



EVERYONE ON YOUR STAFF IS A MARKETING MANAGER

by Mona Zemsky

AT A TIME when budgets may not allow for massive marketing outreach, laboratories need to maximize the potential of one of their greatest resources, their employees.

When business is strong, all of us—employers and employees alike—can become careless about how we handle customer contacts. Now's the time to shape up.

Here are some responses to customers or prospects you've heard before—maybe from your employees, or maybe right out of your own mouth—along with suggestions to improve these communications.

"Let me transfer you to Mona's voicemail—she does that."

In a world of voicemail "efficiency," a real person answering a question or helping to resolve a problem is rare and valuable. The caller has no idea when Mona will be checking or answering her voicemail, so a pass-the-buck response from you leaves him without the information that he needs ASAP. Avoiding the transfer button is an opportunity to impress a caller with your service and extra effort.

Offer to find the answer and get back to the caller personally. If Mona is the only possible source of this information, you can be knocking on her door the moment she's back in the office, getting an answer and calling back the customer. (Mona may have ten other phone messages to retrieve.)

If part of the problem here is that Mona is the only one in the laboratory with answers to the important questions, offer to learn. Train yourself. Develop a policy manual that includes answers to frequently asked questions. You can enhance your value to your business as a side benefit of doing right by your customer—not a bad idea when every third word in the daily paper is "layoff."

While you're helping the customer, be sure to get his complete contact information. Make a record of any details he shares that give you insight into his needs and add this information to your database for future marketing endeavors.

"I don't know anything about that—can you call back later?"

Seriously? You don't know *anything* about that? Aren't you embarrassed that you don't know *anything* about that? This is worse than voicemail. At least with that approach there was the chance of an informed person calling back. In this case you've dumped all responsibility back into the lap of the caller.

How dare you impose that on a regular customer? If you need to put him on hold or call him back, do it. In the meantime, ask a colleague or call your boss on his cell phone to get the answer your client needs. Show a sense of urgency on behalf of the customer—and on behalf of your employer. This is how you proactively protect your lab against a customer finding crowns for \$5 less. Saving him time is worth money and loyalty.

If the caller is not a regular customer, your offense in suggesting he call back later may be even greater. Did you hang up the phone without knowing who's on the line and qualifying him? Do you realize how much money your business has spent to market itself and develop its reputation? Do you know how much work it took to get someone to even pick up the phone to call you? Before you hang up, you'd better know who's calling (with complete contact information), how they got your number (learn how your potential customers are finding you and you'll know how to find more) and what their needs are (qualify them).

Get the ball rolling. The caller should have a sense that you are glad to hear from him and eager to be responsive. If a follow-up is necessary, make sure it happens as soon as possible.

"No, that product does not require an MSDS."

This is like the bus driver who answers "no" when asked if his bus stops at Lake Street. It's short-sighted. A more helpful answer from the bus driver would be, "No, but I stop at Randolph, just one street over." Learn to listen for the question behind the question. If the product does not require an MSDS, tell the caller why. Use

the opportunity to sell. Tell him why your product is not hazardous. Talk about your ISO initiatives and your hazmat training. Assure him that your laboratory is on top of all rules and regulations and is committed to health and safety standards.

“Yes we do metal-free.”

This is an important chance to qualify the caller. Clearly, if he didn't know your lab handles metal-free restorations, he's not yet sending you that work. So who is he using? Is he thinking of switching? Why? Is he calling because he has a patient with a metal allergy, or is there potential for a significant number of metal-free cases?

Understanding his circumstances affords you a better chance of getting his business. If this is a prospect with good potential, perhaps you can offer to make two units for him to compare—one metal-free, one with metal. Show him the difference in esthetics and price. Talk to him about why you'd use one over the other. Demonstrate your skills as a resource and an advisor. That's not something a discount provider will do. Remember, advice and trust help justify your price.

“Sure, our web address is _____.”

Yikes. Don't let your website do your selling for you. Most people still prefer the phone, *especially when they're already talking to you*. If you're local, the phone is a great way to remind customers that you're real and *right there*. If you're not local, use the phone to bridge that gap. Remember, it's easier to end a business relationship when there's no “relationship”—only “business.” Use the phone, with the website as an assist.

If there's vital information on your website that you want a caller to see, offer to go on the website with him and help him navigate to that area. Or send him there *only* at the end of a productive phone conversation—perhaps by e-mailing him a link to a specific part of your site, which is a great way to get his e-mail address for your database.

These five examples demonstrate the difference between being a call-taker and a marketing manager. In today's competitive environment, no one can afford to be “just a receptionist.” Leverage your experience, your points of differentiation, your niche and focus on making your laboratory indispensable to customers and irresistible to prospects. ■



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