

Turning The Tide In Your Favor

BY JOHN GRAHAM

Even the most self-assured and stoic among us feels the intensity of the times. The economic recovery seems quite elastic at best. Today's good news can disappear as quickly as it appeared. The end of the economic drought isn't in sight, as far as retailers are concerned. They continue their deep discounting in spite of having trimmed orders. It may be a good idea to prepare for even more demanding conditions.



Who wants to do business with someone who ignores deadlines, who jokes about being late to meetings and then bows out early? This is no small problem for business organizations. If you Google “time management,” there are 195 million entries!

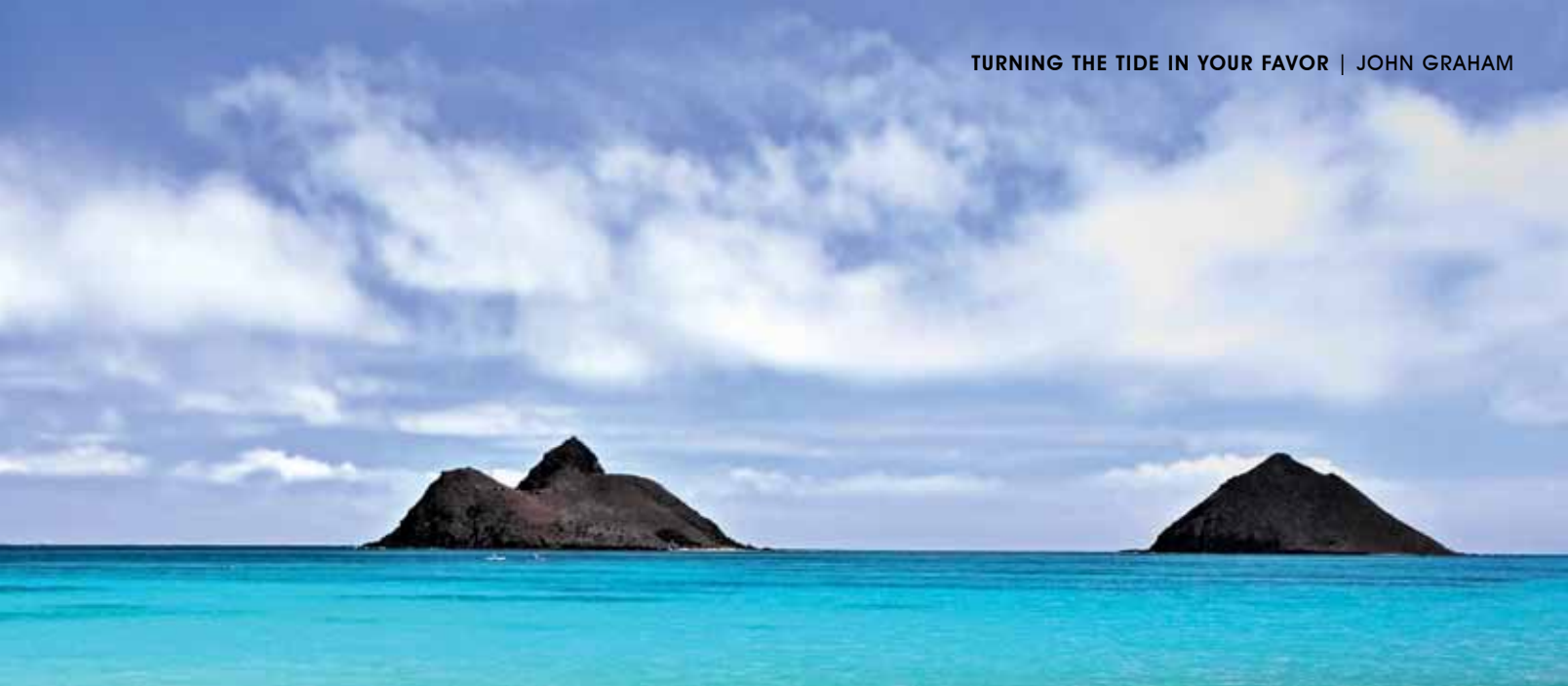
In spite of this extended “dry spell,” we’re still faced with the necessity of doing business, of making sales and meeting customers’ expectations — and, yes, demands.

Here’s a series of strategies that can help turn the tide in your favor. They’re straight from the real world and doable. Some may seem more significant than others. Perhaps they are, but each one may help gain a prospect’s attention and solidify a customer relationship. While these strategies may not solve every problem, they can help turn the tide in your favor.

Increased Customer Expectations Require Real-Time Responses

Seemingly innocent comments can send the wrong message. For example, “I’ll get that for you when I get back to the office” can make sales reps look like they’re out of sync with the times. Whatever else is happening, *business today is a “no waiting zone.”*

Although apparently surprising to some, the iPad’s appeal to the business community seems rather obvious as it provides continuous connectivity and its touch screen makes it a seamless extension of the person using it. It keeps the attention focused on the person using it rather than on a piece of equipment, such as a laptop. And unlike a laptop, the iPad is uniquely designed for sharing. Whether these distinctions are actual or perceived makes no difference; the results are what count and that’s real-time responses.



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Salespeople Must Be Competent Business Consultants

While “there will always be a need for salespeople,” those who only want “get the order and get going” are fast disappearing.

The change is evident in most industries. “In our business, we bring a lot more than the next load of gasoline to our dealers,” says Jonathan Shaer, vice president of Mutual Oil Co., Inc., a large independent gasoline distributor based in Brockton, Massachusetts.

“To earn a gasoline dealer’s business today, we must be consultants, bringing a wide array of technical and business solutions to help them cope with changing circumstances and to take advantage of new opportunities for growth,” says Shaer. “That’s a demanding task that requires both experience and expertise.”

Keep Your Promises

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For some reason, it’s easy to forget that appointments are promises. Meeting times are promises. Due dates are promises. Proper preparation is a promise. Deadlines are promises.

By consistently keeping these promises, you send

your co-workers, supervisors and customers the message that you are someone they can count on, someone who delivers.

Develop Your Own Networking Group

With all the networking opportunities that exist via the Internet and face-to-face, why spend the time doing it yourself?

Although that’s what most of us might think, Preston Diamond, executive director of the Institute of WorkComp Professionals sees it differently. At his suggestion, Insurance sales executive Curt Dumbleton of Widerman & Company in Haddonfield, New Jersey, started a networking and sales group with a few current clients, along with several prospects he wanted the chance to work with.

When he approached them, “The response truly surprised me,” Dumbleton reports. “Everyone jumped at the opportunity to join us.” And for a good reason. Rather than taking the popular “So, what do you do?” approach, Dumbleton turned networking on its head. “We keep it very simple,” he says. “It’s about ‘How can I help you grow your business?’”

Dumbleton says that this isn’t a message that those involved are used to hearing from insurance people. “My clients have no problem inviting others to our monthly luncheon because it’s different from other networking groups they’re involved with.”

He says there’s a new success story every month.

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“It’s gone so well that I’ve been asked to start two other groups.”

Dumbleton summarizes his success this way, “I’m meeting new people and opportunities keep coming. I’m currently working on two very nice accounts, primarily because we wanted to help these people grow their businesses.”

Stay Away From the Lowest Price Trap

“It’s easier said than done,” you say. Perhaps. But Progressive Insurance, the company that goes head-to-head with GEICO on low price, introduced its “freedom to name your price” advertising campaign, an effort to move the focus from telling the customer what to pay to what the customer wants to pay. Beyond being an excellent attention-getter, it’s an effective strategy for engaging the customer in the buying process.

In a similar way, Goodyear lets customers decide what they want to pay with a comparison rating system for its four lines of car and minivan tires. Using this educational tool, customers select the qualities that are most important to them, which is an effective way to relate value and price.

Stay Away From “Entrapment Marketing”

While it’s nothing new, the Internet has elevated “entrapment marketing” to new dizzy heights. It might also be called “marketing for suckers.” It starts with a lure, usually a *free* “report” or an article with an intriguing title that captures a viewer’s interest. Then, when someone clicks on it, up pops a page with the first few paragraphs of the article. Getting to the rest of it takes another click — and filling out a form with your contact information.

This is just one example of entrapment marketing. How did you feel if this has happened to you? Probably angry and resentful. And you want nothing to do with a company that plays you for a sucker.

If you offer valuable information, then make it available instantly without any strings attached. Then, at the end of the article, make your offer of “more information” a subscription to the company’s newsletters or

the opportunity to complete a survey. If you have captured the reader’s interest, they may be ready to share their contact information with you. Instead of eliciting anger, you are rewarded with appreciation.


Make It Easy For Customers To Find You

This may sound so obvious it’s silly. Yet, compare the amount of time and money companies spend on trying to find customers with their pitifully limited investments in having customers find them.

Most salespeople know that the chances of making a sale go way up if the customer calls them. It’s at that moment that the twin conditions of need and urgency come together.

Yet, most companies continue to ignore the value of working with motivated buyers. Instead, we continue to pursue prospects with outdated sales strategies that focus on cold calling in one form or another.

Today’s customers want to be in charge of making purchases; they don’t want someone chasing them. The task, then, is staying in front of customers, whether it’s on the Internet, through advertising, articles or using the social media so that when they get ready to buy, you’re there. The “hottest” lead of all is when the customer contacts you.

Each of these strategies aims at turning the tide in your favor, a challenging task anytime, but even more so today. The winning success formula calls for new ideas, careful execution and consistent implementation. 



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