Keeping in Touch Is More Important Than You Think

With just 4% of people willing to do business with you the very first time they hear about you, keeping in touch with your prospects is more important than ever. The other 96% will do business with you only when trust has been established.

Yet, business owners continue to work hard at talking to prospects, networking, and implementing business-awareness marketing strategies, but lack solid systems to cultivate trust and stay in touch with those people whom they meet. Incredibly, keep-in-touch systems are often forgotten about or neglected by many small business owners. With only 20% of leads actually followed up on, that's a heaping pile of lost opportunity.

Just as important to having a system to keep in touch is how you approach using your system to cultivate your relationships. One wrong move and you could be creating more work without developing a strong return on your relationship investment systems.

There are three main elements every entrepreneur should consider so that their keep-in-touch systems work for them:

- Make your system permission-based,
- Be Consistent, and
- Develop Stakeholder-Specific Keep-in-Touch Systems

Make Your System Permission-Based

One of the major mistakes entrepreneurs make is create an e-newsletter and call it their keep-in-touch system. They will attend networking events and erroneously place everyone they meet on their list. They think they are growing their list but wonder why it's not working for them. It's not only important to have a system, but how you approach using that system.

There are four things fundamentally wrong with adding someone you just met to your system without their permission. First, not everyone you meet will want to receive information from you. They may not tell you that directly but they will forward it to their junk email in which case your email doesn't get read. You're also putting the ownership on a person you just met to opt out – not a way to start a relationship. Second, not everyone is your ideal client. Third, if you add them and they didn't asked to be added, you did not get their permission. You run the risk of being reported as a spammer. Further, each time they receive an email from you, it will be a source of annoyance because their email is already filled to capacity. Rather than eager with anticipation to read something they asked to receive, your email will trigger a negative emotion. Fourth, it becomes a quantity versus quality list. Quantity does not work if nobody on your list would ever do business with you. It's the people who want to receive your value-added content that you want to establish a rapport with.

With a permission-based and opt-in only system, they are making the choice to join your community. When they opt in, they are choosing to receive information from you and likely will have expectations of receiving value-added content. With a permission-based system, you are reversing the sales process by pulling in those prospects who opt in rather than pushing hard by adding them to your list.

Be Consistent

Consistency over time creates trust. There's nothing worse than establishing an expectation and not following through on it. It does nothing for your credibility or for cultivating a strong relationship with a prospect, customer, or referral source.

Whether you send a card to a predetermined number of prospects each week or an email to your entire list community, make sure to establish regular contact. My mortgage representative has developed a nice stay in touch system. Several times a year, I receive a newsletter in my mailbox that has home decorating tips and other interesting market information about home ownership. Each year, she also invites us to the local cider mill to enjoy cider, donuts and conversation. I always look forward to receiving the newsletter and the invitation to the cider mill. Your system doesn't have to be expensive or online but it does have to provide value and remain consistent for you to be top of mind.

Develop Stakeholder-Specific Keep-In-Touch Systems

One size does not fit all. Some of your prospect-related communications may not be appropriate to include with a referral source you just met. A referral source is someone who has the same target market as you do and who may send you referrals.   Your approach and system would be different for a prospect and a referral source. When you send a letter to your referral source, cultivate the relationship by asking them how you can help them. With a little ingenuity, you may come up with a way to make them look good for their clients or simply make an introduction to someone they have been trying to connect with for some time. Having stakeholder-specific systems helps you to tailor your message and keeps your database current. In sending out a regular letter to my referral sources, I discovered several referral sources changed or expanded their target market. They returned a response in the self-addressed, stamped envelope I included with my letter. My referral sources thanked me for asking them about any updates to their contact information and their target market. It also keeps my database up to date so when I send referrals their way, they are spot on.

Keeping in touch should be more than a year-end holiday card. With value-added systems, you can close your communication gaps, establish trust, and, most importantly, be top of mind with both your prospects, clients and your referral sources.

In what ways do you keep in touch with prospects, customers, referral partners or referral sources?

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