

What makes you so special?

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Now more than ever, it is vital to the success (and maybe even survival) of your business to separate yourself from the competition. Doing something uniquely different from the other guy differentiates you in the mind of the customer, and it's often the "edge" you need to pull to the front of the line. It does not have to be expensive or daunting, just different.

I saw a news piece once about a self defense course for women that positions itself by calling the workshop "spy school". They hold their classes in a Las Vegas casino with lots of cloak and dagger. Women come from all over the country to take this course, which includes poker lessons, roulette and "spy fashion" classes along with the personal security and self defense. Talk about differentiation! These folks don't consider the martial arts studio in your neighborhood to be competition for them on any level.

Clearly most of us cannot remake the business model we are using and managers are not in a position change up the owner's image. But there are endless ways that you can find that unique touch that will stand out in the minds of your customers.

I checked into a hotel in Minneapolis almost a year ago and the Guest Service Agent asked if I would like to have a few post cards to send home. All I had to do was address them, drop them off at the desk and then the hotel would pay the postage and drop them in the mail. That was a total investment on the part of the hotel of less than a buck and I am still telling people the story a year later. Another hotel I heard of has worked a trade out with a safety guru and is offering free classes in "personal security on the road" to its guests.

Your best customers are people who use your product or service on a regular basis. The danger is that you can become viewed as a commodity over time and once that happens, the only thing your customer looks at is price; a bad place to be stuck. So pull your team together and brainstorm some ideas. Ask your customers what they would like to see differently. Pull ideas from business in other industries and figure out a way to apply the ideas to your own. That unique twist will keep you out of commodity status and create loyal customers.