

Turning Contacts from Data into Gold

What did you do with all those leads you brought back from Chamber Expo?

If you are like 90% of the businesses I see, nothing. Why? I hear lots of reasons; here is what I have found to be the top two.

Life got in the way: After all, you were away from the office for two whole days. Not counting all the time you spent getting ready for those two days. When you got back in the phone message pile was as high as the stack of work that needed to be done. An RFP was due and your secretary called in sick. Before you knew it a month has gone by and you can't even remember who you talked to or even where the cards you collected are. More importantly, you are too embarrassed to follow-up now.

You didn't have a plan: Well you had good intentions, but not a plan. So when Thursday rolled around and you unloaded all the stuff from the show, you then got right to work with the matters at hand. If you had a plan and a system you could have delegated the pile of cards to be inputted into your contact manager with the appropriate follow-up activities scheduled immediately. Your follow-up/thank you for stopping by my booth letter would have already been written (before the show) and your plan of what to do with the leads would have been in place.

Why is this scenario so common? I have found that when it comes to marketing your business it tends to be a "fly by the seat of your pants" method. I have found that companies tend to market when it's slow and when they are busy, well lets say marketing is not top on their list. Then they seem surprised when things slow down. So they start again with the intense marketing effort till they get too busy and then nothing. Hmm, have they been there before.

Let's use the Chamber Expo as an example of how a solid plan with the right tools can turn one marketing activity into a tremendous opportunity. First you need a good contact manager. A contact manager allows you to not only store names (like a database) but it stores the history of any activity you have with the contact. You need to plan what kind of leads you want to get from the expo (and I don't think more is better here). When it comes to an Expo, quality wins of quantity every time. You need a plan of action in place for the follow-

up before you set up your booth. It would be helpful if you have the letters in place, and sales track set up for the follow-up.

Let me explain this a bit further. I use GoldMine Software; in fact I have used it since 90s. This is a powerful contact manager. You can set up an automated process and track so that once the names are inputted and marked as Chamber Expo it will automatically launch a series of events including merging the letter, setting up a series of follow-up calls for the following week which will be placed on your calendar. So the following Wednesday when you open your calendar you will see a series of follow-up calls to make from the Expo. Not only will the names be there with their phone numbers, but any notes you might have taken about your conversation will be noted in their record. Once you complete those calls, you can update the data with a few key strokes including the outcome of the calls and any further follow-up that might be needed.

The key to success are these:

- Pick an event where you will meet the right people.
- Set up the follow-up strategy including writing the follow-up letter before the event.
- Only spend time at the event with the right people. Take time to qualify and disqualify at the event.
- Only keep the contacts that pass your predetermined litmus test. This way you don't have tons of people trying to win a candy jar but they don't want your product or service.
- Immediately capture this information into your contact manager. If you don't have one, talk to Gary Zimmerman (<http://www.ecsh.net/>), he's my GoldMine Guru. He has the ability to make a software package come to life, feel easy to use and hold's your hand through the process.
- Make sure you set aside one hour a day for the next week (or whatever time you determine makes sense) on your calendar to do the follow-up.
- Enjoy the fruit of your labor and go out and get your gold.

Lia Allen, Lia Allen & Associates, is a Business Development Specialist that helps small business get unstuck on the roller coaster ride of Business Development so they can have more fun and close more business – for more information go to www.liaallen.com.