

1. Avoid a Cash Flow Gap
2. Leadership
3. Tax Breaks
4. Success in Succession
5. Marketing – Get a Hook



Our Business is to Improve Your Business

Our mission is to provide information and strategies to business owners and managers for improvement in the effectiveness of its business management so that key objectives can be realized.



Marketing – Get a Hook

By Tina Ferguson

McDonald's has one. Kohl's has one. Do you? Recently, we dined at a local Mexican food restaurant. We were there primarily because our four-year-old wanted a sno cone. But, where do you get a sno cone in December? He knew, of course, that you get free sno cones at this quaint little Mexican food diner. Alas, as we walked in, there were six – count them – six other children lined up for their sno cones. This, my friends is a marketing hook. As, we all know these children were not dining alone!

What is your company's marketing hook? A hook is nothing more than something that hooks customers and brings them back for more. It is something that reaches out and grabs them and brings them to your door when they have literally countless other options for the services you offer.

For some companies, their exceptional employees are the hook. For example, one Starbucks may have just the "right" kind of employees that make you feel extra special when you walk in the door. They know you, they know your favorite drink, heck, they even know your husband's name and ask about him! That makes for a totally different trip to Starbucks. We all know these types of employees and the companies that recognize and encourage them to perform their best often reap the rewards.

Southwest Airlines is another good example of a company maximizing employee star potential. After years of driving short distances, we recently flew Southwest to a conference. We were delighted with our experience to say the least. You could almost measure the positive energy from the employees. We were energized just from being around them. Their smiles and consideration stood out from our previous experience on another airline. We experienced the hook and promised ourselves that we would take Southwest Airlines every time we could and that we would make a concerted effort to make more weekend getaways. Now that's powerful!

Hooks may come in other forms such as lower prices – think Dell, Best Buy – or free shipping – think eToys, Amazon – or they may come in something completely creative like giving something away for free.

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Many companies have given away inventory for free. For example, a gentleman awoke from a dream and decided to buy 80,000 stickers that displayed a photo of the Earth from space. He poured his life savings into his vision and sent the order to a local printer after obtaining permission from NASA to reprint the photo. Once he got it back, he started sending the stickers out to organizations he thought might use them – for free. He figured that they may send back a small donation. That was millions of EarthSeals ago and Paul Hoffman is still marketing and hooking the same way, except now he has a donation guideline. Learn more at www.earthseals.com.

Not sure how to devise a marketing hook? Here is a list of guidelines:

- **Be real.** Marketing hooks should reflect core values. Just because a hook worked for someone else doesn't mean you should copy it. Do something that reflects what is meaningful to your company. For example, Chick-Fil-A's founder, S. Cathy Truett feels very strongly about giving back to children. The company's kid's meal giveaways are always educational in nature and the store gives millions of dollars in scholarships away to company employees each year.
- **Do it your way.** A hook should reflect your company's way of doing business. If you have to go too far off your beaten path, it's not likely to work for the long haul. Southwest Airlines doesn't have to try to be energetic, they are energetic. Make your hook a way of doing business. Or vice versa.
- **Be creative.** A hook isn't born in a meeting between 10 and 11 am. It's a process that requires tapping into your creativity. Ask people from all levels of your organization what it is that brings people back to your company. The answers may surprise you!
- **Be persistent.** Every company has the ability to develop a hook. If at first you don't reveal yours, don't give up until you find it.

The time invested in a marketing hook is time well spent. If you need more guidance, consider joining one of our business round tables! ■

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