

# TAKING CARE OF —•YOUR•— BUSINESS

Strategies for growing your company and keeping customers happy

By Dan Ditzler  
President, Newton Associates

**Editor's note:** Dan Ditzler challenges dealers to think bigger in the first submission of his "Taking care of (your) business" column. Simply helping your customers is a low bar; find out how to help make their businesses (and your own) the best they can be.

Customer-centric businesses succeed ... for a while. But they may eventually fail because their focus is only on customers instead of a combination of customers plus agile, alert, and responsive business management.

Achieving a balance is easier said than done. Servicing customers day-in and day-out is a grind that can leave little time for short- and long-range planning. The goal of this article is to inspire you, the dealer, to start thinking about everything through a focused lens — one that concentrates on the health and success of your business while exceeding customers' expectations.

## Branding/Marketing: The foundation, not an afterthought

Most dealers probably haven't assessed their branding/marketing strategy recently (unless you're establishing a new business). Most likely, your focus is on delivery of sales leads, professional communication with existing

customers, and testing your territory's media options to see what works best.

But regularly evaluating your brand is essential to continued success. Is your brand recognized locally? Are your company graphics and messaging tired or predictable? Do your employees understand your brand and what it represents?

Branding/marketing serves as the foundation that everything else in your business should be built upon. Therefore, it's always a good time to assess your company image and the way customers and prospects perceive it.

A consistent and professional brand will take you far, but only so far. It is important to ensure that your messaging and marketing materials accurately convey how you want your business to be represented in the marketplace. Employees should receive not just technical and safety training, but also education about what it means to be an ambassador of your brand.

## Be a "SWOT"er, not a "SWOT"ee

Essential data for charting the direction of your business requires a regular SWOT analysis of your territorial marketplace. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. The

**Strengths** and **Weaknesses** categories are easier to identify, because as a business owner you most likely know what your enterprise does well and the areas in which you need improvement.

**Opportunities** are a little trickier to uncover. Staying on top of geographic market trends and new construction and looking for places where you can promote your brand are vital to business development. For example, how does your business divide up between residential and commercial customers?

Try to think outside the box when brainstorming marketing opportunities. Consider exhibiting at local Township Days, promoting your business on high-profile billboards, or sponsoring a Little League team.

**Threats** requires research to identify the competitors in your market and determine their strengths and weaknesses. It's important to pinpoint how each differentiates from your company.

How do your competitors represent themselves to the market? Do they offer the same range of services as you do? If yes, incorporate strategies to stand out. Provide unique offerings, such as garage safety, comfort assessments, EV charging options, and of course, exceptional customer service and good-better-best products.

## Identifying and pursuing ideal customers

Not all accounts are created equal. Some are one-and-done customers. Others can monopolize a technician's time with frequent callbacks or long technical support calls. Others demand premium products and service.

It isn't easy, but it pays to identify and focus on your highest profit customers versus the ones who are always demanding your installers' time. First, figure out who your quality customers are, then look to attract more of them through testimonials, referrals, key demographics, targeted (by zip code) media advertising, etc.

## Balancing the tools of the trade

Be careful not to underspend or overspend on marketing. While it can be hard to justify spending hard-earned dollars on marketing, it will be even more difficult to find and reach new prospects if you don't invest appropriately.

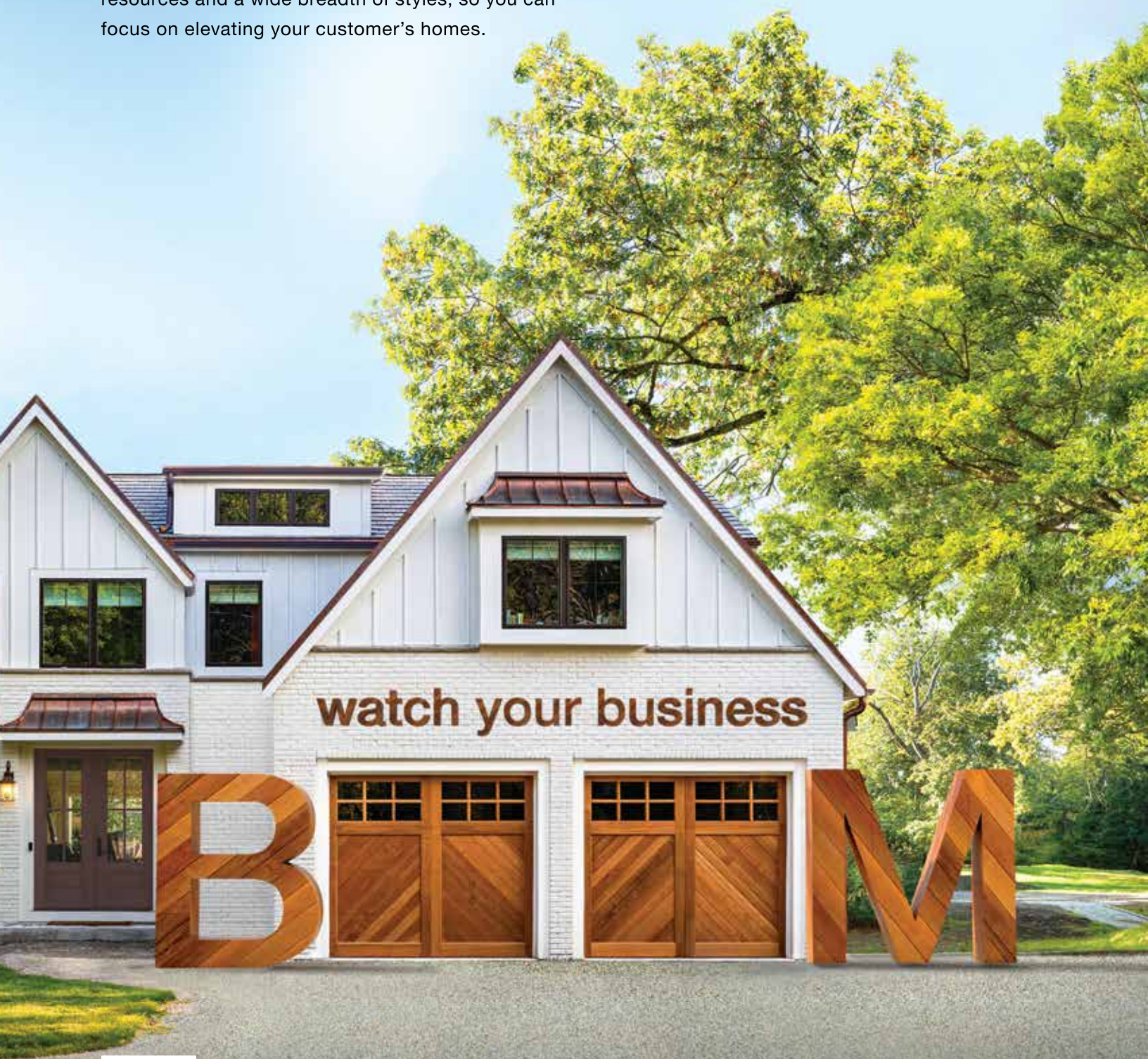
The bare-minimum marketing efforts typically include establishing a website, adding vehicle wraps, and/or purchasing logoed shirts and caps. For customers to easily discover your company, it is critical to invest in an advertising and PR program that keeps your business at the top of Google searches and at the forefront of



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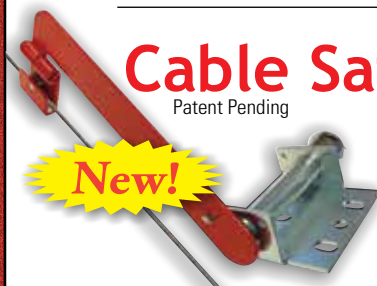
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their minds. That means a dedicated budget for media placements and hiring an in-house marketing officer, an outside agency, or both.

Another growing trend is to hire a fractional Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) — a consultant who works part-time to develop and implement your branding and marketing strategy. This approach helps you avoid the full-time cost of an in-house CMO's salary, reduces overhead costs, and benefits the entire marketing department.

### Maximize your principal relationships

Installing dealers carry a variety of product lines and represent multiple leading manufacturers. These relationships can be unpredictable, especially depending on evolving factors in the business world (not the least of which are mergers and acquisitions).

It is important to stay on top of industry changes, especially companies' products you sell and install. Stay current with relevant product training and sales promotions.

Sometimes new products are minor upgrades; other times they are genuine breakthroughs. The latter presents an opportunity for you to become an early adopter and to get a leg up on your competition.

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### Tis the seasons

Depending on the area of your dealership, you may or may not be challenged by changing weather conditions. The holiday season can present possibilities for special promotions. Some companies are even using events like Daylight Savings to tie-in a promotional product offer.

When visiting customers, encourage your techs to conduct an informal site analysis and to note future opportunities. For instance, it might be advantageous to alert customers who have attached garages with thinly insulated doors well before the cold weather rolls in. Have your customer service representatives follow up to share ideas that can avert or solve problems.

### Train your entire team to be salespeople

Every employee of your business wears a different hat, but every person needs to be able to adopt another role — salesperson. Most employees will interact with prospects, customers, vendors, and other contacts. Therefore, training every employee on company messaging, mission, products/services, policies, territories, etc., ensures brand consistency and helps distinguish your company from your competitors.

Make sure everyone is on the same page. The goal is to attract more prospects and to convert and retain more customers. Educate employees about the risks of overpromising then underdelivering.

Remember, building your business is a process. You need to be constantly developing and improving it if you want to prevent the day-to-day grind from becoming an impediment to growth and excellence. ■

**Author's note:** In future stories, we hope to explore a range of topics linked by a common theme — helping installing dealers build stronger customer relationships while building their own businesses.

*Newton Associates is a metro Philadelphia-based business-to-business advertising and PR agency representing manufacturers of garage doors, door operators, gate operators, access control systems, radio controls, security and home technology systems, and related building products.*