



# The Three-Mile Radius

In last year's animated film *Shrek II*, a giant gingerbread man steps on a building and sends all the customers scurrying across the street. The name of the establishment they leave and the one they run into is "Farbucks" – poking fun at the fact that an unending stream of patrons appears willing to pay four bucks for a cup of coffee.

While it's an exaggeration to say there is one on every corner, since 1992 Starbucks has exploded from 192 locations to more than 9,000 worldwide, and will average four new store openings every day this year.

Starbucks isn't the only retailer attempting to create density in the marketplace. Walgreen's and CVS are popping up locations everywhere – usually across the street from each other, just like Lowe's and The Home Depot. In Tomball, there are even two Shell stations on either side of 249 at Main Street; definitely a strategy of getting your customers coming and going.

As a small business owner, your challenges probably lie more in the area of finding new customers than in what area to open your new location. The first step in growing your business is to own the three-mile radius surrounding it. Before worrying about how to get folks from the other side of Houston to do business with you, make sure you've taken the proper approaches to informing everyone who lives and works nearby that you are there for them.

There are many techniques for getting your name out to prospects, and you may already be utilizing some of them. Networking at community events is a great way to become visible to your potential customers. And don't be shy about asking your best customers to refer you to their friends and associates. Advertising in a magazine like *CountryStyle Texas* is an excellent way to reach those in your target market. Direct Mail, billboards, Yellow Pages, radio/TV and even a magnetic sign hung on your car door are all proven forms of effective advertising.

An often overlooked marketing gem is public relations. Think of PR as free advertising... with one big difference. With advertising, you pay for the ad and control the message. When it comes to PR, a newspaper or magazine publishes a story about your company and charges you nothing, but they control the editorial content. Despite this important distinction, PR has the potential to send many new customers your way.

To get publicity for your business, write a press release containing your newsworthy information. Don't worry about making it fancy, just include the "Who, What, Where, When, Why and How" and your contact information. Find out the names of the editors of local publications who distribute in your three-mile radius such as the *Montgomery County News*, *Woodlands Villager* and *1960 Sun*, then send them – by fax or e-mail – your press release. Be sure to follow up the next day with a phone call asking if they received it, and if there is any more information you can provide. They'll respect your diligence and you'll rise to the top of their "possibilities" file.

Editors are always looking for news, but be aware they don't like press releases that appear to be promotions or sales pitches. One of the first things I learned in journalism school more than 25 years ago is "Dog bites man. No story. Man bites dog. That's news." Be creative in crafting your press releases. Start by thinking about yourself. What makes you unique?

One of our coaching clients is a former two-time individual world champion in his sport. When opening his business, he decided to separate the successful athlete of his youth from the aspiring business owner of his adulthood, so "people would take me more seriously." When we started working together, I immediately suggested he change that philosophy and capitalize on the champion angle. After sending out a few press releases, he started receiving many calls from editors who recognized the connection between perseverance as an athlete and a business owner. The ensuing articles led to speaking engagements at community events and, ultimately, to more customers.

The mythical kingdom in *Shrek* – home of Princess Fiona – is named Far Far Away, and some area businesses are able to attract customers from far away neighborhoods. The faux jewelry and fashion stores on Harwin Drive are perfect examples, as are unique restaurants like Tomball's own La Tavola. If your business doesn't fall into this category, remember to focus on owning your three-mile radius. There are plenty of potential customers within that circle just waiting for you to tell them how you will make things better for them. *CSTX*

*Tomball resident David Handler, The Coach, is the founder of Success Handler, LLC (www.successhandler.com), and specializes in helping franchisees, franchisors and business leaders achieve their dreams. He understands the challenges of running a business, because he's been there – as a business owner, trainer, corporate leader, and in a franchisee and franchisor environment. For a complimentary copy of David's list – "11 Affordable Ways To Market In Your Three-Mile Radius" – send an e-mail to coach@successhandler.com.*

## 10 Reasons to Send a Press Release

1. Introducing a new product
2. Announcing you are serving in a leadership position of a local organization
3. Sponsoring a workshop or seminar
4. Celebrating an anniversary
5. Receiving an award
6. Attending a continuing education workshop or seminar
7. Meeting an unusual challenge with a customer
8. Expanding or renovating your business
9. Participating in a community event
10. Announcing you reached a major milestone

Adapted from *Guerilla Marketing in 30 Days* by Jay Conrad Levinson and Al Lautenslager (Entrepreneur Press - © 2005).

*(Editor's Note: Success Handler, LLC recently received some national publicity. The topic of the press release that garnered this attention: David is mentioned in the Acknowledgements of Guerilla Marketing in 30 Days. To the best of our knowledge, the other 40 or so people who were thanked along with him failed to recognize this as a marketing opportunity.)*