Eight top marketers of 1989 chosen by the Sales and Marketing Executives International of Greater Baton Rouge have hurdled tough times through philosophies centering on community involvement, innovation, price, quality and service.

“Anytime you have a bad economy, you have to work harder for every dollar you bring in,” said Ricky Stockner, chief executive officer of Metro Information Service Inc. Stockner was one of eight marketers of the year honored Thursday by SMEI. The list included Lee Michael Berg, president and owner of Lee Michael’s Fine Jewelry; Jack Hughes, executive director and chairman of American Championship Ballooning; Saundra Lane, managing director of Turan-Lane Advertising Inc.; David Manship, associate publisher of the State Times/Morning Advocate; Patrick C. Powers, research and development, General Health Inc.; Les Slaydon, president of Telemarketing Corp. of Louisiana Inc.; and David Trufant, general manager of Cellular One.

“If you stop thinking of ways to improve, it’s all over,” said Stockner, whose firm handles traffic reports and advertising, and must make the most of every dollar his customers spend. Companies have to “convince the people the product is worth what they pay for it,” said Manship. That takes more marketing and promotion to customers “so that when they're watching their dollars you won't be the one that's discarded,” he said.

In the 12 years Berg has been in the jewelry business, his business hasn’t slowed, despite the economy. “You don't need the negatives. You concentrate on the positive,” said Berg, who attributed his stores’ success to customers buying lasting, quality gifts on special occasions.

That has to be backed up by hiring dedicated, customer-oriented people and offering good products at a good value, Berg said.

General Health has adapted to a more price-conscious marketplace by shifting its marketing toward preferred provider organizations for medical services and toward services for self-funded insurance programs. “It's made us more price sensitive,” Powers said.

Slaydon’s telemarketing firm has found a niche for itself by targeting small businesses. “They’ve always been taken for granted,” Slaydon said. “We relate to them very well, we’re a small business,” he said.

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Customers don’t just look at expenses, but also quality and companies that are receptive to their needs or will make referrals, Slaydon said. “We don’t want to just sell to the community. We want to be involved,” said Trufant of Cellular One, which actively sponsors public events. “Public relations has certainly been a marketing tool,” he said.

The company also promotes its mobile telephones as being more efficient for customers. Lane, who represents her father’s automobile dealerships, also believes in community involvement and activity sponsorships.

They also weave the community into testimonial ads and jazzy music-video commercials, which key on recognizable sites in the community, rather than “ridiculous low price come ons,” Lane said. “People like to see people, not prices,” she said.

Hughes, who got a balloon championship off the ground in Baton Rouge this summer, “had to draw on the work I did for 20 years with volunteers” in the Jaycees, he said. “We had a good idea and no money,” he said.

Before going to local sponsors, Hughes lined up national companies sponsors first. He didn’t just ask for cash but included in-kind service, such as asking corporations to tie the balloon festival into corporate advertising. It was not just a donation, but a mutual promotion, Hughes said.