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Make client contact count

Create a perception of quality among your clients and watch your sales improve

Oct 1, 2004
By: M.J. Gilhooley
Business Planner



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Many landscape firms fully realize and embrace the importance of quality service, but they don't yet fully understand how to communicate the perception of that quality. Why is this so important?

In a ranking of 16 small cars, the top quality car was 12th in sales and the second-highest came in 9th. There may be objective ways to test the true relative value of two landscape or lawn care firms, but consumers don't conduct

these tests when making decisions. They go with their perceptions. Like it or not, your average revenue is firmly grounded in your ability to make every client contact count.

Consumer spending on professional landscape and lawn care services will climb to \$41.6 billion in 2004, said the most recent survey commissioned by the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA), a 31% growth rate. How much does the power of perception fit into this increase?

"Referrals from family members or friends is the top method (55%) used by those hiring landscape/lawn service professionals," said the survey. "Other methods used were: advertising (22%), phone book/Yellow Pages (22%), area professional organizations, Internet and contact from the professional."

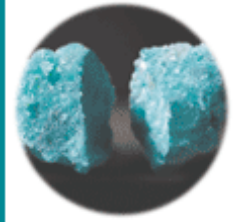
Before you or your staff can effectively inspire this kind of impressive referral base, ask yourself a few important questions: What do you think of your profession? How do you perceive your company and your services?

If you want a long-term return on a professional image boost, you must have a genuine, company-wide buy-in. The quality of your client contacts will measurably improve when your team begins to experience the passion that got you into this industry in the first place.

The first step is to recall and reinforce what makes your services different and better, and then arm your clients with that knowledge.

What do your clients say?

What are professional landscapers and lawn care operators judged by? You might be surprised.



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LM WEEK IN REVIEW



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Echo: two-stroke is alive and well

Grounds accident reveals



They're judged on the following points:

- How long does it take the office to return phone calls? E-mails? What do prospects listen to when they're put on hold? Are they reminded of the advantages of doing business with your firm?
- What is the appearance of your service representative on a first call? Does he or she project professionalism? Are the shoes dirty and worn? Do they act tired and indifferent?
- Do you and your staff make it to appointments on time? Are jobs completed as scheduled? Do you leave the job sites cleaner than when arrived? Do your crew members retrieve clients' newspapers from the driveway or save homeowners steps by pulling garbage cans to the curb?
- What is the condition of the notebook or clipboard your team uses on calls? What do the forms on the clipboard look like? What does the vehicle look like? Are you or your staff jotting down notes with a pen that has been chewed on or, even worse, displays another company's name on it?
- Does your handshake confirm that you're someone who cares about outstanding service and attention? Do you give the occasional 'gift' such as a rain gauge for the woman of each household in a nice box with a big bow? Perhaps provide a dozen golf balls on the company's anniversary as a thank you?

You may want to work closely with your printer to find useful household or business items you can adorn with your logo. Soccer season coming up — maybe water bottles for the kids, or a soccer ball! When was the last time you drove around a neighborhood to identify common landscaping needs? Perhaps you see a lot of the wrong kind of plants. Come up with a list of plants that would work in their subdivision — trees, shrubs, flowers — and distribute it with your name and logo at the top of the handout. Encourage them to call with questions and requests.

There are numerous suppliers, marketing firms and consultants who can add value to the impression you make, for any budget.

More headlines for the October 29 issue.



About the Author

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About M.J. Gilhooley
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