

Five Tips for Making a Great One That Lasts!

by Bethany Foyt

The key to a good first impression is a firm handshake and confident eye contact . . . at least that's what my mother always told me. But in today's business world, the struggle with making your first impression count is that it's not only in person, but also virtually.

First and foremost, you must ask yourself an important question:

What do you want to be known for?

The answer to this question is different for every business and it is what makes you unique. Creating an impression *with purpose* gives you control over the future of your business and allows your marketing efforts to fall into place. Once you've defined what you want to be known for, here are a few steps to making that known through great first impressions, in-person and online:

1. Write an article about your company- Take some time to highlight specifically how your company has excelled in customer service or how you and your employees volunteered at community charities. You can submit your article to periodicals or ask to be highlighted in the charity's newsletter for some recognition. If you're passionate about something, there is no harm in getting some bonus exposure, especially when it may be to your target market!

First Impression Reaction: "Wow, this company actually goes the extra mile for something they believe in on top of providing valuable services. I want to be involved with this company."

2. Apply for awards that show off your skills-For example, if you want to be known for great customer service, seek out applications or awards that acknowledge great customer service efforts. If you're a finalist or even if you are not chosen, you can still share how you applied and took time to share your customer service success stories.

First Impression Reaction: "Customer service is important to us and it looks like it's important to this company as well since they received honorable mention at Microsoft's Customer Service Conference."



3. Be a judge for awards in your area of expertise- Check out area schools, community competitions, or relevant business awards such as “top companies to work for in Phoenix” for judging opportunities. Being a notable judge builds up your reputation as an expert dedicated not only to your area of expertise, but your community. For example, Cheryl Strege (President of The Partner Marketing Group) has judged Microsoft’s Distinction in Marketing award for four years which highlights Microsoft partners’ marketing accomplishments. This shows our clients the depth of our marketing expertise and our dedication to the Microsoft community.

First Impression Reaction: “I’m impressed with how much experience this company has and how even other companies leverage their expertise for competitions.”

4. Volunteer to teach about your area of expertise- The first time I visited my dentist, she shared with me how she teaches at the community college a few times a week. I was immediately impressed with her initiative to not only drill into people’s teeth on a daily basis, but to go and teach her skills to the next generation of dentists. It may not be at local colleges, but check out opportunities at your Chamber of Commerce, SBA or community associations that may benefit from what you know.

First Impression Reaction: “If they take the time to teach others outside their organization and client base, they must be passionate about what they do. Their training skills must also be great!”

5. Refresh your marketing tools, social networks and website often-It’s important to keep your marketing materials, social networks, and website up to date with the most relevant information you have. The more value you can provide, the more your prospects will want to work with you.

- Keep your content fresh on your website by incorporating blogs. Blogs are a quick and easy way to stay up-to-date without having to change entire website pages. This is also a great way to increase your search engine ranking so you’re easier to find on the web.
- Keep your prospects engaged with changing and intriguing offers. Give them deadlines so they sense the urgency of acting now.
- Engage your prospects through Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Share a “tip of the day” or ask a question about their business. Building your relationships on social networks is a cost effective form of marketing.
- Change your email signature monthly to highlight specific offers or new programs. Follow the steps on <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/outlook> .
- Update your marketing materials to speak to the pain points of your customers today...not 10 years ago. Stay in touch with your current customers and don’t be afraid to ask them how you’ve helped them specifically and use their testimonials as ammunition when trying to close more sales.

First Impression Reaction: “This company really has their stuff together and looks to be actively helping companies like ours with the same issues.” And “This company provides valuable content that I can actually use. I don’t need their services now, but will definitely keep them on my radar for the future.”

So get started today by answering the question- What do you want to be known for? The steps above can take time and resources, but do not be afraid to take the next step to not only making a great first impression, but one that will stand the test of time.

IDEAS ON WHERE TO MAKE YOUR GREAT FIRST IMPRESSIONS:

Great Place to Work Institute:

<http://greatplacetowork.com/>

100 Best Companies to Work For:

http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/bestcompanies/2010/full_list/

Small Business Awards:

www.hartfordbusiness.com

www.smallbiztrends.com

www.smallbiztechnology.com

Customer Service Awards:

www.serviceinstitute.com

www.stevieawards.com

www.businessweek.com

US Chamber Award:

www.uschamber.com

Contact Bethany at Bethany@thepartnermarketinggroup.com to learn how The Partner Marketing Group’s services can help you make that first step to creating a great lasting impression on your prospects and customers.