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Upcoming Events

Banco Popular presents Speed Networking at ICNC- Oct. 8th

New companies and those looking to meet and network with other neighborhood businesses can talk to 20 new contacts in just 90 minutes. ICNC's speed networking events are a great place to meet potential clients and to expand your network, all in a fun and informal environment. Join us to make connections, share leads and meet friends at this fun, fast paced, FREE networking event. Sponsored by Banco Popular. Wednesday, October 8, at 10:00 - 11:30 at ICNC. Free, but space is limited so please RSVP to Andrew.



Financial incentives for energy efficiency improvements - October 22

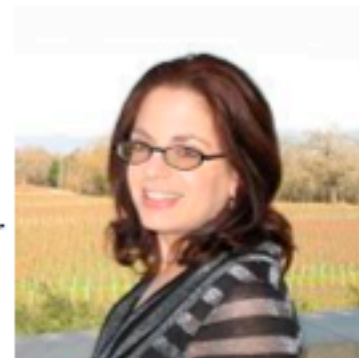
Learn about financial assistance available to help you implement your energy-savings strategy. Whether you're just installing new lights or planning an addition to your building, find out about grants and loans that could help cut your costs. Wednesday, October 22 from 9-10:30 a.m. at ICNC. Free, but please RSVP to ICNC.

Get money back on training costs

ICNC has money available from the State Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to reimburse companies for up to 50% of what they spend on employee training. Call ICNC for more information on how to get started. The paperwork is easy and most trainings (besides sales training) qualify.

Guest Column- Mona Zemsky

Smart business owners are always looking for ways to differentiate their business from the competitors. Do you know why your customers should stay with you when they are continually being solicited by your rivals? More importantly, do your customers know why they should stay with you? Mona lays out seven great ways to make your company stand out in the minds of your clients. [Click here](#) for the full article and for information on how to contact Mona for more ideas.



Marketing Strategy: Seven Ways to Differentiate your Business

by Mona Zemsky

Look at what the competitor is doing! Look how little the competitor is charging! Certainly you've heard "the sky is falling" from your employees, your partners, your friends. Time to panic? Lower your prices? Spread rumors about the competitor? No. Time to focus. Focus on what you do well -- and if you don't know, find out. Focus on your ideal customers. It's not about your competitors. With rare exception, there's opportunity out there, and your biggest concern should be eliminating the barriers your potential customers may have before making a decision. Your most unfortunate loss is the sale you lose because your potential customer postpones his decision or tries to do it himself. Your goal is to make your business a unique and compelling choice, and a great value. Below are seven ideas to consider for doing so.

1.No Time Like the Present.

Does most of your industry works 9-5? Work 5-12 and make it convenient to potential customers who are busy during standard work hours. In high school my girlfriends and I were clients of hairdresser couple Paula and Jay, who worked 5 to midnight weeknights at Shear Elegance in Northbrook. I applaud the salons that are breaking the tradition of being closed Sundays and Mondays, but I've yet to find another salon focusing on nights. This follows the very successful Sam Walton model "go where they ain't".

2. Eat an Extra.

Is it standard in your industry to charge for delivery, engraving, drinks, parking, proofs, initiation? Waive it, and make sure your clients know. Every logical buyer knows that the extras are still built in to the cost of your product or service, but logic doesn't always rule vendor selection.

3. Frequent Flier Program.

Watch your customers flee to a company that rewards them personally for their repeat business. Airlines, hotels, restaurants, so many retail and hospitality businesses benefit from the added incentive. I am frugal beyond belief, and yet I'll pay more to fly or sleep where I get points for free travel. If you're a magazine, a gym, any business that charges a monthly fee, reward your customers so they think twice about quitting their subscription. It's too hard to replace them. If you're a restaurant, shop, service provider or any other business that might be used multiple times, reward loyal customers. I always get upset when I see my bank (where I've held an account since I received gift money as a twelve-year old in 1979) giving \$50 bonuses to new sign-ups. They've benefited from my loyalty; at the very least they could not insult me by insinuating that my business is any less important.

4. Pick a Favorite

One of my clients (mostly) restricts his potential customer base to a single profession, though he's capable of providing his service to anyone. His point of differentiation makes him more appealing to that profession, because he is seen as the expert for that profession. Oddly, it does not even limit the reach of his marketing, as other professionals see this expertise and want my client's services as well.

5. Make it Personal

Tell your story, how your business came into being and why you love it. A financial planner client was inspired to his career from his father's complete failure at investing, having turned a high-paying career into a near-bankruptcy. Another client is a former real estate agent turned software developer, with his first product designed to help real estate agents brand themselves. A story instills trust, and sets you apart as someone who understands in a very personal way.

6. Bring More to the Table

Charge more. Everyone's trying to pare down and cut costs, and the result shows. Add a service to your own. You sell flowers? Offer a package with a restaurant meal delivered with the flowers. Of course your clients can get that same meal directly, but you're making it easy. You're a gym? Offer space for free to a weight management group like Weight Watchers. One of my clients sells a computer interface to busy professionals for a monthly fee. He recently started offering a package that includes web hosting and design along with the interface. He knows there are thousands of web hosting and design sites, but he's making himself an easy choice and a valuable niche.

7. Pick Up the Darn Phone

Email makes it so easy – too easy – to get the work done, we often forget there's a person on the other end. You think email makes you efficient? Be careful your customer doesn't think you're a drill sergeant. If you're local, the phone is a great way to remind customers that you're local, and real. If you're not local, the phone a great way to bridge that gap so you don't lose the business to a local company. Either way, remember that it's easier to end a business relationship when there's no "relationship" – only "business". Use the phone.

The most important thing about the above suggestions is that not one of them involves having a sale, lowering the price, running a special, using coupons. I'm certainly not the first to quote this, but it's true: "There's always someone willing to go out of business faster than you by lowering and lowering and lowering their price." The price competitor is nowhere, is easily expendable and easy to overtake.

Ask yourself why your company is different from the competition. If the answer doesn't impress you, find a new point of differentiation. Impress yourself with how great your business is – then impress your customers.

Bio:

Mona Zemsky, principal of M.Source, helps companies grow sales, results and exposure with hands-on, practical marketing strategies that maximize bang for the buck. Formerly (for 18 years) Marketing Manager of ICNC member Bird-X, Inc., Zemsky provides clients the big-picture mindset and passion of a long-term employee coupled with the low risk and greater flexibility of a freelancer. "My niche is small, successful companies that know they need marketing help, yet don't want to commit to a full time staff, and in fact are too busy running their successful businesses to have time to conceive, evaluate or implement all the great back-burner ideas," says Zemsky. She may be contacted at 773-600-7740 (cell), 312-202-9224 (home office), or mona@msourcemarketing.com.