

Last-Minute Marketing

by Diana Hanson

Now that the home-show season is over and you've followed up on all those leads, you can't afford to let your phone stop ringing. But this is your busiest time of year, so it's tough to make extra marketing efforts to keep the calls coming in. Here are a few easy-to-use marketing suggestions that won't take up a lot of your time. A few hours here and there, and you're done.

Tune Up Your Business Cards

Sometimes, your business card is the only thing a potential customer knows about you. This means you have 3½ by 2 inches in which to convey what you do and that you do it well—not an easy task. If you haven't given your business card any attention lately, now is the time (Figure 1).

Most big-box office supply stores offer business card printing as well as templates for designing your own card. Or you can look online and find free apps for designing a business card; Staples and Office Depot offer this service. There are also online stores such as Vistaprint (vistaprint.com) that can supply you with business cards.

Good business cards are surprisingly inexpensive. You can buy 250 professional-looking, effective cards starting at about \$30, and going up from there depending on the paper stock, the color, and extras such as raised print. For larger quantities, the cost per card goes down.

When you design your card, the following are a few things you can do to make it more effective.

Website. Prominently display your website address. If the card gets someone halfway to calling you, your website will take her the rest of the way.

Proofread. Make sure there are no typos on your card. If you can't make a card without mistakes, how are you possibly going to build a deck without mistakes?

***TIP:** Give each employee a short stack of business cards. Provide an incentive for your crew to look for ways to present the cards—perhaps a \$50 gift card in return for a customer gained through their efforts. Use your imagination.*

Use both sides. Use the front of the card for the usual information: website, company name, phone number, your name, address (at least the city and state),

and email address. On the back, put a stellar photo of one of your decks.

Phone number. There should be one primary phone number on your business card, and it should connect the caller to a live person, not to a recording. Potential customers might move on to the next deck builder on their list if they get a recording when they call you. A recorded message instead of a live person also makes you look like a very small business. If you aren't in a position to hire someone to answer the phone, consider an answering service, or at the very least, a call-forwarding service, so that you don't miss calls.



Company name is easy to read

Single phone number, not a list

Preferable if email matches website

Short company description



Author suggests putting the website on the front instead, and in larger type

Back of card is ideal for displaying a photo of your work

Figure 1. A business card should have both the name of your company and your website prominently displayed on the front of the card. Don't leave the back of the card blank; it's a perfect place for a photo that shows off your work, as well as for additional contact information.

Bi-fold cards. Consider a bi-fold business card. While it costs more to have printed, you double your business-card real estate. You can even afford to leave blank space for making notes, like an appointment date or a referral discount that can be presented back to you when you're making the sale. Use the extra space for a bigger logo, comments like "serving the Any County for over 20 years," or a catchy slogan like "What the heck! Get a deck!" An added benefit of a bi-fold card is that it is not like other cards in your potential customer's wallet. It stands out. It also stands out on a kitchen counter or desk and is likely to be handled more and have a longer shelf-life.

Send a Message With a Sign

I've read that it takes five impressions to make an impact on potential customers. In other words, they need to be exposed to your name at least five times before they start to recognize it and feel connected enough to trust you. Every time someone sees one of your signs, you make an impression. Signs work for you 24-7 and they are generally not expensive. You should have lots and lots of signs placed where they will be seen often.

Magnetic car-door signs and yard signs (with lawn stands) are available at reasonable prices, usually at the same sources

where you buy your business cards.

Mobilize. Signs are particularly effective on things with wheels, which become mobile billboards. So make sure that every vehicle, trailer, and wheelbarrow you own has a sign (**Figure 2**). Every drive to a jobsite, lumberyard, or a favorite lunch spot is an opportunity to make hundreds, if not thousands, of impressions—an opportunity you can't afford not to take advantage of.

***TIP:** Put a supply of your recently tuned-up business cards in the glove box of each vehicle. Your vehicle drivers should never need to tell a potential customer that they don't have a card to give her.*

You can do anything from expensive yet effective vehicle wraps and professionally designed signage, all the way down to magnetic signs and window lettering. Just put something on each and every vehicle.

Not only do vehicle signs gain impressions for you, but by being seen frequently around town, they also make you look busy. Potential customers like to hire busy professionals. They think you are a good choice because others have hired you. Nothing attracts customers more than popularity.

Signs in yards. Always put a com-

pany sign in the front yard of each jobsite. Neighbors trust their neighbors to pick a good contractor. Neighbors are also curious about and competitive with their neighbors, which will prompt them to take a look at your website, and perhaps even strike up a conversation with you while the project is going on. You'll then have leads where the potential customers have seen your sign and your work and have become acquainted with you. That's a powerful result from a little sign.

Yard signs are inexpensive. The type that real-estate agents use is sturdy and versatile. The sign insert is common and easy to get printed up. If you are unsure of the best place to have one of these made, ask a real-estate agent.

If you ask nicely, customers may even let you leave your sign in their yard for a couple of weeks post-build. Every car that drives by your sign is another impression.

***TIP:** Make sure your website and your phone number are prominently displayed on your yard sign.*

Signs on people. Put signs on your crew and on yourself (**Figure 3**). Shirts with company logos are walking, talking, impression-making superstars. Everywhere you and your crew members go—out to lunch, the bank, or the grocery



Figure 2. Add signs to the sides of your truck to turn it into a mobile billboard advertising your company. Make sure the phone number can be easily read from a distance.



Figure 3. Hats and T-shirts with your company's logo help establish your brand and will be appreciated by your employees.



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store on the way home—your name and website go too. Just like vehicle signs, shirts with a logo create many, many impressions.

TIP: You raise a customer's comfort level when your team of workers arrives to build her dream deck wearing company shirts. Customers like knowing they are dealing with professionals, so why not look like professionals, too?

Put your company name and logo on the front, and (in large-print) website and phone number on the back. T-shirts work well, but a nice collared polo-style or button-down shirt will make an even better impression. Work jackets with your company's logo on the back get your message out even when temperatures are cool.

Whether you buy locally or online, you'll need to consider fit and comfort as well as price, since you are asking your crew to wear these shirts several days a week. If the shirts are uncomfortable or too tight, I can only guess what your workers will do with them. Shirts with your logo will probably cost less purchased online—I've seen them advertised for as little as \$20. Ask for a sample, or order a single shirt first to make sure you are happy with the quality.

Participate in Your Community

Potential customers want to hire companies they can connect with. Tap into their lives, needs, and wants by participating in community events. Giving of your time or money makes you appealing and admirable. This participation creates a bond between you and your community.

Your participation increases brand awareness of your company in your community. You also get in-person contact with potential customers—an opportunity to chat, shake a few hands, and hand out some business cards.

Leverage that community participa-

tion into some good public relations for your company. Send a news release to the local paper and talk about it on any social media sites you are hooked into. Put it on your website—"Proud sponsor of Scout Troop 32" or "27th place in the 2015 Fire Department Chili Cook-off." Remember to include a couple of photos of you and your crew.

Event sponsors and participants are often listed on the event website, and sometimes on a T-shirt, banner, or other advertising. You might even have a chance to be on the news when the local TV or radio station covers the event.

People like doing business with businesses that are involved in the community. They like that you are interested enough to participate in or even just attend their events. You don't need to do anything grand. Just some sponsorships or participation is all that is needed to make your community aware that you are aware of them. Sometimes, just showing up is enough for them to know you are supportive of your community.

TIP: Before you head off to a community event, make sure you are wearing your company shirt, have a pocketful of business cards, and arrive in your beautiful, branded company vehicle.

You can, for instance, do something as easy as sponsoring pizza for a scout group or Little League team, running in a charity 5K (cheering from the sidelines counts, if you are not a runner), or participating in a chili cook-off.

You can do bigger things if you are up for it. Pick a community organization that you like and find out what it needs. You can even host your own event. What you choose to participate in is not as important as the fact that you do it. ❖

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