

Principle 28

Capturing Customers Details

*Your customer's details
are a valuable commodity*

A list of customer names in an extremely valuable commodity to anyone selling anything. Names, addresses and phone numbers of qualified clients are big business in themselves. If you have ever dealt with a professional list broker, you know what I'm talking about. A one-time rental of a very hot, very clean list of 5,000 names can cost a minimum of £750, but very often a lot more.

While you can go out and pay good money to buy lists, you also have the power to create your own. Every customer who answers your ads, responds to your sales letter, or comes into your store has a name, and you should have a system in place for not only capturing that name, but all additional data associated with that name as you can muster.

Gathering names that is keyed to buying behaviour has become a high-tech science, but is also somewhat controversial. Laser scanners in check-out lines, for example, can automatically capture all of the information on a customer's credit card and store it electronically. It can also key customer names to specific products they buy. So when a person goes to the same supermarket over a period of several months, an entire data base of that person's buying behaviour can be automatically tracked and stored in customer list files, which marketers can then examine at their leisure for the purpose of shaping and directing future marketing messages at those individuals.

I say it's somewhat controversial because, increasingly, privacy issues are involved. Some people feel uncomfortable with major or even minor corporations that are subtly and automatically



building up detailed personality profiles on individuals by tracking their buying habits and behaviours. Also, the crime of identity theft is the fastest growing kind of offence in the world. Because of this, people are increasingly leery of giving personal information and additional data about themselves to anyone, including honest people like ourselves who only want to sell them good products and services.

Taking all of this into account, you should still have a plan to capture as many names as possible and build your own customer list and data base. Computer technology makes it easier than ever before. Ask your software and computer dealer for the equipment you need to capture and manage customer information.

A personal touch still has a place in our world as well, however. That means getting your salespeople to ask people for their names and addresses, along with the strong reassurance that you will never sell, share or use their personal information for anything other than for interaction with your business. The majority of people are still glad to do it.

Look at other ways to capture customer details

Contact forms are an easy way to capture names and other vital information because people need to fill out your form and list all of their information when they send it in.

But another good way to capture names is to run contests and conduct surveys. Many people will happily fill out your form in exchange for a chance to win something of value. When you use a survey, you can combine valuable marketing research efforts with gathering names.

Have a plan for gathering names and building a customer mailing list. Ask any experienced, successful marketer and he or she will tell you - their "house mailing list" is their most precious commodity. Indeed arguably, the most valuable asset in any business is the customer list and, as has been discussed in other chapters, the closeness of the relationship that the business has to that customer list. Working the list consistently, can be a source of incredible income for years to come.