**Marketing Ideas for Onsite Professionals – Part 3**

In this final installment of a three-part series on ways installers and other onsite industry professionals can market their business, we will focus on some ideas which are fairly easy to implement. In some cases, you may not even think of them as marketing-related, but they are. Marketing is more than just the sales call, a company brochure or a website. Really, anything which leaves an impression about your company in the minds of your customers has a marketing component.

**Incenting your customers.** Word of mouth is the most effective form of advertising. Make sure to leave extra business cards of brochures with customers upon completing your job. Considering offering your customers a finders fee, coupons for movies, restaurants or some other incentive if a referral from them results in business for you.

**Incenting your employees.** New work frequently comes from neighbors who see your employees on the job. Make sure they understand how to deal with potential new customers and put your company's best foot forward. Also, take advantage of their circle of family, friends and other contacts. Give some thought to providing incentives which encourage them to identify and exploit opportunities to sell your services. And who knows? Perhaps there is a great salesperson among the folks who work for you.

**Advertising items.** Little giveaways such as refrigerator magnets, pens, notepads, etc., can be very effective ways to keep your company top of mind when people need your services. They work well as giveaways at fairs, but can work in a wide range of settings where you connect with potential customers. The best items are those which are likely to be used or seen frequently, such as the items above.

**Appearances matter.** How you present your company will leave an impression on both current and potential customers. If the inside of your truck is filled with fast food wrappers and other trash, if your equipment is caked with mud, if you aren't reasonably well groomed with clean clothes, people will take notice. As the expression goes, "You only have one chance to make a first impression."

**Have a consistent look.** Everything which advertises your company -- your brochures, your website, your truck signs, your estimate forms, invoices, etc. -- should present your company in a similar fashion. One goal of advertising is to get people to recognize your company right away. If everything about your company looks different, your message is less likely to be easily retained by your customers. The two characteristics all of your company materials should have are: your company logo and a consistent color scheme (ideally not more than one or two colors).

**Ask customers how they heard about you.** This is the simplest way to figure out what's working and what isn't with your marketing. Over time, it will be clear which tactics are the most effective and which should be dropped. As you go forward with next year's marketing strategy, this is perhaps the most important intelligence you can gather to improve the way you spend your precious marketing dollars.

**Handle problems personally.** Studies show that 50% of the time an unhappy customer will still use a business in the future if the company made a good faith effort to address the problem which made the customer unhappy. If you are the owner of a business, it is in your interest to make sure that you are dealing with problem customers personally. No matter how good your employees are, they are not as invested in the success of your company as you are, and won't care as much about the consequences of poor customer relations.

**Septic smart sidebar:**

EPA rolls out SepticSmart consumer education program.

The Environmental Protection Agency recently introduced SepticSmart, a homeowner education program which advises owners of septic systems about ways to manage and maintain their systems. To help spread the word, EPA has provided materials for contractors to use in their own marketing materials. The most useful of these tools is a “badge” which you can download and put on your website (with you can hyperlink back to EPA’s SepticSmart website). By linking your business to a ‘trusted authority’ like EPA, your credibility with customers and prospective customers is enhanced (and they will have access to reliable, authoritative information). To learn more, visit the SepticSmart website: http://water.epa.gov/infrastructure/septic/septicsmart.cfm.