

Diamonds in your back yard



by Nick Hughes

David was a very ambitious and proud man, who was desperate to be very rich. To this end, he traveled the globe, spending years away from home searching for a diamond mine. He knew that once he owned a diamond mine his dream of riches would come true. Unfortunately, David ended his days neither rich nor happy. After he died, the local condominium developer bought David's property and started to dig the foundation. And what did he find? He found that for all these years David was sitting right on top of a very large, very rich diamond mine. I tell this story to remind us to look first in our own back yards for the glittering opportunities.

The *Diamonds in Your Own Back Yard* story is a powerful model to use when developing strategic growth plans. Seldom do we look in our own backyard for the answers to our growth needs. For example, before planning new products, take a close look at your existing product line for growth opportunities. Before planning to hire a new manager, consider the opportunity of promoting from within.

Always apply the Diamonds model when you are developing strategies to increase sales to fuel business growth. In other words, do not first think about new clients, new markets, or new products. Think about the diamonds in your backyard; namely your present and past clients. They are the ones, after all, who know you, love you, and buy your products. Moreover, if that is not a good enough reason remember it costs ten times more to land a new customer than it does to sell to an existing customer.

Here are some proven strategies to nurture the diamonds in your back yard:

Keep in regular contact. It is an old adage but true, "out of sight, out of mind". You must keep in touch on a regular basis with your present and past clients and prospects. One way to do this is through a regular newsletter. With the advent of Internet tools for creating and distributing very professional-looking electronic newsletters, it has never been easier to keep in touch. But, make sure your message has value.

However, face-to-face contact is still the most effective. Pick up the phone and have a conversation. Contact customers who have not bought for a while and find out why. Meet for lunch, coffee, or martini for a more informal chat. Stay in touch and nurture these valuable diamonds.

Make it easy to buy! You may have the very best widget in the world but if it is difficult for customers to buy, you will limit

the sales. For example, if you sell consumer products then you must be available in evenings and on weekends. Think about drive-through banks and fast food outlets; you do not even need to get out of your car to buy! Whether you are business-to-business or business-to-consumer, provide easy payment options—cash, cheque, Paypal, credit card, etc. You want it to be as easy as possible to buy.

Provide free value. Recently, a major bank launched an incentive program to get new clients. They offered a really cool gift to every new customer who opened an account with them. No free value for existing clients; nothing for those loyal customers who had been with the bank for many years. Take a lesson from this. Provide free value for your customers on an ongoing basis. Hold free half-day seminars. Give them a gift subscription to Enterprise magazine. Thank them!

Educate. Do not assume your customers know all about your products. Educate them in all of your products and make sure they are brought up to date on all new products. They can only buy from you what they know you have. For example, include product catalogues and/or new product announcements in with your invoices.

Look at what your top five customers are *not* buying and talk to them about these products. This will give you a valid reason to get in touch (regular contact!) and potentially increase sales. Remember, you are not doing your customers a favour by not telling them about products that could benefit them.

Collect referrals and testimonials. Your customer base is the very best source for getting new customers. A referral from a customer who loves you and your products is the most powerful sales tool you could ever walk into a prospect with. And when your client exclaims, "You guys went above and beyond in getting me that widget," immediately ask if you can put the testimonial on to your website.

Dig down deep and you will find lots of business opportunities right in your own back yard. When you find your diamonds, look after them really well so that no one else comes along and steals them! Enjoy your successful growth. **E**

Nick Hughes is President of Your Planning Partners. The company works with entrepreneurs who are serious about growing their business. They have a number of products ranging from half-day working sessions to their famous Strategic Focus Program™. They conduct regular seminars and publish an e-news for business owners who want to grow. For information about their programs, seminars and e-news visit their website at yourplanningpartners.com, or call 416 429-2415.