

**Ask SCORE for Business Advice**

**“Ask SCORE” Column - “Necessary” Marketing  
Green Bay Press Gazette Sat., Aug. 8, 2009 by Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt**

In last week's column, it was noted that the businesses that thrive in a recession are typically those that customers consider necessary. Knowing this, what can a business do to promote its products and services if they are considered to be wants rather than needs? I posed this question to one of the area's foremost marketing experts, Dana VanDen Heuvel, owner of MarketingSavant. According to VanDen Heuvel, it's all about making your business “relevant”.

“You need to communicate so that people understand the value of what they're buying,” VanDen Heuvel explained. “It's not just the pricing. It is the total value of ownership of that thing we're selling so we can make it relevant and necessary.”

He disagrees with the practice of increasingly cutting prices in an effort to obtain business. “I would imagine you could think of a store that you've been trained to shop at only because it's on sale. They train you to never pay full price,” he said. Instead, he recommends offering events and programs that are time specific and build customer loyalty. For a retail store, this could mean a weekly fashion night with a bonus for attendance or a fun event that builds the image of the store.

Events are a good way to reach loyal customers on a limited budget. VanDen Heuvel notes that everyone has a telephone and contacts, and it doesn't cost much to utilize those resources. Communication is vital and owners need to keep an on-going dialog with customers.

“How do we stay in touch? Are you using direct mail, email marketing, social media, and other things that might have been dismissed before? Without contact, you can become irrelevant or non existent,” VanDen Heuvel stated. “If customers hear from a company, the likelihood of doing business with them is much greater. Who do we go to? Who did we hear from last?”

Once on-going communication is established, it's up to the business owner to use the conversation to change attitudes. VanDen Heuvel says that the business owner needs to give customers a reason to buy. If it's upscale clothing, promote the benefits of investing in higher quality goods.

“Get at the emotions that people have in parting with their money. Let them know that it's okay for them to take care of themselves, too,” VanDen Heuvel recommended.

In downturn marketing, it is important to stay in touch with the most loyal people. Every business has only a certain tribe of people that will be customers, and this group should be a focus.

“Ask yourself everyday what you're doing to be useful to your customer. Have I provided them with value? Whether it's a newsletter, advice, or programs, we need to use our intellectual and emotional capital to be relevant,” VanDen Heuvel concluded.

Next week, VanDen Heuvel will present specific ideas for becoming a more necessary business.

If you'd like to learn more about the necessity of research, contact the Green Bay Chapter of SCORE. Visit [www.greenbayscore.org](http://www.greenbayscore.org) or call Cindy Gokey at 920-496-8930 for information.

[Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt](#) is co-owner of DB Commercial Real Estate in Green Bay and Assistant District Director for SCORE, Wisconsin.