

## *INvertising, Part 2 – A FREE Gift For Those Who Read On*

Have you ever walked out of a store frustrated because no one seemed to be able to help you?

It happens at Bruce's store every day, but Bruce doesn't know about it.

Bruce (not his real name) is the small businessman who seems to be in control. He has a good mix of merchandise, a clean store, excellent signage, and an above-average advertising program. Bruce appears to be doing everything right.

But when a customer calls or walks in, Bruce's control is lost.

This week Bruce is advertising a special offer on red widgets. Unfortunately some of his associates don't know about the sale because they have not actually seen or heard his ads. When customers come in and ask about the red widget special, his staff doesn't know what they're talking about. Some of them don't even demonstrate basic customer service skills, like making sure each customer is acknowledged when they walk in. This is a losing combination when it comes to satisfying customers.

In order to complete the circle, Bruce must "sell" his own staff on the value of his products and why people choose their store. He also needs to let them know what means of advertising he's using to bring new customers in, what the ads say, and how important each team member is to the company's overall success.

This process of creating great advertising to the outside world *and* "selling the inside" on what those messages mean to them is what we call INvertising. Andy Corbus and I are developing this new program, and we spoke on this subject at the annual Life Services Network convention at Navy Pier last month. Here's the kind of buzz that was generated from this group of senior living community administrators and marketers:

"We should have been doing this years ago."

"I can't wait to get back to try this with our staff!"

"It's simple, yet very powerful."

INvertising is a staff training program that covers four critical areas:

- the overall core business philosophy;
- the different ways in which the products or services benefit the end user;
- preferred sales and customer service techniques; and
- information on the shorter-term, time-sensitive offers and specials being advertised to the public.

Most companies would say they're covering 2 or 3 of these bases. Very few are hitting a home run by touching all four.

For example, most companies have a tri-fold brochure (or something similar) that describes your business, its products and its services. How many of your employees have ever read or studied your brochure to see what it says? If there are promises being made in the brochure, like "the parts you need are always in stock", the staff should know what the customer's expectations are so that they can better fulfill them.

## **Closing the gap between what the customer expects and what they actually experience is what INvertising is all about.**

If you need a good reason to consider an INvertising program, let's look at the speed at which word-of-mouth advertising can spread today. Text messaging, blogs, IM, BlackBerries and other personal communication devices are now commonplace... and cool. Eat a great meal at a restaurant, and more people will know about it instantly than ever before. See a bad movie? There are now dozens of ways to broadcast your opinion.

Receive a negative review about your business, and you'll have no idea what hit you.

Word-of-mouth is far more believable than any advertising campaign. People can say whatever they want in an ad; in word-of-mouth, brutal honesty is king, and it reigns supreme.

The answer, of course, is to minimize bad or unexpected experiences. And the best way to do that is to make sure your staff is armed and ready.

So how do you begin an INvertising program to "sell the inside"? You must first start with an understanding of what your staff knows about your current advertising.

To do this, Andy and I have developed an Advertising Awareness Audit. It's a simple 3-page questionnaire that you can use to help gauge how well your people already know what your ad messages are, and where they're being seen or heard.

We'd like you to have the questionnaire as our gift to you. Go to [www.SellingtheInside.com](http://www.SellingtheInside.com) and click on "Advertising Awareness Audit". Print it out, copy it, and give it to your staff. Tell them there are no right or wrong answers; all you want is an idea of their current level of knowledge.

Here is a sample of the 29 questions we've created:

*What are the 3 main reasons why you believe that people should choose you to do business with?*

*Would you be comfortable answering the question, "Why should I shop here vs. anywhere else"?*

*Who do you think is your biggest competitor in town?*

Once you see the results, you can begin to identify where the information gaps exist. You can then incorporate information about your advertising to your staff in ways that will help them better meet the expectations of the customer.

Use the tool. It's easy to give out to your staff, and you may learn some extraordinary things about how you can improve.

Bruce thought he really had it together. Now he knows why his sales aren't what they should be. And the good news is that Bruce's sales and profits will be measurably better at this time next year.

How about yours?

*Bill Guertin, Chief Enthusiasm Officer of The 800-Pound Gorilla, works with companies of all sizes to improve their service skills, image and profitability.*