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MARKETING 101

Common mistakes companies make – and how to fix them

By Heather Hudson

If you work in heavy construction, marketing is probably not at the top of your list of priorities.

For many busy companies, marketing is often what you intend to focus on when business is slow. It may not immediately contribute to the bottom line. And the digital world – where most of today's marketing lives – is complicated and ever-changing.

But if you're relying solely on the (albeit, considerable) power of word-of-mouth referrals, you're stunting your company's growth, according to Harley Rivét, president of Deep Dish Digital, an interactive agency that provides marketing direction, design and development in Saskatoon, Sask.

"Word of mouth may keep you busy, but if you want to expand your sales growth, you need to get new people into the sales funnel," he explains.

To do just that, we've asked experts to identify the most common mistakes they've seen construction companies make when trying to market their businesses – and tell you how to avoid them.

Mistake #1: Avoiding marketing altogether

You're a thriving company with a steady flow of work. You don't know the first thing about marketing and you're too busy to think about it. If that's the case, YJ Tso, owner of Sepia River, a marketing specialist who once owned his own construction business in Vancouver, B.C., says not engaging in marketing might not be a mistake after all.

"It's easy to say everybody should grow their company but, having been involved in a company that grew too fast, I know [marketing] is not always a good idea. Maybe you get plenty of work from referrals and you can't take on more than that without over-extending yourself."

However, if you do have ambitions to grow your business, marketing is essential.

"It's rare to grow a business to any significant size without marketing. It just doesn't work," says Tso.

He recommends setting aside a certain amount of resources for marketing. Even one or two per cent of your annual revenue can go a long way to carrying out a successful plan that will have you poised for growth.

Mistake #2: Failing to plan

If a business prospect came to you with a vague budget and no specs, you'd know they weren't serious. If that's how you're approaching marketing your company, you're not serious either.

Just like business planning, it's critical to identify your goals and quantify how you're going to get there. And if marketing is not your area of expertise, consider handing it over to people who can work their magic on your behalf.

"Add or contract a marketing professional to your staff. Find somebody who can take your knowledge or experience and turn it into consumable content like blog posts, email newsletters, training seminars and client forums," says Rivét. "It's easy to find one by simply connecting with the Saskatchewan Professional Marketing Association at www.saskmarketing.com."

Mistake #3: Marketing offline

Business cards, flyers, door hangers and an ad in the local newspaper are all good marketing tools, but in 2016, truly meaningful marketing lives online.

"Many construction companies don't realize that their prospects and customers see their website as another extension of their office. Many fail to devote proper attention to it," says Rivét. "A website should not be an afterthought."

Both Rivét and Tso are quick to caution that hiring someone to slap together a website and put it up doesn't qualify as taking care of marketing. They say a prospect will judge your organization within two seconds of landing on your homepage.



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"Some pundits have claimed that business-to-business sourcing is pretty much 80 per cent decided before they even contact a supplier. You need to have a good, resourceful website just to be a consideration," says Rivét.

Important features of a modern website include:

- Mobile-friendliness: more than half of all internet traffic comes from a smartphone or tablet – if users can't easily navigate your site that way, it's useless
- Contemporary design: tiny font against a flat background is '90s design; your site shouldn't be a paper brochure translated for the screen
- High-quality photographs: seeing is believing; show your prospects who you are, what you have and the kind of work you've done with professional photographs
- A call to action: give your visitors something to do at your site, i.e. download a free white paper on a subject they could use, click a "Call now" button, visit blog content, etc.

- Contact information: an email form for users to contact you is great, but make sure you regularly check its functionality and respond to all inquiries; otherwise it does more harm than good

Mistake #4: The "set-it-and-forget-it" approach to marketing

Tso says he sees it all the time. The business that puts together a good website – and then brushes their hands together and considers marketing finished.

"It's important to create content [on your website] that other people will find interesting and useful. That might be resources they can use in their work and it might also be a very clear picture of what your company does and how they do it.

"But most importantly, you've got to update your site regularly."

Tso advises clients to include good-quality images and information about construction projects that are in progress.

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"You can tell a lot about a construction project by its progress photos, including the conditions of the worksite, how organized it is, what kind of equipment is used and the scale of the projects the company takes on. [Photos] are immediate testaments to things you can do."

Other ways to keep your website fresh and relevant – which will keep Google interested and result in better search engine results – is to put together case studies when each project is complete. Rather than posting a testimonial page, hire a writer or marketing company to write a complete package that tells the story of your biggest triumphs.

"Word of mouth may keep you busy, but if you want to expand your sales growth, you need to get new people into the sales funnel."

– Harley Rivét, President,
Deep Dish Digital

Mistake #5: Avoiding technology to meet marketing (and sales) goals

"Using targeted email marketing or running online ads on websites that their customers use can be a lot cheaper and effective than billboards or tradeshow conferences," says Rivét.

"It's a lot easier to stay in contact and aware of client information with customer relationship management (CRM) software and email marketing. That's the first thing I would recommend to any company looking to do a better job of customer service – capture emails and store them in a CRM system."

You don't have to be intimately aware of every new piece of technology or social media platform to make use of them. But you should probably employ someone who

does – or contract your marketing to a business that can make good decisions on your behalf.

"For social media, I would strongly recommend getting a presence on LinkedIn and creating a YouTube channel to showcase some videos of the projects that you have built," says Rivét.

Having a presence on social media is also important – but only if you're committed to maintaining it regularly, i.e. dedicating two

to four hours of resources a week to ensuring all accounts are monitored.

When done right, marketing is interwoven into the fabric of your business. You invest in it the same way you do in good-quality equipment. You make it part of everyday operations.

"There's not a 'set-it-and-forget-it' approach that actually works. When done right, it can be the smartest investment your business makes," says Tso. 



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