

## **ASK SCORE**

### **Got Business Questions? SCORE has answers**

By Willy Campbell – Special to The Pilot

#### **Have you thought about your Marketing lately?**

It's so easy to fall into a routine and let it run you rather than you take charge. Your marketing efforts need to be reviewed periodically because changes are going on around you. New competitors, new arrivals into the area, a changing economy – all have some impact on your business and should impact your marketing!

First you must be sure that you have identified and understand your “target market”. Unless you know who your actual and potential customers are in terms of location, demographics and interests, there is no way to plan an effective marketing program. This will allow you to select the right media and to use the proper appeals in order to convey your message.

Secondly, you must determine your “image” or “niche”. What makes your business unique? If there are two additional competitors, why should I buy from you? You should carefully identify the strengths and weaknesses of your competitors (and yourself!), which will allow you to understand your market position: been in business longer, more experience, greater product selection, lower prices, etc. Then you will be able to intelligently define the image you will want to convey.

The relatively inexpensive part of your marketing program should be public relations. Are you a member of the Moore County Chamber of Commerce? The Chamber's members may represent part of your target market. The Chamber has many business functions and relationships that can benefit you directly. If you are a small business in Southern Pines, are you a member of the Southern Pines Business Association? If you have a particular expertise in an area of business, you may be able to serve as a guest speaker on a business topic for a local professional group's meeting. Exposure, exposure, exposure!

Knowing your target market and your image will allow you to spend your advertising dollar wisely. Moore County media reach out to all the area demographics. Are you in The Yellow Pages...and if not, why not? The selection of local media outlets offers you a way to selectively address your target market: The Pilot, Sandhills Business Times, Pinehurst magazine, Panorama Carolina magazine, and more. Many small business owners fail to recognize that you need to select your media with an eye to being able to measure the results of the advertising. The wise person will be continually evaluating the results and changing when necessary.

Another aspect of media coverage is the exposure opportunities they offer beyond paid advertising. Newspapers, periodicals and radio often look for special stories about small business, especially those offering a unique or unusual product or service. Perhaps you may have a visiting specialist in your business's product area and you wish to have your current and potential customers be made aware of the special event. Can you work with a supplier to introduce a new product with you and the supplier creating a special event of broad appeal to our community? Introduce yourself to the media business editors who cover such stories in Moore County and learn what they are looking for.

Finally, participate in and sponsor community events – interact with the public. Be an active participant in your community!

If you would like to discuss marketing or any other business issue with SCORE (Counselors to America's Small Business), please visit our local web site at [www.sandhillsscore.org](http://www.sandhillsscore.org). Our web site describes all our services, discusses each of our seminars and provides a direct link to our automated "Request For Counseling" page where you can describe your needs; we promise to get back to you within 48 hours. You may also contact us at 910-692-3926.

Remember – send your business questions to me at [www.info@sandhillsscore.org](mailto:www.info@sandhillsscore.org) and don't forget to provide a way to contact you. I may not be able to answer all of them in this column but every one will receive a personal answer from one of our Sandhills SCORE counselors!