



Who *Really* Is Your Competition and What You Can Do to Differentiate Yourself

Every business owner, whether the business is a large, multinational company or a small, regional enterprise, is asked the question: who *really* is your competition? Smaller, regional businesses would all likely answer that question the same: the big guy. And why? As Mr. John E. Dustin, CEO of J.E.D. Insurance & Financial Services Agency, Inc., in Foxboro, Massachusetts, explains, “The big carriers, the companies that go direct, they might target a client 12 to 16 times a year between Super Bowl ads, mailers, and emails. Small companies like ours don't do that.” He qualifies that basic marketing truth by stating that smaller companies, even with the internet and all of the social media platforms and tools available, still do not have the advertising resources and exposure that a corporation's large marketing budget allows.

So, what is a small business to do to stay competitive, in a way that makes sense for the company's profitability and growth? For John, he takes the resources he has and uses those to develop a niche market. This approach resonates with small businesses competing in an open market. Specifically, he and his team focus their attention on finding customers who want to be educated, who are nice people, and who appreciate a service provider who wants to help them. John is known for being a resource and a connector. This can only be achieved when he gets to know his customers well and learns what matters to them. “We can't compete on price. You could shop all day and get a cheaper price. But we've carved out our niche for people who want good information, who want to be part of the insurance program, and who want to make good decisions, based on knowing what their exposures are, and to see how they can cover risk. We offer value-added, above-average customer service. That's our niche,” John declares.

Above-average customer service means completing audit paperwork for his commercial clients, as well as conducting a risk review every single year, to name a couple of examples. Also, another way he stays competitive is to initiate timely discussions about what direction they see their business going in.

“Asking them, ‘Do you need help with other resources that we can bring in from networking groups or from our Rolodex?’ We are not one-size-fits-all. Our approach is very customized,” John articulates. “If you’re a technology company, we’re going to figure out what cyber product best fits you. Who provides the best claim service? Who’s going to make sure you’re protected by doing testing, as a risk service? We try to find unique and efficient ways to handle your policy, especially if it’s not more expensive,” he clarifies.

While shifting directions toward nurturing relationships with individual or private clients, John takes a personal interest in making sure he understands the family, their needs, and anticipates future insurance requirements, such as when the kids get their driver's licenses.

John takes pride in offering those little things that keep him in touch with his clients. From the beginning, he has insisted that any phone call that comes into the office is answered by a human being, especially when there is a claim, and an anxious customer needs a reassuring voice to take control of the situation. Conversely, the larger companies rely on 1-800 numbers and impersonal, automated claim filing.

Also, John’s office employs technology whenever possible. “We’re paperless. We don’t have any filing cabinets. We front-end scan and we use DocuSign. We have a great management system to keep our records in chronological order. This helps us to stay agile. Even during COVID, we adapted fairly quickly,” he shares. Ultimately, this system supports above-average customer service to his niche market by making it easy for anyone in the office to pick up a file and help a customer when they call.

All of the aforementioned practices seem to be working, too. This is confirmed by the positive feedback that the team relays back to John, after they’ve been out of the office meeting people. With the economy shifting like it has for the last three-plus years, and continuing to do so, John believes that companies are going to focus more and more on marketing. That’s standard in a common market, but deliberately focusing on a niche market and with deliberate practices, like those stated above, the consensus that the J.E.D. Insurance & Financial Services Agency, Inc.’s approach to offering quality consistently and efficiently, with a personal touch is a significant factor in the company’s brand identity, differentiating itself from the competition, the big guy. This can be applied across many different industries. - *Copywritten by [Boston Edits, LLC](#).*

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