

# BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE REPORT



October 2009

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ASPEN CHAMBER

### [Surveys Says...](#)

In September, the ACRA surveyed its membership about the use of outdoor space in the

downtown core this summer. In brief:

- 53% of respondents said the amount of outdoor merchandising was just right.
- 51% of respondents said the city could allow more outdoor restaurant seating.
- 66% of respondents said the number of sandwich board signs was fine.
- 56% of respondents said they enjoyed the additional options offered by temporary food vendors.
- 79% of respondents said the City should lighten up on outdoor restaurant seating, followed by 40% who said temporary food vending.
- 50% of respondents said the City should tighten up on sandwich board signs, while overall signage and outdoor merchandising came it at 36% and 37%, respectively.
- 59% of respondents said the city should have looser regulations on outdoor merchandising on the weekends.

For complete survey results, contact Erik Klanderud at 970-925-1940.

## **Vote YES on 5A!**

Mail-in ballots for the Nov. 3 election should arrive in voters' mailboxes around Oct. 13. The ACRA and Aspen Lodging Association is urging everyone to vote YES on Referendum 5A, which would allow for the creation of the Aspen Local Marketing District and a 1% increase on lodging tax. This is not a property tax!! For more information, please visit [www.aspenchamber.org/almd](http://www.aspenchamber.org/almd)

## **Attention Employers of Notaries Public**

Senate Bill 111, which took effect July 1, includes a number of changes to existing laws governing notaries public, as well as several new provisions. The National Notary Association would like to assist in providing additional information on this important new law. As an employer of Notaries, it is critical that you are informed about the provisions of the new law and what it means to your business and your Notary staff. For more is available at: [National Notary](#), or by calling the National Notary Association at 800-876-6827.

## **ACRA Board Supports 1A**

At its most recent meeting, the Aspen Chamber Resort Association Board of Directors endorsed Referendum 1A, the Pitkin County ballot measure that would create a voluntary loan program for residential and commercial property owners interested in making energy upgrades. Pitkin County is seeking voter approval in the Nov. 3 election to issue as much as \$7 million worth of bonds to finance the program. The bonds would be repaid by property owners who choose to participate, not taxpayers at large.

## **Breast Cancer Awareness Month**

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month and the Aspen Affiliate of Susan G. Komen for the Cure wants to be sure every woman is breast self-aware. The Affiliate provides free mammograms, among other services, to women without insurance in its tri-county service area: Pitkin, Eagle & Garfield. For more information about Komen Aspen services, or to volunteer, call: 970-920-0250 or visit: <http://www.komenaspens.org/>.

## **Health Care Update**

The newest bill to be introduced comes out of the Senate Finance Committee, and is sponsored by Sen. Max Baucus. Referred to as America's Healthy Future Act, it provides

different rules for small and large employers, and sets different phase-in periods for each segment. The proposal does require that all employers eventually be subject to health reform rules. Van Gilder Insurance Corporation has outlined what you need to know in its latest newsletter. Please click [HERE](#) to download a copy or contact Roaring Fork Valley Community Health Plan at <http://www.rfchp.com/>.

## Save the Date!

\* Aspen Lodging Association General Membership Luncheon, Wednesday Oct. 7, 2009, at noon, at The Sky Hotel. For more information, contact Tim Clark, 970-925-4000.

\* Colorado Entrepreneurship Marketplace, Friday, Oct. 9, 8 a.m.-7 p.m., Two Rivers Convention Center in Grand Junction. For more information or to register, visit <http://www.ruralcolorado.org/>

\* Visit the ACRA Community Calendar for all local events and happenings this month at [www.aspenchamber.org/calendar-of-events/community](http://www.aspenchamber.org/calendar-of-events/community)

## Occupancy Report

To view past occupancy reports, visit [aspenchamber.org](http://www.aspenchamber.org).

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## STRATEGY

### Cut Costs Without Losing Customers

**Discover the secrets to how you can cut costs while actually increasing customer satisfaction.**

THERE IS NO DOUBT in this economic environment that cash is king and tough investment and cost-cutting decisions need to be made to ensure that your business remains viable, for the sake of all stakeholders.

However, decision-makers who are worried over the stability of their company's finances should remember one simple truth: The source of your business's cash flow is your customer base.

What all of this boils down to is the need to make smart, informed investment and cost-cutting decisions that have both a short-term and a long-term perspective.

If a company is not careful, it may perpetuate a business death spiral: Cost-cutting impacts customer satisfaction and demand, which in turn impact top-line revenue, creating the need for yet further cost-cutting.

That vicious cycle results in a difficult position for any business to re-emerge from. Yet it can be avoided — by maintaining a customer perspective during these trying times.

Although each business's model and situation are different, there are common steps for addressing the challenge:

**1. Revisit your segmentation.** A business's customer base is its ultimate source of cash flow; however, not all customers are created equal. It is surprising how few companies have systematically analyzed the profitability of customer segments at anything deeper than a gross-margin basis.

Examining your segmentation — with an eye toward which customers are truly driving your cash flow and are absolutely critical to retain, and which customers are less important but are consuming critical fixed resources — will help to inform your investment and cost-cutting decisions.

**2. Recognize and appreciate your customers' situation.** Recognize that your customers are also taking a hard look at their expenditure profile, which may result in (1) eliminating consumption of a particular product or service; (2) reducing consumption; or (3) continuing to consume at the same level but with a lower-priced product or service.

That third option is a result of the individual consumer's switching cost being lowered by the current economic environment. Pay particular attention to that third group. The first and second customer groups are difficult to influence, but the third can be addressed by continuing to demonstrate the value that your company's offering delivers to them.

**3. Map your customer touchpoints.** Develop an understanding of the impact that each touchpoint has on your customer and the degree of perceived value your customer receives from each touchpoint. Which add value and are critical to satisfaction? Which are "nice to have"? A simple map of known touchpoints and their hypothesized importance will do if you haven't studied this systematically.

Being armed with this knowledge of the relative importance of activities will help focus your investment decisions and help avoid cutting activities that impact satisfaction and loyalty.

**4. Maintain or increase your customer marketing investment.** While investing heavily to acquire new customers may not make sense in this economic environment, investing to retain your customers makes absolute sense. This should not be customer marketing as usual. We would not advocate barraging your customer base with cross-sell and up-sell promotions.

Now is the time to increase customer equity through activities such as these:

- *Opening a dialogue with your customers:* Thank your customers for their business; recognize the economic situation and sympathize with the challenges your customers are facing.

- *Rewarding your customer base:* For a period of time, offer free services that have a limited impact on your cost structure but deliver additional value to your customers; offer special promotions that are low-investment items but are perceived as valuable by your customers.

**5. Step up customer service.** Now is not the time to under-deliver on your customers' expectations, especially in customer service. As we noted, switching costs have been reduced — and one poor customer-service experience could be enough to drive a customer to a competitor.

Without making a significant investment in customer service, a business can take various actions to improve the level of service delivered. The following are examples:

- *Creating a sense of urgency in your customer-service groups:* Clearly set expectations that the business viability is dependent on the customers' experience and the customer service group has the ability to make a significant impact.
- *Developing programs to foster improved customer service:* Develop internal competitions for your customer-service team; establish awards and recognition initiatives for your customer-service team.

Current economic conditions require that businesses make difficult investment and cost-cutting decisions. Maintaining a customer perspective in these trying times will ensure that the right activities are invested in and your customers are satisfied and secure..

Those that retain their customers in the current economic environment will not only be more resilient in the short term but also best positioned to prosper in the long term, when the economy begins to rebound.

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## TRENDS

### Tapping talent through internship programs

Small business owners are discovering an upside to the economic downturn: a deeper pool of talent to tap through internship programs. Large employers have slashed the number of internships by around a fifth this year as part of recession-related budgets cuts. At the same time, demand for internships is rising among students facing a tight job market where employers are putting a premium on work experience.

Hiring permanent staff can be costlier and riskier right now because of the uncertain economic environment, but business owners can keep expenses in check by employing lower-cost labor, such as interns.

"It's a good opportunity for small business owners," says Keith Ashmus, chair of the National Small Business Association. Ashmus, who is also a co-founding partner at Frantz Ward LLP, a law firm in Cleveland, says his firm's ongoing paid-internship program is attracting higher-caliber candidates as larger firms cut back.

Interns can energize a workplace with their enthusiasm. They can pitch in to support projects that might otherwise languish on a back burner. An internship program can also serve as an effective recruitment ground for future hires.

Setting up an internship program doesn't require a large investment of time or money. To get the best results, business owners need to find appropriate candidates and screen them to make sure they have the skills needed to get the jobs they want done. Once hired, provide a clear description of duties and give regular feedback, as it should be a learning experience for

the intern.

Source: *The Wall Street Journal*, August 24, 2009

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## NEWS

### **Are Web 2.0 tools worth the investment?**

Is investing in interactive Web technologies worth the time and money? A new survey by McKinsey Quarterly polled companies about the benefits gained from using various Web 2.0 tools and found that several technologies were a boon not only for customer relationships, but for relationships with employees and external partners and suppliers.

When it came to customer-related benefits, blogs were the most useful tool, bringing measurable benefits to 51% of responding companies worldwide. That was followed by video-sharing and social networking (48%) and RSS feeds (45%). Technologies such as wikis, podcasts, ratings and tags were less useful, but still benefited customer relationships for up to one-third of companies worldwide.

More than one-half of respondents said Web 2.0 tools increased marketing effectiveness, while 43% reported higher customer satisfaction and 38% reduced marketing costs. Businesses in the high-tech/telecom industry were most likely to report customer-related benefits of Web 2.0, at 65%, followed by business/legal/professional services firms, at 60%.

Companies cannot simply adopt these technologies and expect their customers to use them en masse, however. Among firms reporting measurable benefits from Web 2.0, 74% said it was important to integrate the tools with other forms of customer interaction, and 52% said marketing the Web 2.0 initiatives themselves was a best practice.

Source: eMarketer.com, September 16, 2009

### **Red Flags Rule deadline looms for small biz**

Chances are, your business is subject to a new Federal Trade Commission (FTC) rule and you didn't even know it. Back in January 2008, the FTC's FACTA Red Flags Rule went into effect, requiring financial institutions and "creditors" to develop a written program to prevent, detect and minimize the damage from identity theft.

What many small business owners didn't realize is that the term "creditor" includes any business that provides its products or services before invoicing clients. This resulted in mass confusion regarding which businesses are covered, so the FTC extended the compliance deadline several times in order to get the message out. The current deadline is now set for November 1, 2009.

Defining who is subject to this new regulation can be confusing. For example, you may be

considered a “creditor,” but your customer accounts may not be covered by the rule. And accepting credit cards as a form of payment does not, by itself, make you a creditor.

To help clear things up, the FTC has developed a Red Flags website ([www.ftc.gov/redflagsrule](http://www.ftc.gov/redflagsrule)) with information that can help determine if your business is covered and how to comply with the Rule. It includes an online compliance template to design an Identity Theft Prevention Program, as well as articles directed to specific businesses and industries, guidance manuals and frequently asked questions.

Sources: [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov), [blogs.business.com](http://blogs.business.com)

## New thoughts on price and perceived quality

We’ve all heard that raising prices often raises the perceived quality of a product or service. So does that mean that raising prices will increase sales?

Past marketing studies support this theory. But according to new Cornell University research, “A positive perception of a product based on its higher price doesn’t automatically translate into a decision to buy it.”

In order to determine the extent to which price influences consumers’ attitudes toward a product, the researchers conducted experiments with differently priced foods. A few of the findings: Participants did not clearly favor the higher-priced items. Furthermore, a higher price tag can create a favorable first impression of an unfamiliar item, but this may not be enough for a consumer to buy it.

The researchers believe that price still has some effect on demand but that the effects are too small to be significant.

“When you make something more expensive, the psychological effect may make it more attractive, but that’s forgetting good old economics — when something is more expensive, you can afford less of it,” said one of the researchers.

Source: [bnet.com](http://bnet.com), September 10, 2009 [\[go to top\]](#)

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## T I P S

- **Do you have a lot of prospects pending but not closing?** You may not be asking the tough questions early enough. Find out if the person you are talking to is really a player by asking the “cleansing question.” “Mr./Ms. Prospect: We’ve been talking for a while now and have agreed that we’d be able to help you with \_\_\_\_\_. I want to make sure that I’m not wasting your time or mine. What is the probability that we’ll be able to work together in the next month?” If they say “zero probability,” great — now you can find out the real problem or move them out of your pending file. If they give some other probability, get a commitment and time frame.

Source: [www.businessbyphone.com](http://www.businessbyphone.com)

- **When giving negative feedback to an employee,** paint a picture of the behavior you

expect to see in the future. Be specific about the behavior you want improved or eliminated. For example, don't say "You're always late for work." Instead, say "I'd like to see you at your desk, ready to work, by 8:30 every morning."

Source: *Manager's Edge*, 1101 King St., Alexandria, VA 22314

- **Get more out of your coupons with a few tweaks.** First of all, never give away single coupons to just one customer. If you give away multiple coupons, people are sure to be walking around the office handing them out. Next, get everyone recruiting friends for your discount by having a minimum number of participants required to activate it. Instead of the generic 10% off for each coupon, make it a significant discount that only works if they bring in three friends. Finally, help your coupons spread by putting them in an email and let your subscribers pass it on to their friends.

Source: [www.gaspedal.com](http://www.gaspedal.com)

- **Diffuse an irate person with this question.** When Los Angeles-based wedding planner Scott Regberg has a customer go into an out-of-control rant over a minor, readily handled problem and act as though it's the end of the world, he calmly asks: "Do you really believe that?" The trick is to ask the question not in a hostile or degrading manner, but in a calm and straightforward way. It causes most people who use hyperbole or exaggeration to backpedal and restate their position, allowing you to pin down the details of the actual problem. In the uncommon instance that someone replies with a firm "yes," be reachable and listen carefully to what they have to say. Either way, you'll have the opportunity to sort through the problem.

Source: *Just Listen: Discover the Secret to Getting Through to Absolutely Anyone* by Mark Goulston, AMACOM (2009)

- **Peer-to-peer lender, Kiva, now facilitates microloans to entrepreneurs** in the U.S. Originally created for business owners in the developing world, Kiva has partnered up with Opportunity Fund and Accion USA to replicate its lending model in this country. No loan will exceed \$10,000 and loans are targeted at entrepreneurs with low or moderate incomes who can't get credit. Kiva does not define who qualifies for a loan and leaves that job to its partners. Opportunity Fund makes loans to those with less than 80% of an area's median income, while Accion says most of its borrowers are low- to moderate-income immigrants or minorities.

Source: [www.businessweek.com](http://www.businessweek.com)

- **Is your Google AdWords bidding strategy optimized?** One tool to help you find out is Google's new Bid Simulator. The feature allows advertisers to simulate what could have happened had they bid differently on the previous campaign week. The feature should enable advertisers to make better judgments on which keywords to alter spending on, giving a better picture of the trade-off between cost and click-through volume.

Source: [www.bizreport.com](http://www.bizreport.com)

- **Are your sales goals too high?** Sales managers often think that it's a good idea to set goals just a little higher each time. However, arbitrarily setting goals 10% or 20%

higher than the last period can actually be demotivating if they are unreachable. Good salespeople want to reach their goals and can become depressed if they don't. The most effective sales goals are based on salespeople's behaviors and not on something tied to outside forces — like the economy — that they can't control. Make sure goals are customized to fit the particulars of each salesperson's situation. Goals should be broken down into small bites or a series of steps so that reps see a clear path to reach the larger goal.

Source: [www.sellingpower.com](http://www.sellingpower.com)

- **If your company uses "robocalls"** (sending prerecorded messages to telephones) for lead generation, beginning September 1, the FTC requires that you obtain written permission to send prerecorded sales and solicitation voice messages to consumers. Additionally, telemarketers must provide dedicated toll-free, opt-out phone numbers for all messages left on voice mails where automatic opt-out functions are not applicable.

Source: [www.targetmarketingmag.com](http://www.targetmarketingmag.com)

- **Get publicity by finding out what stories will be covered** before they hit the newsstands or get on the air? The secret is editorial calendars. These calendars allow you to see what topics a media outlet will be covering in the future and help your company to get some much-needed exposure. Typically, editorial calendars can be found in advertising sales kits. Look over each calendar and determine which of their upcoming stories you may be able to offer your knowledge as a source. Don't wait to the last minute to pitch your idea, however. A good rule of thumb is that they will be looking for information about four months ahead of publication.

Source: [www.thepowerpublicist.com](http://www.thepowerpublicist.com)

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**Business Intelligence Report** (ISSN 1091-9597) is published 12 times a year by DBH Communications, Inc. PO Box 22337 Kansas City, MO 64113, email: [4info@bizintellreport.com](mailto:4info@bizintellreport.com). Subscriptions are \$89 per year.

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