

Make the Effort and Marketing and Promotion Will Make You a Sales and Customer Service Success

Sales and service are basic processes of your business, but they are incapable of operating efficiently and successfully unless you are willing to invest your time in the marketing and promotion process as well.

The marketing and promotion process brings prospects to your door, which makes it a close companion of sales and service. Sales is the process of transforming interested prospects into paying students, and it starts with your initial contact. Marketing and promotion is the process that generates those interested prospects, attracting them to your message and image. Some may think the sales process ends as soon as prospects are paying customers, but you should always be “selling” your current customers because they are the most likely sources of future revenues, which are also the most efficient to obtain. This is the point in the process at which sales overlaps with service.

Service, or customer service, is your relationship or interactions with students once they are paying customers. Customer service has two purposes: to deliver on your promise of what students will learn and how it will benefit them (as communicated in your marketing and promotion program); and, second, to retain as many of those students (customers) as possible, based on the strong relationships you develop and your ability to influence them to continue their training.

Think of marketing, sales and customer service as three complementary challenges:

- The first challenge (marketing) is to generate enough interest in the public to motivate a steady, but ever growing, stream of prospects to contact or visit your school.
- The second challenge (sales) is to close the highest percentage possible of those prospects.
- The third challenge (customer service) is to make sure martial arts and your school are satisfying students’ perceived needs and convince them to

become second-time, third-time, etc. customers, i.e., renewals, upgrades, pro shop purchases, etc.

These challenges only reinforce my point that marketing, sales and customer service are separate, but overlapping, processes that must work together to help you grow your school. Remember, if your school is able to boast of a high retention rate, then prospects are more likely to want to join your school because they know there must be a good reason why so many students renew. Likewise, current students are more likely to renew or upgrade because they notice that so many prospects agree to become students. Current students know that if they don’t renew that they may lose their position in a school that is generating considerable interest with the public. Current students also see your marketing, advertising and promotions, and those messages continue to reinforce their loyalty as current, and repeat, customers.

Your Sales, Marketing and Customer Service Success Begins with Your Investment of Time and Money

You can overcome these challenges successfully if you are willing to invest time in planning and implementing a marketing/advertising/promotion program. As a business owner, you only have two resources to invest: your money and your time (or others’ time). Now, if you are in a financial position that allows you to contract with professionals to help you develop and manage a marketing program, then that is probably a worthwhile investment of your money. You will still have to invest some of your time in the marketing process, but probably not quite as much. Now, if, conversely, your financial position does not allow you to invest in professional assistance, then that leaves your time.

Regardless of your circumstances or role at your school, you should invest conservatively one-fourth of your time in your marketing and promotion efforts. Many school owners invest more of their time; some even

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triple that investment to three-fourths of their time! That may seem like an impossible commitment, but they do it because it works and is worth it! Start with one-fourth of your time, however, and increase your investment slowly and as it begins to generate a return on your investment.

Address Your Prospects and Students' Needs in Your Marketing and Promotional Messages to Maximize Enrollments, Retention, Upgrades and Revenues

The marketing/promotion process targets specific audiences with images and messages that attract their interest, pre-qualifies them and draws a steady stream of prospects to your door. Your prospects must see or hear your business' "buy me" request in various forms: the sign on your business, your demonstration team, your newspaper ads or broadcast spots, your publicity story or your column in the local newspaper, word-of-mouth or directly from you or someone who works for you.

Your marketing messages (buy me requests) must not only inform, but also motivate people to take the time and effort to determine if they have a real interest in martial arts and your school's credibility to teach those skills. Then those prospects must be willing to use even more of their time and effort to contact and/or visit your school, listen to your pitch and weigh all the information carefully before agreeing to become a student. For many people, that is asking much!

No doubt, you have quickly and easily noticed how the effectiveness of your marketing process has a direct bearing on the success of your sales and customer service processes. Think of it as an industrial assembly line: Sales is unable to create "quality" products (new customers) and customer service is unable to sell additional products (repeat customers) unless marketing places the correct raw materials (prospects) on the conveyor belt.

In a sense, your marketing messages "set up" your prospects; they prepare them to be sold. That is why marketing and advertising messages must attract by the form, look or sound of your messages; must interest and motivate by the emotion and feeling that your messages convey; and must brand your school as prospects' primary choice by the quality and credibility of the information your messages provide.

Your primary marketing messages should satisfy two basic needs of every potential customer:

1. Communicate to prospects exactly how martial arts training, and your school, will address their perceived needs. Martial arts training has the possibility of being a solution for many prospects' problems (or needs), and your marketing messages must help to connect the solution, which is your school, with those needs. This is a classic marketing concept known as "the product as the hero."
2. Describe the features of your product, and school, in a series of benefit statements, which answer most prospects' primary question, "Why should I buy from you?" Remember, "features" are the "what" and the benefits are the "why," and the "why" is the most important information for prospects. It provides the credibility you need to be considered as the "solution" to their problems or needs.

Although this is not a copy writing report, let me provide you with some examples.

- If a primary feature of your school is a family program with discounted rates, then the benefit to family prospects is saving money. A secondary benefit is the opportunity to share an activity with the entire family.
- If a primary feature of your school is self-defense classes for women, then there might be a dual benefit that will appeal to women: learning to defend themselves and toning and trimming with increased physical activity.

Take These Action Steps to Improve Your Sales, Marketing and Customer Service

To invest your time in your marketing and promotion process more effectively and efficiently, consider the following actions:

- Contact your local media: newspaper(s), magazines, radio and TV. Develop first-name relationships with editors, station managers, disc jockeys, talk show hosts, news anchors/announcers, producers and reporters whose assignments relate to your business, even in the smallest ways. Obtain their complete contact information. Send them interesting story ideas and press releases once a month, every month. As Chris Rappold so aptly advises, what you do at

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your school every day is newsworthy, and editors will think so too.

- Join and develop a relationship with your Chamber(s) of Commerce and its members. There may also be separate Chambers in surrounding communities. Involve yourself in their activities and help them support the local business and general community.
- Develop relationships with as many school principals and teachers in your community as possible. Don't be deterred if they ignore you, fail to return your calls or even regard you as "just a martial arts school owner." Discover how you are able to help them in their missions or satisfy needs at their schools. Develop a specific message that will interest and motivate principals and teachers, create credibility and trust for you and your school and communicate that you are contributing to the community.
- Become familiar with EVERY event, fair, parade, fund-raiser, telethon and all other programs sponsored by community groups and organizations. Create a calendar of ALL of those events. Know who organizes, manages and support those events and their goals. Develop relationships with those people. Help them reach their goals and they are likely to help you reach yours.
- Use your power of influence with your students and their families to improve and help others in your community. Become known as one of those citizens of your community that doesn't stand on the sidelines when something needs to be done. Act like the master you are and lead. You will reach more people and in a meaningful, heartfelt and genuine way.
- o If there are children in hospitals that need emotional support, then volunteer to provide visits, demos and motivational chats.
- o If there is a waterway or field in your community that's dirty with trash, then organize a crew to clean it. In your position, you should be able to mobilize 100 people to complete such a job quickly, compared to the week a smaller group may need.
- o Start a "Random Acts of Kindness" program and be the catalyst for thousands of kind acts. Ask your mayor and every school principal to keep a "kind acts" journal for a day. Convince them to support your program and teach its lesson by example.
- o If there are children in your community who are being bullied, then start a mentoring program that involves your students teaching bully-management techniques.
- o Help a family in need once a month throughout the year.
- Know your customers better. Don't just sell them a product or service but really know them as individuals and then you are better able to help them satisfy their personal needs. A more personal relationship with customers is often the strongest method for retaining them as repeat customers. When you're able to influence your students' lives in a positive manner; when you're able to help them develop a better attitude; and when you're able to motivate them to take action to achieve their goals, then you have loyal, happy customers. Happy customers advertise for you.
- Convince your students to make their martial arts lessons an important part of their lives outside of the school environment. When you are able to motivate a child to behave at home, in school, in public and with friends, according to the lessons and ideals you're teaching them at your school, then you are implementing your most powerful sales tool. Students who are more polite, thoughtful, organized and motivated are walking advertisements that other parents want their children to emulate. When you're able to help your adult students to manage their anger better, release their stress healthfully, remain focused and FEEL better, then you're scoring big sales points.
- Read the books of such authors as Tom Peters, Jay Abraham and Jay Conrad Levinson. Their books on sales and management are your homework, your education and re-education to prepare you to succeed at marketing, sales and customer service.
- Subscribe to at least one sales and management magazine and read it cover-to-cover every month.
- Create a year-at-a-glance calendar of promotional activities on a wall in your office and in your day planner.

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- Perform 10 acts of marketing every working day of the month.
- Read your local newspaper every day from which you should be able to extract at least one marketing idea or contact.
- Ask 20 of your professional peers to help you determine what is newsworthy at your business and what programs and events you should implement to increase the newsworthiness of your school. Think about and research their suggestions. Make a list of ideas and take action on those ideas every week and month.
- Generate opportunities to ask 100 people a week personally to buy your service. You must commit to being the primary spokesperson of your school. Develop methods and opportunities to speak to

individuals and groups every week. If you maintain that average, then you will have asked 5,200 people, face-to-face, during a year to become students. You don't have to close all of them; in fact, you only have to close a very small portion. If you close just 5%, then you will have increased enrollments by 260 students; and 260 students, generating \$100 a month in revenues, equals \$312,000, annually. Even if one-fourth of your time in a year is worth \$100,000, then your return on investment is still more than 300%!

Invest the time, make the effort and the marketing process will "set up" your sales and customer service very nicely, indeed.