



by Doug Knorr



Turn It Around

Douglas Knorr, known as a “retail marketing activist” is president of Knorr Marketing (www.knorrmarketing.com), a full-service marketing and advertising agency specializing in the home furnishings industry. The agency provides strategic planning, creative production, public relations, sales promotions, website development and media buying services. Headquartered in Traverse City, Mich., the firm serves clients throughout the United States.

How can you *tie the knot* with your customers?

I have the unique privilege to meet and consult with retailers all over the country. During my initial meeting with a new client, the first thing we do is take a brief walk so that I can get an overview of the store. Typically, the first question I ask is, “How do you perceive your business is doing?” All too often I hear the same answer: “It could be better but ... we’re just waiting for business to bounce back!”

What about you? Are you waiting for business to bounce back? If you are, then you have little hope of turning it around in 2008.

Today we have to do business *on purpose!*

Business will never be the same as it was a few years ago because the communication mediums and the customers have changed. Yes, it’s true — the cheese has moved, and unless you are willing to make changes and integrate new attitudes and technologies that meet the changing retail environment, your business will continue to fail.

On the other hand, if you are willing to roll up your sleeves and develop a strategic marketing strategy, not just an advertising plan, you can define new ways to grow

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your business even in these difficult times.

The biggest change in marketing, other than the increasing influence of the Internet, which we will discuss next month, is that the consumer no longer allows us to control the relationship. You have heard time and time again that the consumer is in control — but let me challenge you with this question: “What are you doing about it?”

If you want to turn it around and turn your business on in 2008, you have to focus on the needs and wants of the customer. In fact, marketing today is not just about the advertising message and medium — it's about the marriage! That's right, the marriage.

Today, the customer does not freely give you their loyalty. Research upon research shows that the consumer sees the relationship as all about them. In fact, a customer loyalty research document by Bain and Company indicated that 60 percent to 80 percent of customers who defect to a competitor said that they were satisfied or very satisfied, just before their defection.

And there is only one real reason for the defection — the customer is not committed to you! They do not see your store as the very best or “only solution” for their need. Bottom line, you are not married — you're still dating, and they are still considering the options!

So what does it take to “tie the knot” with the customer? First, and let me make this perfectly clear, it is not a job for the weak of heart! It takes commitment from top management, determination from the entire staff, and the discipline to develop and follow a strategic marketing plan.

To tie the knot with the customer, you must be able to answer four basic questions.

The first question is, “Who is my customer?” Today, you cannot be everything to everyone. You must be selective to be effective!

For example, our proprietary software, Knorr-Detect™, allows us to analyze customer databases and get a clear understanding of our customer's age, family size and their lifestyle preferences, so that we know what our best customers look like.

Secondly, you must ask, “Where can I find more of them?” Advertising to the masses is not only expensive, it's a waste. We use our system to develop primary and secondary targets, and it allows us to hold our advertising accountable.

The third question is, “What exactly are they looking for?” What unique product, service or experience must I provide to earn their loyalty? Once this is understood, you can develop your unique message or promise to the consumer.

And the fourth question you must answer is, “How do I connect with the customer and earn their loyalty?”

Once these questions are answered, you can start working on the marriage.

First, get off the treadmill of busy-ness and start working on building the relationship with your customer! You begin with research. Make it your commitment to know how your customer really feels and what they are looking for in the relationship.

Find platforms to let your customers talk to you. Spend time

reading blogs online and you will learn a lot about how the customer thinks, as well as what they demand. Then make the changes required to meet their wants and their expectations.

Make sure your dialog with the customer goes both ways. Today, it isn't enough to just send out your message to the customer; you need to listen to them. It is important to provide them a clear pathway to gain the information they are seeking on their own 24/7 and allow them to ask questions on their terms.

Making your website interactive instead of just a virtual online showroom is a great place to start. For our clients, we have created a product called Knorr-Connect™ that weaves together traditional media with the Internet and allows the customer to ask questions, schedule appointments and enjoy special pull-through offers that keep us connected to them on their terms.

Lastly, make sure that every employee is empowered to create “magic moments” with the customer. This requires that you anticipate how you will respond when the customer has a special need or a problem. These situations provide you the perfect platform to create a magic moment for the customer. Every time you provide your customer a solution, it reinforces why they are married to you.

If you want to turn it around in 2008, don't wait for business to bounce back! Take control, be proactive, and if you need help, outsource a company that can guide you through the steps to develop your strategic marketing plan today.

I really would like to know how you are turning it around in 2008! Send me an email to: dougk@knorrmarketing.com using the subject line, “How I'm Turning It Around in 2008.” I would love to hear your story. 