

Best Practices for 2016 Success

BY JAMIE GOLD, CKD, CAPS

Whether you're looking to improve your marketing, upgrade your Web site, find a new job or take your firm to the next level, consider these best practices shared by industry pros to help you achieve your business goals for 2016.

So how are those New Year's resolutions coming along? While losing weight and starting new exercise programs top many surveys, entrepreneurs, executives and career ladder climbers may have a more professionally focused goal set.

If finding a new position, landing a promotion, helming a successful launch, improving your profit margins or closing more deals are among your resolutions for 2016, these best practice trends from industry pros may be the fuel your fire needs.

FOR DESIGNERS & DEALERS

Known as a buying network for kitchen and bath dealers, Charlotte, NC-based SEN Design Group also provides extensive practice management training for its 200-plus member firms across the country. "Financial stability of an individual's business should always be top of the list," shares John A. Lang, LPBC, SEN's Head Business Coach, on what he sees as the key best practice. Most of the other business aspects of a successful firm, such as developing a proper sales process or

setting up a marketing plan, fall into place when the fundamentals have been established, he adds.

For many creative entrepreneurs, the hard-core finance practices Lang defines as essential for long-term success may be largely foreign. If there's one best practice resolution kitchen dealers need to make, the SEN trainer believes, it's this: "You have to understand what your gross profit margin should be after adding in an owner's market rate salary plus a healthy net profit."

Perhaps you're at the point where you've mastered these essentials, have a successful business and you're looking for something more. Maybe your resolutions include taking your firm and your life to the next level.

Robert Criner of Criner Remodeling in Newport News, VA is one of those entrepreneurs. He has long believed in the benefits of continuing education and volunteerism. "Twenty-five years ago, I joined the Remodelers Council at my local home builders association. In my market, I noticed that all of the successful remodelers belonged and I wanted to be one of them. I've taken an active leadership role from the start and I'm still reaping the benefits as the 2015 chair of NAHB Remodelers, the remodeling arm of the National Association of Home Builders."

Membership in an association, he believes, differentiates a business. "Remodelers who take the time to access continuing education are creating a reputation that will serve their company well in a market that's only becoming

more crowded," he says. Criner encourages his employees to get involved in associations like NAHB Remodelers and the National Kitchen & Bath Association. He also believes that keeping up with training and the trends shared in trade publications are essential career and business best practices. "Never stop learning how to improve your remodeling business," he suggests.

FOR MANUFACTURERS

Sherry Qualls, CEO of integrated marketing communications agency White Good & Co. in Lancaster, PA, consults for a wide range of kitchen and bath brands. It all starts with strategy, she believes. "Recognizing the value of bringing all partners together at the front of the concepting process is an evolutionary idea." Brainstorming ideas with key team members and subjecting those concepts to reality tests gets the strategic and creative processes rolling.

Then the creative content needs to be focused. "Award-winning creative only matters if it causes your key targets to remember and act," Qualls notes. That is how advertising, public relations, social media and Web site optimization best practices translate into the seeds of sales. The first and most important best practice to increase sales from your marketing efforts is storytelling, Qualls shares. "Powerful sales initiatives have a focused message or story." Back those up with solid information to share about a product or program, she adds. "Facts, insights and data reduce the chance for objections."

Web sites also count heavily. "Be sure sites are filled with beautiful images, alt-tagged for optimization purposes. All sites must auto-adapt to mobile platforms; 62 percent of all content is being consumed on a phone or tablet. If sites aren't responsive, traffic will bolt," the White Good



Encourage your employees to continually network and train.



Best business practices include giving back through volunteerism.



Give consumers the chance to test drive your products in experiential showrooms.

CEO adds. In this social media/online shopping age, be sure that your site has a review capability. Then pay attention and be sure to read and respond promptly. “Too many industry manufacturers have built sites that are trade-driven. Make sure the user interface is consumer-friendly.”

Trade show participation should be considered part of a fully integrated plan, Qualls says. “Leveraging a trade show as part of a launch is an effective way to generate excitement from a large audience,” she notes, but suggests doing it as part of an integrated strategy. “Choosing to invest in a trade show without connecting all of the marketing dots can be expensive. “Maximizing the investment is key.” Some best practices she offers exhibitors include cross-promotion with complementary exhibitors, presentation and award opportunities and effective press relations.

Qualls sees experiential showrooms as one of the key industry trends that manufacturers need to be watching. (This also, of course, impacts



■ Maximize trade show investments by seeking out award opportunities.

showroom owners and retailers!) “Consumers want to touch and feel, and, if possible, ‘test drive’ products before making a purchase. Creating an environment where customers can experience how a product performs, preferably in a fun, collaborative environment, is keeping the brick and mortar showroom relevant and

important. Brands need to find ways to encourage and allow showrooms to use their products accordingly,” she advises.

FOR JOB SEEKERS

Maybe your resolution is finding a new job in 2016 or finding new employees to grow your company. Lynn Kirchgatter, president of industry recruitment from the Saint Ansgar, IA-based Keercutter & Associates, has some best practice trends to share with individuals at both ends of the hiring spectrum. While recruiting tools have changed in the Internet age and some newer skills can make you more marketable in certain jobs, there are some fundamental best practice trends to consider. Kirchgatter says, “We waded through hundreds of resumes a week. Many are well-written, in an easy-to-read and understandable format, but many of them need work. Job seekers will have a better chance of success if they modify the resume to fit the job applied for. For example, if you are applying for a sales position, make sure that your resume reflects sales accomplishments translated in percentages or dollars. The best skill a kitchen designer can hone is how to ask for the sale and close.”

Kirchgatter also offers these best practice insights: “Learning to network can add significant value. Make sure you have a LinkedIn profile. Learn to blog and publish on LinkedIn, Twitter and other social media. Join professional groups and trade associations in your specialty.”

The one fundamental best practice that has not changed is the need for research; the Internet and social media just make it a ton easier. “The hiring manager will want to understand why you think you are that perfect match,” Kirchgatter says about a job opening. “Make sure that you have an overall understanding of this company before you step through the front door. Is the culture collaborative or competitive? Where can you make a difference? Where do you match? Weave what you learned into your interview. You will be surprised how much more at ease your conversation will be when you are not in ‘wing-it’ mode,” the recruiter shares.

She has some best practice trends to share with hiring firms, too: “Job seekers tell us that employment ads are boring. They realize that eventually they need to read a detailed job



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■ Treat your body with high-performance habits to meet high-performance goals.

description that lists responsibilities but, for them, that is the second step in their research. For Gen Ys in particular, the first step is to find opportunities that meet their personal expectations in terms of company brand, culture, thought leadership, work/life balance and overall reputation. So, if you want them to pay attention, sell them on that first."

What should you include, then, to stay ahead of hiring trends and find your ideal candidate? "Today's hiring has flipped," Kirchgatter says. "Many job seekers think they are in the driver's seat. They want to know what's in it for them first." She suggests compelling statements like: "Work from home one day a week; If you enjoy having fun while you work with a dynamic team; If you have a high passion for; Your credentials are important to us – we pay for CEUs; Signing bonus for the right candidate – is that you?; We volunteer in our surrounding communities." You're going to need to sell your company first, the recruiter notes, to close the deal with today's job seeker.

LAST WORDS

Whatever your career goals for the New Year, you're going to need stamina to achieve them. And you're going to want to have an outside life at the same time. Work/health/life balance is essential, and contributes to that stamina. Neil Denault, personal trainer at Muscle Therapy San Diego, consults for business people both locally and long distance. He shares these best practice tips for stamina in 2016: "Exercise should be inserted at the most appropriate time to fit busy lives."

Traveling to events like Design & Construction Week can be challenging. For those, like independent reps and trainers who travel regularly, the challenge is even greater on both schedule and nutrition. Denault suggests, "Here is where supplementation becomes important. Carrying meal replacement bars with you can ensure that you are eating often enough and not overdoing it. You may have the business dinner where you lose control over preparation and portions. As long as you plan your daily food intake and weekly exercise

routine, it should not impact your results."

Bottom line, Denault says: "High-performance professionals should treat their bodies with high-performance habits." That is the single best practice trend you can employ in any end of the industry. ■



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