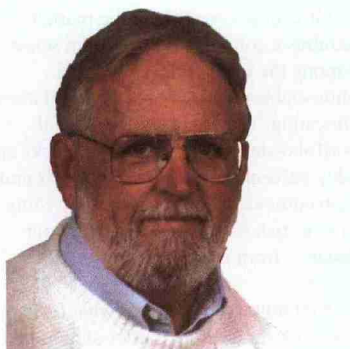


Agitate & Spin

Opportunity knocks ... what's your plan?

by Mike Staats alias Captain Toolhead



I RECENTLY RECEIVED AN EFFECTIVE, BULK-MAIL marketing postcard (I call them trolling for business cards) from PIP Printing and Marketing Services. You probably have a company like this in your area. I'm not pushing PIP Printing. Their message, however, struck me as *right on!*

On the front of the card, two questions:
 Should I be looking for new customers?
 Is now a smart time to be marketing my business?

Their answer, of course, on the reverse, *No question about it.*

Here's what else it said:

The upside to a down market is opportunity. And PIP can help you maximize it. Meet us for a coffee break and discover how our printing and marketing services can serve your business needs. Capture new market share with lead generation campaigns. Drive incremental sales with upsell efforts. Strengthen relationships with customer loyalty programs. The timing is right. The opportunity is now.

Obviously, this company is aggressively seeking clients who can now see the economic rebound underway and suggesting they take advantage of their competition who might react more slowly to the turnaround. What do you think? Is it time to create a marketing plan — perhaps that customer newsletter that you've been thinking about?

Opportunity does knock — often loudly — but you gotta open the door. What's your plan?

Give me feedback concerning what you think about this idea and how you plan to add customers and increase market share for your service business.

Half empty or half full?

From MarketWatch online: The National Federation of Independent Business's small-business index edged up 0.4 points in February to a reading of 94.5, helped by gains in hiring and plans to hire. "This is not a reading that characterizes a strongly rebounding economy," said NFIB chief economist Bill Dunkelberg. "But it is the third-best reading since the fourth quarter of 2009 when the economy was expanding rapidly." Only a net 9% of small-business owners surveyed expect that business conditions will improve over the next six months.

What's your opinion?

Kitchen design trends

I found an article that outlines a new trend in high-end kitchens where appliances both large and small are hidden away. Like a Sub-Zero refrigerator within a mirrored cabinet.

Or a refrigerator with freezer drawers that look exactly like the rest of the cabinets. Ditto for the dishwashers. And a "breakfast garage" that hides a toaster, coffeemaker and microwave oven behind retractable "garage" doors!

So, instead of high-end appliances prominently displayed like trophies, the new look is "streamlined, uncluttered, often with LED lighting and a mix of stone and wood finishes." Many of these new designs incorporate fireplaces and TVs — almost like a family room. For proponents, these features support the kitchen's new role in entertaining, lounging, homework and media surfing. Media surfing? In June, Samsung will introduce a \$3,500 refrigerator that has an LCD touch screen with Wi-Fi connectivity on the door, and which the household chef can use to access apps, such as Pandora, Twitter and Epicurious. Wouldn't everyone like to stand at the door of the fridge and google recipes? I don't think so.

Other manufacturers are buying into this design trend. Sub-Zero is developing "panel-ready" refrigerators in new sizes to help them blend seamlessly with cabinetry — providing that simple, calming, clean-kitchen look.

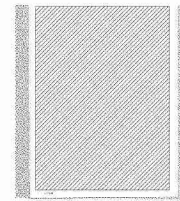
Whirlpool has introduced a clear-glass-and-stainless canopy for over the cooktop for about \$1,000. The marketing message is "a lighter look." Under the Jenn-Air brand, Whirlpool has new, built-in refrigerators that "virtually disappear" into the kitchen décor.

Just think if you went out with the boys one night, came home and actually couldn't find your refrigerator to simply get a drink of cold water! Maybe there will someday be an app for that — finding your major appliances in your own high-end kitchen. Or, by then, maybe there will be a new trend.

Wow! You say ... what a nightmare to service appliances in such a kitchen. I would say *indeed*.

If you think I'm making fun of this new kitchen design trend, it's because I am. These are not kitchens for you and me. These are not even kitchens for people who actually

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cook. I don't give a damn if I have people over and they can immediately locate my refrigerator so they can retrieve a beverage for themselves.

These are called high-end appliances and costly kitchens for a specific reason. They are *way* expensive. The kitchen remodel mentioned in the accompanying newspaper story cost \$97,000. That kitchen remodel alone would be more money than I could sell my whole house for today.

So, if I've identified this trend correctly, people no longer care to shout "That's my Sub-Zero \$10,000 refrigerator and right over there is my very expensive Viking commercial-style range — don't you just love that look (and by the way, I'm very wealthy)?"

Instead, folks with too much money now want to conceal their high-end appliances and play a high-end version of hide and seek with guests. Cover your eyes and count to ten. Unbelievable.

Toolhead quotes of the month

Don't follow the crowd ... you may not like where they're going!

Andy Rooney has learned ... that life is like a roll of toilet paper. The closer it gets to the end, the faster it goes. Ω