

Market Yourself



▶ The most successful producers understand that a sound marketing plan is a vital element of their practice.

By Raymond S. Phillips

Being a brokerage general agent provides a unique perspective on the insurance industry. We have the opportunity to work with an array of different organizational structures ranging from the most well-defined institution all the way to the single-person firm. I'm always intrigued and amazed at how a professional can weave his way into the fabric of a family or small business to have a genuine impact on that entity's financial security. I've been fortunate to work with a number of quality firms and individuals over the years, and I have had numerous opportunities to observe the traits of the most successful producers.

I was influenced by a tremendous producer at an early point in my career. When I asked him about his secret to success, he said that I had to understand this: He was not an insurance agent, he was not a financial planner, he was not a consultant, he was first and foremost a marketer; "...and I market myself," he added. He had a robust practice containing elements of consulting, insurance sales and financial planning, but none of those happened without his ability to market *himself*.

That was a long time ago and, since then, I've been fortunate to rub shoulders with many successful people in the insurance business. Many of them are extroverts. Many others are introverts. Some are extremely technically oriented. Others are more relationship oriented. There really is no consistent personality or demeanor among these producers. But the common thread is that all of them are excellent marketers (often without their recognizing it). Their approach tends to be entrepreneurially focused as they realize they're really not salespeople. They are business people, and appropriate marketing is a vital element of any good business.

A fundamental trait that is common to most successful producers is the recognition that it is vital that they continue

to provide insight as their clients' situations change. Sounds pretty elementary, doesn't it? Successful producers recognize they have clients, not customers.

Holding consistent face-to-face reviews with their clients to discuss existing insurance strategies or overall financial plans allows successful producers to keep tabs on their clients' changing needs and goals. Clients can be educated on different types of policies to address their needs and goals, and their current portfolios are reviewed to make sure their products are performing as initially planned.

Referrals become a likely byproduct of attentive interaction with clients. Another producer explained it to me this way: "When I do an insurance review with a client, invariably I find they need additional coverage, they need a different type of coverage, or I get referred to two or three other people to work with." Prospecting becomes much easier when you are attentive to your in-force clients.

I've seen many successful producers offer periodic seminars and workshops to introduce new concepts (and old concepts!) to clients and prospects. They have systems in place for effective follow-up and interaction with their attendees in order to build up their prospect list.

Being visible is another consistent attribute of star producers. They tend to be active in their community, church and other organizations. They place themselves in situations where they have what I've seen referred to as "customer collisions," i.e. putting themselves in positions where they are interacting with clients and prospects in a setting outside of their business relationship.


I recall the time I complimented a producer on his new car, a silver Mercedes-Benz. He said, "Do you know what I do every Friday? I take it to the west side of town, where there's a place that hand washes cars while you wait. Now, often my car isn't that dirty, but I take it every Friday. Know why? Because there are other owners of such cars standing there waiting for their cars to be washed, and after you see them a number of times, you start to talk. And over time a

relationship is built and I've developed a prospect."

The power of social media can aid in "being seen." Used effectively, an active LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook presence continues to remind people of the plans that have been implemented. That social media presence helps build your brand and introduce concepts to prospects. A friend of mine who is a marketing coach developed this motto in reference to the use of social media tools: "If you're not e-visible, you're invisible."

Newsletters and other proactive contacts via e-mail, phone call, or even "snail mail" correspondence can be an effective way to "be seen." They provide enhancement to the producer's brand and creates an informed customer base for future strategic discussions.

I'm always impressed by the true professional's concern for clients. I've often said, "The most successful people in our business are not on a sale. They're on a mission." The monetary aspect of what they do is almost secondary to their commitment to doing right by a client. There's a sense of obligation to provide appropriate coverage to a small business owner or family – an excitement in the opportunity to find a solution to a constituent's problems. That sense of obligation has fueled many successful practices.

As a brokerage general agent, I've seen all shapes and sizes of producers and organizations. I have come to the conclusion there simply is no "right way" of being successful. However, there is a consistency. The successful producer approaches his or her practice as a small business. They understand that, like any small business, the foundation of success can be found in solid business acumen, not the least of which is a sound and methodical marketing plan. They recognize that marketing breeds sales and that, in essence, they are all marketing themselves. 

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