

[Promo Power]



PROMOTE YOURSELF ...or Plan to be Passed Over

If you're not actively promoting yourself, you can plan on being passed over in favor

of someone who is.

Face it: promotions and deals don't always go to the most qualified. They often go to the person the boss or buyer knows and trusts. If you're just hiding in your cubicle doing good work, they're glad you're there...and that's where you'll stay, if you don't get out and promote yourself.

Think of yourself as a little one-person business. At the moment, you may only have one "customer," your employer. But like any other business, it's important to constantly look for new customers while working to keep the customer(s) you already have.

Businesses have budgets for marketing; individuals should, too. Even if you only budget "time," you should have some resources set aside for self promotion. Here's a simple outline for your personal marketing plan:

- Market • Product • Pricing
- Distribution • Promotion

The first two go hand in hand. You have a set of skills and talents (product) that you want to market to a set of prospective customers. Conduct an objective assessment of those skills, and of the people or organizations that would be willing to pay for them.

Your ideal "market" may, or may not, be within the organization or market segment you serve now. If your talents aren't appreciated where you are now, you may want to look for new markets or start developing new products.

Smart businesses (and individuals) are always working to improve and expand their product line. Take night classes. Go to seminars. At least read a book. Add capabilities that add value.

Pricing is the value you attach to what you do. Of course, it has to align with

what your market is willing to pay. People pay a broad range of prices for seemingly similar products and services. Research this carefully. It's one thing to charge a premium price. It's quite another to be considered overpriced. It's even worse to be underpriced.

Distribution is how and where you deliver your services. If you're sick of that cubicle, you may want to propose a work-from-home arrangement. Or, you may want to become an independent contractor providing similar services from your home office. Can you be mobile, physically serving a number of customers and locations? You might want to be virtual, serving a number of customers in different locations online.

Promotion is last because all of the other pieces have to be in place before you can do it effectively. You have to know who the target customer is so you can focus all of your promotional activities on them. Once you know who you want to serve, you can figure out where they hang out, what they read, and what kinds of organizations they're likely to belong to. Now, you'll go straight to where the money is without wasting resources talking to non-prospects.

Once you know who the target customer is, you make everything you say in your marketing communications about them. See, they don't care about you. They only care about themselves. That means that everything you do and say has to relate to their wants and needs, and what you can do to satisfy them. They don't care that you're unhappy in your cubicle. They don't care that your dog needs surgery. They don't care that you're losing your hair. They only care about themselves, so that's what you need to talk about.

If you own a business, I just gave you a pretty good outline for a marketing plan. If you're an individual looking to advance in your career, or possibly become an entrepreneur, I've just told you the first steps to making it happen.

Sales and promotions almost always go to the "seller" that comes to mind first. If you're not actively promoting yourself, it's not going to be you. ■



WHERE TO PROMOTE YOURSELF

Internally Be a leader in your organization's social activities. Be the one who organizes the company food drive. Volunteer when new projects come up. Suggest new projects that will move your organization forward.

When you complete work that helped your organization increase profits or save money, quantify the results and report them to the boss...face to face. Show how your work affects the bottom line and you can't be ignored.

If you're not confident making presentations, you must develop that skill. You can't get ahead if you can't present your results and ideas effectively. Look into Toastmasters International. There's a chapter near you that meets at a time that's convenient for you. I guarantee you'll be more confident making presentations within a few months. Don't wait until you're getting ready for the first presentation. Start now, and you'll be ready when the opportunity arises.

Externally Now that you know who your target customer is for future business or employment, you want to be where they are. Join and be active in organizations they belong to. That can mean trade associations, political groups, social groups, sports...anywhere that those people gather. And, "active" doesn't just mean showing up. It means serving on committees and volunteering for leadership positions.

Want a great first step? Volunteer to be the greeter at the organization's meeting. When you work the registration table or front door, you get the unique opportunity to meet everyone who walks in.

Do your networking skills need a little work? Take a seminar. At least read a book. You need a strategy when you go networking. But, what you need most is experience. Go do it. Do it often and you'll be surprised how quickly you'll get comfortable.

Get out there now, even if you're not looking to make a move. It takes time to develop networking skills and to grow a network. You never know when you might need them, especially in this economy, so start working on it now.