Kitchen & Bath Marketing Handbook

How local distributors, dealers, designers and remodelers can generate a steady flow of leads, sales and referrals.
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Introduction

What’s working for you in marketing?

And please don’t say referrals because that’s what everyone says. Yes, referrals are important – and we talk about them in this handbook – but right now, I want you to focus on those other marketing activities that you need to implement to generate leads and sales.

Print ads, direct mail, online ads, search ads (Google Adwords), direct mail, trade shows, PR, you name it.

If you’re using any of these marketing activities, that’s great.

But do you know if any of these are actually producing new business for you? How do you know? And how do those results compare with other activities you’ve tried?

Whenever you run a marketing campaign – any campaign – you want to be able to track your new business leads back to specific ads and other promotions.

You want to be able to see exactly which ads and which media choices are producing response – and which are not. So in the end, you can move your budget to your higher performing options.

That’s our main message in this report.
Finding New Business

Most kitchen and bath owners got into this industry because they knew kitchens and baths. They understood design, or appliances, or cabinets, or countertops, or remodeling.

They did not start their businesses because they were marketers.

For most owners, marketing is one of the least understood parts of their business – and yet, if you have no marketing, you have no business.

Not too many years ago, kitchen and bath businesses relied on traditional marketing to build their business. They used print ads, (and TV and radio advertising), direct mail, trade shows, PR, Yellow Pages – and of course, they relied on referrals.

Today, all of those same marketing tools still exist, but now you also have a whole new set of tools at your disposal.

At the center of marketing today is your website. Prospective customers spend a lot of time researching you before you ever hear from them. But you also have email marketing, online advertising, search advertising and social media.

It is our goal to help you navigate this increasing complex array of marketing choices.
Performance-Based Marketing

There are those who will tell you that marketing is all about brand-building and creating an awareness of your business and product line in the marketplace.

This type of thinking usually results in image-based advertising that often looks nice and may do a good job of telling your story.

But ask about performance and you’ll get a little dance.

How many leads did it generate? How many phone calls did you get from your ad? Which ad or which media channel produced the most responses?

That’s what your advertising should be telling you.

We believe that the primary purpose of marketing and advertising is to generate a measurable response.

We believe your investment in marketing and advertising should produce a steady flow of sales leads (prospects) that you can then follow up to produce orders (customers).

While brand building and awareness do contribute to your business over the long term, we believe you want to see results right now.

That’s what we do.
Your Showroom

For some K&B distributors, dealers and designers, the showroom has become the marketing focal point for generating new business.

To be sure, the showroom brings prospective customers to your location where they can shop and visualize what their kitchens or bathrooms may someday look like.

A showroom gives you a leg up on the sales process. You just need to get people in the door. And once there, you need guide them carefully toward the right buying decision for them.

Of course, not every kitchen and bath business has a showroom or even a store to showcase their products. Some have to go on the road to sell their wares.

And while this may seem to be a disadvantage, it is a workable business model. You just need a different marketing strategy.

Whether you use a showroom, a retail store or a portfolio, you need an advertising and marketing strategy that supports your sales process.
Your Website

Websites have become the centerpiece for businesses today. And as a result, major investments are made in the creation of visually compelling websites.

This is certainly true in the kitchen and bath industry where glossy design and beautifully photographed products are put on display.

But a beautiful website, while helpful and desirable, isn’t enough. The truth is there are a lot of beautiful websites out there.

How you differentiate yourself from the others may be determined by whether your website is:

- easy to navigate
- providing essential contact info
- optimized to be found by search engines
- providing keyword-focused content
- designed to generate leads

And just as importantly from a practical standpoint is whether your website is easy to edit. Today more and more websites are being developed on a platform that makes it easy for users to edit on their own – without having to call their webmaster.

This new development has been welcomed news for many business owners.
Your Sales Process

Marketing and sales go hand in hand.

Sales depends on marketing to generate leads and provide other collateral support. Marketing depends on sales to follow up and close their leads.

For marketing to properly support sales, it needs to first understand the sales process – and the needs of the sales team – for a particular business.

By laying out each step in the sales process, marketing can develop promotions to motivate prospects to take the next step in the process.

The K&B sales process typically goes something like this

Step 1 – Initial inquiry – lead generation from multiple sources
Step 2 – Appointment – face to face meeting
Step 3 – Consultation or Design – preliminary engagement
Step 4 – Estimate – detailed presentation
Step 5 – Close – resolution of final details

How does this fit with your sales process?
Marketing Programs

Referral Marketing

Ask any dealer, designer or remodeler – heck any business owner – what their best source of new business is, and they will tell you the same thing:

Referrals.

And when you have a good reputation in the eyes of your past customers and the professionals in the industry, you probably already get your share of new business referrals.

But what can you do to accelerate the referral process? Can you build a referral system that maximizes your opportunity to generate a steady flow of referral leads?

The first step is to be willing to ask for referrals. You can do this in person or by phone – or you can develop a consistent outreach to your target audience using email and direct mail.

By consistently connecting with your past customers and the professionals in your area, you can stay “top of mind” when referral opportunities come by.

Should you offer an incentive? Some do. Some don’t. It’s a personal choice, but you can be sure incentives will increase your results.
Lead Generation

While referrals generate the best kind of lead (because they come with a third party endorsement), the volume is typically insufficient to rely on referrals alone.

That’s why K&B businesses also need to develop a Lead Generation program – to reach out and find prospects early in the buying process.

This requires a consistent outreach campaign designed to get a prospect to raise their hand and say “I’m interested.”

Of course, that interest level will vary from a serious prospect to an early stage tire kicker. But they are all leads – because they are all more interested than those who did not respond.

Lead generation programs can be developed with direct mail, print advertising, online advertising, Google Adwords search advertising, trade shows and other marketing activities.

The key is to apply tracking techniques so you can see which of these activities is producing the most leads, the most qualified leads and the lowest cost leads.
Lead Follow-Up

This is a much-overlooked part of the sales process.

Too often, leads are quickly turned over to sales – and nothing happens. The sales rep might cherry pick the leads or make just one follow-up phone call.

But even those leads that do receive proper follow-up can get stale over time – and your sales people will shift their attention to their newer, hotter leads. This allows some leads to fall through the cracks.

However, with a good lead nurturing process in place, you can be sure to stay in touch with all your leads for all long as you want – whether or not your sales people stay on top of them.

Lead follow-up can take many forms.

- It may include a short-term series of emails delivered to every new lead shortly after their inquiry.

- It may include a long-term strategy that involves a weekly or month email update – or an occasional reminder postcard – to keep your name “top of mind” over an extended period.

- It may include multiple lead series that targets leads based on their product/service interest or their place in the buying process.

- It may include visitor tracking so you know when your previous leads return to your website.
Website Marketing

Your website is at the heart of your business, but having a compelling website isn’t enough. There are many things you can and should do to generate visitor traffic to your website and improve your chances of being found on the web.

Optimizing your pages
Take a look at the pages you already have in place and find out if they have been optimized for a keyword phrase that is important to your business.

Adding new content
People are searching on search engines to get information – to answer their questions – about topics related to your business. If you can provide those answers, you will be found.

Developing a local search presence
As owners of kitchen and bath businesses, most of your customers are coming from local homeowners. You need to spend the time to establish yourself for local search on Google, Yahoo and Bing.

Integrating with social media
You don’t have to be a social butterfly to take advantage of social media. You can build social media pages that become integrated with your website, and start sharing your knowledge beyond your current circles.

As you can imagine, this is continuing process.
Marketing Activities

Print Advertising

We hear all the time about the death of newspapers. And yes, circulation is down and both newspapers and magazines are getting thinner every day.

But print advertising is still one of the most popular ways to get your message out to your local market.

Depending on where you’re located, you could have several newspapers and magazines covering your area.

Some have paid circulation, some have free circulation. Advertising costs will vary greatly. There is always some kind of deal available. And you can pretty much count on a sales call from one of these publications every day.

So how do you know where to advertise? The ad reps will give you all kinds of numbers – eyeballs, impressions, demographics, pass-along readership – but none of it should affect your decision.

What you should be asking yourself is how many leads will this ad produce? And at what cost?

As you explore print advertising opportunities, look at media choices, ad sizes and, if available, pre-printed inserts.
Online Advertising

Online advertising is often lumped in with all Internet marketing including website development, search engine optimization, email marketing and pay-per-click advertising.

We cover all that in this handbook, but here, we want to focus specifically on online advertising.

Today, most of the newspapers in your area have online editions. While these news sites may not be frequented by you, they do get their readers.

They are not necessarily subscribers – as is the case with the print publications. Most come to the news site through search engines, social media, email or bookmarking.

But these news sites do have an audience – and in some cases, they provide a guaranteed audience. What that means is that your ad will be given a guaranteed number of impressions for a fixed cost (which you cannot get from print).

In addition to your local news publications, other websites and blogs may be available to reach your local market.

While you can search for those on your own, you might also want to try the Google Display Network. The Google Display Network, which is part of Google Adwords, can place your ad on local websites, blogs and news sites in your local area.
Search Advertising (Google Adwords)

Search Advertising refers specifically to Google Adwords (as well as the less popular Bing/Yahoo Ad Network).

Google Adwords is a relatively new platform that allows businesses of all sizes to promote their business to people who are searching for the products and services they sell.

In many ways, Google and the other search engines have replaced the Yellow Pages. Today when people want to find a local kitchen dealer, they don’t go to the Yellow Page. They type in a search on Google.

When you look at a Google search page, you will see a lot of listings. Those showing in the main (left) column are considered “organic search” meaning they are what Google thinks most likely answers the search question.

The listings down the right side and at the very top are Sponsored Ads, or paid ads, which is Google Adwords.

Unlike traditional advertising where you pay a fixed amount up front regardless of your response, with Google Adwords, you only pay when someone clicks on your ad.

Costs can vary greatly - from a dime or a quarter to several dollars per click. It depends on your product, your market and the competition. A recent check for the term “kitchen cabinets” showed an average cost per click of $1.36.

But beware … a click doesn’t mean a lead. When someone clicks on your ad, they are taken to your website or preferably, a dedicated landing page, where they are asked to take some action (like joining your mailing list or downloading your free guide). Then they become a lead.

Google Adwords is a great option for a small business because it’s affordable and low risk - and you can target local areas. Still there are some nuances about the system that can make it a little frustrating for the newcomer.

Beyond the basic listings, you can use some of the advanced features of Google Adwords – including phone extensions, additional site links and product displays.

In addition, Google Adwords offers retargeting which allows you to put your ad continually in front of people who have previously visited your website.
Direct Mail

Direct mail is still a workhorse for K&B. When you understand that not everyone is a prospect for what you sell, you realize targeting those who are prospects makes sense.

Direct mail generates leads – when done right.

And once you have a program in place that generates a consistent flow of leads, you can schedule out your mailings to generate that quantity consistently over the course of 12 months.

The key concern about direct mail is cost. A direct mail campaign can cost between 50 cents and $1 per piece – depending on the mailer format and the quantity.

Although direct mail has higher upfront costs, it often reaches a pre-qualified audience so the “cost per qualified lead” could actually be lower than other promotions.

Direct mail is a multi-step process that involves mailing list selection, offer planning, creative, printing, addressing, mailing and postage.

Direct Mail to New Homeowners

If you’re looking for people who might be interested in a new kitchen or bathroom, a new homeowner is probably your best profile.

When people move into a new home, they have a list of things they want to change right away. And most of the time, that list includes a new kitchen or bathroom.

Consider developing a monthly new homeowner mailing.

Direct Mail to Homeowners of a Certain Income

As a K&B owner, you know that your products fall into a particular price point – and the price point can be matched to a particular income level.

This will help you identify your ideal target customer.

Once you’re identified this target audience, we can help you find the right lists and begin the process of reaching out with direct mail.

Shared Mail

Shared mail is a less expensive way to use direct mail by sharing the costs with other advertisers. Program availability will vary with location.

While shared mail is appealing because of its price, you can probably expect response to be less than solo mailings – if only because your message may get lost in the mailer.

But if we track response and measure against costs, we will be able to determine overall effectiveness.
Email

When it first came on the scene, email was a real game-changer. It was fast, personal and cheap. It still is.

But the key with email is the list – and by that we mean an opt-in list of people who want to hear from you.

When you build a list of opt-in email addresses, you have created great leverage for yourself because you’ve got a willing audience you can reach in a matter of minutes.

Today, great effort is put into building an opt-in email list.

But email is much less effective when prospecting for new customers. There are lists you can buy or rent, but you need to tread very carefully.

Email for prospecting purposes is largely unwelcomed, uninvited email which can result in spam reports.

In summary, we love email for lead nurturing and customer communications (with opt-in names), but we shy away from email as a prospecting tool.
SEO/Local Search/Social

You have a website and you’re happy with the way it looks. But is your website getting found on the search engines? Consider these elements:

**SEO**

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a term to describe the strategy and techniques needed to get your website ranked high on Google, Bing, Yahoo and the other search engines.

This is known as “organic” search, or free search, because unlike Google Adwords, you cannot pay your way to the top.

Google alone determines whether your website and web pages are relevant to the search based on a number of factors which include keyword match, on-page optimization, meta-page optimization and inbound links from other websites.

What can you do to improve your rankings? You can do the things mentioned above – and then you can provide content on your website that provides answers to questions your community is likely asking.

This is one of the reasons many business owners and marketers start blogs. Blogs provide a format for creating new content that appears on your website – where you can answer those questions. A blog is not essential, however.

**Local Search**

Separate from search engine optimization, local search involves getting your website listed on the local search platforms for Google, Bing and Yahoo.

With local search, the search engines will highlight local businesses for certain keyword inquiries. Often those businesses will appear at the top of the page and may even appear on a local map.

**Social**

Clearly social media is the rage these days in marketing. And yes, there are some people who are building their businesses around social media.

But the vast majority is using social media not as a centerpiece of their marketing but as a support vehicle.

Even if you don’t intend “get social” yourself, you can still build a social presence with major networks and over time use those networks to spread your message.

As a starting point, you’ll want to create accounts and business pages for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+. Your social media activity will ultimately improve your rankings on the search engines.
Trade Shows

Trade shows and home shows provide K&B businesses with another way to reach out to the public.

Their advantage is that they put you face to face with potential customers. The downside is that they can be expensive both in terms of costs and time.

Still, trade shows and home shows can produce leads. And with the right strategy, you can maximize both the quantity and the quality of your leads.

The key with trade shows – as with all lead generation activities – is the follow-up. You need to check in with your leads after the trade show to determine their need.

For shows that offer advanced registration, you can sometimes obtain lists of registered attendees, and then send invitations to ask those attendees to visit your booth. This will increase your visitors and your leads.
Measuring Your Performance

With so many marketing activities available to you, there is no way to determine which activity is most effective for your business without measuring performance.

By using dedicated web landing pages and telephone call tracking, you can see precisely how many leads each activity is able to produce.

Measuring for lead quantity is a good start, but you may also need to measure for lead quality as some media or other activities could be reaching a more qualified target audience.

Finally, when you measure marketing performance, you need to take into account the varying costs of each activity.

For example, if you are spending $500 for one ad, and $1000 for another ad, you can reasonably expect the more expensive ad will generate more leads. But will be twice as many to compensate for the more expensive cost?

This is also an important consideration.
Refining Your Marketing

So what will you do with all of this response data?

For too many business owners, the answer is nothing – which means there was no reason to track and measure in the first place.

What you should be doing is making adjustments – revising your program to continually seek and achieve better results.

When you have comparative response data at your fingertips, you can look at the winning activities and expand on them.

You can then look at your losing activities and drop them. Those in the middle with so-so results may be worth testing a little further.

Your winning activities will become your control. As you test new elements, you will be measuring them against the results of your control.
Next Step?

Thanks for reading our Handbook. We hope it has provided you with a good overview of the marketing opportunities that exist today for kitchen and bath professionals.

To be sure, there is a lot to consider.

If you’d like to explore this further, we invite you to request a **FREE 30-Minute Strategy Session** where we will review your current program and results – and then we’ll make specific recommendations for improvement.

Ultimately we would like to help you with your marketing. We’ve developed four programs designed to address specific areas of your sales and marketing process.

- Referral Marketing
- Lead Generation
- Lead Follow-Up
- Website Marketing

For a modest monthly fee, each program is offered separately or together with the other programs to form a comprehensive marketing effort.

For complete details and pricing, call Bob McCarthy at 508-473-8643 or **bob@mccarthyandking.com**.
About

Bob McCarthy is a consultant, copywriter and creative director.

Working with both businesses of all sizes, Bob has been responsible for planning, creating and executing dozens of direct response campaigns – both online and offline.

Bob is a past president of the New England Direct Marketing Association (NEDMA). He began his career in journalism working as a reporter for the Quincy Patriot Ledger.

In 1980, he became a copywriter for The DR Group, one of the nation’s first direct marketing agencies. Four years later, he left the agency to work as a freelancer.

He is currently president of McCarthy & King Marketing, Inc., in Milford, Massachusetts.

In addition to his client work, Bob spent 10 years teaching direct response copywriting at Bentley College (Waltham, MA), and two years teaching mailing list research at Merrimack College (Andover, MA).