

## Features

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## Death by Marketing

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An Italian proverb reads, “He that deceives me once, it’s his fault; but if twice, it’s my fault.”

The fastest way to put a bad business out of business is for this operation to advertise to bring customers in and see why they wouldn’t go back there in the first place. If you’re spending money in hopes that people will come and do business with you—don’t, until you’re sure they’ll be likely to WANT to come back.

The definition of a “business not worth going back to,” as defined by its former customers, may not align with that of the owners, employees and remaining customers. Expectations are at an all-time high and defining what a “good business” really is has become a moving target—and it’s completely in the eyes of the beholder. The good business today has to be one where the consumer would feel themselves going back to and say to others, “I’d be an absolute fool to go anywhere else (regardless of the price).”

Getting consumers to show up the first time is relatively easy as compared to getting them to come back. Getting customers to return is much harder, even if they had no complaints. The pull of even the best of marketing won’t easily outdo even one negative experience. Chances are your place isn’t so bad. Or is it?

I’m not going to waste your time this time of year, so please, just take this seriously—as in ACTUALLY DO these next five things. If you wait, you’ll waste another day where you could have made a difference or at least measured that you didn’t.

### **Look Here First**

The place to start looking is where the vast majority of consumers begin—at their fingertips. Your website is now your front window. It’s your curb appeal before the consumer even gets in their car. If your windows are dirty, (as in unappealing in the least) their screen is dirty. They’ll abandon you in a New York City minute—that’s fast! Next! We all move our fingers rapidly in search of what’s next when a website disappoints. And we’re certainly left with no reason to go back there.

Warm up your Google data and see what’s happening on your website. How long do visitors stay on the first page they visit? What other pages do they visit, in order, and how long do they stay on each? How many pages do they visit in total? How long do they spend on your site? Look at these numbers by the way visitors arrived to your site—did they put your URL in their browser window? Were they brought by a search engine because of something that was on your site? Did they click on a referral link from another website? Did they click through from your social media account? Is it a mystery why they came?

The most important question a customer has when they’re on a website is, “Can I do what I want to do here?” If they want to Live Chat, can they do that? If they want to purchase something and pick it up, have it planted, or have it

delivered to someone else, can they? If they want to do those things but can't, how likely is it they'll be back there? How likely is it they would come to your store if they can't?

### Look Here Second

People don't notice what doesn't change and sometimes they notice what does. Yogi Berra once said, "You can observe a lot by just watching." Take a look at your curb appeal. Go out next to the road where customers first see it. Stand there and take a long look at it. Do you see any compelling reason for someone who's just driving by and not looking for you to look over there? What's that reason?

### Look Here Third

Take a picture from where you stood and looked, and then look at the picture on a BIG screen. What do you see that you didn't see just before you took the picture? Is it something good?

### Look Here Fourth

The first front window in an open-air store like a garden center is the approach to the entrance to your store from the parking area. This is often called the "Decompression Zone." It's where the person slows pace enough to actually see what's there and take it in for a moment—if you give them space to do so.

### Look Here Fifth

Bring the Windex, a razor scraper and a roll of paper towels with you. Are your front windows clean? This may not seem all that important, but it is. What people don't see can be as important as what they do see. A window is supposed to be clean and clear—invisible—so the customer can see what you're actually doing for them.

### What You Didn't See

What we see is often not what really is there. We don't know how bad, or how good, things are until we look into the numbers. Are customers coming back to the degree that we thought they were? What evidence do we have? The numbers don't often align with the expectations we have about the return rate of customers. Using the information in the POS system can be of help if the right data was captured. Do you have a way to find out how many new customers come into your store? Is the new customer count increasing month by month? Looking at the numbers that tell the story about how well your marketing and curb appeal are working is essential.

What percent of customers came back at least once each year? \_\_\_\_%. You don't know this off the top of your head? Should you? How about we pause right here so you can go to your POS and figure it out? Oh, you didn't capture data for that? If you start now, you'll be able to measure that next year.

### Another Spring is a Terrible Thing to Waste

This world rotates around to spring only once each year; "Spring Fever" is a powerful motivator. Add to the pull of Spring Fever even a lackluster invitation and you're likely to pique the curiosity of people to check out whatever you invite them to come see. If you fail or just don't do this really well, they're unlikely to return. **GP**



- *Ravenna Gardens in Seattle, Washington, uses pops of color on the side of the store along with plant material to create curb appeal.*
- *Al's Garden Center in Sherwood, Oregon, has a coffee bar right inside the entrance to slow customers even more before beginning their shopping journey.*