

By Hal Theiste

## A Sound Marketing Strategy is a Must for Any Business

In this article I'd like to touch on one of the most important foundational elements of a sound business. Marketing is the glue that joins a sound product line, strong financing and top operations management into a highly successful business.

Many people equate "marketing" with sales and advertising. While these are important elements of a marketing strategy, there are a host of additional tools and tactics that can increase both the visibility and attractiveness of a business to potential customers, which are included in the marketing function. And, as with the overall business structure and strategy, successful marketing requires careful research, planning, and a wise use of resources.

Think of marketing as a combination of steps designed to identify, attract and retain good customers, and to differentiate your business from the competition. Marketing encompasses everything from your company name, logo, and service lines to advertisements, public relations, presence at trade shows, and community involvement.

While it's helpful to use comparable businesses as a guide, what works for them may not be appropriate for you. Your marketing strategy needs to be tailored to your business and your target customer audience. To prepare yourself for marketing, create a detailed profile of your ideal prospect. Use this to develop all aspects of your company's image, including your logo, your brochures, your sales channels, key messages, product packaging and the like. As you create your marketing message, be sure to include the benefits the customer will receive and the special knowledge and expertise you offer.

Look for ways to make the buying process easy for your customers. What roadblocks can you remove? Simplify everything; eliminate potential interruptions in the sales process and make decision-making as painless as possible for your customers.

Put your marketing budget in proper perspective. For example, think of marketing as your "ace-in-the-hole" rather than merely a "cost." Try to set a budget and a pace that lets you market continuously. Customer memories are short, and they are bombarded with thousands of marketing messages and images daily. Your effort must be ongoing or people will quickly forget.

Match your marketing to your primary market. If it's a local market, then that's where your marketing focus should be. Broadly focused newspaper or radio advertising, for example, might be attractive, but if it doesn't have a message that rings with the needs of your local market, it could be the wrong choice.

A good place to find marketing help is the American Marketing Association's Web site, [MarketingPower.com](http://MarketingPower.com). The site's Best Practices section contains valuable guidance for small businesses in the areas of research, Internet marketing, advertising, public relations, customer service tips, and many others. The national SCORE website, [SCORE.org](http://SCORE.org), has a lot of marketing tips for the entrepreneur. The SCORE organization

also offers an excellent seminar in Marketing as part of their small business seminar series presented twice a year.

Remember that nothing good happens in business without good marketing. It stimulates the sales that provide the cash to make the business run. A good idea and quality products and services are highly important, but nothing happens without good marketing.

SCORE is a nationwide nonprofit association of experienced business people who provide free and confidential business counseling to small business owners. The Sandhills Chapter is very active in counseling, mentoring and presenting free business seminars. For a counseling appointment contact the Chapter via the web at [www.sandhillsscore.org](http://www.sandhillsscore.org) or at 910-692-3926.

In addition to counseling by appointment, the Sandhills chapter of SCORE has members available for drop-in service from 10am to noon every Tuesday at the Moore County Chamber of Commerce building on Hwy 15/501 in Southern Pines.

The local SCORE Chapter is always seeking motivated volunteers. More information on SCORE's counseling activity and a complete description of each seminar can be found at the Sandhills SCORE website, [www.sandhillsscore.org](http://www.sandhillsscore.org).

