



Marketing To Different Markets

Targeting specific accounts uniquely will increase your likelihood of success.

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Selling to different vertical markets, such as schools, governments, health care facilities or retail operations, can vary considerably.

Some, such as school districts and many government facilities, tend to have a buying season, usually in the spring or at the end of summer.

For JanSan distributors, it is during this buying season that these types of facilities consider making larger purchases, for example, floor machines and carpet extractors.

After the season is over, the JanSan distributor may provide them with small products — cleaning chemicals, paper goods and the like — but will typically have to wait a year to market the bigger goods again, unless the district needs to replace equipment or experiences significant growth.

For building service contractors (BSCs) in these markets, the same buying season will likely apply.

What usually happens first is the school district selects BSCs who have asked to bid on the district's cleaning needs and who meet the district's specific requirements for such items as insurance and workers' compensation.

The district may also ask for financial statements from the BSCs to verify the financial strength of the contractors.

Why would they do this?

In some cases, the school district may take 45 to 60 days to pay its bills.

School districts want to make sure the BSC has sufficient funds to meet payroll and operating expenses during this time.

In addition, more and more facilities are requiring BSCs to be Cleaning Industry Management Standard (CIMS) certified, which serves to help ensure that the contractor is structured to deliver consistent, quality services that are designed to meet the customer's needs and expectations.

Once this step is done, many school districts will actually take all the approved vendors on a group bus tour, visiting each building they will maintain if selected.

This means that, for a couple of hours, you will be sitting next to your competition.

Contractors are then provided with bidding packages that include square footage, cleaning needs and other details that may affect a bid.

The same or a very similar process is carried out in many state and local government facilities as well.

Typically, bids are due on a specific date and none will be considered after that date.

The winning bid is usually announced one to three months after the due date.

The Prized Vendors List

For the health care and retail industries, as well as many other markets such as commercial office space, a specific buying season that applies to all members typically does not exist.

Many have a cleaning equipment and supplies budget they can draw on throughout the year.

This means the JanSan distributor servicing these clients can help them with their smaller consumables — paper products, cleaning chemicals and the like — but may also suggest new machines that are greener, more efficient and more effective throughout the year.

As to BSCs, facility managers in these industries may take bids at any time of the year.

However, particularly in health care, once a vendor has been selected, it is not uncommon for a facility to have a contract with the BSC that runs two or more years.

Typically, contracts for health care facilities tend to be more ironclad and can only be terminated due to poor service or if the BSC is not providing services as contracted.

Even if an industry has a buying season or a commercial facility has a contract with another company, that does not mean JanSan distributors and BSCs need not call on these organizations.

In fact, just the opposite is true.

These facilities, as with most large organizations, maintain a vendor list, and the only way to get on the vendor list is by making sales calls or by marketing your firm to these organizations.

To get on these prized lists, both BSCs and JanSan distributors must follow certain steps.

Among them are the following:

- Know who the decision maker is

This can be surprisingly difficult, especially if it is a large organization.

Often, there are gatekeepers who put up roadblocks that can be hard to get around.

And, for a retailer, health care facility or property management company, the physical buying office for the organization may be halfway across the country.

A good way to work around this problem, if possible, is to have a connection.

If you know of other vendors who have already established a relationship with the organization, they will possibly have the contact names you need.

And, if you are really lucky, they may even introduce you to one or more key buyers in the organization.

- Be prepared

What if you call on a location and are able to meet with the decision maker that day?

In this case, be prepared.

The decision maker will likely only give you a few minutes to introduce yourself and discuss your company.

Develop a presentation and have professional-looking brochures and information ready.

If you pass this test, the door to the vendor list may open for you.

- Know your market

JanSan distributors that sell to health care facilities, as an example, will generally know what types of products these locations purchase on a regular basis.

Similarly, astute BSCs know that the services provided to a school or office building may not suffice in a medical setting.

Each market may have specific cleaning needs.

Know those needs before walking in the door so you don't waste the client's time or yours.

- Find out if the client has special hiring programs

At one time, many large organizations like retailers would have a central buying office that selected vendors such as cleaning contractors to service all locations of the company.

While this is still prevalent, some organizations now have what are termed local purchase programs that give facility managers the authority to hire local cleaning contractors and JanSan distributors.

In some cases, they may also have hiring initiatives favoring women business owners or minority groups.

Along with locating the decision maker, find out if the organization you are interested in servicing buys locally or has one of these special purchasing programs. It can be a real timesaver.

- Patience pays off

Even if you do get on the approved vendors list for organizations in a variety of industries, it can take a year or longer before the organization takes bids for cleaning or considers selecting another JanSan distributor.

Frustration will get you nowhere.

Keeping in touch with the decision maker can definitely get you somewhere.

And, even if your bid is not selected to provide services or products to this organization, that does not mean you cannot try again.

Treat it as a learning experience; often, you can find out why your company was not selected and can rectify this the next time around.

Which Market Is for You

A mistake some JanSan distributors and BSCs make is calling on everybody as if each facility is the same and has the same needs.

As referenced earlier, this one mistake can result in scores of marketing failures.

For instance, one BSC in California specializes in cleaning medical facilities.

He even started his career working for a large hospital as a maintenance worker.

Very simply, he knows just about everything there is to know about cleaning a health care location — and the decision makers like this.

This industry knowledge and experience counts and helps decision makers feel better about the vendor they select.

Specialization can have other positive ramifications as well.

Some decision makers hire vendors based on referrals.

If similar organizations, even competitors, are happy with a contractor or JanSan distributor because they have heard the vendor is well-versed in that market's specific needs, when the time comes to make a change, that contractor or distributor may be the first in line.

Marketing to disparate markets can be complicated; however, knowing the various markets' needs and landing a spot on the preferred vendors list are the first steps in what can be a very successful and lucrative direction for your business.

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