

Cultivating Growth

New GrowthWorks Program Offers Dealers Turnkey Marketing Strategies

by margot douaihy

Concurrent with a soft economy is a whole set of learning curves for business owners. Even when the economy is at its most clement, companies face unpredictable challenges. When is it time to restructure? Should I order a hiring freeze? What about the proposed expansion? The new plasma wall for the showrooms...should those plans be put on pause? Or, perhaps, now is the time to diversify your offerings, adding more bang for your client's buck.

And what happens to the business components that are (often erroneously) deemed low priorities—like marketing or advertising? Is it sensible to engage in marketing activities while tightening the belt?

There are no simple answers to these questions, but according to Leslie Stevens, president of Eclipse Marketing, a down economy is exactly why dealers must spend money on marketing. Just a few years ago, contracts were falling into the dealer's laps. Today, not only due to the economic slump, but also the influx of more custom installers into the channel, dealers must aggressively seek new business, and they must maintain communication with previous clients.

These reasons, compounded by the experience of working with dealers on a project-by-project basis, clarified for Stevens that custom integration dealers need more than just litera-

ture on a piecemeal basis, but rather a complete solution to systematically funnel business through their doors.

"Based on that, we [Eclipse Marketing] developed GrowthWorks, an all-inclusive, turnkey marketing program that starts with a semi-custom marketing plan and implementation of it over the course of several months," Stevens said.

Stevens asserts that dealers have always recognized the need to market themselves, but until recently, it was not particularly ur-

gent to do so. Now, however, is a different climate, and dealers are starved for information on marketing their companies. Stevens sees how management and marketing classes at CE-DIA, NAHB and Electronic House Expos fill up quickly, and believes that it reflects how interested dealers are in marketing themselves.

As a common solution to this marketing dearth, many dealers outsource their

needs on a project-by-project basis, or attempt to do it themselves, yielding a non-cohesive marketing campaign. Instead, Stevens argues, to capture "mind-share" of a target market, there needs to be three separate occurrences, such as direct mail, press articles or advertising that presents the message to the targeted audience. "And since dealers are in the business of design-



Eclipse Marketing's
Leslie Stevens



The new program outfits dealers with the tools and strategies to market themselves to consumers, builders, architects or interior designers.

ing and installing integrated systems, not marketing, they often only talk about the need to be consistent and coordinated with their message," she noted.

Eclipse Marketing, a design/marketing organization with diverse specialists, parlayed their collective experience in the A/V industry, builder market and design services into creating GrowthWorks. Prior to founding Eclipse, Stevens served in high-profile positions with Sharp and ChannelPlus.

Offering dealers valuable marketing curriculum is not a new concept; seminars and classes grow more sophisticated with each industry event. GrowthWorks, however, is the only turnkey program with laser-beam focus on custom dealers and a "soup-to-nuts" approach. Though Eclipse's program charts new terrain, the response already has been favorable.

"Just out of the starting gate, we've received many requests for GrowthWorks," Stevens noted. "Yes, we are offering exclusives to dealers who request them."

Some notable dealers currently involved with GrowthWorks are Randy Wilson of Wilson Home Theater, Andy Wilcox of Proline, Bill Anderson of Genesis Audio/Video and Greg Simmons of Eagle Sentry. Stevens also talking to buying groups that have expressed interest in the new program.

Prices for the program, which range from \$11,500 to \$14,500, include all costs of design, production, stock photography, printing, postage, ad design, mail lists, shipping and printing. All expenses required for the four- to six-month campaign are included in the program fee.

"We understand that cost is a big concern for many dealers," Stevens said, which is why the program is partially customized for each dealer, and at the same time, a template. The program itself consists of the same tools—literature, direct mail and public relations—however, each tool features the dealers' individual projects, glamour shots and company logos. This is an essential element in an industry comprised of colorful personalities.

Due to the tepid economy, businesses with tight budgets naturally want to guarantee a solid return on their investment. "[That] can only be determined by sales," Stevens added, "GrowthWorks is not a sales program, it's a marketing program designed to drive potential customers to the dealer. However, we understand the importance of sales tools, which is why GrowthWorks includes semi-custom literature and presentation folders."

According to Randy Wilson, "In these times when every dollar counts, Eclipse Marketing has put together a 'Gorilla Marketing Package' that will get you and your company in front of your target audience. Whether your focus is increasing your current customer base, or entering into a new marketplace with the building community, this four- to six-month program takes minimal time for the dealer and provides maximum return for your dollar."

GrowthWorks also represents shifting trends and paradigms in the custom systems sector. The significant presence of big box retailers like Best Buy and Circuit City in the industry is one development that may require dealers to step up to the plate and "Educate their local market about [what is] 'true in custom installation,'" according to Stevens. Self-promotion via marketing is a feasible way to spark that initiative.

Another trend necessitating the need for marketing strategies is the expansion of custom work into track and custom homebuilding. It's proving fertile business ground, and more and more dealers are exploring ways to forge alliances with builders, architects and interior designers.

Homebuilders, however, generally lack basic knowledge of pre-wiring or "future proofing," and optional upgrades, let alone how to work collaboratively with dealers. Because the biggest concern for the builder often is cost, the custom dealer needs to clearly educate them about the bottom-line costs of such a project. It's also essential to articulate the unique (but seemingly

intangible) value of technology in the home, and how that also translates into dollars for the builder.

"The dealer can accomplish this by utilizing the Builder Program contained in GrowthWorks, which includes, among a number of tools, a semi-customized press and advertising campaign, direct mail and literature," Stevens said.

Once the builder understands the basic tenets of pre-wire and upgrades, the dealer needs to assist them in effectively promoting

the exciting new features to homeowners. To that end, GrowthWorks' Builder track provides literature for convenient distribution in model homes and option centers, specifically directed to the homebuyer, about the potential of residential technology.

For more information on GrowthWorks, contact 949.363.5340 or eclipsemarketing@cox.net, or visit www.eclipsemarketing.net.

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