



KnightLine

Fall 2002

Volume 1, Number 4

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"This is a great time for a little introspection to see what is and what is not working. Tap into the power of your employees and teammates' minds and to brainstorm on your year-end action plan."

Brainstorming Can Build Your Business

by Ray Knight

*This is the fourth in the series of articles designed to help small and medium-sized businesses improve their marketing and sales by **cost-effectively** increasing awareness, protecting their customer base and attracting new business. In previous articles, KnightLine covered:*

- *Marketing-Reward Your Customers First*
- *Marketing Research Drives Results*
- *Referral Sales Make Dollars and Sense*

In this article, we focus on harnessing the power of the brainstorming process to generate new marketing and sales ideas for your business. We introduce the SWOT analysis technique and offer 10 ideas to jumpstart your business building action and planning process.

Times are tough. And when the times get tough, the tough get moving. Want some more business and potential business, take action. Face the facts, the year is almost over, but there is still time left to squeeze more sales out and do some tests or groundwork for next year. This is a great time for a little introspection to see what is and what is not working. Tap into the power of your employees and teammates' minds and to brainstorm on your year-end action plan.

One of the simple marketing planning processes you can use is a SWOT analysis. Look internally at Strengths and Weaknesses and externally at Opportunities and Threats in your marketing, operations and customer service strategies and tactics. The longest journey starts with the first step—so allocate some time today and put on your thinking caps.

Here's four areas you and your team can discuss and start working on today.

1. **Strengths:** Learn from your successes. Repeat or increase those actions that worked for your business in the past.
2. **Weaknesses:** Fix or modify a strategy, tactic or policy that is not generating new prospects or sales.
3. **Opportunities:** Try something new! Apply an idea you see another business use that left an impression on you because it was a courtesy, a convenience, clever or just plain common sense.
4. **Threats:** Identify the biggest threats impacting your business- Is it the economy as a whole, the trends in your industry, the dynamics of your competition? Think of a series of small steps your business can take weekly to address those issues and stick with the action plan.

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To jump start your process, here are 10 ideas that could get your wheels turning.

1. **Find Lost Business**- Where did they go? Call or write customers you haven't seen in awhile and find out what is happening in their lives. Tell them you want their business and entice them back. A simple way is to examine old order forms, billing software or your customer database for lost revenues.
2. **Work Existing Clients**-Increase communications with your existing customers-send a postcard, letter or email once a month and stick with it. Better yet, ask for their email address and save the printing and postage costs!
3. **Engage New Clients**-Find out more about their needs. Ask them some questions while they are in your office or on the phone and identify how often they may need your product/service or experience. Ask them if you can call or write them periodically.
4. **Add a Service to Sell Your Products**- Do you take orders on the phone and offer free delivery? Have you tried offering to do the shopping in your store for your client to save them time and present three options for their business or gift giving needs? You could consider creating a simple, inexpensive website to showcase your offerings too. What about a grocery store printing and providing a Shopping List that coincides with the major product categories in the aisles of their store?
5. **Offer New Conveniences**- As nearly everyone struggles with the challenge of balancing out work/life demands, convenience is a key selling point. Could you imagine if the local grocery store had a shopping/delivery service for time-starved double-income households? What about bringing your service to your clients instead of them coming to you? What if the local florist or home furnishings or antiques store visited you in your office or home with their photos/catalog to help you find just the right item? Or the pet grooming store or salon that calls or writes (like the dentists do) to remind you to drop by for your pre-scheduled appointment next week?
6. **Personalize Your Products/Promotions**- Any business can start to personalize promotions by recognizing their clients' birthdays, anniversaries or business anniversary. Start collecting those dates and drop them into a simple calendar for easy reference and action.
7. **Secure Customers Involvement**- Solicit and publish their opinions. What if a video store started a notebook with client's comments on their favorite movies that you could read when looking for just that right movie for you, your spouse or your family? Or a grocery store created an area to post and share favorite recipes? Or how about setting up demonstrations in your store to entertain and educate? How about giving away some professional advice for free to attract potential new clients?
8. **Apply Timely Themes and Promotions**- Make a commitment to do something new each month over the next three months. October—"A Deal So Great It's SCARY". November- "Thanks For Giving Us Your Business" or December- "Our Gift to You". Get creative, if you are not making as much sales as you are used to, you'll might as well have some fun using the spare time you have available being creative to acquire and better serve more customers.
9. **Go Direct to Where Your Customers Live** -Test doing a direct mail piece to your target markets and give them a special offer or incentive to respond. Go house to house- what about testing the home delivery of a printed offer by hiring some local youths to deliver a door hangar to a section of town as a

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test? If you have your customers' names, outside services can help you inexpensively obtain their email addresses to activate the online channel of communication.

10. **Special Pricing/Offer for the Low Times-** Almost every business has high and low hours, days or seasons, but many have the same prices at all times. Restaurants use the “blue plate special” and bars offer “Happy hour”, what are you trying in your business? What about offering a gift certificate for \$10 value for \$9 dollars if used for certain product or service or at a certain time?

Experience has consistently demonstrated that two heads are better than one. So harness the brainpower within your employees, friends and family-all you have to do is ask, listen, record, evaluate, take action and measure results and progress. Additionally, sometimes to think out of the box, companies need to seek ideas from outside their box—or outside the four walls of their business. Ideas to build your business can be found in all typed of magazines, books, newsletters and online, all you need is the desire to improve results and the courage to take action.

Ray Knight, President & CEO of Knight Consulting, has over 20 years of marketing research, marketing, business development and sales experience gained internationally and domestically as both a corporate executive and an entrepreneur in a variety of industries. Much of the content included in KnightLine incorporates strategies and tactics he has personally applied to growing his and clients' businesses. Ray lives and works in Miami Springs and can be reached at 305-888-1905 or by email at knytlyfe@hotmail.com. Read past articles and learn more techniques at www.shadow.net/~rayknight/