



Marketing Messages

MARY CHARLESON

Simple sales tips from a successful five-year-old

It's amazing how some small businesses and even major corporations often misunderstand strategic marketing and sales. More amazing perhaps is that a lesson in the basics could be had at the hands of a young child.

My 5 year old son recently made \$15 in 1 1/2 hours selling lemonade on the West Vancouver seawall. He set up his stand in a high pedestrian traffic location along the seawall at the bottom of 19th St, a natural start or end for a walk and a high traffic intersection. It was a shaded area with a view well away from any restaurants, water fountains or vending machines.

Lesson #1: Location matters. Be easily accessible to as many of your target customers as you can. Make the environment pleasant. Distance yourself from competitors. He placed a large sign, "Alex and Pat's homemade lemonade 25¢" on a red draped table. He then placed signs 15 meters either side on the seawall telling people that lemonade was just ahead.

Lesson #2: Advertise your product or service. Customers need to know you exist. Tease them with your ads. Tell them why you're better. He didn't just stand there. He walked around and invited customers to stop. He pointed people to his stand and with a big smile he'd asked if they wanted some lemonade. He'd use the assumptive close, "Gee, it's a hot day, I'll bet you'd like a lemonade to cool off." He pre-qualified his customers. Noting that more women seemed to buy and in particular, women with strollers, he would select them in advance as they approached and extend a personal invitation. He accepted prepayment. His response to someone who said they had a water bottle was, "That's OK, you can pay now and have a lemonade when you come back!" They did, and he had cash in hand. He made 2 for 1 offers. When 2 people had only a quarter between them, he gave the second drink for free, but not before reminding them that the next time he was there, they could buy more. He suggested to one man that he still looked thirsty and perhaps he needed another. The customer bought a second glass. His clean white shirt was tucked in and his hands and face were spotless. He worked in a team with his sister behind the table while he directed traffic to the stand.

Lesson #3: Personal selling is very effective. Work the crowd. Meet your customers. Present yourself well. Be upbeat. Pre-qualify your target group. Upsell if you can. Use the assumptive close. Make special offers to get future sales. Sell as a team to support business. Learn that prepayment is good. The product he sold was homemade with fresh lemons served cold with ice in a big glass. It tasted good.

Lesson #4: You might get away once with great marketing and a crappy product, but only an excellent experience will bring customers back. He sold the lemonade for 25¢ a glass. This was certainly a bargain compared to Starbucks up the street, but since it was homemade and the product costs were low he still had a decent margin. Plus, his supplier didn't charge him for the goods. Several people paid him more than 25¢.

Lesson #5: Price your product based on your costs, desired margins and the prices charged by your competitors. People may pay more than asked when you're 5 and cute, but don't count on it later in life.

I suspect there may have been some West Vancouver bylaw prohibiting the sale of beverages without a license on a public walkway, but as his legal council I was ready to defend him if necessary.

Lesson #6: Know the laws and regulations affecting your business and industry. Don't trust your Mother.

There you have it. Basic rules for marketing and selling your products and services from a 5 year old. Simple isn't it?

Mary Charleson, MBA is president of Charleson Communications, a company specializing in market research, strategy and advertising development. She writes monthly and can be reached at mary@charleson.ca