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Interactive Marketing for Higher Education

**Secret Shopping Results:
New Ideas to Increase Your Conference
and Event Business
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Presenters



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Background

- Secret shopping study started in 2008
- Presented initial results at ACCED-I 2008 in Las Vegas
- Re-evaluated this year to see if there was a change
- Worsening economic climate brings this issue of lead generation and cultivation to the forefront

Agenda

- Business as usual must be a thing of the past
- Secret shopping results- 2009 vs. 2008
- New ideas to grow business

Business as usual?

Recent headlines:

- “Legendary Greenbriar Resort Files for Bankruptcy”- March 20, 2009
- “2009 is Going to Be a ‘Survival Year’”- March 4, 2009
- “Holiday Business off 40%”- January 2009

Business as Usual?

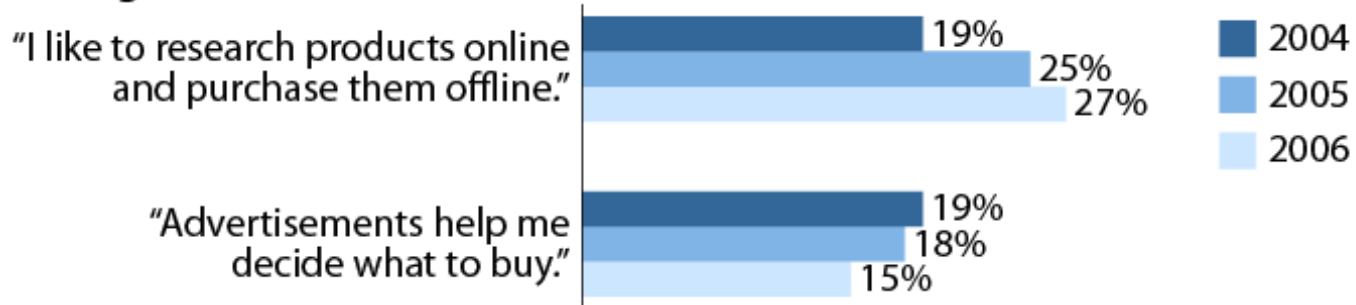
- If there ever was time for a reality check...
- Spending on tourism/events may be worse in 2009 than it was after September 11, 2001 - Federal Reserve study

Business as Usual?

- Add in the complexity of how prospective customers shop

Consumers are driven by research, not advertising

Percentage who agree:



Source: Forrester's Consumer Technographics® 2003-2005 North American Benchmark Studies and Forrester's North American Consumer Technology Adoption Study 2006 Benchmark Survey

Business as Usual?

- Given the economic climate and the way consumers shop online, collegiate conference and event facilities must engage with prospects where they are

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Study Methodology

- Randomly selected 58 ACCED-I member institutions
 - How long did it take to respond?
 - What method?
 - Rate level of professionalism
 - Recorded phone calls in states that allow it
 - Institution names removed and voices altered
- Shopping took place in late February and early March 2009
- Tested two methods of initial contact
 - Direct phone call
 - Web forms

Finding: Response Time

Number of Days	% in 2009	% in 2008
1	46%	47%
2	3%	11%
3	5%	13%
4	7%	7%
5	2%	2%
6	2%	2%
7	2%	2%

Findings: Method of Response

Method of Response	% in 2009	% in 2008
Phone	24%	39%
Email	43%	33%
No response	20%	17%

Findings: Qualification

“The representative asked questions to qualify my needs.”


Rating	% in 2009	% in 2008
Strongly agree	15%	15%
Somewhat agree	25%	15%
Neither agree or disagree	19%	21%
Somewhat disagree	26%	31%
Strongly disagree	15%	18%

Findings: Qualification


“Was the response professional?”

Rating	% in 2009	% in 2008
Strongly agree	25%	15%
Somewhat agree	32%	33%
Neither agree or disagree	18%	18%
Somewhat disagree	14%	18%
Strongly disagree	11%	15%


Examples: Secret Shopping Recordings

- Example #1 
- We were returning their voice mail
- Transferred multiple times
- 30% of our call time was on hold


Examples: Secret Shopping Recordings

- Example #2- 
- The prospect was on the phone, yet sent to website to complete application

Examples: Secret Shopping Recordings

- Example #3- 
- Excellent qualifying questions
- Demonstrated knowledge of the area and the center
- Agreed upon contract
- Contract delivered the same day

Examples: Secret Shopping Recordings

- Example #4- 
- Institution was one of our bad experiences last year
- MUCH better this time around!

Feedback From our Researcher: Good Experiences

“Representative was equipped to help me on the first call. Dates not available, but provided me with availability for alternate date. Gave me pricing information on the phone and sent proposal packet by end of day. Very, very professional.”

“Representative was very prompt in response to web inquiry. Asked how I heard about them and then proceeded to deliver what they promised when they promised it.”

Feedback From our Researcher: Bad Experiences

“I called number provided on website. Representative answered, but was clearly on show floor...found out he was ‘in a bucket/fork lift’. Yelled to other staff to ask how to transfer calls. Very nice person, but not the most professional experience.”

“Representative bordered on being combative. Questioned which facility I was calling about and then basically talked me out of doing business there. Ended call suggesting I call the other facility.”

Feedback From our Researcher: Bad Experiences

“My first date was not available, but I was never asked if I had alternate dates. It was like the window was closed and there was no follow up to see if I was flexible on my dates.”

General observation: Bad phone etiquette, disconnect between departments, general attitude of “do it yourself...I don’t handle that area.”

Why is this a problem?

- Damages institution's image
- Drives up acquisition cost
- Missed business opportunities...at a time when no one can afford to lose business

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#1- Establish a Culture of Measurement

- Set (and track) goals for:
 - Leads
 - Contracts offered
 - Contracts signed
 - Repeat contracts
- Clearly assign staff responsibility for these
 - More than one staff unit impacts these

#2- Shop yourself

- Benchmark your current efforts by secret shopping yourself
 - Create a series of profiles for each intake point
 - Shop every intake point (opportunities for consumers to engage with you)
 - Document your findings

#3- Make your case

- Write a business plan
 - Document your problem (use secret shopping information you gathered)
 - Present a solution
 - Tie solution back to business goals

#4- Develop response standards

- Define expectations for all interactions with new business leads (and repeat business)
- Set response time frame expectations
- ‘Script’ initial conversations to ensure that necessary information is gathered
- Set a procedure for how leads are handled
 - Who answers calls when
 - Who monitors leads coming from web?

#5- Trust....but verify

- Build your own secret shopper program
 - Test at regular intervals
 - Evaluate same metrics each time
 - Compare results over several testing periods
 - Adapt as needed
 - Offer praise at every point you can

#6- Close the Loop

- Tie lead management success to bottom line business success
 - Seek out scenarios where leads managed effectively resulted in new or repeat business
 - As lead management improves, does your business improve?

Summary

- In today's environment, no one can afford to NOT manage leads well
- This is an opportunity for improvement in collegiate conference and event facilities
- You can't manage what you can't measure
- Be the internal advocate for measurement...and then do it

Additional Resources

- Presentation
 - Leave your card for a pdf copy
- Blog
 - www.CollegeInteractiveMarketing.com
- White Papers
 - Study will be a white paper released this spring
 - Leave your card for a pre-release copy

Additional Questions

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