

How Do You Creatively “Package” Your Product or Service?

by Carol Hartman, M.B.A.

When you hear the word “packaging,” most people immediately picture a container, like the box their breakfast cereal comes in. But from a marketing perspective, packaging means much more than paper and cardboard. It means how you *promote and present* your product or service. It can be a critical factor in the success of your business...and in differentiating you and your company from your competitors.

Although packaging decisions are often much easier for tangible products than for intangible services, Anthony O. Putnam, in his book *Marketing Your Service, A Step-by-Step Guide for Small Businesses and Professionals*, offers this excellent advice: Your target customers buy your product or service because of how it fits their needs and their circumstances. Their needs and circumstances vary depending on what else is going on in their world. What might they need from you on a normal day? How would this differ on an unusual day, or in an emergency?

Think of ways to package your product or service to meet customer needs under various scenarios. What can you do to be more flexible in serving them? For example, could you deliver your product if a customer is unable to pick it up? Could you offer training if your customer doesn't know how to use it properly? Could you include installation as an option? Could you better serve customers through extended or unusual hours? Could you offer short term financing for customers in a cash crunch? The list goes on depending on your type of business, but I'm sure you get the idea.

Here is an example of a packaging success story I heard several years ago. A nearly bankrupt hair salon is now doing a booming business. What caused the turn-around? A change in how they “packaged” what they offered. They changed their hours to better suit their regular patrons. Instead of closing during the week at 6 p.m. like their competitors, they extended their hours until 11 p.m. And they began to be open for several hours on Sunday afternoons. Their established clientele – most busy career types – loved it! And the positive word-of-mouth publicity was an incredible source of new customers.

The moral of the story is this: Find out what else you can do to meet your customers' need. Try putting yourself in their shoes and engaging in some creative thinking from their perspective. And here's another way that is so amazingly simple that we often forget to do it...just ask them what you could add to your business that would help them. Find out how much they'd be willing to pay for it. They will surely tell you and they'll be delighted (and flattered) that you asked.



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