

MARKETING



JAMES WARNER

Marketing is a general term for all the things one might do to obtain customers or, in other words, make sales. But there are many forms that it might take, including print and other advertising; press releases; publication of technical articles; and, yes, networking at venues where interested people might be. But I have found through the years that the very best marketing effort is much simpler and certainly less costly: *perform the highest-quality work and be honorable in your dealings*. This will bring repeat business and recommendations to others—always choice clients.

There are all manner of people and organizations in our industry; at the bottom are those who look only at low price and minimal performance, while those who value honesty and quality work completed in a timely manner reside at the opposite end. Most fall between these extremes. I have found that those at the bottom tend to be less principled, oftentimes cheating and conniving to their benefit, are slow to pay their obligations, and are generally not very nice or profitable to deal with. Conversely, those at the other extreme are typically a pleasure to work for and with to our mutual profit.

My former firm had a considerable clientele of commercial and industrial interests. To them, minimizing interruption of normal operations and loss of business were of the highest importance and they put a high value on dependability, quality, and performance. They also tended to be agreeable as to the cost for top performance and paid their obligations in a timely manner. They were Grade A clients, a pleasure to work with and serve. I have, however, run across firms that operated in the bottom mode, chiseling unceasingly and sometimes unethically for a low price, were slow-paying, and were generally a pain to work for. Although I had no knowledge of these things when starting the firm, it didn't take long to see the huge variation in potential clients.

An interesting example is two firms in exactly the same business: catching, processing, and canning tuna fish. Their

plants were located directly across the street from each other on Barracuda Street, which jugged out into the harbor on Terminal Island, CA. We had done jobs for one over several years. They were Grade A all the way, demanded top performance, and were a joy to work for. They paid their bills promptly as well. Then, one day, we had a request from the other guy to make a proposal for some work. The condition of the plant was grungy and the attitude of the “buyer” in the purchasing department was bad; upon checking, we discovered that their payment record was not good. We declined to become involved. Interestingly, they filed for bankruptcy a few years later.

I often hear stories about how tough business is, owners who force the price down and then don't pay, contractors submitting unjust claims, and everybody being sued by someone. Things aren't really that much different now, however—these same stories were common back when I was an active contractor more than 50 years ago. And while there remain rotten people and firms, there still are many that are Grade A. We as individuals select the manner in which we conduct ourselves and, sadly, many choose to operate in a less than honorable manner. But the choice is ours, and for those who choose to *perform the highest-quality work and be honorable in their dealings*, there remain top-grade clients who are a pleasure to work with.

And—oh, yes—marketing? Performing work of the highest quality and conducting oneself ethically is all that is required; there's no need for expensive advertising or other promotions. Repeat work and referrals are always preferable.

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