

How I Built a Nationally Recognized Brand in a Niche Market By Welcoming Competition, Not Fighting It

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Key Takeaways

- When everyone in a niche market gets along and does well, the whole category benefits. Treating each other with compassion is the best way to keep things friendly.
- You have to choose your battles more carefully in close quarters. Not all competitors have the same idea of what constitutes friendly competition.
- Minor competitive transgressions can sometimes serve as free publicity, but serious harmful actions (like tortious interference) require firm enforcement of boundaries.

If you've ever owned a pet, you know they're different from animals that live in the wild. Out there, competition is fierce because every day is life or death. But at home, everyone has to play nice and get along.

Running a business in a niche market is a bit like being an indoor cat. There's still competition, but if you're too aggressive towards the other players in your space, it makes the space uncomfortable for everyone.

Conversely, when everyone in a narrow category gets along and

does well, the whole category benefits. Think of it this way: Guests want to visit the house where the cats compete by doing tricks for treats, not the house where fur is always flying.

That's why I've always welcomed healthy competition in the roof restoration industry, which my company Roof Maxx disrupted by offering a cost-effective and eco-friendly treatment for asphalt shingles. There's no point in being threatened by others, as long as we're all behaving ethically and responsibly in our shared space.

Below, I'll tell you more about what I think that means – along with how it benefits all parties and how to recognize when competition isn't friendly anymore so that you can take proper steps to protect yourself.

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Why a rising tide raises all boats – especially in smaller ponds

Let's put aside the pet metaphor and talk about a concrete example from my career. Most homeowners I talk to aren't even aware that roof restoration is an option for them. That's how small the category is, especially when you're serving the residential market.

Roof Maxx has grown into a national brand. Our dealers collectively generate more than \$200 million per year in total revenue through roof repairs, maintenance, cleaning, restoration and replacements. Our dealer network represents a different kind of roofer: One focused on helping property owners avoid costly roof replacements by giving them real options. In fact, roughly 80% of roofs being replaced nationwide could be saved, often extending their life by a decade or more.

But our goal isn't just to stay in business. It's to make roof restoration an option for every homeowner with treatable shingles. Not only will that help a far greater number of people save money on protecting their homes, but it will also build an industry worth roughly \$10 billion each year.

The key to doing that is educating people. And that will go much faster if others are spreading awareness about residential roof restoration than if we have to do it all by ourselves.

I know this because I've already watched it happen quickly in the commercial industry. All the restoration products that currently exist for commercial roofs have sprung up over the last 40 years or so. The inspection, restoration and maintenance programs that ultimately cropped up around them are even younger.

So the more companies that are out there doing residential roof restoration correctly, the more demand there will be for what we do. I don't mind someone trying to be the Pepsi to our Coke.

Related: [3 Reasons Why I Gladly Welcome Competition](#)

Why you have to choose your battles more carefully in close quarters

Not all competitors have the same idea of what constitutes friendly competition. But often, I find it's better to be lenient about minor transgressions than it is to bring out the big guns.

I've seen other businesses use our graphics, or conspicuously similar ones, without obtaining our permission. I've seen marketing copy that uses word-for-word claims we've made. But I'm not a particularly litigious guy, and most of the time, these things don't bother me too much. In fact, they can even

be helpful sometimes.

Roof Maxx is the most established brand doing what we do. So if someone is parroting our claims or borrowing aspects of our branding, they're practically giving us free advertising. Most customers are going to do at least a little research before they commit to treating their shingles, and when they do, they'll probably find out that we're the bona fide original with the most research backing up our product. I have a pretty high opinion of most people, and I trust them to read the writing on the wall at that point.

As leaders in the space, the way we respond to issues like this also helps set the tone for others. I don't want an antagonistic relationship with the other businesses in my space. I prefer the competition to be friendly, and I understand how much better it is for the industry as a whole.

Related: [The 4-Step Strategy That Helped Us Create a Fast-Growing New Niche in a Legacy Industry](#)

Teaching others how to treat you goes both ways

But sometimes, a competitor behaves in ways that give the whole industry a bad name. Years ago, another roofing business targeted our dealers and fed them misinformation about our product in an attempt to make them quit.

What they did wasn't just potentially harmful to our business. It was harmful to the entire concept of roof restoration as a viable solution for residential properties because it interfered with customers' ability to make properly informed decisions.

It was also illegal. That's what's known as tortious interference, which is when a third party knowingly and wrongfully disrupts an established contractual agreement. So

we sued, and the court found them guilty – not only of deceptive trade practices, but also of intentionally destroying evidence.

The moral of the story is that when you're all in the same small community, friendly competition is good for everyone, and treating each other with compassion is the best way to keep things friendly. But keeping your community safe means protecting it with strong boundaries. And a boundary is only as good as your willingness to enforce it.

Be friendly. Be kind. And if others mistake your kindness for weakness, don't be afraid to prove them wrong. That's how you earn goodwill in your category without sacrificing respect. And it's how you set an example that your competitors will want to follow, so that all of you deliver a more professional experience to customers.

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