

How to Get the Most from Your Past Customers

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For many of you cleaning season is getting ready to start next month, but are you really ready?

You have probably already thought about getting your equipment in shape and buying supplies for the start up. You may have plans for marketing to new customers. But have you also planned for how you're going to keep and manage your current customers?

In our website blog posts, I have touched on the importance of existing customers before, but this topic is so important I will do so again here as a refresher for some and maybe give even new things to think about for others.

- Selling to past customers only requires about 20 percent of the amount of time and effort that it takes to gain new prospects. That means getting jobs from current customers saves four times the cost of marketing old versus new.
- A business, no matter how successful, will lose about 15 to 20 percent of its customer base year to year by no fault of the business.
- A satisfied customer may only tell one to three close friends they liked your service, but an unhappy customer will tell at least 10 people they know.
- Referrals from happy customers usually only come in the initial 24 to 48 hours after service is completed, unless motivated to do so.
- The national average of unsolicited

word of mouth referrals is two percent of your customer base. That means with 300 customers, you should get at least six new customers from the existing ones.

Here are some steps to plan and use your current satisfied customers to bring you much more new business than the 20 percent you will more than likely lose, or the two percent you'll gain if you do nothing at all.

Go back over your jobs from last year.

Make an index card for each one with who and where they were, when the work was done, what type of work they received, how long it took, how much they paid versus how much it cost you, and any other factors you deem important.

Armed with this information you can **build a skeleton job schedule** for this year to then work to make it permanent, filling in the gaps. These can also help you divide up the jobs between crews if you have them, keeping them in the same geographical area during work days.

Get out your rough calendar for the season and **place the cards of the current customers where you think they might fall this year**, if at all. You may have a job that you did that you know will not be repeated this year. But that customer may have a different need this year or be able to refer you other work. Place them



in a separate pile as you fill in your calendar.

Start with repeat contract work as to when they most likely will be. For example a fleet you wash twice a month on Sunday afternoons, a commercial restaurant you clean once a quarter on a Wednesday night, an apartment complex you spend four days cleaning in May. Make a card for each visit. These are contracts you most likely already have signed, sealed and delivered as guaranteed work. Now let's work on the maybes.

Example 1: You cleaned Mr. Miller's house and pool area for the first time last June. He called at the last minute because they were going to have a summer pool party, he got your name just from seeing your rig around the neighborhood earlier that year, he paid top dollar for the fast service and was very happy with the results. Place his customer card somewhere in May.

Make a list by month noting to call, mail or email him a reminder about summer and pool season and if he books early he will get the best time and maybe also make a special offer. Remember do not discount services; offer added value first instead, like free patio furniture cleaning with the pool deck cleaning. This is also the time to mention your referral program, how he can participate and what benefits he can get. (To learn more about referral programs, see the article in the Fall 2011 issue of *PCC/eClean Magazine*.) For example give us names and numbers of four friends and if someone books before your cleaning you will save \$50, or if after his cleaning they get a \$25 gift card. This promotes your customer to think about getting the work done earlier (better for you) plus already thinking about getting the word out about your service to save him some money (even better for you).

Example 2: Next customer card is an elderly lady who has had her house washed every spring for the last four years. She always
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sends you two or three referrals each year. Put her card down in the time she is used to getting the service. Be sure to contact her and discuss the timing of her cleaning, to thank her for her past referrals, to let her know what the current benefits are this year for helping you again with referrals. You might want to give her an added bonus for being such a loyal customer, like a free air conditioner coil cleaning. You will already be at the house and this service will not take more than 15 to 20 minutes to perform at a very minimal cost to you.

Plan this year as you are gaining satisfied customers to **ask for testimonials** along with the referrals at the completion of the service. If you can, get them on video; if not, try for a photo and at least the written testimonial. These you should post as soon as possible to your Facebook business page, and added to your web site along with the date to show repeat visitors to your site that you are continually having satisfied customers. That in itself will get you new business with no need of having to pay out referral fees.

Now back to the cards in the pile you did not place in your calendar. For instance the fellow that answered a direct mail campaign for soft roof washing late last year at a special price and you know that it has only been 6 months and his roof is still going to be clean

and not need service. He is the customer that you can market a different service to early this year. Hopefully you noted during that job other jobs you could do for him. Like the fact that he has a large back deck that could be washed or stripped and stained or a weathered fence around his back yard. His drive way and sidewalk were really dirty last Fall that you even gave him a quote on, but he did not want anything but the deal on the soft wash. He would be one to send a special offer card to along with the referral pre-service incentives to save him money on a job this spring or summer. You already know that deals motivate him so capitalize on that.

Work to try and pre-plan and place 60 to 80 percent of the customers you already have for this coming season before it starts. This way you can budget and plan your other expenses and profits around it, besides family time and industry events. For instance if you already know you will be doing more wood restoration and cleaning this summer than last year you can take that Wood Restoration Certification

class, order your supplies to take advantage of a vendor sale or to get the best bulk price and lower shipping cost. You may be able to see you have a weak work gap of weeks that need to be filled late in the summer and can plan a marketing campaign well in advance so you will not hit a slow spot. Leave a few mornings, afternoons or one day a week open each week to fill in with reschedules due to weather, customer changes and new business.

I am not saying to slow down or stop working hard to gain new business throughout the season, but with better management of your existing customers you will be able to more easily fill openings at a lower cost and hopefully increase the amount of business and profit you make this coming year.

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