

The most effective advertising a company can get is more difficult to achieve but much more effective and lasting than traditional media advertising. It is word of mouth advertising, and it is earned rather than purchased. It is your customers' opinion of your product, which at times can be very vocal with praise or derision.

It is available to start-ups as well as large corporations. It can be achieved with minimal cash outlays by doing things right. It can be earned quickly or over a long period of time, depending on the product or service you are selling. Word of mouth is sometimes instantaneous. After people view a new movie, they talk about what they've just seen. It could be "What a great picture" or "This was a stiff." Descriptive word spreads quickly, and new viewers of that movie result if those who saw and liked it tell their friends. On the other hand, word of mouth on an automobile takes a much longer time. Drivers are interested in how well the car drives, the ease and quality of service, the car's trade-in value, how problems are handled, car breakdowns, etc.

Here are seven factors to consider for creating a good word of mouth for your company and its products.

1. Quality - From day one, all company employees must be aware of the importance of maintaining quality, and systems must be put in place to monitor it. Any products or components outsourced must be rigorously inspected to see that your standards are met.
2. Service - Regardless of whether your product is a high or low service one, customers' problems with its use must be addressed and solved with a minimum of effort on the customer's part and in a timely fashion.
3. Instructions - Many products need to be assembled or explained. The instructions accompanying the product must be clear and concise. Many companies fail miserably in this area and devote little time and effort to it. Poor instructions can turn off consumers to all your future products and create bad word of mouth.
4. Communications - All contact with your customers and their inquiries must be promptly addressed with courtesy and knowledge. This starts with the telephone.

Tip for Entrepreneurs: Have humans answer your phones, not computers like most large companies do. This simple move will start you on the good word of mouth path with your customers. Also your receptionist, who I call "The Director of First Impressions," is a more important hire than most employers acknowledge. You want an upbeat, intelligent, pleasant person in that slot. Management's interactions with employees, suppliers, and stake holders

should also be first class and monitored. This good word of mouth as well as customers are important to the company's health.

5. Value - The value you deliver on your products to customers is paramount in their returning and spreading the good word about you. It must meet or exceed their expectations. A good maxim to deliver to all the employees is to under promise and over deliver.

6. High integrity - You want all your stakeholders and customers to trust you. This trust must be earned continuously. It takes time to develop, but can be lost in an instant. Problems must be addressed and solved quickly. They cannot be ducked, delayed, or shifted politically. Mistakes should be admitted and corrected. People want to do business and work for trustworthy companies.

7. Be a good citizen - There is no doubt that a company's prime responsibility is to make a profit. To not do so will eventually lead to its demise and the loss of all jobs. Do not be embarrassed to earn a profit. However, I believe the company has a responsibility to take actions to enhance the quality of life of their community and employees. This good citizen appellation should not be just empty promises for show. If real, it is also good for your business, your family, and your sleep.

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