

Working Relationships

Quick! When's the last time you called a client whose job you completed a year or two ago or longer? Was it because they called you? Not good enough.

What we're talking here boys and girls is you calling a "job done" client to see how they are. I'm talking about calling to see what's new with your client's life and their family, and to find out what might be new in the garage or to ask them about that home entertainment system that they've been enjoying courtesy of your people.

Most businesses don't do this, even the ones that should be thinking about building great customer relationships and referrals. Most of

us are buried by our day-to-day work, dealing with the day's fireball, closing out a job, finally

ishing a bid and making time to read articles about our hard-work-but-fun industry.

You need to ring up your clients and hear what's new with them and be able to tell them some stuff about you, your life, and family...anything but about your business. You will get to the business end of things eventually.

How many of you have not only called an established client

"You need to ring up your clients and hear what's new with them"

but also invited them out to dinner? Surely you have a few clients who you would enjoy hanging out with and visa versa. Dare to be different and extend the invitation. Head for a nice restaurant. Maybe you take them with their kids and yours. You have to believe that they'd tell their friends about this and surely some of their friends envy the gear that they have in their home. Your classy style of periodic follow-up might just make that friend decide that it is time to finally build the system that they've been thinking of.

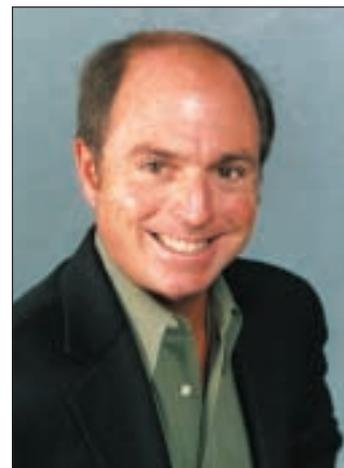
Of course, you can be more direct with some clients, especially those who appreciate the fine art of business development and closing new deals. Talk to them about new stuff that you've learned about since their home was completed. Tell them about the cool new products that are out now that could easily be integrated into their system. Maybe the price trend of flat panels has finally made it right for someone to decide to

pop them into all of the bedrooms and one in the master bath. They're half the price that they were one or two years ago and now adding them sounds like a cool idea. Heck, finally find a way to make the kids happy and get Mom and Dad to say "yes" to an iPod sound system in the teenagers' bedrooms. iPods are a really cool way to get the family into the home entertainment system.

Here is an idea that you can implement immediately in your business. It starts with you and then you need to pick out your best sales people and relationship builders. Meet briefly and decide that you want to begin making calls on a regular basis to clients that you haven't followed up with since final payment time. Come up with some good reasons that you can all agree on as your company's "reasons to call" and make a few calls like this each week. Surely someone will show some enthusiasm for updating his or her system. This news coming into your company will be exciting and others on your team will be jazzed that they work for a company that has built relationships so good that they can go back and sell more to that client.

Create a regular routine so that these calls become a habit in your business. Great businesses follow up. Follow up drives new ideas and strengthens relationships. New ideas in extended relationships can be turned into new sales.

Now, if you really want to have some fun and are ready to put some work and a few bucks into it, you can plan a special event at your business. Try a "technology"



evening where you not only invite a small number of clients and prospects but also invite some local business owners and community leaders. Get some diversity in the crowd so that the chances of everyone meeting and chatting someone up is good. Include some prospective clients or, if you're really good, invite some whose jobs you are in the middle of. Remember, I said to do this only if you're really good and that includes how you price your work. Done right, there's no risk.

So often we hear our colleagues saying, "I am my business to my customers." Most of us are, so let's make sure that we maintain those relationships just as carefully as when we first created them. In most instances your clients won't be expecting to hear from you. So when they do, make it special. Be inviting. Be real. Always be selling.

Buzz Delano (buzz@delanoassociates.com) brings more than 20 years of worldwide sales, marketing, customer service and business development experience to his role as CEDIA Dean for the Electronic Systems Customer Relations (ESCR) track.

