



## Market Knowledge

### **Developing an Effective “Plan of Attack” Marketing Checklist**

This time of year you see many articles on how to prepare for the upcoming season. Problem is, the advice often requires months of preparation and planning. So here are a few pointers to help get your marketing strategy into high gear right away – and pay you dividends all season long.

Whether you’re a small or large business, your company will benefit from having a comprehensive marketing “plan of attack”. For some, this means developing a formalized strategy, complete with an analysis of the competitive environment, an assessment of your firm’s strengths and weaknesses, and the development of realistic and measurable goals and objectives. If your company has not been through this process, it’s well worth it..

But with the busy season almost upon us, a simpler approach that will still let you hit the ground running is to develop a marketing checklist. It’s a basic “to do” list that enables you to develop a logical and measurable approach to your marketing efforts and expenditures all season long.

Your checklist should take into account all the regular activities used to promote your business and reputation even when the phone is constantly ringing. More importantly, it will give you some backup items to implement if business starts to slow.

Sound simple? Do it and you will immediately be ahead of 7 out of 10 of your competitors. That’s because some contractors do their marketing “when they get around to it”. Others use the same tactics year after year whether it works or not because “that’s what we’ve always done”. These same contractors panic when the weather or the market changes.

So now’s the time to start building your checklist:

First, think about targeting specific groups of customers. Existing accounts should receive mailings reminding them to re-enroll for maintenance services. These customers can also represent great opportunities for additional business, such as lighting, ponds, specimen plantings, or seasonal color changes. You should also have campaigns that target specific groups of new customers. Specialize in multi-family developments? Advertise in the local property managers’ newsletter. By focusing your message and your delivery vehicle, your promotional efforts will have greater impact.

Second, consider timing. Some contractors launch a marketing campaign during the busiest weeks of the spring season, when they already have plenty of work. Then they are desperate for something to offset the summer slump. Better to have a campaign for the summer doldrums already “in the can”, designed, developed and ready to launch as the slower times hit.



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Third, think about budget. Yes, this one is simple, but few actually do it. If you're trying to grow aggressively, be prepared to spend 7-8% of your annual sales on marketing. Steady-eddies can spend 5-6%. Reputable stalwarts can get by on as little as 3%. Be forewarned that setting aside the money is the easy part. Spending it wisely and effectively is the challenge.

Fourth, re-evaluate and improve the items that represent your largest marketing expenses. For most contractors, this means your yellow pages ad. Although your yellow pages rep would like you to increase his commission by buying more space and extras like color, resist the temptation. Take the opportunity to remodel your existing ad instead. And check to see if you are eligible for trademark listing programs offered by most major irrigation and lighting manufacturers. They're a bargain and can really help offset your marketing expenses.

Most importantly, re-evaluate whether "the same old" is working. Sometimes a consistent message delivers a steady stream of buyers. Other times, you're just wasting time and money on advertising that doesn't improve your lead count or reputation. Sometimes a fresh start is the best start.

### *About the Author:*

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