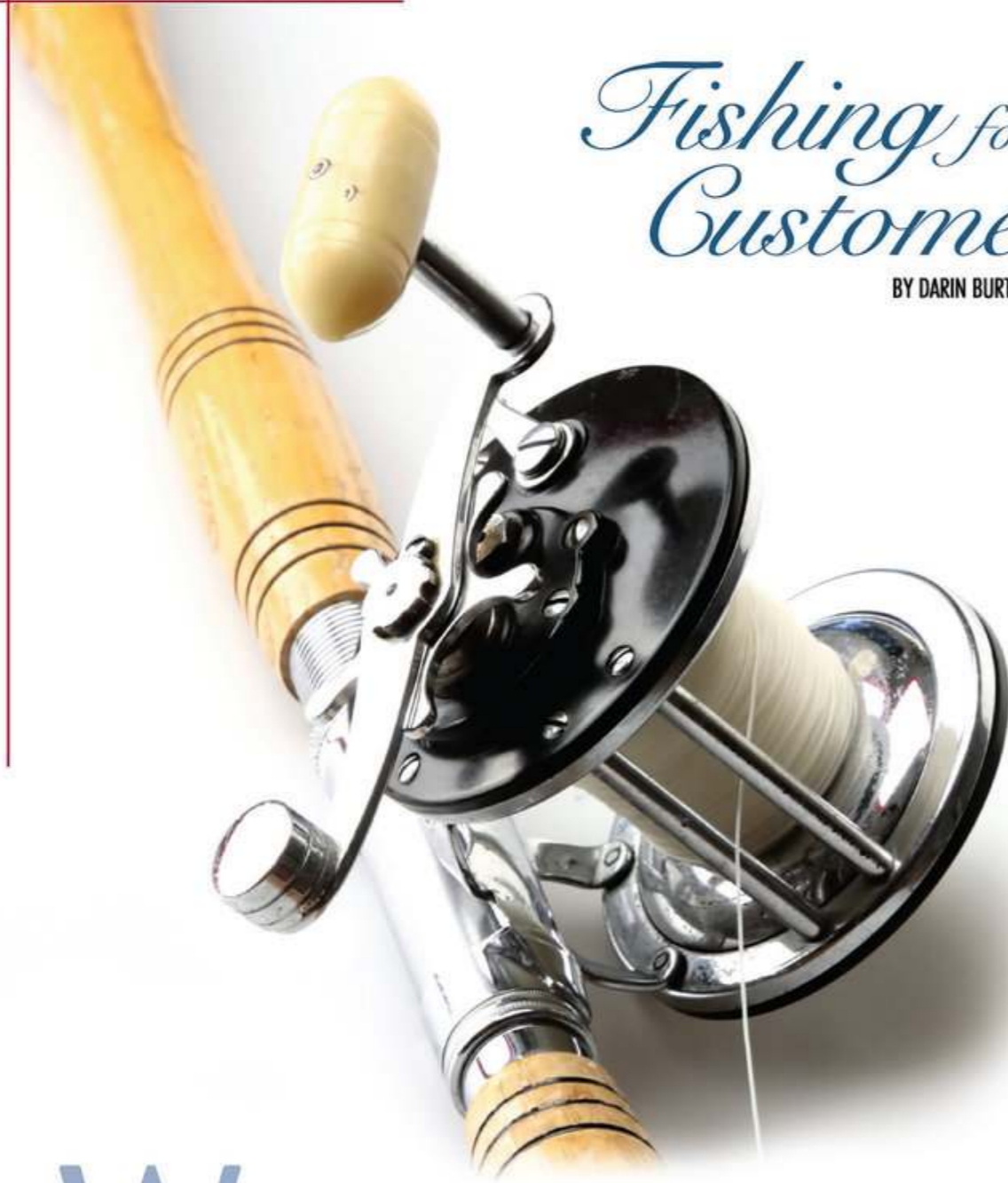


Fishing for Customers

BY DARIN BURT



When it comes to attracting customers to your business, you may wonder why “the fish” aren’t biting. Are you using the right bait? Did you cast your line into the hot fishing hole? Those are some of the questions that Chuck McKay answers in his new book, “Fishing for Customers and Reeling Them in.” You might think of McKay as a fishing guide for marketers. With more than three decades in newspaper, radio, and television advertising, he has the know-how and the tackle to help you set the hook.

Any fisherman knows that one of the best parts of fishing is relaxing with a cold beer and waiting for the fish to bite. Is hooking customers this easy?

It’s never that easy. It takes continual work because you’re shooting at a continuously moving target. The guy who wakes up this morning and his wife says, “I’m pregnant!” is now for the first time in his life becoming aware of ads for baby food and diapers. This time next year, he’ll be ignoring those ads and somebody else will be paying attention. Anytime you decide to sit back with a beer, part of the crowd that’s in the market for what you sell is going to miss the message.

What is the best way not to scare off the “fish”?

In the book, I say, “stop shouting.” By that I mean don’t yell, “WE WILL NOT BE UNDERSOLD!” - to a lesser extent anything you do that draws attention to yourself that is unnatural. In the animal kingdom you never see a gazelle running in front of a group of lions going, “Hey, come and get me!” If you spend all your time talking about yourself, it makes customers wonder what’s wrong with you.

In the book, you define relational and transactional customers; what’s the difference?

When you’re in the market for something either you think you have all the information you need to make an intelligent decision or you don’t. If you think you know everything, you’re probably just shopping price. If you’re scared that you don’t know enough, you’re shopping for somebody who will give you the answers and not take advantage of you. The transactional shopper says, “Tell me what it costs,” and the relational shopper says, “Tell me what I need.”

Is one better than the other?

The transactional customer is going to be a good source of word of mouth for your business because he’s going to be bragging to all his friends about the great deal he got, but the relational customer is never going to grind you for price, and as long as you don’t take advantage of him, he’ll keep coming back again and again. For most small businesses, relational customers tend to be more rewarding and profitable.

Many people talk about “word of mouth” being the best advertising, but that takes time to grow; is there a faster way to generate a good reputation?

There are ways you can do it quicker, but there’s no way to do it fast. You’ve heard it said, if somebody likes you they’ll tell three people, and if they don’t they’ll tell twenty. That’s absolute crap. If people like you there not going to tell anybody; why would they? To get remarked about you have to be REMARKABLE.

How can a business “rock the boat” without tipping it over?

It has to be a surprise. Lets say, a guy comes in and buys six compact discs and you give him this special little knife that is designed to cut the cellophane off without damaging the jewel case. That is going to get you some big positive word of mouth. The rewards should come erratically because if you do that with everybody, it’s no longer special. You still want to treat everyone really well, but sometimes go above and beyond.

Is it more effective to direct advertising at existing customers or people who have never heard of your business?

We spend way more money to bring new customers in than we ever do to retain customers. I used to say, why would you ever have a frequent shopper card because all that does is give discounts to your existing customers, but later I came to realize the importance of discounting your regular customers and letting them know that you’re aware there are other choices and you’re glad they chose you.

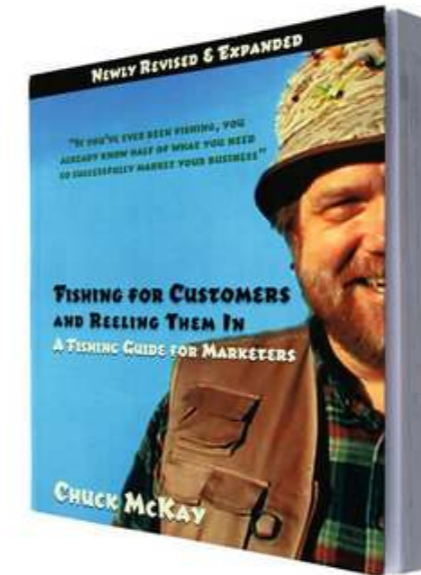
You talk about the importance of being a “specialist” in order to attract the profitable 20 percentile of your customers; does being

a specialist mean only selling one thing?

No. It means being known for one thing and it should be something that your customers feel that they can’t get from anybody else. It could be a product, it could be attitude, it could be knowledge.

How does a retailer, say a smoke shop that sells everything from rolling papers and pipes to tie-dye t-shirts and black light posters, make themselves into a specialist?

In the first place, they have the inventory that you can’t get anyplace else, and in the second place, they understand the lifestyle. There’s a credibility that they offer; if JC Penny decided to start selling tie-dye shirts, they wouldn’t have any credibility. When it comes to your staff, you need to have people who can identify with the customers and vice versa.



You say “never waiver from your specialty”; does that mean never reel in and check/change your bait?

From time to time, you will have to change the bait. Lets face it; the economy we have now is different from what it was 18 months ago, and you spoke to customers about solving other problems by buying your products. Your specialty doesn’t change, but your reaction to the world does because it has to.

What do you feel is the best advertising medium for a small business?

In terms of being least expensive, I would say outdoor advertising, such as billboards and bus benches, followed by radio and cable television. Most businesses should not be in mass media, though; they should be distributing door hangers, postcards and fliers around their

neighborhood – in most suburban neighborhoods, two to three miles is about as far as people will go to shop in any particular store.

The Internet has created a much larger “fishing hole”; how has the Internet affected the way small businesses relate to customers?

You need to have an Internet presence just to be considered “real” anymore. If I do a quick Google search for “Skateboard Shops Bismarck” and you don’t have a website, how good can you be? It doesn’t take much; put up a simple page with pictures of the store and people enjoying the products, tell me your hours and give me a map, and always include a picture of yourself to tell people that you’re the guy they’re going to be dealing with, and not some faceless conglomerate. Most businesses want to look bigger than they are, but people want to know that they can pick up the phone and talk to a “real” person.

Customers like to be appreciated; what’s your best idea for thanking customers for their business and letting them know you care about their continued patronage?

Hand written thank you notes. Nobody does it anymore, but 50 years ago that was the etiquette of business. If there’s anything at all that you can do to remind the customer that they had a pleasant experience in your store, you’d be a fool not to do it. ♡

For more insightful advice from Chuck McKay, visit his website www.fishforcustomers.blogspot.com