

CUSTOMER ATTITUDE AWARENESS

by Gary H. Maler

Why must we be concerned with our customer's attitude? Take a moment to recall your personal exposure to the thousands of sales programs, promotion campaigns, radio and television commercials, newspaper and magazine ads. These sales devices are intended to sell the consumer a never-ending variety of products, services, investments, etc. This points to a problem that a lot of business people have not been exposed to and which may be causing frequent loss of sales. I will present here a deeper and more factual look into our customer's receptiveness, or lack of it, toward our sales and service proposals.

When a sales approach is consumer accepted, it will do the job it was designed to do, which is promote our business. However, when an approach is consumer rejected, it will not promote our business; and furthermore, will serve to erect a wall of defense between the consumer and our industry. This wall of defense, relative to caution, is constructed entirely of past experience, thoughts and impressions and represents a mental resistance to being pushed, pressured, or fooled into anything that is not wanted or needed. This especially holds true when consumer dollars are involved. A haphazard attempt to sell is worse than no attempt at all. Any sales approach is either met with consumer acceptance or rejection. It benefits all of us to carefully evaluate our sales approach, keeping in mind this pitfall. If we lose a sale, that in itself is not a problem, but many times that first rejection carries over into several years.

This defense wall has many doors that may be opened and closed instantly at the discretion of the consumer. The consumer often triggers the opening or closing without being aware of his reasons for doing so. Therefore, an analysis of customer attitude includes measuring the amount of customer resistance to our sales approach. This, in turn, activates the "doors" in decision making. We either get by the attitude defense mechanism or we are shut out by it. Our concern

when we don't make a sale is, was the door graciously closed or violently slammed?

The average consumer is shrewd, dollar and market conscious, and can instinctively sense when he is being hustled. He can quickly sense incompetency and/or hard-sell tactics. He knows that millions of advertising dollars are spent for one purpose — to gather consumer dollars.

The goal of any sales strategy is constancy. We wish to open doors and keep them open. Some advertising companies do not understand these basic fundamentals. The consumer becomes a target to be hit. The consumer should not be sold short. If the sales approach is not tolerant toward the delicate customer attitude, a dependable and honest supplier can lose sales and customers. Worst of all, he wouldn't even know why.

There is a better way. We can understand customer attitudes, and work with the mental resistance that has been put there by careless and unfactual sales programs. We can work with customer attitudes and profit from it. Consider the Coca-Cola commercial with Mean Joe Greene and the little boy. A masterpiece, pleasing to the viewer. Effect on consumer attitude? Opening of doors. No wild claims to create confusion and frustration. Even if this commercial fell flat on its face, which it did not, there is no risk of arousing customer attitude in the wrong way, and incurring its wrath.

Gear your advertising and selling to your customer's attitudes, not to your customers. If you maintain an ever-conscious effort to present yourself, your service, and your products in a manner that will not offend your customer's attitudes, you will have accomplished something of value.

Attempts to spice-up your advertising and sales approach do more harm than good. The more factual and condensed you keep your presentation, the less problem your customer will have making a decision. If you build a sales approach that is cluttered with sales motivators, your customer will

have to find the facts before being able to decide on your proposal. Customers are often lost in this fact-fiction search.

Caress customer attitude, don't slap it. Make the decision making easy for your customer. Condense your sales proposals to factual bottom lines. Proposed work, cost factors, time schedules, payment terms, etc., should all be concise and plainly spelled out. Add conclusions to your proposals so that the only decision your customer has to make is yes or no.

Put a block in a door to keep it from shutting on you. Be specific and be confident. Take command of diagnosis or estimate calls and show authority,

but do it in a brief and pleasant manner that leaves no doubt of your qualifications. Make your proposal, set your price, and stand firm. People will always respect and relate to an honest, factual and no-gimmick sales approach when they sense no troublesome loose ends. Do not crowd your customer for a yes or no, or it will probably be a no. When your point is made, don't belabor it.

Qualify all aspects of a sales program, before activating it, with this thought: open a door, or at the very least, don't slam it on tomorrow.

*Maier Tree Care Service Center
Des Moines, Iowa*

ABSTRACT

Cinque, M.T. 1979. **Protecting fall plantings from the ravage of winter.** *Weeds Trees & Turf* 18(11): 14, 16, 38.

With the increasing popularity of fall planting of evergreens and deciduous materials, in some areas of the country, winter protection of those plants is important. Newly planted materials are in more danger of winter damage since the plants are not fully established and acclimated to their new location. Rapid temperature fluctuations can be absolutely devastating because the sap freezes and thaws resulting in a rupturing of the tissues. Since the severity of the winter can have adverse effects on newly planted trees and shrubs as well as on established plant materials, it is therefore important to supply them with a means of protection. Winter protection can be supplied by staking, wrapping the bark of deciduous trees, mulches, the use of anti-desiccants, and various forms of physical protection. With whatever method is used the soil should be given a thorough drenching before the ground freezes.

Williams, D.J. 1980. **Growth regulators for ornamentals — selection and use.** *Grounds Maintenance* 15(3): 43, 46, 48.

The potential of plant growth regulators for use by professional grounds managers is considerable. The availability and cost of labor have encouraged managers to look for chemical alternatives to traditionally manual maintenance problems. The following discussion of plant growth regulators for ornamentals is not intended to be a complete review of all growth regulators but a discussion of chemicals that are of interest to commercial groundskeepers. This is the third in a series of articles covering the selection and use of horticultural chemicals available to the professional grounds manager. Each article, written by an expert, provides the most current information on the selection and use of chemicals to deal with specific plant problems.