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Musings From Panera

I write from inspiration. A subject comes to me and within five minutes I have half of the column mapped out in my head. How that subject comes to me is a mystery, but I have never had a problem coming up with things to write about for Successes & Strategies, even being 62 issues in. I had about 3 or 4 things in my mind for this month, however none of them seemed to warrant an entire column. So I decided to write about each of these things as "short subjects" and include them in one column.

Signs - Did you know that the mere existence of an "OPEN" sign, in front of a business or in its window, by itself increases sales? Knowing that, if I were any kind of business that accepts walk-ins, I'd seriously consider investing in one. Does "OPEN" not fit the mood you wish to create? Well, perhaps you can try "Please come in" for your sign. How about thinking outside of the box and having a sign that says boldly and brightly: "Accepting New Clients" or one that says "Customers rule!" I think a non-traditional business with such a sign would find the results a bit surprising. You can thank me for the sales increase later.

Social Networking - If I were a business owner and I didn't have a LinkedIn account, I'd get one fast and learn how to use it. Same goes for Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and the like. If you have not noticed, your customers are flocking to these social networking sites like bees to a hive (meaning by the millions). Chances are that the first (*insert your industry here*) they encounter will be someone they connect with for being where *they* are *first*. You do have to be very careful with how you manage your relationship with possible customers on these sites. In order for them to allow you to keep their attention for any period of time, you should use this opportunity to inform and entertain vs. sell on about a 10 to 1 ratio. Use your business presence on social networking sites to become an indispensable resource for potential and existing customers. Opportunity is knocking here so don't blow it by turning into an advertising machine. You'll get tuned out and quick.

iPod for - You can keep an iPod in a compartment in a ski hat, in

a zipper pocket in your gloves, they have special holders on baby carriages, in cars, on bikes, boats, exercise equipment and in countless other places...except one. By all means someone can inform me if there is an exception but airlines, who have recently invented checked bag fees, second bag fees, change-your-flight fees and countless other ways to extract cash from their customers, seemingly are unable to find a place where their customers can easily store their iPod (among other things). Customers are left to put them in that lovely pouch behind the seat in front of you that also holds old gum, candy, grocery lists, magazine offer post-cards, and of course, the barf bag. Alternatively, they keep them on their person or in their carry-on luggage to be dug out at great inconvenience mid-flight. The poorly designed drop down or pull out trays are in need of a drastic re-design. With a better cup holder, a clipboard type device to hold papers and an iPod-type holder, the airlines might just start to give the impression that they care.

Cooks vs. Servers circa 1979 - Servers (a PC word for waiters and waitresses) work hard for their money, as do cooks. When I was in college I worked as a cook at Pizza Hut (and I still have the burn scars on my knuckles to prove it). At my earning peak, I pulled in a cool \$4.25/hour. While the servers made roughly half that amount hourly, their tips pushed their pay to \$8 - \$12/hour. I drove a Bondo-laden 1970 Chevy Impala and the top 2 servers, both college students like me, drove brand new Pontiac Sunbirds. The point of this? Be sure your compensation reflects fairly the relative contributions of those responsible for your profits - or hard feelings may occur, and endure. OK, maybe I'm a little bitter - I can still tell you the colors of those two Sunbirds, 30 years later. Now that I have finally vented, I can move on.

Cheers from the Panera in Danvers.

See you next month.



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