

Be More Than Just Different



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“We provide quality work at a fair price.”

Sounds good, doesn't it? Simple. Direct. It's what everybody who purchases a product or service wants, isn't it? Work done right the first time without issues. A reasonable price that you feel comfortable paying for the value you get in return.

There's one problem: Every business says it. Your prospects can't tell the difference between you and your competitors because one looks just like another. Same types of trucks and equipment (despite what we think are the obvious differences). Same general logos. Same promises. Customers – busy with their own daily lives, problems and challenges – can only see the similarities.

That's when your business becomes commoditized because the only separator in the customer's eye is price. The lower to mid-priced providers win the work because the more expensive providers haven't done anything to encourage customers to choose them. And it's not just about price in today's economy. The American Express Global Customer Service Barometer found that 70 percent of Americans are willing to spend an average of 13 percent more with companies they believe provide excellent customer service.

Quality work at a fair price is no longer a company differentiator. It's an expectation.

Time to ask yourself: “What really makes us different?”



You can get together with your top people and make a list of what sets you apart, but a better first step might be to ask your customers. Someone who

buys from you is more prepared to tell you what you do that makes you different – how they found you, why they trust you, why they renew and what motivates them to refer business your way.

There are likely tiny touches you provide that your competitors don't that are important to your clients. There are probably also areas where you'll find customers crave improvement. Gather these nuggets of customer data – customer surveys hand-delivered by crews at job completions or sent by mail along with invoices are good ways to collect this information. Then tap into those specifics: perfecting your strengths, improving your weaknesses and using this insight to communicate how you're different.

For instance, maybe there is a particular frustration in the landscape that your crews address better than anyone else. Maybe the way you interact with customers is unique. Maybe you have experts on your team who have rare and highly valuable experience that elevates your brand in customers' minds? Can your stand-out service or the results they produce become the crux of your marketing message? Can you use your customers' words to tell your story?

Goodyear Tire is a good example of a company that had a differentiation problem in the eyes of its customers. For a long time, customers were unwilling to pay a premium for innovations the company introduced to extend tire tread life. Without a clear differentiator, buyers experienced sticker shock and gravitated toward lower-priced tires. Goodyear solved their problem by pricing various tire models based on how many miles they could be expected to last – something customers understood – rather than by their engineering complexity – something customers didn't value as much as Goodyear engineers did. This highlighted innovation advantages and taught customers how to compare offerings that aligned with Goodyear's value proposition. What part of your service matters most to your customers? When sitting down to compare service providers, does this make you unique from your competitors in a clear and important way?

Other examples can be found in the hotel industry. Many hotels offer the same basics to guests – a clean, presentable room; a relatively comfortable bed; a private bathroom with a shower; and a TV, a phone and Internet access. But some hotels can charge more because they provide a guest experience rather than just a place to stay, including bigger rooms, valet, concierge, turn-down and babysitting services, thicker robes and towels and high-quality linens. Guests who favor this more comfortable stay will pay a little more for the enhanced experience. What extras do you offer that enhance the entire landscape service experience for your customers?

The point is that a landscape or lawn care company must stand out in today's economy to attract customers and charge a premium price. But you can't just be different to be different. You must be different in a way that your market will appreciate.

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