

Remodeling



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YourBusiness Sales+Marketing

Section Editor: Joseph F. Schuler Jr.

Picture (Free) Postcard

Would potential clients identify more with verbal repartee between husband and wife leading to a remodel rather than a beautiful photo of a completed job?

That's the risk Ridley Wills of The Wills Co. of Nashville, Tenn., took with a five-card postcard series — none with pictures.

Wills says he didn't want to limit his prospective clients to only those who identified with the firm's high-end work. "I don't want to pre-set imagination," he says. "We want what you see to be what you want your project to be. We thought of the approach not as a risk, but as an edge."

The red, white, and black 5½-by-8½-inch text-only postcards play off the typical push-and-pull of a couple considering renovations to their home.

One reads: (obviously the husband) "I can get some guys from work to help me." (wife) "I thought we were thinking of home *improvements*." The closing line: "Great renovation. There's one thing they'll agree on."

The design and approach was a collaboration between Wills, his printing company designer, and a marketing consultant.



The Wills Co.'s monthly postcard campaign included this card, among five in the series.

Wills supplemented his \$2.6 million-a-year firm's 1,000-client database by buying a list of homeowners who earn \$150,000 and up, with houses 10 years old or more in certain ZIP codes. Mailing, printing, list purchase, and marketing fees pegged the 10,000 cards at \$1 apiece.

"They receive all sorts of things in the mail," Wills says, "so any approach is a risk. I felt cleverness is where I needed to be. No matter how stunning a picture, it wasn't going to make it as much as clever would, with my client base."

Wills is evaluating the campaign's effec-

**sometimes
it's the little things.**

A new chair set for the dining room. The leaky faucet that's dripping your coffee. The door that sticks. More energy-efficient windows. Insulation. Built-in bookshelves. A bay window. More storage room. Sometimes, it is the little things that need doing. When you've got a project, you want someone to do the work quickly, with craftsmanship, for a reasonable price. Talk to Wills Residential Remodel.

WILLS

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tiveness, although he's convinced it's "soft marketing," with a longer-term payout.

"If you like it, you really like it," he says. "Otherwise you don't get it. And maybe the ones who get it are my market." —J.F.S.

Delivering on Marketing Goals

Colette Gandelot of Vujovich Design-Build gets a lot of mileage out of her \$30,000 annual marketing budget. The sales and marketing manager has boosted the profile of the \$6 million-a-year firm and cemented essential relationships in Minneapolis. She does so by setting marketing goals, then delivering on them. Her formula is simple and effective:

Understand your limitations. By doing so, you can set realistic objectives. And, by doing a self-assessment, you may realize you

need to hire outside help, such as a photographer, to enhance program success and to get other creative minds working for the company.

Achieve consistency. Set up your year to achieve maximum effectiveness with those who see your message. While a monthly direct mail piece may be most effective, it may not be realistic or take into account your limitations. Done quarterly, or in chunks, the message will be conveyed and be consistent.

Spend more time implementing than creating. Don't drown in planning.

The marketing plan can change — it's a guide, not a bible. Ultimately, you need to do the work.

Share your plan internally. Make sure marketing is discussed in team meetings. Members of the field staff are the most important part of Gandelot's programs. "They hear the customer's voice every day. And there are many of them, and only one of you." Field staff contact neighbors, asking for tolerance during a project. They become advocates, answering questions from

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passersby. "Marketing happens in many ways, and when everyone talks about it, it becomes part of the action your company takes," Gandelot says.

Make your plan automatic. Program marketing reminders into your electronic calendar or jot them in your day planner. Include calls to home section editors at the local paper. Gandelot contacts editors monthly for "relationship-based marketing," which promotes the company and its projects for free. "Most people, when they

think of marketing, they think of ... something they pay for," she says. "That doesn't have to be the case."

Measure results. Ask your clients about your latest mailer. Did it convey what you wanted it to say? Assess results quarterly, and make the bottom-line connection. "Obviously the greatest measure of success," Gandelot says, "is how many people call." But the quality of the leads is important, as well. If people aren't calling, find out what's wrong. Gandelot uses ACT! lead tracking

software to keep track of and analyze who's calling and why, constantly assessing lead sources. Then, she uses the data to target specific neighborhoods. —J.F.S.

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Six Tips to Boost Referrals

Relying almost 100% on referrals, both Stephen K. Hann of Stephen K. Hann Custom Builders in Houston and Leo Martineau of LCM Remodeling Co. in Merrimack, N.H., know how to keep clients happy, from start to finish to follow-up:

Create a detailed spec sheet. This spells out the scope of work and prompts conversation about finishes. "It minimizes misunderstandings," Hann says.

Keep the jobsite safe and clean. Martineau lays down recycled felt cloth to protect floors from foot traffic. The site is vacuumed daily, and at completion, a professional cleaner scours the house. If the front yard is li-

able to get torn up by work crews, Hann's people build a plywood walkway.

Project a professional image. Uniforms go a long way here.

Communicate. Hann's project managers hold weekly client meetings to review selections, change orders, or problems. "Make it fun," he says, "so when the client is sitting around late with friends, they'll say they enjoyed the process."

Reward. Recognizing that clients have lived through a trying process, Hann sends sandwiches and flowers on move-in day.

Follow up. Thirty days after a project's end, Hann sends a survey and note asking for feedback. He includes a dinner gift certificate. "This makes for an event," he says, "and they talk about us or think about us, or take someone to dinner and tell them about us." —J.F.S.

Budgeting for Marketing

The REMODELING Benchmark for marketing expenditures is 3% of annual revenues, less for large companies, more for specialty remodelers. But for a small or mid-sized firm, what's the process for setting the marketing budget?

Theresa Same, controller at the \$2.5 million-a-year Small Carpenters at Large in Atlanta, says, "We look at our overall goals for the year." In December, owner Danny Feig-Sandoval reviews the year and examines trends. If sales haven't increased, the marketing budget goes up. The company also examines neighborhoods where new jobs are.

The firm's marketing budget, which ranges from 1% to 3% of revenues, includes signs, clothing, brochures, a presentation kit,

door hangers, Web site maintenance, project photography, awards entries, and festival or tour-of-homes sponsorships.

Same says setting the marketing budget is as much intuitive as it is an assessment of future costs, taking into account such things as a down economy. "The year we revamped the whole marketing package started with Danny wanting new signs. Once we started that, we decided we wanted to maintain the new look."

The firm also considers other needs. "If we need to spend money somewhere else, and marketing doesn't need money put toward it, we put it somewhere else," Same says. "Because we're design/build, we know what the construction schedule looks like about eight months down the road." —J.F.S.