



A quarterly publication  
of the Management in  
Food and Nutrition  
Systems Dietetic  
Practice Group

*for managers of money, minutes,  
materials, manpower, machines*

**Winter 2004**

## **BOOST CUSTOMER SALES WITH AN ANNUAL CHECKUP**

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Next time you conclude a visit to your physician's or dentist's office, the receptionist might make another appointment with you for six or twelve months down the road. The receptionist will log the appointment in the office computer, hand you an appointment card and, in all likelihood, send you a postcard a few weeks before your next appointment as a convenient reminder.

This simple reminder system assures you that your checkups will happen on a regularly scheduled basis. But it also assures the professional of a steady stream of patients.

The annual checkup is a powerful, but little used, marketing technique. It's useful for anyone who manages or owns a business, or sells virtually any kind of product

If you're not offering annual checkups to your customers or clients now, think about doing so in the future. Here's what you need to do:

- **Give 'em a slogan.** The annual checkup might be nothing more than an alert to customers, letting them know about new products or services. But checkups could also be more personal: an annual inspection of a piece of equipment, an opportunity to discuss service needs, or assistance with gift buying, for example. "Package" the checkup in an easy-to-remember slogan: "Customer Care ..." or "Annual Assessment Agenda," for instance.
- **Give 'em a reason.** In the eyes of customers, a checkup has value because it can bring them excellent customer service and convenience. By offering this rationale to customers, you're assuring them of strong future service and you're taking worries off their minds.
- **Give 'em a date.** You might tie checkups into a special day or season, such as holidays, vacation periods, or annual events in your business cycle. *[Editor's Note: You may wish to refer to seasons or cycles unique to your field.]* But remember: almost any product or service can be positioned for a checkup at any time.
- **Give 'em an introduction.** Let customers or clients know, by letter, sign, or personal introduction, why you offer the annual checkup. Sell the concept to them.
- **Give 'em an appointment.** Once you recognize opportunities for repeat business, look for opportunities to make checkup appointments for the future. For instance, staff

members might make appointments at your service desk, retail counter, or other location where customers and clients pass.

- **Give ‘em an incentive.** If selling the checkup concept is difficult, offer a premium. This could be a free gift for alerting you to a customer’s birthday, or a product sample for sharing information about the customer’s annual buying cycle.
- **Give ‘em a reminder.** Inexpensive, but colorful, postcards or e-mail messages, are usually sufficient for the annual checkup. You can probably generate them by computer. If your customers need highly personal reminders, a telephone call might be appropriate.
- **Give ‘em warmth.** Even when the annual checkup is simple and unassuming, be sure your contact is warm and personal. A cheery reminder note, a warm welcome to customers when they visit you for the checkup, and prompt personal attention to whatever needs they express will garner long-term customer appreciation.
- **Give ‘em alternatives.** If your customers are technologically sophisticated, they might prefer a Web-based checkup, complete with an easy-to-use digital survey or evaluation. Or if you can’t realistically conduct checkups for all customers, offer the checkup as a value-added option – or limit it to new customers or preferred customers.

The annual checkup is an elegant, but simple idea: give yourself and your customers the opportunity to systematically discuss their needs at least once a year. This checkup is an opportunity to strengthen customer relationships, obtain valuable feedback about the strengths of your business efforts and, most important, set the stage for new business from those customers who already have confidence in you.

### **The Annual Checkup: It’s Not Just for Customers**

Annual checkups are great business boosters. They can bring about product sale increases, and help protect and build market share. But you can use checkups with people other than customers as well.

Identify key colleagues and peers, for example, and conduct informal annual reviews with them. Use the checkup with prospects in an effort to gauge their interest in what you have to offer. Use checkups with committees or organizations you’re involved with.

Virtually anyone with whom you have an ongoing business relationship can benefit from an annual checkup. So can you.

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