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## **IDN Co-Marketing**

This article discusses the advantages IDN co-marketing can have for both developers and for the end QuickBooks user. It offers an inexpensive and effective way to add value for your existing customers, and at the same time increase your customer base with the help of other IDN members.

### **Newsletters - if you aren't sending them now...you should**

For the most part, IDN members are selling inexpensive, canned products. We are not customizing enterprise level applications for Fortune 500 companies. We are instead selling niche solutions to small business that are short on time and short on money. IDN business models have to reflect this in order to have a chance of being profitable. Your dream sale probably fits this scenario: a customer goes to the QuickBooks Solutions Marketplace, finds your product, downloads it, evaluates it, calls with a couple final questions, and makes a purchase. You don't hear from them again for months, except for a 5 star review on the marketplace telling the world how happy they are with your product. Well done! You are satisfied because you kept your variable sales and support costs low, and you hopefully made a profit. The customer is satisfied because they were able to find a solution that met their needs, and found it easy enough to implement without training or support costs - all for an inexpensive price.

But after the sale, how can you continue to provide value to this customer? It's worth doing, you know. The longer this customer uses your product the more word-of-mouth they will spread, and the more they'll buy from you in the future. How do you let your customers know, on a regular basis, that you really do care about the success of their companies, and that your company is serious about a long term relationship? Meeting face-to-face and follow up calls are likely luxuries you can't afford to have.

Some IDN members have successfully fostered a “community” by having annual users conferences. These can be great, but the downside is that they are expensive and time consuming for your customers, and it takes you a lot of planning to pull off properly. Most IDN members either don’t have the resources to put on a user conference, or a willing and sizable customer base to support it.

Another way to add post-sale value is through newsletters. These can be either electronic (via email) or through ‘snail’ mail. Either way, they are an absolute necessity for your IDN company. Our company sends out a QXpress e-Newsletter every two months to our customers. We have several sections to the newsletter such as: Upcoming Releases, Quick Tips, and Advanced Knowledge-Base how-to articles. Since many of our customers have seasonable businesses, we also include a “seasonal tip” that proactively addresses a frequent question about the upcoming time of year. The effects on our customer’s brand-loyalty and company-loyalty is outstanding. Recently, we surveyed our customer base to see if customers were actually reading the newsletters, or in other words, if we truly were adding value for them. Over 85% who responded said they read the newsletter and considered it to be “part of the overall QXpress product”. Think how effective this can be for your company. With one click of a button you can instantly increase the value your customers receive from your product, and therefore increase the loyalty they have to your product and to you company. All this at no cost to them, and almost no cost to you. If you don’t currently send out newsletters, you should. It’s a no-brainer.

### **Co-marketing can be both inexpensive and highly effective**

So how are we adding value to our customers via e-Newsletters? By giving them useful and timely information. Since we understand our customers and their businesses, we are able to deliver software-related information that they can act on in order to improve their businesses.

This information should go beyond just your product. What if there was another company running a QuickBooks training session in their region this month? Even better, what if this training session was specific to their industry? Do your customers a favor and make them aware of it. If they choose to go they’ll gain valuable skills that could help them and their staff use QuickBooks in a more effective way.

What if there is another IDN product out there that can help them on a day-to-day basis as well. We all can’t be everything to everybody. Our company sells QXpress, which is scheduling software for contractors in the property service industry. But QuickBooks and QXpress is not always the full solution for our customers. They also have further needs for advanced

estimating, certified payroll and timecard management to just name a few. We, therefore, have mutual customers with other IDN members who offer complementary rather than competitive products. It should be a goal of your company to let your customers know what products and services are out there to help them. Include this in your newsletter in its own section: “Complementary Solutions”, with a one paragraph description of the IDN product, along with a web address for them to click on.

**Benefit 1: Keep your customers from shopping for competitive products.** If you agree that you can't be everything to everybody, then you'll also agree that your solution together with QuickBooks is not satisfying 100% of the software needs of your customers. This means that they will still be hunting for software now or in the future. Rather than have them looking to replace either your product or QuickBooks with a competitive product that *markets* itself as an “all-in-one”, try solving the puzzle for them by offering up another IDN product as that missing piece. Like the old saying goes, if you don't satisfy your customers, somebody else will.

**Benefit 2: Loyalty.** Why would your customers ever want to wander? Your product is a lot more than the software installed on their computer - it is the company standing behind it. There is a lot to be said for a company that truly cares about its customers, and you have proven this by providing information about products and services that you don't even sell. This loyalty will lead to more word-of-mouth referrals, and a longer business relationship with your customers.

**Benefit 3: Reciprocal sales!** Did I forget to mention what probably drew you to read this article in the first place? Of course, there are massive benefits to be gained through co-marketing to another IDN member's customer base. This is not a one way street. If you are going to be highlighting another IDN product in your newsletter, you had better make sure that you are highlighted in their newsletter as well. Just think of how amazing this concept is. No other form of advertising can get the attention of a better target market. These potential customers are already pre-filtered to be in the right industry, be QuickBooks users, and have proven that they will invest in IDN products that help their businesses. Let me say that again: these are QuickBooks users in your industry segment that have proven their desire to improve their businesses via QuickBooks integrated technology. Could you ask for more? Sure, let's worry about ROI. When you are trading product highlights in newsletters, what is it really costing you? Next to nothing. That's about the best ROI anyone could ever ask for.

## Implementation

The hard part is finding the right IDN companies to trade product highlights with. First of all, you both need to be sending out newsletters to your customer base. Second of all, you both need to be willing to participate in the co-marketing. And finally, you both need to do a little research into each others products to make sure that they will be that “missing piece” for some of your customers.

Start the process off by sending out newsletters to your customers. Even if you don't go the next level further and include IDN product highlights, you are still adding value to your customers. Make sure you choose your interval properly. If you are going to send out newsletters pick an interval you can really handle. Our company chose every two months because we knew that it was a task that we could handle with our resources. There is enough fresh content to ensure we have something worth reading, and there is enough space between newsletters to give us time to make sure we always send it out on time.

Next, after you have sent out your newsletter at least once, begin looking for IDN products that may complement yours. The first place you should look is on the developer-to-developer forums on the Intuit Developer Network Advisory Council web site at [idnac.org](http://www.idnac.org) (the forum is located here: <http://www.idnac.org/forums/forumdisplay.php?f=17>). Here you can make a post saying who you are, what your product does, and what type of IDN products you feel would complement yours. You can also read posts from other IDN members to see who may already be a good fit for you to co-market with. In addition, there is nothing stopping you from searching the QuickBooks Solutions Marketplace for complementary products. If you find one, contact the company, and ask them if they would consider co-marketing. Make sure you refer them to the [idnac.org](http://www.idnac.org) web site, and to this article so they know what angle you are coming from.

Selecting the right IDN product should be done with some due diligence. Download the product, read reviews on the QuickBooks Solutions Marketplace, and consider doing an online demo of the product with your contact at that company. You should be looking to see if you share similar company values, and whether the product appears to deliver as promised.

Finally, in writing your newsletter be careful with your wording. You should not be endorsing or recommending the product to your customers. You should merely be telling your customers that there is another IDN product that exists and that it may be worth researching to see if it is a fit for their company.

#### “Highlighted IDN Product: ABCD Payroll Solutions

ABCD Payroll Solutions offers a product geared at construction companies who have a monthly payroll of 5 to 50 staff members. ABCD focuses on taking payroll data out of QuickBooks and producing state-required reports that are not found in QuickBooks alone. ABCD intends to save you several hours a month if you are currently creating these reports manually. If this is something that might help your company, you can visit <http://www.abcdpayroll.com/ref=123>.

*Please note that we are not affiliated with ABCD Payroll Solutions, and are not endorsing or recommending their product.*

*You should research this product as you would any other.”*

### Considerations

**Tracking results.** Like all marketing efforts, make sure you have a method of tracking success. Avoid giving generic web address links like [www.abcdpayroll.com](http://www.abcdpayroll.com). Instead use [www.abcdpayroll.com/ref=123](http://www.abcdpayroll.com/ref=123), where ref=123 allows ABCD Payroll to track how many times your customers clicked on the link to go ABCD Payroll web site. Also, ABCD Payroll should always ask how their customers first heard about them, so they know how many referral leads your newsletter generated for them. This way they'll know if this is something they want to focus on in the future.

**Partnerships.** Avoid entering into partnerships with other IDN members for this purpose (i.e. talks of exclusivity, multi-year deals, and bigger picture projects). Such talks will inevitably lead to longer discussions involving promises and complex contracts. This can delay the co-marketing, and in worst case scenarios cause it to be abandoned all together. Try to keep it simple and keep an open mind for more to come between you two in the future.

**Avoid sharing your customer lists.** Newsletters work because you have full control over your own content and your own customer list. Avoid sharing your customer list with other companies, as there is no reason to give up this control.

### It works! Now what?

So you've done your first successful IDN co-marketing newsletter. You have built customer loyalty, and added new users to your customer base. So what now?

First, tell the IDN community about your success. Visit the developer-to-developer forums at the [idnac.org](http://idnac.org) site and tell us what you did, what you learned, and offer advice to others doing the same.

Next, do it again. With hundreds of IDN products, and the vast diversity of needs your customers have, you can keep co-marketing indefinitely.

Finally, maybe it is time to take this to the next level. If you now share customer bases with other IDN members, are there ways you can help your customers with further automation by releasing your own SDK? Maybe - but that's another discussion!