

Make your move



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Use these strategies to turn prospects into customers.

By **STEVE MARSH**

Companies allow dozens of quality consumers who want to use their services to slip through their fingers.

Picture any of the following:

You're cleaning for a customer when one of her friends comes by. Your customer gives you a glowing endorsement and the friend sees what fantastic work you do. The friend asks for a card and tells you that she will definitely call.

While attending a social event, a guest mentions that you are the best carpet cleaner she knows. Two other women testify what a great job you did for them. A third woman excitedly asks for your business card.

You're cleaning a retail store. A woman passing by sees your work and asks if you also clean homes. After you satisfactorily answer her questions, she asks you for a card.

In each of these scenarios, you "had" a new customer.

If they had an immediate need for carpet cleaning, you'd be the cleaner they'd call.

They are excited to have finally found a quality cleaner.

They have been disappointed by many other cleaners in the past.

They know you're the type of cleaner they have been looking for.

Unfortunately, these prospective customers rarely call.

Why?

They lose your business card!

Don't rely on the consumer to remember your name and contact information.

It may be months before she needs your services, and it is unlikely she will remember you, where she put your card, or even who referred you. She may have wanted to use your company, but she can't find your information or is not willing to research which company it was she heard good things about.

The solution is to follow-up with prospects.

They need help. You must help prospects remember your name, your telephone number, and that they would like to use your company.

You can readily increase the number of potential customers you keep.

What is prospecting?

Prospecting is the process of developing a professional relationship with consumers before they use your services.

Most successful companies have a follow-up system for existing customers to improve retention and increase the frequency of repeat work.

Prospecting is similar, except that you don't have to wait for the consumer to actually use your company. You can secure potential customers with a follow-up system.

You have already accomplished the hard part of convincing them to use your company; helping them remember you should be easy.

You need to establish a new habit to make this system work.

Along with handing out your business card, it's

important to collect prospects' names and mailing addresses.

It might seem bold to ask a potential customer for such information, but remember, they just asked you for yours.

You will be asking for this information when they call to schedule work, so it is reasonable for them to give it to you at this time.

Simply ask them for their name and address so you can send them your newsletter.

Treat prospects differently from customers

The relationship with a prospect is fragile.

Prospects are hopeful that your company will be different from those they have used in the past. Until you actually convert them into a customer, your job is to continue to build their confidence in your company.

Your success increases the more you stay focused on the special concerns of a prospect.

The prospects in the above scenarios are a special type of consumer.

They care about the maintenance of their homes. They realize that regular carpet cleaning is important and are willing to pay extra for quality. They are also probably disappointed with companies they've used in the past.

A good follow-up system fulfills two objectives:

1. It keeps your name and contact information easily available.
2. It builds the prospect's confidence that your company is professional and qualified.

Keep your contact information easily available

Don't assume consumers are organized.

They won't file your business card where it can easily be found. Instead, your card will end up in a pile of business cards with other forgotten companies.

A helpful tip: When you hand out a business card, write on it the name of the person referring you or how you met. When

Design effective newsletters for prospects

The right newsletter can play a key role in a follow-up system for qualified prospects.

First, it is an excuse to, again, put your name and contact information in front of the prospect.

Other printed materials, like holiday or reminder cards that work well for existing customers, aren't appropriate for people you haven't cleaned for.

Secondly, your newsletter should educate the prospect about your company. It should be a powerful tool that persuades prospects that you are a professional expert in your field.

A two-page newsletter that can be read in a few minutes works well.

Make the lead article an interesting and relevant topic related to services you provide.

These newsletters aren't meant to be entertainment, but to demonstrate that you can clearly communicate information about your primary services.

It might also effectively cover relevant consumer maintenance tips, frequently asked questions, and a personal note from the owner.

It's always a good idea to list your credentials, such as years of experience, certifications, and memberships in industry related associations and organizations.

If you include your photograph, it may help remind the prospect that you have already met.

"First time only" incentive discount coupons are also useful to prompt prospects to call you sooner rather than later.

Remember, the prospect is already sold on your company, so save your "sales pitches" for another time and place.

— S.M.

they see your card later, they will remember why your card is important.

Sending out printed materials regularly exposes prospects to your name and telephone number and reminds them that you are the company they have decided to use for their next cleaning.

Including appropriate promotional items, such as a refrigerator magnet, provides another way they can locate your company information.

Build the prospect's confidence in your company

Follow-up materials help to confirm your company's professionalism and expertise.

These materials educate the prospect about your industry credentials, years of experience, business philosophy, and other relevant information that answer their concerns.

Including your photograph on your
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Prospecting versus Advertising

| | Prospecting | Advertising |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| The intent is to: | Develop a professional relationship | Sell now (expiration date) |
| Return on investment (ROI) | Long-term return | Immediate return |
| Target market | Maintenance and quality-minded consumers | Event-motivated and budget-minded consumers |
| Sales pressure | Low | High |
| Effective | Before they need cleaning | When consumer is looking for a cleaner |
| Type of audience | Warm audience | Cold audience |
| Type of marketing | Precision marketing | Mass marketing |

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materials helps them remember meeting you.

Educating prospects about topics related to your field demonstrates that you are the expert.

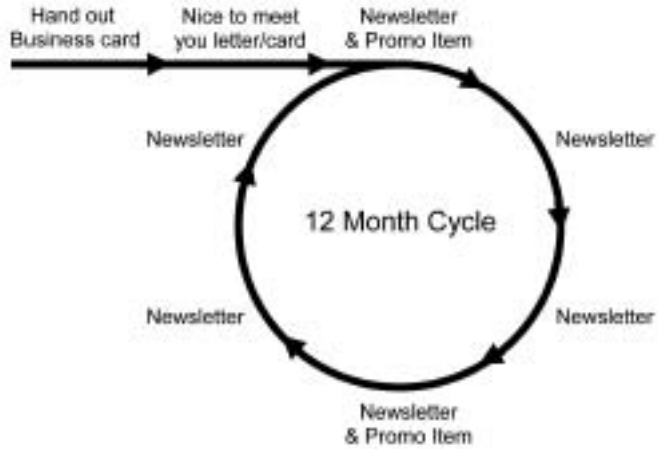
Boasting that you are the "best cleaner in town" has little positive effect. Clearly communicating ideas, techniques and helpful hints shows you are knowledgeable in your field.

Sales efforts should be kept to a minimum. These prospects have already been sold!

Too much pressure suggests that you are more of a salesman than a cleaning expert. Experts don't sell; they advise.

Focus on your primary services, especially the service they want. You are far more valuable in prospects' minds if they view you as a "specialist" rather than a "jack of all trades."

Prospect Follow-Up Cycle



After you have proved yourself to be an expert in one field, they will be glad to hear that you offer other services.

Provide "first time only" incentive dis-

counts to motivate prospects to call you. These help persuade them to give you a try.

Unless you are trying to attract "budget-minded" consumers, pricing should not be

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mentioned anywhere else.

Focus on the prospect and your company.

There is no reason to mention that unethical and sleazy companies exist. The prospect is fully aware of this. Don't stoop to mentioning it.

The following tools are suggested for a balanced professional follow-up system:

- Business cards
- "Nice to meet you" cards
- Prospect newsletters
- Quality promotional items.

A good follow-up system

When you meet a prospect, hand her a business card. Remember to note on the card how she met you. Get her name and mailing address.

Send a "nice to meet you" card or letter and include a business card.

About a week later, send her the first prospect newsletter. Include a quality refrigerator magnet.

Continue sending newsletters about every two months. Sending a newsletter more frequently tends to overload prospects and they stop reading them.

At about six months, include another promotional item (such as a rubber jar-opener) with the newsletter.

Continue this pattern for 18 months.

If they have not called during this time, consider dropping them from your list or putting them on a less-frequent-contact schedule.

A powerful business building tool

You are no longer dependent on the consumer to tell you when she is ready to think about your services.

The right prospecting system enables you to claim a consumer and essentially eliminate future competition.

When it's time for cleaning, you will be the only cleaner she considers.

You have the ability to build a quality clientele just by introducing yourself. The timing no longer has to be "just right." It is possible to build an entire clientele before you even clean for them.


It's only a matter of how fast you can

meet enough qualified consumers. Once your prospect list is large enough, you are assured a quality clientele.

A system that stays in touch with prospects increases the number and quality of your clientele.



Investing in such a system enables you to hold onto customers that would otherwise be lost.

Establishing a consistent follow-up system for prospects is a fast way to build a profitable company. *CM*



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