

with columnist Robert Ciccone



Pay heed to the moving parade

Customers buy when they're ready, not necessarily when you're selling

Let me tell you the story of what happened when I became a homeowner, and the marketing lesson it teaches us.

Several years ago, my wife, my young daughter and I were happily living in a condo in Burnaby. Then we found out our family was about to grow – our son was on his way – and we decided it was time to do what millions of Canadians before us had done: buy a house.

We found our dream house in the suburbs. It had plenty of space for a growing family, including a workout area and man-cave space for me. It also had a beautiful front lawn and a big backyard for the kids, and a place for my wife to enjoy planting and tending a garden. I was even looking forward to mowing the lawn and looking after the yard.

Bear with me. The marketing lesson is coming.

Shortly after we moved in, we started getting calls, visits and mail from businesses that provide useful home services – alarm systems, renovations, gutter maintenance, painters, local retailers, and others. One Saturday, as I was proudly mowing my new lawn, I was approached by a man offering lawn-and-garden services. His company and approach impressed me. If I hadn't been so happy doing the job myself, I would have definitely hired him over the other lawn-care companies also making their pitches.

Fast-forward two summers. I was ready to pay somebody to do the work. But by then I couldn't remember the name of the guy who had impressed me. I hadn't kept his card or brochure. In essence, he was out of sight and out of mind. So, I hired someone else.

We are now a pretty good client for the company we hired. They come in every week during the summer and take care of the lawn and garden; they do a couple of major clean-ups per year; they sell us other services during the winter. Over the years we've even given them a few good referrals.

What's the lesson here? The lesson has to do with that very first lawn-care guy who impressed me, and the fact that he does not have my ongoing business or referrals. It's a lesson I call *the moving parade*.

The moving parade goes like this: All of us, every day, parade our needs and wants to the marketplace. There are certain vendors and suppliers who satisfy those wants and needs. Just because I may not want or need what you have today does not mean I won't need and want what you have tomorrow, next month, next year – or, as in the case of my own lawn-care purchase, two years later.

The moving parade makes the point that people will buy when they are ready to buy – not when you're ready to sell!

Here's the lesson of the moving parade: You don't make your presentation and then end it there. If it is a prospect that you want, or a client you want keep, then maintain contact. Stay top-of-mind – provide timely and useful information, remind them why you exist, and at some point they might need your product or services. And, when they do, they will not only know whom to call, but also be more educated about your company and the value you provide.

There are many ways to communicate regularly with your prospects and clients. You can use everything

from e-zines to social-media connections; greeting cards to postcards; free reports to instructional videos; and a simple, regularly scheduled phone call, just to name a few.

Now, what about coming across as needy or pushy? No worries here – as long as your communication has value, is relevant, and puts the recipient's interest ahead of your own, your efforts will be viewed as useful and of service.

As I noted above, people buy when they are ready. Heed the lesson of the moving parade – stay in touch and top-of-mind. Doing so with the right strategic approach, content and

timing will not only produce more sales; it will also make a significant and positive impact on order size, frequency of purchases, loyalty and referrals.

Robert Ciccone is the president and founder of Success Unlimited Sales and Marketing Group (www.susmg.com). He is also the creator of the Marketing for Profit Program, a three-part results program that provides the marketing systems, tools and ongoing support to help participants effectively build, manage and operate a profitable business (www.susmg.com/MarketingForProfit). Robert can be reached at 604-535-2111 or rob@susmg.com.

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