

Optimizing Your Business Center: Deploying Real Marketing Strategies That Work

Welcome back to the second article in our series, *Optimizing Your Business Center: 6 Key Strategies to Drive Profits*.

In this edition we will explore the world of marketing and *Deploying Real Marketing Strategies That Work*.

We last reviewed optimizing your sales process as one of the first keys to driving profitability in your center operations, but to fill your sales pipeline you must develop a real marketing plan. It is truly amazing in today's world the number of business centers we see which are not taking advantage of the basic marketing tactics to help fill their pipeline and drive sales.

The marketing basics we will explore today are best practice principles specifically applied to the business center industry and are proven to be successful in any economy. But first I wanted to caution **against** contacting your local marketing agency and getting a proposal on what they can do to help you with your marketing. Typically marketing agencies are boutique shops that really don't know business to business marketing, much less the business center industry, and will suggest things like expensive billboards or extensive print advertising. If you don't know better these strategies might appear to make sense, however typically these tactics will produce very few leads or sales as 99% of the audience is not your target customer and these things will just break your budget.

Now let's talk about things that will work, first and foremost you must develop a marketing plan that takes a multi channel approach to your strategies. A multi-channel approach means engaging in more than just one marketing tactic to reach the same customer multiple times or successfully reaching more of the right prospects. Alliance Office Strategies creates these for customers daily and understand the unique aspects of marketing in the executive office industry.

The marketing plan for your business center should include all of the following: Relationship Marketing, Physical & Social Networking, Web Marketing, Direct Marketing, Database building, Targeted Advertising, Specials and Promotions. Individually these tactics are good but deployed together they are powerful and will help you build a strong pipeline, now and into the future.

Relationship Marketing and Networking, both physical and social, are often overlooked components of a marketing plan and this is a major mistake. Remember even in today's digital world people do business with people they like and will send business your way if they know about you, your center and your services. You should always look to participate in the local networking activities and promote the business to the membership. Examples of groups to seek out are local Chamber of Commerce, Business Networking International (www.bni.org), Commercial Real Estate Women (www.crewnetwork.org), and other local leads groups. Alliance Office Strategies works with clients on an ongoing basis to refine these critical skills for the business center industry.

One of the top lead sources in the office business center industry comes from relationships with your local commercial brokers as well as internet brokers. You must develop relationships with these brokers to work with on a referral basis to assist in marketing the center. I'm always shocked at the center managers who never step foot out of the center or make a phone call to someone who will help them be successful. Don't let this be you! Additionally, just as you are selling a professional image to your clients, you should ALWAYS be sure to have high quality professional hand out materials (brochures, business cards, letterhead, etc) to give your clients to refer back to once they leave your center. These materials are very affordable and effective when done correctly so don't just ask your local intern to create these for you.

Web marketing is another critical marketing plan component to drive leads to your center. You must make sure the center website has been developed to be optimized for search engines to utilize basic functionality of the internet and on social networking sites such as LinkedIn. Additionally, make sure you are using web analytics to evaluate your web traffic and make sure your web copy is written in an effective way to drive more leads to the center. Your website MUST make it 'easy to contact' you via your website; this is often overlooked but our research tells us that when centers have their contact information easily accessible on every page of their website, they are contacted by prospects more frequently. Furthermore, define pay-per-click campaigns with proper key word targeting so that your business center is easily found through major search engines such as Google. Again, be very careful of agencies offering these types of services as you can spend money on the agency rather than driving prospects. We almost always find that companies outside the industry WILL NOT know the proper keywords to target for your center and will cause you to spend many unnecessary dollars. I see many centers advertising on Craig's List and while this can be a very good source of leads, like anything else, must be managed effectively in order to get the optimal results.

Hopefully, you have taken the advice from the previous article and have a good CRM in place, now you need to fill the CRM with prospects. As discussed earlier being active in your Chamber and other organizations will provide you contact details for people who may be viable prospects. Always seek to add these contacts and build your database for direct mailings, e-mail campaigns and cold calling. If you haven't begun using an e-mail platform, there are many affordable and user friendly solutions available. You should develop print collateral including sales brochures, flyers, meeting room coupons and direct mail letters for targeted industries. Again, don't forget you are selling a professional image to your clients so it is extremely important you have one as well.

Selective targeted advertising can help promote your center however, be sure to create your advertisements with strong calls to action while advertising benefits and value, not features. For placement seek alternative local publications such as local business journals and specific vertical markets, i.e. financial services, attorneys, insurance, etc.

Another key tactic to your marketing strategy should be to develop a series of specials and promotions which rotate on an monthly basis dependant on your occupancy rates and as a sales driver. Your database now becomes a revenue generator utilizing these promotions.

Finally, consider a membership in the Alliance Business Center Network which gives the center the ability promote worldwide usage of meeting rooms. Additionally, the center assumes the position of being competitive with global meeting room offering of industry leaders. The ABCN membership will also help promote the center and virtual office packages tremendously by being able to include the ABCN white site/portal on your website. The typical ROI that a business center receives on their ABCN membership is greater than ten times the investment.

Above are just a few of the many tactics utilizing a multi-channel approach which can effectively market your center in an increasingly competitive market place. Now get started on your Marketing Plan today and don't be afraid to ask for help when putting your plan together; the Alliance Office Strategies team would love to help your center achieve great success! Stay tuned for our next feature article in the series on "Optimizing Your Center Technology." For more information on any of the above tactics feel free to contact me directly at kcondi@allianceofficestrategies.com or visit www.allianceofficestrategies.com.

About the Author:

Karen Condi has over 12 years experience in the Business Center industry and has been a key player in Alliance Office Strategies rapid expansion; she possesses extensive knowledge and expertise in the areas of sales, marketing, operations, planning and development. Specializing in turnkey, takeover, start up and crisis management projects, Ms. Condi has dramatically increased ROI for many clients across the country. Prior to working with Alliance, Ms. Condi served on the leadership team for a national Office Suite provider, where she opened, acquired, developed and managed over 30 locations throughout the United States. Ms. Condi brings unparalleled development, management and operations experience with a complete understanding of best practices to maximize ROI, revenues and profits. She is currently the Executive Director and Principal of ALLIANCE Office Strategies. The AOS team is currently engaged in over a dozen consulting, development and management engagements with business centers around the world.