

# Business suggestions from the best idea contest

## Results of a one-hour think tank of independent servicers

By The ES&T Staff

Every year at the National Professional Electronics Conference (NPEC), an annual convention and show held by the National Electronic Service Dealers Association (NESDA), attendees have a meeting at which they share ideas with each other for improving the operation of their service centers.

This meeting is called the "Best Idea Contest." Some of these ideas are actual servicing tips, some suggest ways to improve business operations, some suggest ways to avoid waste or improve customer relations.

Following is a listing of the best ideas generated at the 1993 NPEC, generously shared with ES&T readers by the people who generated them.

### Best Ideas

1. Get the most out of yellow page advertising by using the yellow page coupon system and referring to them in *your* display ads. Gives the prospective client another reason to do business with you. Don't refuse outdated coupons, but challenge the client cheerfully to "make up" for the fact that it's outdated by referring their friends to your company.

2. Create an "I love me" wall in your service center. Put up all training certificates, CET Certificates, awards etc. This helps to boost the morale of employees.

3. Develop a team approach to servicing. At least three techs per team (teams of two seem to fail). Reworks can be done by any team member. This helps everyone pull together and become a more productive team.

4. To remind members of association meetings, supply each member with a calendar for the year with all meeting dates stamped on it.

5. Make cards to be put on repaired VCRs during the winter months stating "*Cold weather warning.*" This alerts owners who are picking up repaired VCRs to let their recorders reach room temperature before inserting a tape.

6. When tape damage and debris is found in VCR servicing, use a sign on the door of the VCR telling the client to replace their defective tapes. Include instructions on how to examine, store, care for and purchase videotape.

7. Have a calendar printed on the back of your **business** cards. Gives another reason to keep your card.

8. Create a flyer telling of the benefits of calling a service center that employs CETs. Put your service center name, address, and phone number at the bottom. This allows for a self-imposed standard and brings a servicer to another level by association involvement.

9. Charge a hazardous material disposal charge. Five percent of parts billing.

10. Request effective placements of print advertisements. Best placement is the outside half of the page. Study your media buys.

11. Try a reverse print ad to draw attention. Use a black background with bold white print.

12. Use trade listing in outlying area phone books. List your company logo in column ads.

13. Use a separate phone number to track Yellow Pages ads in outlying area phone books to track where phone calls are coming from. Ask your yellow page

salesman to tell you about key call forwarding. This inexpensive method will require no added phone lines, but count the number of incoming calls generated by a specific ad.

14. Prepare a hardbound service center brochure to give to prime clients, retail dealers, bankers; whoever you wish to impress with the scope and professionalism of the company. Use color pictures of **your exterior** and work areas. Neatness always counts.

15. Give dissatisfied clients, upon making amends, a ten dollar appreciation postcard coupon to be used for the next time they need service. Gives you a second chance to please them. Confirms the concept that you truly want to please them and do business with them again.

16. Use a six-inch length of folded duct tape on your test video tapes to stick out of VCRs so the test tapes don't get lost. Apply this tape to the bench area and the front office test videotapes to avoid leaving them in the repaired and tested video recorders. This works for Nintendo test cartridges and some audio applications.

17. Create an advertisement on the tape described in the item above.

18. Use yellow safety tape on the test tapes above.

19. Print hookup instructions for clients. Place on all outgoing repaired products. Be certain to put an advertisement (of what other work you do) with a coupon on this instructive flyer.

20. Whenever presenting a bill to a client, declare: "You must not have a service contract, I see there is a charge-

would you want to purchase extended service coverage?

21. Make a deal with video rental stores to put your coupon with each tape rentals going out, to promote your service. Reciprocate with cleaning clinics at their video stores.

22. If you do a high volume of shipping, charge the client for insurance and put this money in a separate account and pay claims yourself instead of paying the package delivery company.

23. Spruce up your service 'center by putting up manufacturers logos, lights, flyers and banners. Many are free from the manufacturer-just ask. Some must be requested from sales departments.

24. On all VCR repairs, place a card that provides details of VCR adjustment and cleaning entails. A good beginning sample document is provided in the advertisement of test alignment equipment manufacturers.

25. Save counter space by mounting computer monitors under the counters and the keyboards on drawers. This also looks very professional.

26. Update your credit card machine. Use a new scanner that produces the invoice; some scanners even have an ATM that can put the money directly into your account. Stay in contact with your bank for new services.

27. Print business cards that have a spot for **your** pager number. This is now a well accepted modern day contact system. Most clients know how to use pagers.

28. Use a red ink stamp on billings that imposes a financial penalty if "not paid within thirty days." Allow a space for the cutoff date after which a \$15.00 late charge would be imposed. This declares an anticipation of timely payment with a penalty if delinquent.

29. Generate a postcard that states if the serviced unit is not picked up within two weeks after notification, a dollar-a-day storage charge will be levied. Check to be sure this is allowed by local ordinances.

30. Use an "extra service performed" checklist sheet and tape it to the repaired unit. Detail cabinet cleaning/inspections, door reseating, antenna rod lubricating, etc.

31. When units are left for over a few weeks, send a letter requesting ten dollars for a disposal fee. This provokes the action of the owner to either send the money or pick up the product.

32. Put a stamp or a card on your invoices to proclaim membership in professional organizations-let clients know your company is industry alert and a participating member of an organization.

33. Conduct a free VCR cleaning clinic. If you are an independant servicer, work out an agreement to do this at a deal-

ers store. If you are a servicing dealer, do this on your sales floor. Focus the session toward working VCRs in need of cleaning. Give preliminary estimates on any unit needing repairs. Sell new units, tapes and accessories at this' session.

34. Create an employee involvement suggestion program. Offer rewards from \$25 and up depending on how productive and useful the suggestion.

35. Whenever an ASR (Additional Service Required) product arrives at the front counter, have available a red tab to place prominently on top of the work order, to show the client that immediate service will be performed on their unit. This acts as a direct front counter action to confirm the expedite process to the set owner.

36. On some products you can use a tier method for estimates. If the primary estimate is turned down, give another estimate using generic parts at a lower price. This will often help save the job. Uses the same concept of generic medicines as a cost alternative in health care.

37. Have a **system for** preapproved estimates at the incoming counter. Only call an estimate if it exceeds that amount. Use history of product classifications and dominant symptom code as a guide.

38. Establish a "C & L" charge on invoices-a suggestion was to add \$5.00. C & L stands for clean and lubricate. An alternate suggestion: use "C, L & M." This stands for cleaners, lubricants and service manual.

39. Detail all charges on your service invoice for cleaners, other chemicals, and service data-this confirms, during tax audits, that taxes have been paid on all chemical sales, and that therefore, no added vendor sales tax is due on your chemical purchases for resale.

40. Add a charge for chemical products and one for safety and leakage checks.

41. Inventory your investment in service literature and calculate dollars compared to units serviced. Include return on investment. Suggestion is to charge a \$2.00 service literature charge on each invoice.