

by Jay Conrad Levinson

Guerrilla marketing preaches to the skies the importance of customer follow-up and prospect follow-up if you have even the vaguest notion of succeeding in business.

Why do most businesses lose customers? Poor service? Nope. Poor quality? Nope. Well, then why? Apathy after the sale. Most businesses lose customers by ignoring them to death. A numbing 68% of all business lost in America is lost due to apathy after the sale.

Misguided business owners think that marketing is over once they've made the sale. WRONG WRONG WRONG. Marketing begins once you've made the sale. It's of momentous importance to you and your company that you understand this. I'm sure you will by the time you've come to the end of this online column.

First of all, understand how guerrillas view follow up. They make it part of their DNA because they know it now costs six times more to sell something to a new customer than to an existing customer. When a guerrilla makes a sale, the customer receives a follow-up thank-you note within 48 hours. When's the last time a business sent you a thank-you note within 48 hours? Maybe once? Maybe never? Probably never.

The guerrilla sends another note or perhaps makes a phone call 30 days after the sale. This contact is to see if everything is going all right with the purchase and if the customer has any questions. It is also to help solidify the relationship. The what? The relationship. Guerrillas know that the way to develop relationships, the key to survival in an increasingly entrepreneurial society, is through assiduous customer follow-up and prospect follow-up. And we haven't even talked yet about prospect follow-up.

Back to the customer. Guerrillas send their customers another note within 90 days, this time informing them of a new and related product or service. Possibly it's a new offering that the guerrilla business now provides. And maybe it's a product or service offered by one of the guerrilla's fusion marketing partners. Guerrillas are very big on forging marketing alliances with businesses throughout the community -- and using the Internet, throughout the world. These tie-ins enable them to increase their marketing exposure while reducing their marketing costs, a noble goal.

After six months, the customer hears from the guerrilla again, this time with the preview announcement of an upcoming sale. Nine months after the sale, the guerrilla sends a note asking the customer for the names of three people who might benefit from being included on the guerrilla's mailing list. A simple form and postpaid envelope is provided. Because the guerrilla has been keeping in touch with the customer -- and because only three names are requested -- the customer often supplies the names.

After one year, the customer receives an anniversary card celebrating the one- year

anniversary of the first sale. Perhaps a coupon for a discount is snuggled in the envelope.

Fifteen months after the sale, the customer receives a questionnaire, filled with questions designed to give the guerrilla insights into the customer. The questionnaire has a paragraph at the start that says, "We know your time is valuable, but the reason we're asking so many questions is because the more we know about you, the better service we can be to you." This makes sense. The customer completes and mails the questionnaire.

Perhaps after eighteen months, the customer receives an announcement of still more new products and services that tie in with the original purchase. And the beat goes on. The customer, rather than being a one-time buyer, becomes a repeat buyer, becomes the kind of person who refers others to the guerrilla's business. A bond is formed. The bond intensifies with time and follow-up.

Let me put this on numeric terms to burn it into your mind. Suppose you are not a guerrilla and do not understand follow-up. Let's say you earn a \$200 profit every time you make a sale. Okay, a customer walks in, makes a purchase, pays, and leaves. You pocket \$200 in profits and that one customer was worth \$200 to you. Hey, \$200 isn't all bad. But let's say you were a guerrilla.

That means you send the customer the thank-you note, the one-month note, the three-month note, the six-month note, the nine-month note, the anniversary card, the questionnaire, the constant alerting of new offerings. The customer, instead of making one purchase during the course of a year, makes three purchases. That same customer refers your business to four other people. Your bond is not merely for the length of the transaction but for as long as say, twenty years.

Because of your follow-up, that one customer is worth \$400,000 to you. So that's your choice: \$200 with no follow-up or \$400,000 with follow-up. And the cost of follow-up is not high because you already have the name of the person.

The cost of prospect follow-up is also not high and for the same reason as with customers. Prospect follow-up is different from customer follow-up. For one thing, you can't send a thank-you note -- yet. But you can consistently follow up, never giving up and realizing that if you're second in line, you'll get the business when the business that's first in line messes up. And they will foul up. You know how? Of course you do. They'll fail to follow up enough. Free samples sell everything from cereal to software, so why not use them for your business?