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Marketing**

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Thinking Outside of the Box

By Gregory Neil

If sales is the life blood of a business, marketing is the delivery system. But if the delivery system is still in “business as usual” mode, and one is hoping and waiting for the economic climate to change — think again. The news everywhere is grim and three quarters of the way through the year things are still pretty tough everywhere.

Across the country the number of leads coming in to companies every week is significantly less than it was 10 to 15 years ago. The insurance companies substantiate that fact with a significant drop reported in claims, AAA alone shows a 20 percent drop. And for the first time in several years, the insurance industry institute reported a first quarter loss in property and casualty claims. As the knot tightens around who gets the remaining claims, more contractors are competing for a smaller pool of work, allowing insurance companies to be more selective in their choice of contractors. The prediction here is that it isn't going to change any time soon.

When the going gets tough, get creative!

Claims may have slowed down, but they haven't stopped. Believe it or not — now is a really good time to invest in improving the systems and practices in a business, and the



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first place to focus some attention is on your marketing efforts. Don't buy into the doom and gloom the media pumps out daily. There are still many opportunities to be found, but one has to go after them. There is work out there, and now is a really good time to be very aggressive and creative in the company's marketing efforts. Passive advertising may have worked in the past, but that's not happening now. Companies waiting for the phone to ring or relying on advertising efforts are going out of business.

Here are a few tips:

Have the Right People on Board.

Take a page from the best seller Jim Collins wrote — **Good to Great**. The first thing to do is get the right people. Collins says the right people are the ones who are ready to do whatever needs to be done. They are aligned with the company and its vision. It's very important to have strong and aggressive marketing people right now. Opportunities may not look like they used to nor will customers seek out a company like they did in the past. Therefore, in order to know what's going to work best in an area, a company needs innovative people to lead the effort. People who can get out and explore a target market, find out what the concerns are, and bring creative and affordable solutions.

Board Ups as a Primary Source for Marketing. There are very few companies who have not had some success with the pursuit of board ups, which is possibly the single most important method if done well, but again this takes effort. To establish an effective program and get one past all the significant hurdles it can be helpful to use a consultant or another company experienced in this segment of the market.

Are boardups a viable marketing option? The short answer is yes. The real question is: If firms are generating board-up opportunities in your area and your company doesn't handle them, who is?

Doing the Same Thing, Produces the Same Results

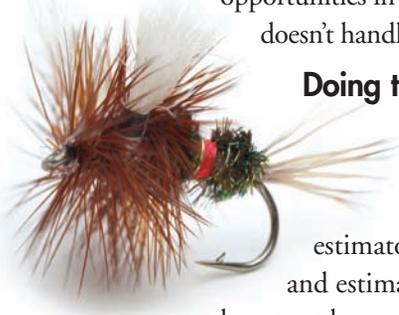
Companies used to view project managers and estimators as simply project managers and estimators. Those days are gone and these people are now seen as account managers.

Companies are being forced to reduce and streamline their work forces and that means estimators who can write for more than one division.

Jeff Farley, CR, of Custom Restoration says, "Estimators used to be able to make a living just being order-takers with the insurance referral work continually flowing in if you just did a good job. Those days are over and now estimators have to develop and maintain a book of business, becoming not only effective marketers, but proficient sales people."

"If estimators are effective managers of their time and can delegate administrative tasks so they can concentrate on sales, even better yet for them. It's important to also be 'account managers' and keep contact with past business referrers. There's so much competition in the marketplace now that you must develop and maintain a consistent presence along with a good reputation so you're not forgotten in the glut of competitors."

Candy routes or just saying hello do not build enough value for a potential client to adequately differentiate between companies. So effective marketing has to be based on a company's unique selling proposition (USP) that offers real value for the customer. Solve their pain and a company can win the work. If an estimator doesn't learn to qualify prospects, understand the sales process and have a system, he or she can waste a lot of time doing free estimates, being



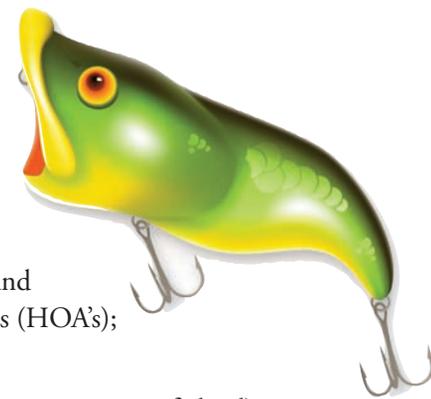
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an unpaid consultant and staying busy without ever selling much work.

Successful companies are using many of the available avenues in order to reach their target markets. No one method may hit anything out of the park, but if several methods are used together, it is possible to generate enough work to sustain a business and possibly experience significant growth — even in this economy.

Here is a partial list of important targets:

- Adjusters and Agents;
- Property Managers;
- Facility Managers;
- Home Builders;
- Apartment Communities and Home Owners Associations (HOA's);
- Office Building Managers,
- Government Agencies (city, county, state, federal);
- School Districts;
- Colleges;
- Universities;
- Class A office buildings; Law, Accounting and other professional firms;
- Hotels;
- Restaurants;
- Fortune 1000 companies.



Also don't forget to target referral partners such as plumbers, carpet cleaners, flooring stores, decorators, designers and architects. In addition, associations like Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA), International Facility Managers Association (IFMA), claims associations, and continuing education classes can be good lead generators.

Time to Reinvent Your Unique Selling Proposition

How a company markets matters more than ever because of the current economic environment and the competition from other contractors. Marketing services the same way one did 10 years ago will not be as effective as it used to be. How a company communicates that fact to potential customers may be the deciding difference. Clients may seem more interested in obtaining the best price than ever before, but they still have to get the job done successfully. Finding creative ways to make offers that are affordable and well within your company's capacity, but are above and beyond what's normally expected will differentiate the firm from companies that have no other option but to compete on price. As Farley says, "Solve their pain and you can win the work."



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Unstoppable Determination and Great Customer Service

A marketing person from Four Star Restoration in Fremont, Calif., walked into a chiropractic school only to find he was a week late and the job had gone to another company. Most people would have left a card and walked away — but he didn't do that. Instead, he asked to see where the leak had happened. When he was shown the area, he noticed the rubber base was detached from the wall. Upon closer inspection he found the walls were soaked — the previous company had dried out the carpet, but left without checking anything else.

Radical Innovation — Adapt or Die

Mark Labourdette, CR, of Design Build Specialists, Inc. (formerly GGHR, Inc.) in Novato, Calif., has been working successfully in the restoration industry for 25 years. Mark's business is located in the Bay Area just north of San

Francisco in a remodeling rich environment, so when things started to change in the local economic climate, Labourdette got busy and built a new showroom. As a restoration contractor, he realized he had an edge over other local contractors because of his expertise with Xactimate pricing. About \$300,000 and six months later, Labourdette has a turn-key offering as a small project specialist for customers with projects under \$300,000. With a full kitchen, customers as well as design professionals love coming in to work on projects with Labourdette and his staff. ■

Gregory Neil is the president of Gregory Neil Associates in San Anselmo, Calif.

He gives employers and employees the tools to create win-win solutions for day-to-day operational challenges, empower employees to be the driving force of the business, and allow owners to "just be an owner" in the business. He can be reached at greg@gregoryneilassociates.com.

