

Spring Cleaning for your Business

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Spring is here, we think.

This is the time of year when most of us look through our crowded closets and stuffed drawers and proceed with optimistic determination to clean it all out and organize our homes and lives. Why not apply this enthusiasm to your business as well?

There are many areas in a business that one can examine for improvement by clearing out, cleaning, and organizing. Like the satisfaction you feel from crossing out items on your home checklist, you will experience the same in cleaning out your business.

Here are a few simple suggestions:

Physical: What are you doing with that pile of junk in the corner? How about the merchandise you bought in 1984, some of which is in storage or even (God forbid!) mixed in with your current crop of products? Feng shui as my sister always yells when she enters a cluttered space---clear your space, clear your head. Your unwanted stuff is someone else's treasure, but they just don't know about it yet. Get thee to e-bay and Craigslist! Do the same with your out-of-date equipment. Don't forget the goodwill, personal satisfaction, and tax deduction you will receive when you give these gems to a needy organization. While you're in the feng shui mood, go through your file cabinets and weed out the duplicates, unnecessary papers, and ancient folders. Remember, too, the cloud is the world's biggest file cabinet.

Financial: You know you have a shoe box, or similar, full of receipts---it's what you bring to your accountant every year on March 14th. If you are too busy or too set in your ways to turn to a computer to organize your books, then at least organize and label your shoe boxes--- one for your

vendors, one for utilities, one advertising and marketing, and so on. For those who are brave, try learning QuickBooks and really astound your employees, vendors, and suppliers, not to mention your accountant. Of all the spring cleaning suggestions, cleaning and organizing your books is the one that will help you feel the most saintly and productive and will last as long as your business is in business.

Marketing: Get to know your customers and your vendors. There is no substitution for friendliness, interest in others, concern. They will appreciate this attention and you will ultimately benefit through your cash register. Keep them satisfied and they will keep you satisfied. Don't be afraid to ask them for opinions and advice---you don't have to take it, but once in a while you might hear a great idea that you decide to set in motion. "Customer reviews" on internet sites are evidence that businesses are starting to pay more attention to their customers' opinions.

Websites are musts! Websites are the new yellow pages and catalogs. Most people under the age of 30 (even 40) don't know why a phone book is useful and they certainly don't have piles of product catalogs next to their beds. Of course a website is not the only marketing tool---you still must drive people to the website where they will find details on your products and/or service and read all the glowing testimonials about them. There are a number of DIY (do it yourself) web site makers online---all you need is some time, a computer, and a bottle of aspirin. If you already have a site, check through it to make sure all the information is current. Don't forget to try Facebook and Twitter---the more online buzz you create, the more interest in you and your business will grow.

There are many more actions you can take to "spring clean" your business in the categories above and others. My final recommendation is to just start somewhere, now. ■