

"4 Ways to Grow Customers"

Ahhh,,, the first signs of spring have arrived. Flowers are blooming, birds are nesting and car carriers are loading up and heading north. For many a South Florida business owner, spring also means fewer customers and slower sales. Here are four ways that you can reduce the impact of the summer doldrums on your business by making sure your sales continue to bloom.

1. **Measure the "soft" metrics.** To capitalize on your most "growable" accounts, look for new ways to measure such relationship components as customer satisfaction, brand equity, and trust. Use a simple customer survey or comment card to measure the strengths or weaknesses of key elements in the relationship between your company and your customers. Businesses that understand where their relationships are strong can use that knowledge to strengthen these relationships further.
2. **Identify key customer groups.** Even if your company has hundreds of individual customers you can try to group them by most valuable, most "growable", or most profitable. Using this information can help you design products or service offerings that capitalize on growth opportunities. For example: A restaurant that identifies a customer group called "wine lovers" may find that this group is ripe for private wine tastings, cooking demonstrations and food pairing events, all perfect ways to draw them into the restaurant during the slow summer months.
3. **Encourage customer feedback.** Customers are usually happy to tell you exactly what's missing from your business. It's up to you to be courageous enough to ask. Customer feedback, both good and bad, is vital for creating and leveraging customer relationships. Even if you don't ask, your customers are still out in the community telling their friends and family exactly what they think about your business. Wouldn't it be nice to know what's being said?
4. **Manage lead generation.** Ineffective lead generation is acknowledged to be one of the biggest obstacles to finding new accounts. In fact, according to an Aberdeen Group "Viewpoint" study, up to 80 percent of marketing expenditures for lead generation and collateral go to waste due to lack of commitment, poor follow-up and a lack of discipline among salespeople and marketers. You need to commit to a disciplined, year-round lead generation strategy to identify and target the most "growable" accounts.

Commit now to taking the necessary steps to ensure your business doesn't wither away during the hot summer season. Take the time to talk to your best customers, develop new product offerings for your best customers and improve your lead generation and follow-up procedures. Finding out what's working and what's not will give you the "dirt" you need to make your business grow.