

## **Turn Prospects into Customers and Keep Both in the Loop -- with a Promotional Newsletter!**

by George Duncan, President, Duncan Direct Associates

How long are the sales cycles for your company's products? Three months? A year? Eighteen months? In today's business-to-business marketplace, long lead times are the rule rather than the exception. And the higher the price point or the greater the complexity of your products, the longer their lead times will be.

How do you keep a prospect interested over the course of 18 months? How do you head off a competitor's inroads into the prospect while your sales rep is working through the approval/sales cycle?

One answer being discovered by companies in every industry is the promotional newsletter -- often used in conjunction with other promotional mailings.

Part gentle reminder, part public relations tool, part sales device, the promotional newsletter gives you an entry into the prospect company when your salesperson can't be there. It helps keep the prospect informed on product features and benefits, company successes, and more, and it generally maintains a favorable impression of your company in the prospect's mind between sales calls.

As for customers, a newsletter is the perfect follow-up to a sales call. It keeps customers in the loop on new products, informs them on effective product use through case studies, and provides opportunities for product research, aftermarket sales of support and training, cross-selling of related products, and upgrades of the products they purchased.

### **With a promotional newsletter, you can:**

- \* **Create an awareness of your company and its capabilities**
- \* **Burnish your company's image**
- \* **Establish your expertise and credibility in the marketplace**
- \* **Show your competitive strengths**
- \* **Demonstrate the superiority of your products and/or service**

### **Include Case Studies**

One of the most effective features you can include in a promotional newsletter is the case history. These are real-world examples of how companies are successfully using your products -- and innovative new ways to use them. Case studies provide powerful peer approval of your products and give your prospect permission to inquire further.

Successful case studies also reaffirm customers' purchase decisions and help keep them sold on your products and your company.

## **Keep it "Newsy"**

New products and services are, of course, naturals for news stories in your newsletter. Be careful, however, not to write about them in a promotional or hard-sell context. Rather, "report" on them objectively, almost as though they were some other company's.

You can use your newsletter to announce new white papers or Special Reports. But don't just announce that they are available. Write about them as news.

Prominent new customers can be featured in news stories as well, together with profiles of key customer end users (your customer's customers, if appropriate).

Product performance test results can be reported as news, and you can include announcements of product reviews in the trade press. (You can also use your newsletter to correct or explain any unfavorable reviews that might have appeared in the trade press.)

## **A Research Tool**

You can use your newsletter to publish questionnaires designed to acquire information about readers' business needs and interests...trade publication reading habits...even salary and product usage surveys.

## **Industry Digest**

It can be genuinely helpful to readers if you excerpt news briefs from your industry's trade publications. Be sure to observe "fair use" laws and obtain permission for any verbatim or other reproductions you may use from other publications.

In some cases, including a request form for readers to recommend peers and colleagues who might have an interest in your newsletter can increase circulation – and provide additional leads.

## **Make It An e-Letter**

If your promotional newsletter contains articles of genuine value to readers, you can also offer it on your company website and use it to capture customers' email addresses. Or create a separate online newsletter for that purpose.

With so many free e-letters available online today, you'll need to make it worth readers' while to download it. Try for an adroit mix of hard industry news items and company information with links to useful information on your website.

Be sure to give prospects an "opt-in" and "opt-out" choice and provide an easy cancel option with every issue.

## **Keep It Professional**

Features to AVOID include "Employee-of-the-Month" and other "house" information...pictures of your building...pictures of the president. In short, keep it a newsletter and not thinly disguised flackery.

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