

SETTING
REALISTIC
EXPECTATIONS
IN MARKETING

IT'S NOT A SPRINT, IT'S A MARATHON!

A white paper for contractors from Tracy Paul, Principal

CORNERSTONE ADVERTISING & MARKETING

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TELL ME QUICK!

Most of your struggling competitors approach marketing like a series of short sprints.

The successful ones take a different approach. They approach marketing with the same mindset as marathon runners: always focused on the end goal, making the most of every step, and ready to adjust when unexpected roadblocks appear.

Doing the same for business comes down to shifting your mindset and working with the right marketing partner.

SETTING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS IN MARKETING

IT'S NOT A SPRINT, IT'S A MARATHON

"Advertising is just a rip-off and a waste of money!" Marty Simonson isn't exactly what you'd call a big believer in marketing. After nearly four decades of owning a small home services business, he's convinced that contractors who advertise – like those green-van guys that have somehow managed to capture a fifth of the local market share in the last two years – just get outsmarted by sneaky advertising sales reps. "Besides, the only advertising I need is a happy customer."

Marty's not a cranky guy, but he does get irritated when the other business owners who have breakfast at Hazel's every morning talk about marketing. It's hard to blame him. A few years ago, he put a few thousand dollars into cable TV ads, and what did that get him? Nor does he believe he's earned any business from that website everyone said he needed. He did fall for those grocery cart ads, and all they did was make him angry every time Joan asked him to stop for bread and some broccoli, and he'd see his face on carts.

MARKETING IS A MARATHON

While Marty knows a lot about running his business, he understands little about marketing. When humans don't fully understand something, they tend to be wary of it, which is what's behind his aversion. **The main thing Marty doesn't understand: marketing isn't a sprint. You don't fuel up with a bunch of money, drop some kind of ad, and then relax and sit back as the calls pour in.**

It's really a marathon – one that's built through consistent effort, long-term strategy, and the combined contributions of the contractor and a trusted marketing partner.

In distance running, a marathon involves more than 50,000 steps for most runners. That's a lot of steps, but every single one of them matters. Every thought, every action is focused on reaching the goal. We'll explore why – and how – the most successful contractors approach marketing like a marathon.

"In endurance racing, speed is a useless metric. Power and cadence tell you how long you can sustain effort. Marketing's the same way – it's not how fast you move, it's how effectively you sustain performance over time."

– Tracy Paul, Principle

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT QUICK WINS

One of the biggest things all sorts of business owners believe is that marketing is like some kind of switch you can simply flip on anytime you need some calls. **HVAC, plumbing, and electrical companies that go into any marketing or advertising channel expecting immediate results are only setting themselves up for disappointment:**

- **It's a needs-based business.** Nobody wakes up in the morning thinking, "Today would be a great day to call my heating guy to handle an unexpected repair."
- **You get short spikes.** Launching a new campaign or a new channel may create spikes in attention, but rarely leads to lasting brand equity or customer loyalty.
- **Fooled by illusions.** Metrics like impressions, clicks, and likes might look promising at first, but if they're not tied to a broader strategy, they're not likely to translate into revenue.
- **You miss opportunities.** Timing is everything, as people say. When your immediate expectations aren't met, you're likely to pull the plug prematurely and miss out on opportunities that might have flourished with time.

MARKETING AS A MARATHON

Effective training for a marathon demands consistency, adaptability, and endurance. It's no coincidence that effective marketing requires much the same. Every email, post, ad, and campaign builds your brand's long-term impression. **Being consistent in messaging and branding compounds over time, leading to stronger consumer recognition and trust in the places you do business.**

- **Ten times plus.** A decade ago, conventional wisdom said that a consumer needed to hear your branding at least seven times before they remembered it. In today's media-saturated world, you need to get to them at least ten times... and 15 is even better.

SOMETIMES, YOU'RE NOT IN CONTROL

You may have developed a remarkably strong strategy for your business, but it can fall short under the influence of outside forces. One of the biggest is the economic climate. Consumer behavior reflects the economy. Downturns and inflation tighten household budgets. **Your marketing campaign may be doing a great job of connecting with local homeowners, but their finances might mean they're delaying much-needed replacements or upgrades.**



"Impatience is the enemy of consistency. If you keep changing tactics, you never give your marketing the time it needs to work."

— Tracy Paul, Principle

Weather and seasonality can pull the rug out from under you. Storms create uncertainty, causing calls to spike or slowing business to a crawl. The holidays probably won't be jolly for your business if the weather's nice. A smart, consistent, long-term strategy considers those variables.

Changes involving your competitors are also rarely predictable, but can have a huge impact on you. You'd never guess that Carl Lindblad was within weeks of selling the business his grandfather started to a private equity firm that plans to outspend you. Or that Tommy Bradley will soon face a health crisis that will take his eyes off his business for six months and force his guys to seek new jobs. **A consistent brand presence is both a strong offense and a powerful defense against the unexpected.**

Patience pays off, too. For example, when implementing SEO, it can take a while to climb search rankings, but the long-term payoff is visibility that compounds over time. When handling any facet of marketing, play the long game. **Brands don't become household names as the result of one viral campaign, but because of years of deliberate, steady work.**

AND SOMETIMES, IT'S ALL YOU

Business owners in your industry that hire marketing partners often assume those partners will be responsible for their success. That's a shortsighted idea. **Your marketing partner can enhance your brand, increase your visibility, and generate a steady stream of leads, but the rest is up to you and your ability to take advantage of opportunities.** Collaborating with your marketing partner lets you combine your product knowledge, customer insight, and operational readiness with the partner's expertise and tools.

No matter how many leads you receive, their value depends upon your sales process. If your customer service representatives (CSRs) get cranky with callers or your sales teams deliver half-hearted efforts, you can spend all the marketing money you want, but those internal issues will prevent the results you're after.

The buyer's journey doesn't end when they click your ad. How friendly is your website? How quickly does it get that buyer to the message that gives them the confidence to call you? How long did it take your CSR to pick up the call, and what kind of first impression did they make? What was the conversation at the kitchen table like? Every aspect of the customer's experience matters.

TRAINING IS A GREAT EXAMPLE

That's why we frequently recommend our clients invest in their people, using training to boost their skills and effectiveness. Not only does it work, but the results are measurable.

Take a typical contractor who receives 1,254 leads to service customer equipment and 345 for new equipment. Historically, the contractor's CSRs have been able to turn 65% of the service leads into booked calls, with a completed job rate of 95% and an average repair ticket of \$564. That gives us 774 service jobs for \$436,731 in revenue. The CSRs are less successful with equipment leads, booking just 55% with a 75% completion rate producing 142 completed jobs at an average of \$12,874. Total overall revenue is just about \$2.3 million. Not terrible.

| *"Don't think of CSRs as order takers. They're the gatekeepers of your revenue."*

— Tracy Paul, Principle

But let's say the contractor puts the CSRs through training that bumps their service booking rate up to just 70% and equipment up to 65%. Keeping all other variables the same, total revenue jumps to \$2.6 million. In other words, a minimal performance increase added \$366,709 to the bottom line. Suppose the techs also receive training that allows them to increase the average service job to \$764 and equipment sales to a slightly higher \$13,500. Now total revenue is \$2.9 million, a gain of \$638,777 over the original scenario – with zero money spent on chasing additional leads.

	MARKETING	CSR/DISPATCH/OPS				KITCHEN TABLE	REVENUE	
	Opportunities	Booking Rate	Booked Calls	Completed Job Rate	Completed Jobs	Average Rev / Job	Total Revenue	
Service	1254	65%	815	95%	774	\$564	\$436,731	
Equipment	345	55%	190	75%	142	\$12,874	\$1,832,131	
							\$2,268,862	
								INCREASE
Service	1254	70%	878	95%	834	\$564	\$470,325	\$33,595
Equipment	345	65%	224	75%	168	\$12,874	\$2,165,246	\$333,115
							\$2,635,571	\$366,709
Service	1254	70%	878	95%	834	\$764	\$637,107	\$200,377
Equipment	345	65%	224	75%	168	\$13,500	\$2,270,531	\$438,400
							\$2,907,638	\$638,777

MARKETING SUCCESS IS LONG-TERM

Too many business owners measure their marketing success based upon instant gratification. Short-term metrics like social media engagement, impressions, and leads are useful, but they measure early signals, rather than the final outcomes that feed the bottom line. Long-term metrics such as customer retention, lifetime value, and brand equity tell the real story. These evolve over months and years, not weeks.

Think of the return on investment (ROI) for your marketing like compound interest from a bank. When you consistently nurture successful strategies, you'll see that your marketing ROI grows. Businesses that aren't constantly resetting strategies or stopping and starting their marketing efforts see steadier growth and stronger returns.

"Staring at data every minute will drive you crazy – and you'll make poor decisions because you lose context."

– Tracy Paul, Principle

WHAT CAN OUR MARKETING TEAM DO FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

The Cornerstone outsourced marketing team handles all the traditional and digital marketing and promotional services you need, from SEO to direct mail to truck design, all delivered through one marketing manager who treats your business as though it's theirs. Even better, we have a lot of practice with all of them. We know what works and what doesn't. We'll provide all this and more:

MARKETING SERVICES

- ▶ Strategy
- ▶ Research
- ▶ Planning
- ▶ List Acquisition
- ▶ Direct Mail Purchasing
- ▶ Budgeting
- ▶ Reporting & Analytics
- ▶ Resource Management & Execution

BRANDING & MARKETING MATERIALS

- ▶ Logos
- ▶ Brand Style Guides
- ▶ Business Cards
- ▶ Brochures
- ▶ Sales Collateral
- ▶ Forms
- ▶ Vehicle Wraps
- ▶ Banners
- ▶ Packaging
- ▶ Posters & Illustrations

DIGITAL PROMOTION

- ▶ PPC Advertising/Google LSA
- ▶ Website Design & Hosting
- ▶ SEO
- ▶ Blogs
- ▶ Email & Text Marketing
- ▶ Social Media Content & Advertising
- ▶ Online Reputation Management
- ▶ Online Directories
- ▶ Online Publications

TRADITIONAL ADVERTISING

- ▶ TV
- ▶ OTT
- ▶ Cable
- ▶ Radio
- ▶ Direct Mail
- ▶ Magazines
- ▶ Newspaper
- ▶ Billboards
- ▶ Printed Directories
- ▶ Video
- ▶ Media Planning & Buying

You do need to measure carefully. In today's world of omnichannel marketing, a prospect who receives your direct mail piece may not use the printed phone number to call you. Instead, they may use email or a different number, leading you to allocate the revenue to a different stream and making direct mail look less effective – even though it really deserves the credit.

It's also important to discern whether your activities are primarily focused on branding or lead generation. **Make sure you understand the value of every promotional tactic and approach each with reasonable expectations.** You may consider that direct mailer to be a lead generation component when its real role is building your branding. After all, it always takes more than just one message to create lasting awareness in the consumer's mind.

READY TO WIN A MARATHON?

As we've noted, **marketing isn't about quick fixes and short-term satisfaction.** Building a high-performing business that dominates your market is a long-distance contest requiring endurance, commitment, and collaboration. **By shifting your expectations from short-term wins to a marathon mindset, you can position your business for long-term resilience and success — no matter what external challenges arise.**

Luck doesn't win marathons. **Strategy, timing, stamina, and a constant focus on the desired outcome drive success.** That's how your outsourced Cornerstone marketing team will approach every aspect of your efforts to grow your business. For decades, we've helped home service contractors like you focus on what's most effective over the long run instead of wasting your money on short sprints that leave you and your budget drained.

Want to sharpen your strategies and cut the guesswork? Start by booking a no-obligation marketing plan review with our team. We'll examine what you're doing and show you how to achieve a higher marketing ROI, so you'll run smarter instead of harder.

**SCAN TO
SCHEDULE A
STRATEGY SESSION
WITH US**



CORNERSTONE ADVERTISING

PROVEN DIRECTION • PROVEN EXECUTION • PROVEN LEAD FLOW

YOUR OUTSOURCED MARKETING & ADVERTISING TEAM FOR
GROWING YOUR BUSINESS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tracy Paul is principal owner and founder of Cornerstone Advertising Inc., where he has helped HVAC, Plumbing, Electric, and Roofing contractors of all sizes grow and become market-dominant companies in cities throughout North America for more than 25 years. Cornerstone is a full-service marketing firm that includes both traditional and digital advertising for the home service industry and gives contractors access to a complete marketing department for less than it costs to hire a full-time marketing director, using proven strategies delivered through a marketing manager who treats your business like it was their own.

Learn more at:

www.cornerstonead.com