



# ideas & inspirations

FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

From KIWIHOST

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## ideas

One of the challenges of managing a business is the continual tasks of finding new customers. Each year, for good and bad reasons, you are going to lose about 15% of your customers. Having a great product or service isn't good enough. The old adage "Build a better mousetrap and the customers will beat a path to your door" has no validity in today's market place. It has been replaced with "If you want fish for dinner, you have to go fishing".

So start to go on regular and frequent fishing trips to find new customers who will help your business grow.

Over the next few months, we will provide regular suggestions about where to fish. We hope you benefit from these ideas.

Here is this month's FISHING TIP – IDEAS FOR FINDING NEW CUSTOMERS.

Develop a plan. Consider who would make the ideal customer.

If you sell to businesses, consider what department is most likely to buy your products or services, and who, having the level of responsibility, would be the one to determine the specific purchase requirements.

Then consider how that individual would normally find products or services like yours. What circles do they travel in? Who are they likely to listen to or where do they look when they want to buy a product or service?

Find a way to put your information, or yourself, in their path.

## QUOTE FOR THE MONTH

*We can believe that we know where the world should go. But unless we're in touch with our customers, our model of the world can diverge from reality. There's no substitute for innovation, of course, but innovation is no substitute for being in touch, either.*

Steve Ballmer

## inspirations

### GONE FISHING

The TV3 programme, "Gone Fishing" and its wheelchair bound presenter sets the tone for this month's ideas & inspirations. Graeme Sinclair, not withstanding his disability, goes anywhere around New Zealand and the Pacific to find fish.

Gone Fishing has stood the test of time. It has been on our screens for a number of years and obviously draws viewers who continue to enjoy Sinclair's comments about it "Being a Beauty", whenever the most mediocre fish is hauled aboard.

But this is what marketing and customer care are all about – celebrating the wins irrespective of how small or how big. Being able to share with others their excitement about their success.

So as you explore this month's ideas & inspirations, think about application. Don't worry if the things you put in place don't produce the "Big One". But above all else, you have to go to the fish. They won't come to you. If you can't find them at one point, try somewhere else. Customers are like fish – always on the move – never responding to the same patterns.

Be persistent and don't let small things like Graeme Sinclair's wheelchair get in your way.

Attitude coupled with commitment to succeed will overcome whatever barriers may be put in front of you.

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## ADD FLAVOUR TO YOUR BUSINESS WITH A PINCH OF VALUE

This is a story about Andrea Bizzarri who loves to cook. As far as I know, he owns the only restaurant in New Zealand that offers DYOD (Do Your Own Dinner) dining – a unique added value concept that has made his restaurant a unique and experiential product.

Andrea loves to cook! He was five when he started making tortellini, gnocchi and home-made spaghetti beside his grandmother in the family home in southern Rome. Andrea later graduated from studying Italian cuisine to join the team at Le Cirque in New York – one of New York's most famed Italian restaurants. A decision to move to the Southern Hemisphere saw a quick stop in Perth, before the shores of Mission Bay beckoned. In 1998 Andrea bought Positano, already a food lovers destination and changed the name to Ristorante Andrea.

Not content with cooking authentic Italian fare, Andrea developed the idea of 'Do Your Own Dinner' – an Italian cooking class with a difference. "I wanted to introduce something new and I thought New Zealanders are always up for a new experience – maybe they'd like to make their own pasta, tortellini, gnocchi. And they do – so much so we added a dessert to the menu, which shows different techniques of making and decorating a cake. I am constantly amazed at the artistry of the patterns we get on the finished product."

This is another example of how a business has set itself apart by creating a difference. It has built a unique product within the parameters of the existing business that has not only enhanced the business, but has also widened the appeal of the core business.

Ristorante Andrea can be found on Tamaki Drive at Mission Bay, Auckland.

## YOUR CALL IS IMPORTANT TO US

How often have you listened to the recorded message sandwiched between music tracks as your temper and stress level has continued to rise? We all have.

Now what about your organisation? Have you called your organisation recently and as a customer tried to navigate your way through a myriad of either holding messages or complex menus?

Today your phone greeting is perhaps even more important than your face to face greeting. As a caller, our attention is focused on the message as you have no physical or visual elements to spread your attention.

There is little doubt that the recent debacle of Telecom and their email changes will cost Telecom dearly. However they will never know what that cost is as their customer base will quietly erode as people choose in their own good time to move on. Never make the assumption that it's okay because your clients are locked into a contract and they will forget. Customers today never forget and they will exercise their right to change supplier when they are ready to.

As a part of any customer service or customer call management process, telephone response and waiting times are critical to the continual success of your organisation.

The first step is you putting yourself into the customer's shoes. So at a peak time, call your own organisation and monitor your experience through the eyes of a customer.

Ask yourself the question, "As a customer how do I feel about the experience?" If you are uncomfortable with the experience, change it. Examine exactly why the problem is occurring, whether it is a long waiting time or the inability to talk to someone who understands your problem. Until you fix it and fix it for good, it will continue to be a festering and growing dissatisfaction amongst your clients.

So don't let this happen to you. Audit your telephone effectiveness, if necessary every day. Make changes and find solutions to the little problems before they become major business hurdles.

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## HOW TO GENERATE REFERRALS

Business such as real estate and insurance depend largely on referrals as a business development tool. So why have other businesses failed to use referrals as a prime and practical tool?

The referral is the most cost effective promotional strategy that any business can use. Referrals provide an endless flow of new clients that will both build new business and replace the natural attrition of the client base.

Building the referral into your business strategy is simple. Ask yourself these three questions:

**Do my existing clients understand the full scope of my services?** It's possible you have clients happy to give referrals who are aware only of the services they use. The solution is to make sure that all your clients have a big-picture view of your company.

**Do my clients know I want to grow my business?** If you think it's tacky to request referrals, we suggest the reverse is true. When you talk referrals, most clients are thrilled that you thought so highly of them that you're sharing your growth plans and requesting their help. Try it and you'll be astounded at the reaction. If you still balk at the thought, plant a quiet seed with a note instead of a conversation.

**Do I reward referral-generating behaviour?** Acknowledge any referral from colleagues with a gift, a free product or an extra resource. It's an honest appreciation and recognition for those people who have helped you. They've taken time from their schedules to do you a favour. Make it a habit to reward any referral, even if it turns out to be the worst prospect you've ever seen. People appreciate rewards, and you'll keep getting referrals.

**The Point:** By devoting a greater share of your marketing resources to the creation of an extensive referral network, you'll see a compounded pay-off year after year. <sup>(1)</sup>

## HOW NOT TO LOSE A CUSTOMER

The focus of ideas & inspirations has always been on the positive and we don't believe that emphasising the negative by telling unpleasant stories is a good way to make a point.

However we recently read an article entitled, "How to Lose a Customer", which listed ten strategies that many companies use that ultimately will lose them clients.

So we should examine our own performance and behaviour against the list so that we become proactive in building strategies that remove the chance of these things happening within our own business.

So here's the list of strategies and activities that will ensure your customer list will reduce.

Ask yourself these questions – Do we...

Play games with their finances, avoid paying rebates or ignore discounts?

Lie to your customers or intentionally mislead them ?

Forget previous promises and refuse to live up to your commitments?

Make false claims or advertising about your products or services,; practice "puffery"?

Make it virtually impossible to get in touch with a human being; add more menu options to answering services; do not return messages?

Disrespect your customer; pretend they are not there; ignore them; be rude or condescending?

Blame problems on company policy or co-workers; take whatever path that is necessary to avoid personal responsibility?

Remind your customer that you are their only option?

Assign numbers to your customers and avoid using their names; make them look for their number?

Tell them to quit whining because there are other customers who have the same problem or have it much worse?

Create an environment that rewards those who stamp out this behaviour and in the process create evangelists amongst your customers. <sup>(2)</sup>

special  
announcements

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## SOLUTIONS ARE MORE HELPFUL THAN APOLOGIES

Apologies are not overly helpful when it comes to managing a customer's expectations, but results are.

Everyone makes mistakes. However, the most important first step for anybody confronted by an angry customer is not to attribute blame or even to be too quick to apologise – the first step is to focus on what will satisfy the customer.

By all means apologise for the inconvenience the customer is experiencing and, if your company is to blame, then you must apologise for the problem. However, if the situation is no fault of yours, you should still focus on making the customer happy.

While customer expectations can sometimes be unrealistic and damaging, it is important to manage a customer's expectations with a sound explanation and to offer alternatives, if possible and practical.

Recently, a friend had a small component of his fridge breakdown. His expectation was that it was a small part and therefore would be cheap to replace. As it turned out, this component was part of a larger 'module' which had to be replaced in its entirety – that's just the way the fridge is built. This is not the service provider's fault, but he did have to manage my friend's expectations.

The solution – besides training your staff in how to deal with conflict – is to give them a written set of processes and procedures to follow in this situation, even scripting some of the things they should say, and empowering frontline staff to take ownership and exercise initiative when solving a customer's problem.

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Colin Kennedy  
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**"And if you're not 100% completely satisfied with our product, remember that a little disappointment is good for building character."**

## BUSINESS BOOSTER IDEAS

### THE 5 P's FOR SUCCESS! — PERSISTENCE

*You have to ask the question. How bad do you want it? The biggest mistake as to why people are not successful is because they give up too soon. They are not persistent in their journey toward success. Simply having persistence can get you a long way in life. When asked about how they obtained their success, many successful entrepreneurs have said, "We simply refused to give up!" They were so persistent in what they wanted; they would not let anything stand in their way. Being persistent can mean the difference between success and failure. Persistence is everything when you're looking for success!*

*The great stories of those in business, sport and science all have, as one of their cornerstones, persistence. The ability to stick with it to have sufficient faith to know that in the end you will succeed.*

Articles in I&I include reference to the following sources:

1. Three Tips for Generating Referrals. Extracted from email 6 Sept 07, MarketingProfs@marketingprofs.ctica.com
2. Mehrmann, J. How to Lose Customers. Retrieved September 2007, <http://www.businessknowhow.com/marketing/losecustomer.htm>