

From the Sacramento Business Journal:

<http://www.bizjournals.com/sacramento/stories/2008/08/11/smallb2.html>

Got Growth?

Now is the time to market your business

Many firms pull back in a down economy, leaving opportunities

Premium content from Sacramento Business Journal - by Larry Mandelberg, Contributing Writer

Date: Sunday, August 10, 2008, 9:00pm PDT

Related:

[Media & Marketing](#)

In an economy suffering from high costs, rising unemployment and tight credit, most businesses look to simply maintain profits and give up on growth. The common wisdom becomes cut costs and ride out the tough times.

I say not so fast — you might be leaving substantial opportunities on the table only to be picked up later by your competitors.

For those businesses that are healthy, regardless of the impact of current economic conditions, this is the ideal time to go after new business.

Now is when traditional strategies can be of the greatest value in driving sales growth and profits. Because of the cost-cutting measures your competitors are implementing, the soil is fertile for outreach efforts to new and prospective customers.

Right now most of those competitors are hunkering down and trying to ride out these rough times. They're looking for costs they can cut as fast as possible without doing any immediate harm to operations, which means they're reducing or eliminating training and marketing expenses. This leads to less exposure for them and their products in the market, and reduction of skill levels in staff who are being stretched and asked to cover more responsibilities than before due to staff reductions.

With reduced exposure from your competition, every marketing message you deliver will be

more likely to be heard, and heard more clearly, making it easier to connect with.

Another interesting dynamic that occurs as a result of less marketing dollars being spent is a loss of business for most media outlets. In many situations, this increases your opportunity to get exposure in hard-to-access marketing vehicles while applying downward pressure on pricing because of reduced demand.

Allow me to paint a picture: unsatisfied customers, overworked employees, reductions in service levels and quality of deliverables, less media exposure for competition, better leverage for buying ad space, and a desire to grow profits. Sounds to me like this is about the best opportunity you could ask for if your goal is to find new customers.

Of course being careful with how you spend your cash is critical. But isn't cash always a critical commodity? Are you more laissez faire with your money when times are good because it is flowing with less effort? No business ever went broke with cash in the bank, and cash is, as it always has been, every business' most precious commodity. If you don't use your cash to grow your business, you are not using your cash wisely.

Which brings me full circle back to my original point. There has never been a better time to invest in marketing than right now, when competition is weak and customers are eager for new suppliers.

There is an old joke about winking at someone in the dark. You're the only person who knows you are interested; the person you are winking at has no clue. When you don't market yourself, you are winking in the dark and hoping customers will stumble into you by accident.

If you truly want to increase sales and have a business that can actually turn sales into profits, now is the time to focus on operational excellence and well-designed marketing. Identify those target markets that would be best served by your business and focus your marketing on them.

Be consistent and targeted, don't try to be all things to all people. Keep your marketing messages simple and clear. Remember we are in an economic downturn, and appeal to people's need for value and quality. Help them understand why doing business with you might be the smartest thing they could do for themselves and their financial difficulties.

Getting value for every dollar spent is critical. Right now, when competition is struggling, you have a rare opportunity to reach out and grab new markets. Do so boldly and with wisdom.

As the economy recovers and you're running down the home stretch toward the finish line, you just might find yourself ahead of the pack.

Larry Mandelberg is a principal with BullsEye Integration, which helps companies grow through merger and acquisition strategies. He can be reached at Larry@BullsEyeIntegration.com or 916-798-0600.