



## Ask SCORE for Business Advice

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### **Last Minute Marketing** by Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt

If your business depends on the months of November and December to turn a profit, you could be feeling the stress of needing to capitalize on last minute sales. Robert Jahnke, owner of Top Hat Marketing and a SCORE volunteer, recommends action over panic. He says that it's not too late to adjust your marketing plan.

According to Jahnke, successful marketing includes everything from advertising and promotions to customer service systems. Great marketing will get customers in the door, and trained sales staff will turn shoppers into buyers.

Suppose you have stacks of licensed Green Bay Packers hats and your 20% off sale isn't working. Jahnke suggests doing a point of sales promotion that might feature something like, "Buy 2 Items, Get 1 Free." The goal is to create additional sales that will move the inventory before it's difficult to sell at any price.

Point of purchase promotions include in store marketing efforts and should be readily visible and attractive to customers. However, this requires that customers have already walked in your store. What are some low cost ways to get them in? Jahnke recommends using email customer lists, joint ventures with other stores (your business gives out their coupons and visa versa), special events or information nights, referral systems, seminars or workshops, packaging complimentary products or services together, customer newsletters, and internet optimization.

Jahnke also advises having employees ask customers what brought them into the store. Not only does that track the success of marketing, it also gives the sales staff the knowledge to assist the customer in their area of interest.

"Setting up systems, what to say when someone walks in the door, what to say before a sale, and what to say after a sale is a strategy that successful businesses will use," Jahnke noted. As an example of incomplete training and most likely a lost sale, many employees have been taught to ask a customer if they found what they were looking for.

Recently, a department store clerk asked me that question, and I gave a list of items I couldn't find. "That happens," the clerk responded. In another store, the clerk told me to go to a different store where the selection was much better.

Promoting other stores is a good idea if you actually don't have the product, but in this case, the store did have a pretty good selection. With assistance, I probably could have found the items. Jahnke considers this a good reminder to train staff in asking and responding. At a sales meeting, staff should do role playing on how to respond to customer inquiries. If a customer did not find an item, the clerk should know how to offer the assistance required to make a sale.

Jahnke believes that this is part of knowing the value of a customer and building on the one-time visit to make a lifetime customer, and making those last-minute sales, your sales.

If you'd like help with marketing, 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.

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