specific ideas on marketing your company, contact VIA Marketing at 219.769.2299 or visit our website at www.viamarketing.net.



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