



MONEY MINUTE

Business news you can really use...in 60 seconds or less!



Recession? Grow Your Business Anyway! – Part 3 December 2008

Lots of gloomy economic news since I last wrote, including an official admission that our economy is in recession (no kidding!) and the over 500,000 layoffs nationwide in November was the biggest single chunk in 34 years. In Savannah, several hundred are newly unemployed with Great Dane Trailers announcing the closing of their manufacturing plant and JCB announcing layoffs, among others. That's tough news to take at Christmas time.

With these events in the background, *The Savannah Morning News* contacted me a few days ago to ask for tips to help struggling business owners survive the current downturn. "Survive?" I asked. "How about tips to help them THRIVE in a recession?" Regular readers of this letter will recognize the tips appearing on the business section front page of the SMN December 7 Sunday edition.

BGA Recommends...

√ [Savannah Tire | Brake & Alignment Centers](#)
Montgomery Crossroads at
Hodgson Memorial Dr.
912.925.9101

Yes, Virginia, you can thrive and actually grow your business in a recession, as my clients learn and this latest topic series is describing. Before we tackle new material, let's do a little review from my October and November newsletters (previous newsletters are available on the Business Growth Accelerators free resources page at www.bgaccelerators.com/freeresources.html):

Important Guiding Principle #1

***** Your service goal MUST BE to make your customer feel successful with EVERY contact and interaction (s)he has with your business, regardless of whether a purchase is made! *****

And, by the way, it's YOUR responsibility (not the customer's) to make sure it happens!

Important Guiding Principle #2

***** Never make the customer wrong! *****

The customer may not always be right. The customer may be all hosed up, confused, and actually at fault. But if you approach his problems (with your business, by the way!) using the tact of "How can we make this right?", you'll maintain your customer's dignity, rescue the sale, and set the stage for repeat business, because (s)he feels that (s)he has been successful in their interaction with your business and you'll see them again...even in a recession!

And introducing this month's principle (drum roll, please...)

Important Guiding Principle #3

***** Making your business customer-friendly costs very little and reaps HUGE returns. *****

Here are some concrete ideas to grow YOUR business in a recession.

OK, nuts and bolts time! How do you put these guiding principles into action? Exactly how do you assess the “customer friendliness” of your business and how do you improve it? Great question! Let’s start with the basics.

Business owners are famous for looking for a single “silver bullet”, the one single thing they can do to fix whatever problem they may be having. But those who have learned to sail on the open ocean know that there is no silver bullet to growing a business.

The same desire is there for a simple, single method to implement to make their business customer friendly. The reality is that making your business customer-friendly is actually making many small things work together that combined make big results. The good news is that these measures actually don’t cost very much.

Businesses constantly send out non-verbal, unwritten messages on their values, including how customer friendly they are. Understanding that you’re communicating in this way, whether you knew it or not, is the first step in discovering what message you’re sending and how to ensure the subliminal messages you display are the ones you want sent.

Example #1 – Customer Parking

Did you know that you’re sending subliminal messages through your parking lot? What subliminal messages might you be sending that way? What messages DO you want to send through your parking lot?

Let’s start with where your (the owner’s) spot is. Is it reserved and prominently labeled with your name and/or title? Is it located directly in front of the door or in a similarly desirable location? What message is that communicating to all who arrive in your lot? It says, “This is MY business, I’m a big shot here, you’re entering my world where I rule, and you can expect to be treated just like the second rate parking spot you have to use to do business here.”

Wow! That’s a tough message! But the problem is so common that local downtown development associations actually have policies or guidelines asking business owners not to park their cars in desirable spots in front of their businesses during business hours.

Taking the next step, where do your employees park? Does your receptionist/secretary have a similar, designated slot in a desirable spot? Maybe you offer that primo spot as a job perk, but what message does that send to your customers who pay your bills? Ask yourself similar questions about your Employee of the Month spot or any other staff parking that would be perceived as a prime location by those who are thinking of doing business with you.

Assigning desirable parking spots based on the company hierarchy is a practice used in government offices or corporate America as displays of power, position, and prestige. A parking spot in that environment is a status symbol and lets everyone know where they are in the corporate “pecking order” in relation to you. But that practice also tells the customers of a retail establishment open to the public (or any government office, for that matter) where they fit in your pecking order, too! When you and your staff assign yourselves the best spots and customers are regulated to less-than-the-best locations, you send a clear message (before they even get out of the car!) of exactly how you view customer satisfaction.

Actually, just moving staff parking (including yours) to less desirable locations in your lot is only a neutral solution. Go one more step by creating a positive customer experience by having desirable locations prominently labeled as “Our Customers” or “Our Patrons Who Keep Us in Business”. What subliminal message would that send? Wouldn’t that be a great experience to pull into the first time? How about the time after that? ☺

Where Would You Rather Shop?

What message are you sending through your parking lot? Do you really enjoy patronizing a business that regulates those who pays its bills to the “south 40”? Wouldn’t you prefer to patronize a business, practice, or shop that honors its patrons, clients, patients, or customers?

Flourishing in a Recession

Seize the opportunity to make your business customer friendly and stand out in a crowd that features the same poor customer service as everyone else does! As we've seen, making your business customer friendly is doing lots of no-cost, low-cost things right and doing them right consistently. Being customer friendly is more about treating your customers as people who have the ability to choose where they spend their money so well, that they'll consistently choose to spend their money with you...even if your prices are higher than the big boxes!

Your business can actually flourish in a recession by consistently solving your customers' problems in a way that delights them. Decide now to make your business customer friendly and grow while your competitors are wondering what to do!

Introducing "Business Growth Accelerators Recommends"

It's our pleasure to introduce a new feature highlighting businesses that have been mystery shopped and, based on our direct shopping experience, have offered excellent customer service, and service or product quality. With an abundance of bad news, we want to highlight businesses that should serve as roll models to the entire business community.

This list is not paid advertising. Rather, it's an honor roll of businesses that are "doing it right", based on our actual staff experience only.

Inaugurating the list is the Savannah Tire location on Montgomery Crossroads. I accompanied my daughter there to check out a strange noise her car was making. Prepared for the worst, I actually enjoyed a very pleasant experience. Their facility is spotless, particularly in the service bays where you could probably eat off of floor. The sales staff was knowledgeable, friendly, and low pressure. The technicians were competent and quickly diagnosed the problem; they escorted me to the car in the bay and showed me exactly where the problem was (worn brake pads). My daughter made an appointment to have the work done the following week and they quickly and efficiently had her on the way again. It's our pleasure to recommend this location of Savannah Tire.



Now It's Your Turn

Share your thoughts with me at results@bgaccelerators.com or via one of the ways you feel comfortable with, below.

Maybe you know you have a problem, but you're not sure why your sales are down or expenses are up. Or maybe you just want a "second opinion" with a fresh pair of eyes to find out why long time customers aren't coming back and new customers have stopped coming in the door.

We can help! Get growing again! **Call us today at 912.538.0746** for a discreet, confidential consultation at no charge, if you really want to flourish. Be sure to ask about our complimentary marketing and sales effectiveness assessment when you call. Let us use our proprietary business growth calculator to show you how to grow in a recession and double your profits in the next 12 months. You'll be glad you did.

Warmest regards, ☺

Dan Elder, principal consultant

Author of:

Spectacular Business Growth!*

**...Without Spending the Fortune You Hoped To Earn!*

— and —

Dramatic Business Growth!*

**...In The Face Of Fierce Competition!*

- Business growth coaching
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☎ 912.538.0746

🌐 www.bgaccelerators.com

✉ bgnewsletter@bellsouth.net

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