



ARTICLE FOR XTRA MSN

STRATEGIES IN AN ECONOMIC DOWNTURN.

The Business Commentators, the Economist, and the News Media are all suggesting that the New Zealand Economy has either stalled, slowed down, got itself into problems or starting to believe the stories communicated within the media that there is going to be tightening business conditions.

The interesting thing is that if you examine the New Zealand economy since the Share Market crash in 1987 and particularly consider 1992 as the time that it came out there has not been a bad year since 1992 in New Zealand, there have been some tightenings of the economy but they don't become long term disasters, and they are all overcome by the application of people in business in particularly the Sales & Marketing end of the business focusing on customer relationships and customer development.

If you choose to believe that there will be a media induced slow down of the economy consider the employment statistics which have a shortage of skilled labour, and the suppliers and customers around you that are unable to meet their full production targets because of the shortage.

Some strategies that you might like to implement to make sure that you don't participate in too tougher recession could include.

Communicate a welcome back to 2006 message to all of your customers and in that communication tell them the good news that you have got happening in your business, the new products or services, the new people, the new added value packages marketing or promotional activities underway and generally give them some good news about your particular business to maintain a positive attitude.

Get out and visit your top customers in the first 12 weeks of the year and put a plan together to regularly visit groups of your customers for face to face interviews every 12 weeks during the year and talk about what projects they have coming up, what developments they have coming up and seeing in how you can get involved in assisting the success of those projects.

Look at adding value by repackaging the way your products or services are offered remembering that anything that has the word "new" and "free" is going

to attract attention so if you can introduce some new products or services, you add some extra bonus value by free purchases, you can perhaps look at different methods of delivery, distribution just in time, ease of ordering, long hours, faster response to enquiries and customer personal issues requirements.

Undertake a research questionnaire of your customers to find out what they like and what they dislike and make sure that in your research questionnaire you list all of your products and services that are available, this has the effect of stimulating the customer to realize that you have these products and services and generally lifts business by about 10% as a result.

Focus your sales team into 12 week action plans that are about more face to face visits less hiding behind emails, telephone calls, and encouraging them to remember that people do business with people not with systems.

Measure your sales teams progress by the increases in face to face visits, focus the sales meetings on success stories about why customers have made a decision and how the sales people helped, look forwards to what you can achieve rather than what happened last month and remember that if you have one win per day at the end of the month you have had between 20 and 31 wins for the month a true success story.

Hold customer functions over the summer period, even socialize with some of your key customers by encouraging your staff to play sports or just enjoy a bit of time at the beach to build the people interaction and to focus on building loyalty with you existing clients.

Send a thank you card or some acknowledgement to every customer who has increased their business over the previous month to let them know that they are special.

Start up a customer loyalty rewards club where you reward customers for continued purchases with special incentives or rewards.

Encourage your CEO and Senior Management and your General Managers to get out and meet with your counterparts in your top ten customers.

Set up with your suppliers preferred supplier programmes that recognize those suppliers that go to special efforts to work with you and make it easy to do business, recognizing them with plaques and certificates and making available face to face meetings and listening to their ideas and getting them involved in working with your purchasing and production people.

Encourage your purchasing people to review their number of suppliers instead of having multiple suppliers to focus on the suppliers that really work to retain your business and give them the biggest share of your budget to encourage them to do more. Get rid of suppliers who are difficult to deal with.

Hold a team vision meeting once every 12 weeks with all of the members of your business helping them to understand the progress that the company is making, the focus for the next 12 weeks, and how everybody can participate whether they be in warehousing, production, administration, management or any department of the business that every contribution will help the team to succeed.

Focus on training on team work, accepting change, and leadership and supervision of others.

Go out and visit with your sales reps and your sales managers to customers, find out exactly what they customers are looking for.

Undertake a marketing audit to review exactly what your strengths and weaknesses are in your marketing and the development and delivery of your brand then start breaking those down in to activities so that you can better deliver not only in the 2006 market but also to fine tune your organization to be able to continue to deliver as the market turns up again.

Undertake a brand audit, to check over what exactly your brand is perceived to deliver to its customers and check this against your values and your organizational culture and see whether it will help you customers to understand more about your brand if you communicate better.

Feed out more positive PR stories to not only your customers in the form of newsletters, your website, but also to specialist trade publications, and to general media of any successes that you have.

Focus your marketing efforts on customer retention, customer loyalty, building value with existing customers to as high as 80% and reducing your new customer acquisition efforts to a lesser amount in your budget say 20%.

Remember that new customers achieved on price will generally be lost on price, far better to get new customers on benefits and value.

Get out and offer to speak to business organizations, trade organizations, Rotary & Lions Clubs and speak at conferences about the successes that your business is having, the successful people that you employ, and be prepared to challenge your industry to new ways of doing things, sharing their successes and to working together.

Look at building alliances with other people in similar industries to you to jointly tackle customer issues or big customer purchases or tenders or RFP's.

But most of all associate with positive people who believe in New Zealand model of business success and share your ideas.

Any one wanting some positive encouragement, mentoring, or just email feedback is welcome to share your success stories with the author Richard Gee, Marketing Strategy Consultant, Seminar & Conference Speaker and Book Author on richard@geewiz.co.nz or check out my website www.geewiz.co.nz for further success stories.