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Eight effective 2015 additions to your marketing strategy

Posted on January 26th, 2015 Written by [Wanda Kenton Smith](#)



“Do things the way you’ve always done them and expect nothing more than the same results.”

In marketing circles, this is the understatement of the decade. Although the goal of marketing remains intact — to deliver qualified prospects into the sales funnel — how we go about grabbing leads and converting them into customers has become much more complex and challenging.

Because this column has space restrictions, indulge me in an oversimplification:

Thirty-four years ago, when I started my marine marketing career, manufacturers built a product. They advertised in targeted boating publications. They produced expensive brochures and videos. A few pacesetters marketed through additional promotional and PR channels.

Dealers sold product. They advertised in local markets and participated in boat shows. Show producers promoted. Buyers came to the show and bought.

Some manufacturers invested in demographic profiling to learn more about their customers — what they liked best about a product and areas where it could be improved.

Smart manufacturers embraced product development. Like sheep, the rank and file followed. New products continued to breathe life into sales.

Such was the industry marketing formula. You make it; they will come. You lead; others will follow. Innovation delivers sales.

When discretionary dollars were plentiful, that practice sufficed. But those good old days are gone. If your company’s marketing today resembles your game plan of the late 1900s, you should quickly reassess. Today’s marketing options are vast and rapidly evolving.

Revisiting tradition

Before reviewing some of the newer marketing opportunities, there are two traditional strategies that remain relevant, but with a caveat. Both are designed to reach our audience of boaters. As an industry,

we should support the best print/online publications and the best boat show producers. “Best” is the operative word and it applies to those who are effectively engaging with boaters.

If the boater persona you are targeting consumes the print or online versions of your favored marine publication, then advertise. If you don't know, ask. Understand the audience. Study the subscriber/reader profile and demographics, know when the research was conducted to ensure it is current and ask whether it's audited. Survey your own customers and prospects to learn about their marine media preferences.

If you're an advertiser, sit down with your rep and discuss how to better engage with his audience. Apart from placing an ad, which is a one-way communication, how else might you customize a program or a promotion to connect with this community? And are you measuring your advertising results?

Throughout my marketing career I've worked with a handful of savvy marine media reps and publishers. The good ones will gladly work with you. After all, your success is in their best interest. Counsel and collaborate with your media partner of choice to garner the best ROI possible.

Secondly, I believe the boat show remains relevant. It's the single best one-stop venue for selling boats and boating-related product — one in which people can see everything under one roof at one time.

Using the Internet, however, a boating consumer can invest a few clicks and learn much of what he needs to know from the comfort of his home or office. Although online searches for discovery purposes are efficient, nothing replaces the hands-on touch and feel of fiberglass, upholstery, electronics and the like. That's why boat shows still have a draw.

Smart producers have boosted the show's viability through a mix of social media and other advertising initiatives, coupled with fun promotions and educational programs. The strongest have survived; many have actually thrived. That's because the best show producers fully embrace new marketing technology.

For the boat show to pay real dividends, however, don't rely on the producer to do your job. Develop your own show marketing strategy. Invite your audience, give them an incentive or reason to attend and deliver what you've promised. Create a positive experience that compels action. Has everything about your show marketing and booth experience been considered from the customer's point of view?

Be sure to capture the names and contact information of qualified prospects who visit, and then follow up pronto, both during and post-show. Don't waste your money by failing to work the leads you generate.

Some strategies

Although there are many others, here are eight of the most important strategies you should embrace in 2015.

1. Customer care. At first glance it sounds old-school, but it carries new applications. From a sales perspective, today's customers exert a much greater position of control and influence than ever before. They want a relationship with their brands of choice. They want to speak, engage and be heard.

What are you doing to foster a culture of authentic customer care? How are you personalizing the customer experience? How frequently are you communicating? How are you listening, and are there sufficient resources in place to respond in a timely manner?

When I posed this question to a former manufacturing client, I was shocked to learn that the company

believed its customer was the dealer exclusively, not the end user. The failure to recognize the boat buyer as a highly valued member of the brand family is fatally flawed. We must consider how we can best extend the highest possible level of customer care into relationships that matter among all of our customer groups.

2. Outbound and inbound channels. “Outbound” marketing represents the company’s more traditional reach “out” through targeted marketing channels via ads, e-blasts or direct mail to paid lists and other prospect sources. “Inbound” marketing refers to methods in which customers seek the company, often discovering through online searches that yield marketing content. By its very nature, inbound marketing has a higher value for your business because it attracts those who are actively seeking what you have to offer.

We need to focus on developing inbound marketing content for consumption by our targeted buyer personas (our various buyer profiles). To be successful, we must develop a content marketing strategy that addresses the most important questions and concerns that interest the buyer. Such content may be self-published by your company and housed on your marketing platforms, and/or it may be promoted and posted on other networks. In addition, your inbound strategy must connect the dots and take into consideration how to convert visitors to legitimate leads once they find you.

3. Online video use. I recently wrote a column (http://www.kentonsmithmarketing.com/documents/trade_only/Video.9.29.14.pdf) about video. Video marketing delivers an impressive open rate among prospects, and is a well-proven strategy.

Some new suggestions for 2015: Shake up the content a bit to continuously engage your prospects. Tease about new products that are coming or give a sneak peek about what’s just landed at your dock. Shoot a quick demo or an easy how-to. Share customer testimonials. At your next big company event, advance-promote a live stream for those who can’t attend.

Videos can be factual or technical in approach, humorous or fun. Post videos on a dedicated YouTube channel (Google owns it — great for SEO!). Cross-promote on other social platforms. Embed the link in a personal prospect email and be sure to create a catchy teaser in the subject line.

4. SEO (search engine optimization). It’s still the kingpin in the strategic marketer’s chess game. When your company or brand is searched, where do you show up? Are your keywords working? Have your pages been optimized? Are you updating content regularly, and have you developed content around those terms that are most important to your buyers? Do you have a blog?
5. CRM systems. Invested in a CRM (customer relationship management) system? Such programs allow a company to manage leads throughout the sales cycle. A major benefit is marketing automation, ensuring ongoing and personalized communication. Most programs allow you to track online prospect activity and response.
6. More mobile. Your website must be mobile-accessible. Considering the explosive growth of mobile usage, marketers must take extra precaution to design and develop mobile-friendly content.
7. Robust social media activity. Although Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube are still the rage, pay attention to newcomers such as Instagram, now claiming more than 200 million monthly users. Manage your social media arsenal with content that delivers engagement.
8. Diversity. The industry understands that diversity represents new sales opportunity. If you live in a market that has a notable affluent non-white demographic, get educated. Meet with leaders of the group and learn about the nuances and opportunities to engage. Test-market on a small scale.

There are a dozen more exciting marketing developments I'd like to tackle, but we have a year. If there's a marketing topic you'd like me to address or something you'd like to share, shoot me an email. I'm listening.

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