

Making Your Business Stand Out

Small Business Marketing Strategies that Really Work



Community 
Futures

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*Making Your Business Stand Out -
Small Business Marketing Strategies that Really Work*
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Introduction

We're all busy people, which is why the Small Business Success Library of books is a great way to get your hands on a lot of information, vital to your success, in easy bite-sized pieces. This anthology on Marketing will give you lots of hands-on, straight-forward ways to improve your small business marketing.

In Volume one of our Marketing series you will find a variety of tips and habits that will show you how to increase your competitive edge in the marketplace.

We start with Learning from the Best – using the strategies from large successful corporations and showing you how you can make them work for your small business. In addition, you'll find information on the importance of honesty in your marketing message, and on blending traditional, proven marketing strategies with new methods of delivering them.

With Cooperative Marketing, you'll learn how to collaborate with other businesses to expand your exposure and increase your customer base. You'll also find out how cause-related marketing can help you increase business.

In this volume, you'll also find several tools to help you stand out from the crowd. Make Your Website Your Customers' Favourite and To Launch or Not to Launch provide tools to help you make smart marketing decisions. The questions in Your Marketing Message, will give you a fresh new perspective on how to evaluate your company's messaging. Finally, Tap into Customer Testimonials gives you some great ideas on how you can easily turn happy customer experiences into marketing messages that will have a huge impact on your business.

No matter how large or small your business, you'll find something in this eBook to make you think about how you are marketing your business, and give you strategies on how to do it better.

Making Your Business Stand Out - Small Business Marketing Strategies that Really Work is a quick and easy read, but the tips and tools you find here will help you to improve your marketing, strengthen your brand, and get your message out to the people who need to hear it – your customers!



Ingrid Vaughan
Business Writer

Learning from the Best

Big Business Marketing Strategies Any Small Business Can Use



Whether you're talking about Starbucks, Walmart, IBM, Microsoft, or any other wildly successful corporation, you have to admit that something they're doing is working in a big way. Starbucks doesn't give out coupons, use punch cards, or advertise on radio or TV. Yet it continues to be one of the biggest business success stories of this generation. Its marketing is actually quite subtle, yet hundreds of thousands of people flock to purchase coffee, food, and retail items there every day. How can you apply some simple, practical marketing strategies in your business that mirror those used by large, successful corporations? It's easier than you think, and costs less than you would imagine. The following marketing strategies come from research conducted with employees of some of those companies. Not surprising, each strategy has to do with recognizing your employees

and their potential impact on your marketing. It's a first step toward shifting your thinking "inside out". They are easy to implement, and can have huge implications for your business profit.

Provide great employee discounts

Although on the surface this doesn't look like a great marketing strategy, take a moment to think about it. Your employees are your best marketing tool. If you make it easy for them to shop at your store, they become walking, talking advertising campaigns for your business. If you own a retail clothing store and only offer your employees a 5 or 10% employee discount, chances are they'll find similar items in another store for less. What incentive do they have to buy it from you? But if you offer them a 30-40% discount, they have greater motivation to shop at your store, and

when other people notice their clothing, your store gets the credit. Not to mention, the more of your products they try and buy, the better equipped they are to sell them to customers.

Give your employees free stuff from your store

Again, on the surface, you may be thinking “that will cost me a fortune”, but it doesn’t have to be high cost items. If once a month you provided your staff (or even selected members of your staff – be creative with how you choose who gets the take-home prize of the month), with a small item from your store, it will go a long way toward building loyalty in your staff, and also getting your staff to try the things you sell when they may otherwise not do so. It’s free advertising. Your employees have friends and families, and they have a huge influence on their buying decisions. Say you own a computer store. Consider that everyone who works at your store has a large network of people who come to them with questions about computer equipment simply because they work at your store. If they don’t know anything about what you sell, they won’t be influencing their friends to shop with you. In fact, they may be a negative influence on your store. On the other hand, if last month, they won a particular piece of hardware that has doubled their computer speed and efficiency, and as a result, they can speak confidently about how this changed their computing experience, how different do you think their discussions and advice to their friends and your customers will be?

Allow your employees to have input in your marketing plans

Strong companies know their employees are their best window to the market. They know, often better than management, what customers want, what they’re talking about, what they need. Give them the opportunity to have input in your marketing decisions, and reward good ideas. And don’t be afraid to implement those ideas! It will show employees their contribution is valued, and allows them to see the impact of being invested in your business. Not every idea will work, but the


more of them you try, the more likely you’ll find ones that do.

Reward your employees for hard work and loyalty

Successful companies value their employees and demonstrate that to them. Whether it’s monetary rewards, company retreats, an occasional paid day off – people love being acknowledged for their hard work. It makes them happier on the job, and this positive attitude affects customer decisions. Not only does it motivate them to work even harder, but they tell people what a great employer you are. This motivates their circle of potential buyers to seriously consider purchasing from you. Potential customers assume that if you treat your employees that well, you’ll treat them well too.

Work on developing your team

Smart, successful businesses put a lot of money and energy into building their teams because they know a strong team is the foundation for a strong business. Professional development and training, teambuilding meetings and retreats, and team-oriented activities on a day-to-day basis strengthen your business. People who genuinely enjoy working together reflect that to customers, and customers enjoy their experience in your business even more when that team spirit is evident. One successful corporation interviewed told us they require every person on every shift, to write a brief note of encouragement to another staff member. This is not optional – it’s a mandatory part of their job! The note can be about how they served customers particularly well that day, or something kind they did for someone, or a way they went above and beyond for someone else during their shift, or even for their product knowledge. This is one way to create loyalty and spirit among your team, as every day they receive positive acknowledgment from their peers.

Your employees are the first ring in your marketing circle. Sell to them first, and you’ll find greater success in selling to your customers. Consider them as part of your marketing strategy and you’ll see big results. 

The High Call of Honesty in Marketing

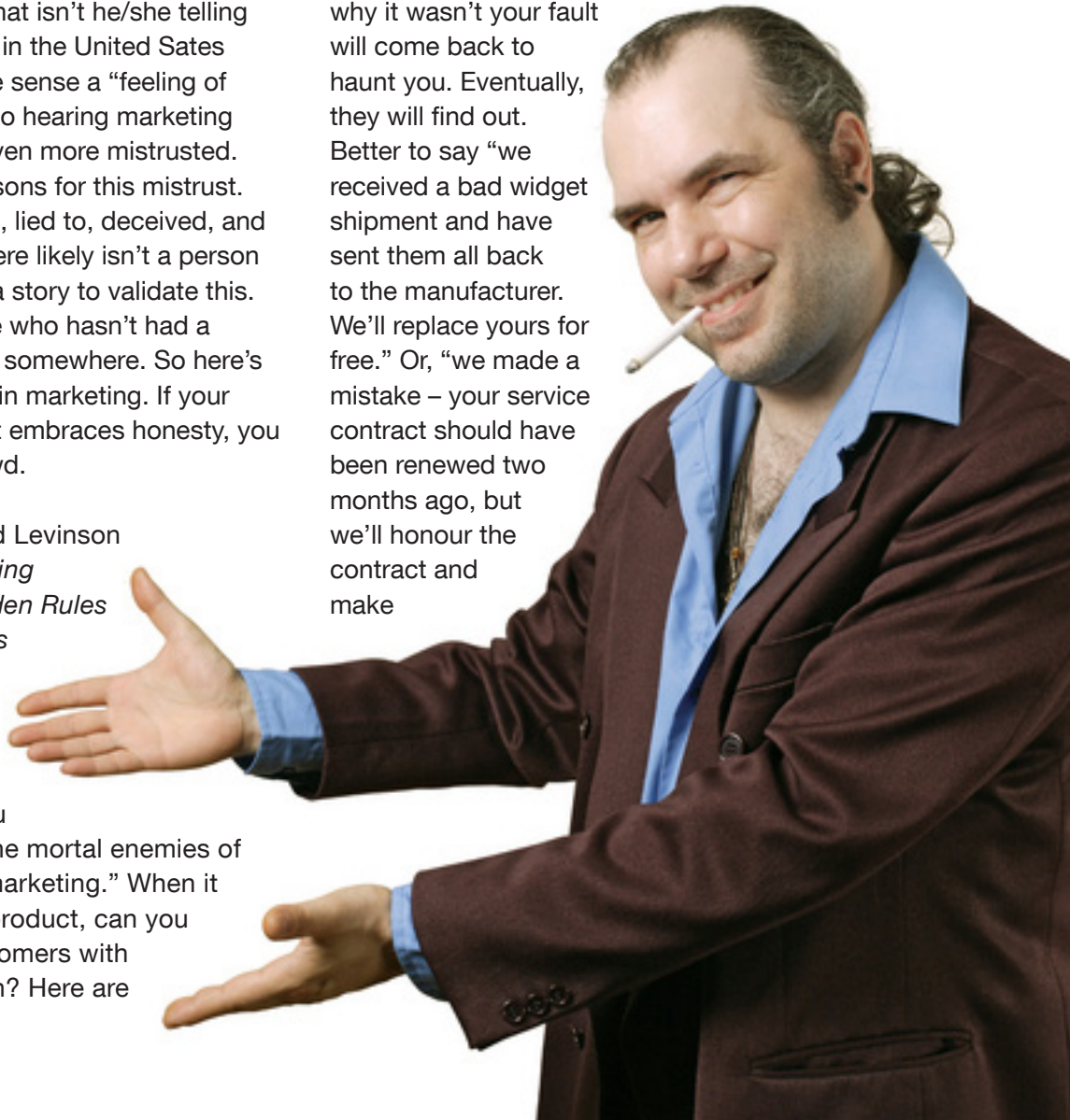
If you made a list of the people you most admired in your life and wrote down the attributes that they displayed, I have no doubt honesty would be among them. Honesty is the most common value people look for in partnerships, marriages, and friendship. It is no wonder it's such an important part of business. Sadly, somewhere along the way we've lost our trust in what people say when it comes to business. We enter into sales situations with anxiety, wondering "what isn't he/she telling me?" A recent national poll in the United States showed that 53% of people sense a "feeling of deception" when it comes to hearing marketing messages. Advertising is even more mistrusted. Perhaps there are valid reasons for this mistrust. Customers have been used, lied to, deceived, and taken advantage of, and there likely isn't a person out there who couldn't tell a story to validate this. It's difficult to find someone who hasn't had a bad purchasing experience somewhere. So here's to a resurgence of honesty in marketing. If your business becomes one that embraces honesty, you will stand out from the crowd.

Marketing guru Jay Conrad Levinson in his book *Guerilla Marketing Excellence – The Fifty Golden Rules for Small Business Success* says, "Although I cannot claim that honesty is one of the most valuable weapons in the arsenal of a guerrilla, I can advise you that dishonesty is one of the mortal enemies of your reputation and your marketing." When it comes to marketing your product, can you afford to provide your customers with anything less than the truth? Here are

a few ideas to inspire your thinking around this issue, and to encourage a truly honest marketing plan for your business.

Admit your mistakes

Nothing builds trust more than when you admit that you've blown it and do all you can to make it right. Covering up, passing the blame, or giving your customer a line about why it wasn't your fault will come back to haunt you. Eventually, they will find out. Better to say "we received a bad widget shipment and have sent them all back to the manufacturer. We'll replace yours for free." Or, "we made a mistake – your service contract should have been renewed two months ago, but we'll honour the contract and make



this repair for you.” Honesty builds trust and trust builds loyalty. Loyalty brings in new customers through word-of-mouth. That’s effective marketing!

Hype attracts, truth sells

There’s no question that the bigger the hype, the more attention you attract. But hype doesn’t sell, truth does. Hype is fun and it may get folks through the door, but in the end it doesn’t get them to part with their money. If you want to sell your customers on your product or service, tell them the truth. Be honest about its great attributes, as well as its limitations. Don’t say “best price in town” unless you know for sure it is, or are willing to beat any competitor whose price is lower. “Largest selection in Canada” doesn’t wash because your customer can’t find out if it’s true. Do your best to represent truthfulness in every marketing piece that you put out. You’ll find your sales statistics much higher than those companies who live on hype.

Offer something for nothing

Once in a while, give something away that has no strings attached. This concept is so rare that if you do it, people will take a while to get used to it. They’ll keep expecting you to ask for something. So instead of offering a newsletter that you will use to promote your next sale, just offer an


informative newsletter that has useful information for your customer. Provide a free seminar on a related topic that is just that – FREE. If you own a car dealership, offer a workshop on how to change a tire. If you own a craft or sewing store, bring in one of your crafter customers to do a workshop on a specific project.

The key here is – don’t ask customers or participants for something as they’re going out the door!

The marketing impact will be greater if you haven’t tried to sell them something, than if they feel they have been manipulated into coming so you can sell to them.

Offer guarantees on everything

Nothing inspires people to believe in you more than knowing you will back up everything you do or sell. If you say you’ll take it back for any reason – people will trust you and buy your product. Whatever is in your power to guarantee, do it. You’ll actually have far fewer people trying to return things, and more people buying with the confidence that they can, if they need to.

Take steps to inspire honesty and the confidence it generates, through your marketing efforts. A little bit of trust goes a long way when it comes to customers. Be a company that customers can believe in and count on and they’ll be loyal to you, and bring new customers to you. That’s a pretty sound marketing strategy! 



An Old Marketing Model Made New

Applying AIDA to Modern Marketing



Social media is changing the way we do business. There's no denying businesses who want to survive in the future will need to learn and tap into this whole new arena (if you're not yet convinced, watch this brief video at http://bit.ly/sbs_social for some shocking statistics and the reality that social media is here to stay). But do we have to turn our backs on old methods and models? To throw the baby out with the bathwater? While the way in which we market is already in place, has changed, and will continue to change, sound marketing principles have not changed.

There is an older marketing model (acronym AIDA) developed in 1925 by a business analyst named E.K. Strong that was taught in business schools

for years. It stands for: Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. The model isn't new, and by modern standards it might seem archaic and irrelevant, yet it stresses fundamentals of successful marketing and thus still has incredible value in marketing today's business.

Attention:

The first principle is attracting your customers' attention. This probably looked quite different in 1925 than it does now, but it is at the core of what advertising does. If you don't get a person's attention, you can't convey a message and certainly can't persuade them to buy anything. Consumers in the 21st century have less time to attend to things such as advertising and seemingly a shorter

attention span than they did in 1925, so grabbing their attention needs to happen quickly – within the first few seconds – or they’ve continued on their way to somewhere else. Today’s audience demands more sophisticated content. To attract attention, the message or impact needs to be rawer, bolder, and on the edge, and customers want it NOW. Traditional marketing isn’t geared to “now”. It comes whenever a customer picks up a magazine, turns on the TV or radio, drives past a billboard or gets a flyer in the mail. Social media allows immediate attention grabbing. Tweet your message and you’ve got hundreds of people’s attention immediately. By having your link on another’s Facebook page, you can attract the attention of a person who isn’t even expecting to see your message there. As a business, you’re going to have to come up with smarter ways to reach your customers and get their attention, and grab it fast.

Interest:

Once you’ve got their attention, you have the equally difficult task of keeping it. Today’s consumers are more savvy. They know more about what they’re buying and they expect more of the companies they buy from. More than ever, they need to know what’s in it for them, so the focus on benefit rather than information is vital. Keep their attention by engaging with them in real time, asking them questions and being interested in what’s important to them. Listen to what they are saying and respond in ways that will mean something to them. Traditional surveys can do this, but social media allows for even greater information sourcing and more meaningful exchange. A question on Facebook or Twitter could get more responses and genuine information than paper, telephone, or even online surveys.

Desire:


Once you’ve got their interest, you must convince them that they want what you have to offer and that it will meet their needs. People can recognize that they have a need, but that is not desire. Desire is what motivates people to buy. Some traditional ways of creating desire are using the scarcity principle (telling people the item to be desired will not be available for long), demonstrating how other

people approve of the item and have acquired it for themselves, or showing them how what you have to offer will solve some of their problems. It’s suggested that a modern substitute or addition to the “D” is DIALOGUE. Today’s consumer wants to talk about what they’re buying. They’re asking everyone all over the world about their experience in buying what you’re selling. If you can open up a dialogue with potential customers that shows transparency and that you’re listening, it will assist you in creating that desire. This is easily done with the new social media, and can flow quite naturally once you’ve captured their interest.

Action:

This principle says you must lead your customers toward action. It is known in current terms as a “call to action”; a “click here”, or a “phone now”. You are actively moving the customer toward the purchase. Shopping channels do this brilliantly, as do infomercials. On the left hand side of your TV screen you see how many items are available, and as the hour ticks on you actually see the number of items available going down, presumably as people are flocking to their telephones to order. “Special offer “, or “if you call in the next 5 minutes you get a bonus” are calls to action. So are dated sales. The next generation of customer may be less and less influenced by these traditional calls to action, so smart businesses may have to find a way to move customers to action without pressure tactics.

Finally, some marketing experts have added an “S” to the acronym, for Satisfaction. This involves an exceptional customer experience - satisfying the customer so that they ‘repeat buy’ and refer their friends.

Here tradition meets the future. AIDA provides strong, relevant marketing principles, and businesses today need to find new ways to apply them. Do some research on your own. Take a course on social media and consider the many ways it can serve your business in the future. Keep up to date on trends and stay on the forward edge in your industry, and adapt the fundamentals of marketing to a new medium. Be the one who stands out because you get it, and you’ll see success. 

Cooperative Marketing

Jay Conrad Levinson (Guerilla Marketing guru) coined the phrase “fusion marketing”, which refers to a marketing strategy that challenges tradition. It involves building relationships with your competition and other businesses with a similar target market to enhance each other’s business success; a twist on the traditional, more territorial marketing methods. Cooperative marketing expands your exposure and your potential for profitability. One recent example of successful fusion marketing partnerships from big business is Tim Hortons and Wendy’s restaurants operating in a shared space. The idea is that people come in for lunch or dinner at Wendy’s, and slip past Tim Horton’s for coffee and dessert.

And who hasn’t enjoyed a cup of Starbucks coffee while shopping at Chapters? Another example can be found with companies who offer frequent flyer miles partnering with hotels, car rental agencies and restaurants. Cooperative marketing is a win-win strategy.

Cooperative marketing is one of the most inexpensive and underused forms of marketing, yet it has the power to increase the value of your marketing dollar. It’s as simple as finding someone who will put your flyer in their window while you



Business
cooperation

put their flyer in yours. It can be as complex as merging huge companies, as in the example above. The purpose of cooperative marketing is mutual profitability, and it can work for your small business. Here's how you can go about finding cooperative partnerships for your business.

Make a list of potential cooperative markets.

Look out your window and write down all the businesses that provide a product or service within your sight. Contact your key suppliers and ask for their ideas. Ask your customers what kind of service they might like that would complement what you offer. Get a business list from your local Chamber of Commerce. Try not to filter too much at the beginning. You never know what kind of synergy might exist in unexpected places.

Think about companies on your list who have a similar target market as your business. At first glance, a car wash and a European deli next door to one another may not appear to have much in common but doesn't it make sense that people having their cars washed might want a sandwich while they wait, or that people who are having lunch might have their car washed while they eat?

Ask what your business might have in common with another. What might a bottled water company have in common with a company that sells organic gourmet coffee? People who drink expensive gourmet coffee are likely to use bottled water to make it. The water company has a rack of the gourmet coffee by its checkout, and the coffee company provides a flyer or discount coupon from the water company to each of its customers. Ask yourself this question in relation to a dozen or so businesses in your area and see what fun you can have trying to come up with some cooperative marketing ideas.

Approach other businesses with your ideas.


Since cooperative marketing is about mutual benefit, it's hard to imagine that people won't be excited about increasing their marketing potential by helping you with yours. Be enthusiastic and

prepared. The more well thought-out your idea, the more likely someone will want to participate. Talk about ways to share marketing expenses. Can you share the cost of printing flyers if each business is featured on one side? Could you add their flyer to your next business mail-out and they add yours to theirs? Can you plan a customer appreciation event together that maximizes both your contact lists? Can you offer free advertising on each other's web sites? The possibilities are endless. Go crazy with your creative ideas.

Keep looking for new partners. Chances are, you're going to find cooperative marketing such a great way to do business, you'll want to keep your options open. Every time you get an advertisement in the mail or purchase a product or service, ask yourself whether this might be the kind of business you could partner with.

Don't forget about web marketing. If you have a website, you owe it to yourself to employ this strategy to maximize your internet marketing dollar. Do a search of companies who offer similar or complementary products, or who do business in your geographic area. Search for established web sites of organizations or associations in your industry, and approach them with a cooperative marketing plan.

Cooperative marketing may require a shift in the way we've traditionally thought about marketing, but it can push your sales and profits to a level you might never be able to reach on your own. Not only will you increase your bottom line, but you'll increase your network and potential customer base at the same time. You may never have heard of the gourmet coffee company mentioned earlier if you hadn't come in to get your bottled water. If you like the coffee, they've just gained a customer they could not have reached any other way.

Think about how cooperative marketing might benefit you and your business, and watch your business grow! 

Standing Out From the Crowd



Chances are, you aren't the only business offering your product or service in your area. If you have competitors, it's worthwhile to take a look at whether you have something that stands out enough to attract people to your business. This process is called differentiation. It's not as much about competing for clients with other 'like' businesses as it is offering potential clients a specific reason to choose yours. Here's how differentiation could work for you.

Determine where you are truly different from your competitors.

This is the easy part. You probably already know this, but it wouldn't hurt to do a competitive analysis on how your product or service differs from others on the market. Be as specific as possible

and come up with as many different things as you can. If you sell a software product, are you the only company who also installs and trains on the software? If you are a graphic designer, do you offer brokering of the print process as part of your service? If you do automobile body work, do you provide courtesy cars with free pick-up and drop-off for your customers? Does your retail clothing store have an in-house alteration service? Figure out what truly sets you apart from your competitors. Why do customers choose YOU?

Think about how what you do benefits your customers.

It's not enough to simply determine where you are different, you also have to figure out how to make that difference matter to your customers.

Look at your list of what makes you different and think of the specific benefits each may have to a customer. For example, what is the benefit of offering installation and training on the software you're selling? It saves time - the customer doesn't have to look for someone else to do the training. It saves money - instead of wasting hours trying to learn from a manual, your training will assist in decreasing the learning curve. It shows commitment - you're not just going to sell and run, you're standing behind your product and establishing a longer-term relationship with the customer. Are they then more likely to also purchase your support package? Probably. You've already given them three reasons to. So take each difference you've listed, and come up with three benefits to your customer that those differences provide.


Anticipate customer problems and needs.

The more accurately you can predict what your customers' needs and problems might be, the better you will be able to deal with objections that come your way, and the stronger your position will be. Take the example of a graphic artist. Sally knows her clients appreciate the design work she does for them, but has noticed their frustration in having to deal with the print process once her service is done. Her customers spend considerable time getting quotes from different printers to determine where to go. They don't understand the language used in the print process, and often end up getting proofs that do not fit their specifications. In addition, they have to spend time running back

and forth to the printer to look at proofs. Now that Sally has anticipated the problems, she can differentiate herself from other designers. Since Sally is familiar with the printers, understands the language of specs, and knows generally which printer specializes in what type of job, she can offer to manage the print process as part of her design service. It takes very little of Sally's time to add a valued service, and suddenly, Sally stands out.

Stay focused - do what you do well.

In trying to differentiate your company, the temptation is to try to do everything for everyone. This in itself may be a differentiation, but not necessarily a good one. Marketing experts say it is better to do one thing exceptionally well than a bunch of things with mediocre results. Determine what you do best and focus on that. Don't be afraid to refer customers to a competitor if they truly offer a better fit for their needs. In the long run you're better off having them happy with what they're getting from a competitor than trying to stretch your abilities and not being able to provide customer satisfaction.

Do you remember what your USP (Unique Selling Proposition) was when you started your business? Is it still the same? How can you use that USP to differentiate yourself in your industry and make your business stand out from the rest? 



Your Marketing Message – Is it Working for You?

Every business has a message, or at least it should. It's the one thing you want everyone to know about you; that thing that makes you unique - your unique selling proposition. The reason everyone should come to you when they need that product or service. Your marketing message is critical to everything you do to market your business, and it should be on every piece of media you use – from advertisements to brochures to your website. A marketing message is not a mission statement, or a slogan (although it can be incorporated into a slogan), or a list of credits and accomplishments. It is the one thing that grabs your prospects' attention and draws them to your business over someone else's. So what's your message, and is it working for you?

David Frey, author and creator of *“The Coaches and Consultants Marketing Bootcamp”* said the following:

“The key to creating a winning marketing message is to make sure that it matches the wants and needs of those who receive it.”

Sounds pretty simple, but few business owners really understand the power of using this principle. Frey continues to say that most businesses approach their marketing with a WWD (what we do) mentality. This means letting potential customers know what the business does and what services it offers. Compare this to a customer-focused mentality that answers the customer's concern - WIIFM (what's in it for me?). This approaches the marketing message by providing information based on finding and filling a customer's need. The customer is far less concerned with a list of all the programs, products and services you offer, than with what specific benefit they will gain through



your company, or that your company has a solution to their problem.

If you are looking for new tires for your car, which message would appeal to you more – “ABC Tire – riding on 25 years of experience”, or “XYZ Tire – your family's safety is our only priority”. Chances are, your family's safety is going to win out over how many years the tire company has been in business. If XYZ tire added “ for 25 years your family's safety has been our only priority” you'd have an even stronger message. In that case, the 25 years adds weight to what's already important to the customer.

So have a look at your marketing message and ask yourself the following questions:

1. Will it reach your specific target market? If you don't know who your target market is, you need to do some research. You can't write an effective message if you don't know who needs to receive it.
2. Does it tell WWD (your perspective), or does it answer WIIFM (the customer's perspective)? Remember, your message will be more effective if it solves a problem or fills a need for your customer, rather than just listing your products or services.
3. Does it push an emotional "button" for the customer? People often buy from an emotional response to something. In the case of XYZ tire, the emotional trigger is concern for your family's safety. That's a pretty hot button!
4. Does it solve a specific problem the customer has? If you suffer from Type II Diabetes, would you be likely to respond to an advertisement that promises to help you manage it more effectively with little interruption to your life? People are interested in solutions to their specific problems. Find out what that is for your target market.
5. Will the receiver of the message feel compelled to come to you? What do you have that's so different from your competition? Why should they choose you over someone else? Answer those questions for the customer and they likely will choose your business.
6. Will the customer have confidence you can provide the solution you're offering? Can you back up what you're saying with experience and with proof that you've delivered that solution to other people?
7. Is everything in the message true? Nothing is worse than trying to make your message more appealing by exaggerating it slightly. Someone, somewhere, will find out you've not been

honest, and your integrity will be shot. That is the most difficult thing for your business to recover from. Make sure everything you say in your message is absolutely, 100% true.

The answers to these questions should inform you about your message and help you create one that will have the desired impact. Once you've come up with a marketing message that speaks to these issues, use it on everything. You want your message to be on everyone's lips, so that your company comes to mind immediately in response to a specific need. Revisit your message often as economic, demographic and industry changes occur. This will give you an edge in keeping existing and getting new customers as your message responds to their needs. SBS



Cause-Related Marketing:

Can Your Business Benefit?



Every June, Tim Hortons restaurants invite customers to buy a cup of coffee and help send kids who could otherwise not afford it, on the camping adventure of a lifetime (Camp Day). It is the single largest fundraiser for the Tim Horton Children's Foundation, and takes place annually at more than 2,300 participating locations across Canada. If you set foot inside of a Tim Hortons on that day it is hard not to notice the excitement and enthusiasm generated by what is a simple philanthropic act. It literally drives people into Tim Hortons, even if that is not where they normally buy their coffee, because they want to contribute to the cause. Special "smile" cookies are also sold to customers, adding to the \$5.5 million dollars raised on Camp Day. This is a successful example of cause-related marketing and many big businesses

have discovered the enormous mutual benefit to their companies in partnering with a charitable or community organization. It's time for small business to discover it too.

Whether your business is in a large urban centre or in a small community, cause-related marketing can be a great way to bring attention to your business and to give back to your community. Cause-related marketing is really just a partnership between a profitable business and a non-profit organization, whereby the business agrees to donate a portion of its product sales for the benefit of a cause. The benefit to the non-profit is obvious; it gains both exposure and money. The benefit to the company is increased traffic to their location, increased exposure, attracting new customers, higher sales

and an invaluable perception of goodwill in their community. You may not be Tim Hortons, but you can participate in cause-related marketing no matter how large or small your business or your community. Here are some things to consider.

Choose to partner with a cause you're passionate about. It gives integrity to the whole process when you can genuinely and enthusiastically stand behind the cause.

Remember the three C's of effective cause-related marketing: Connection, Clarity and Communication. Make sure your "*Connection*" with the organization you're supporting is clear and makes sense. Consumer perception is higher when it can see why you're supporting the organization and where your passion comes from. Chapters bookstore contributes to a fund called Love of Reading Fund, which supports literacy initiatives across the country – a perfect match. Ensure there is a high degree of "*Clarity*" about exactly how the organization will benefit from your contribution. For Tim Hortons, the proceeds of every cup of coffee sold goes toward Camp Day. It's simple. It's clear. It's easy to get behind. People will more readily support things they can understand. Finally, make sure your "*Communication*" about the partnership is strong and clear and throughout the community to attract new customers. Tim Hortons advertises Camp Day weeks in advance and makes sure no one gets through that event without knowing they had the opportunity to participate. Let people know what you're doing and give them plenty of opportunity to join you in supporting the cause.


Be creative with how you will participate. For Tim Hortons it's easy to set aside the proceeds of coffees sold, but if you're selling computers it's a little more complicated. If you can attach your support to a simple product that's great, but if you can't there are other ways to become involved. It's becoming popular for businesses to give their entire staff a day off to roll up their sleeves and work in a community garden that provides fresh vegetables to food banks and homeless shelters. Signs can be

posted on their doors weeks in advance to advise customers they will be closed that day and why. During the preceding weeks they may give their customers an opportunity to bring non-perishable items or donations to be forwarded to the food banks. The day of the event the staff can wear bright green T-shirts so everyone who is driving by the garden that day is aware that the company is helping out the community in this way.

Make your partnership work and become each other's fan club. Meet with your community partner and brainstorm creative ways to partner with them. They may have more ideas than you can actually implement! Talk about them with your customers and encourage them to talk about you to their constituents. This fosters a genuine connection, and generates enthusiasm on both sides.

Get your staff involved. Have them be part of the process. Rather than telling them what you've decided to do, let them know you will be partnering with organization X and ask for their input as to how you, as a whole company, can be involved in the project.

Don't lose your focus. Cause-related marketing feels good, is philanthropic and altruistic, but its purpose is also to market and drive people to your business. Selecting a cause that means something to you is important, but remember your target market in that selection process. If you want them to support you, it will need to be important to them as well, and they need to see and feel that connection.

In the end, everyone wins and cause-related marketing is a way to accomplish many of your marketing goals. It increases success for your business, genuinely assists another organization that needs help, gives the community an opportunity to participate, and fosters goodwill all around. So, what's holding you back from taking a step toward contributing to your community through cause-related marketing? 

To Launch or Not to Launch?

Using Market Research to Validate Your Great Ideas

Sam, the owner of a highly successful local soup and sandwich shop was considering extending his hours to offer dinner to its patrons as well as lunch. Before Sam went to the expense of purchasing extra food and hiring more staff, he decided to do an informal poll among his customers. For one week he offered everyone who was willing to fill out his market survey a free pastry and coffee. The survey results showed him that only a small percentage of his existing customers would have soup and sandwich for dinner. In addition, his location was close to an industrial area that was well lit during the day but where people said they wouldn't feel comfortable coming to in the evening when it was dark. Sam's market research told him that he was being successful doing exactly what he was doing, so rather than extend his hours, he expanded his shop and is still doing a booming lunch business.

Lucy was the Executive Director of her town's Chamber of Commerce. She and her staff came up with what they thought was a brilliant idea to offer a Leadership Training Program to their members. They calculated what it would cost to run such a program and created a preliminary course outline. Before they launched the program, they did an



online survey of their members. Lucy discovered that there was a lot of interest in the program itself, but that the members were not willing to pay what the Chamber needed to make it profitable. Lucy readjusted the program costs, took the course down to 5 modules from 8, and offered the course to her membership. Not only did this provide the foundation for Lucy's initial success with the program, but it became so popular, she was able to raise the course fees the following year and take it up to the original 8 modules.

Although Lucy and Sam are running very different types of organizations, they both benefitted greatly from doing their market research prior to launching

their big ideas. That market research saved them both money and time and led them to more success than they would have had, had they not taken the time to determine what their customers wanted.


It's tempting when you have a great idea (and entrepreneurs have lots of them) to get carried away by your enthusiasm, but there are lots of reasons your idea may not work. You need to know whether your customers will buy into that idea. They are the ones who will support your idea with their dollars, so doesn't it make sense to ask them what they think before you leap?

Author, speaker and sales and marketing guru, Brian Tracey says, "Before embarking on any new business venture, considerable time must be spent in research. Your payoff will be in excess of ten to one in time and money saved or earned. For every dollar, for every hour that you put into research, you're going to save ten or twenty or thirty dollars or hours later on." Here are some suggestions for doing research before you launch your next big idea.

Ask for meaningful information. Leave no stone unturned. Think of every potential detail you may need to know before launching your idea and put it into your survey. Be clear how much it's going to cost you, what you have to charge to make it work, and who your potential customer or audience is. Ask questions that will help you determine whether consumers are willing to buy what you're proposing, and how much they are willing to pay. Asking them whether they think it's a good idea isn't enough. A lot of people will tell you they like your idea, but that doesn't mean they would pay for it. Your research will show you where you need to tweak the details to make it work, or, whether you need to scrap it and go in a different direction.

Do your own research. Read trade magazines, industry articles, and educate yourself about consumer trends and cultural influences. Know your customer's mindset. For example, if your idea consists of selling a high consumption product that's hard on the environment, you're probably not going to be able to sell it given the current environmentally-conscious culture. It's not only about knowing what consumers are thinking today, but where they may be leaning tomorrow that's important.

Be objective. Don't let your love for your idea cloud your judgment. If there's anything dangerous about the entrepreneurial mindset, it's that entrepreneurs tend to love their ideas so much they'll do anything to justify making them happen. Take the real data, learn from it, and make a sound decision based upon it.

Yes, it takes time. Yes, it even takes money. But as Tracey says, dollar for dollar you'll save a lot of money if you spend a little to invest in your research. If you charge ahead based on a wing and a prayer (and even a whole lot of self-belief), you may be in for a rude awakening and potential loss to your business. Don't stop dreaming and coming up with ideas, but make sure your ideas are based on realistic market research and solid evidence for their viability. 



Consider Radio Advertising



This past weekend I was one of the guest speakers at a conference of radio sales executives and creative writers. One of the bonuses of being a speaker at these types of events is that you get to take in a lot of great training from other presenters just because you're there! One of the things that struck me as I sat in on a few of the sales sessions in particular, was how enthusiastic these folks were about helping their clients achieve business success through radio advertising. This particular company's niche market was small to medium sized communities across western Canada (their largest community - 80,000, their smallest - 5,000), so their clients consisted to a large degree, of local small and medium sized businesses.

While these sales execs were selling based on commission (so certainly the motivation to achieve higher sales was in part tied to money), it was also obvious how much they cared about serving their clients well and helping them to achieve sales success. It got me thinking about how few small

business owners that I know personally, are using radio as part of their advertising strategy. So I did some research and discovered that radio is one of the most underused but highly effective forms of advertising for small business. Here are some reasons to think about whether radio advertising might be a strategy you should consider for your small business.


- 1. Radio is cost-effective** – there's a myth among small business owners that radio is an expensive way to advertise. Based on my research, it's actually very cost effective, and can be cheaper and more effective than print advertising.
- 2. Radio provides frequency** – we all have heard the statistics about how many times a potential customer needs to see (or in this case hear) your ad before it leads to an action. Radio is built on frequency – when you purchase a radio campaign your customers hear it over and over

and provides the “hits” you need for them to come into your store or business.

3. **Radio is creative** – one of the comments I heard this weekend was “radio is superior to TV because the pictures are better!” I thought about that – when you’re watching television (or even looking at print ads for that matter) the pictures are provided for you. When you listen to a really great radio ad, much like reading a book, you engage in “theatre of the mind” where you create the pictures – so much more effective and more strongly linked to memory.
4. **Radio reaches people when they are on the move** – most people listen to the radio in their cars, especially in smaller communities. Radio is a connection to the community. What better way to reach your potential customer than when they’re in a position to respond to your ad and pull into your parking lot?
5. **Radio listenership is on the rise in Canada** – a 2008 RMB* study showed that 93% of Canadians continue to listen to local radio weekly! In addition, while all other forms of media usage has declined, only radio and the internet have increased, and 86% of Canadians reported their time spent with radio has increased over the last year, compared with print and newspaper, which have showed a steady decline.
6. **Radio provides its own creative professionals** – it was amazing to hear from the creative writers at this conference – the ones who take your business information and turn it into fantastic, memorable commercials, and to hear some award-winning pieces that sometimes tickled my funny bone, and sometimes brought a lump to my throat and a tear to my eye. It’s all part of the deal – when you sign up for a radio campaign, the creative is done for you. One word of caution, when you work with creative radio professionals, trust them to do their job. You may think you have the funniest idea, but they know what works. Give them as much information about your

business as possible, and let them do what they’re good at.

7. **Radio works** – on average, 80% of Canadians listen while driving to and from a shopping trip and 60% identified radio as the last medium they were exposed to before a purchase. Radio clients will tell you that consistent, creative advertising campaigns build their businesses.
8. **Radio is emotional** – when was the last time you were moved to tears by a newspaper ad or a brochure? Because of its “theatre of the mind” potential, radio can make an emotional connection, and we all know that consumer purchases are based largely on emotion. At the conference, we heard an ad that impacted everyone in the room. We simply heard the voice of an elderly gentleman, talking about his recent heart attack. He told the story of how he ended up at a specific hospital in his community. He continued to speak with warmth and sincerity about his treatment and stay at this hospital – about the nurses kindness and attentiveness, about the quality of care he received, and about his eventual recovery and return to his family. There wasn’t a person in the room who wasn’t thinking about their dad, or grandfather, or uncle – or someone they knew who had experienced a heart attack, and by the end of the commercial, there wasn’t a person in the room who wasn’t convinced if they ever had a heart attack, they wanted to be taken to that hospital! Radio is an emotional medium – and one that can help you connect to your potential customers.

All it takes is a phone call to your local radio station to request a visit from one of their sales executives. The visit will cost you nothing but a few minutes of your time. There are a lot of reasons to consider trying a radio advertising campaign. Don’t miss an opportunity to try something new because of your potentially inaccurate assumptions. Find out for yourself whether this might be a strategy that could help you build your business. 

Is Your Website Your Customers' Favourite?

Ideas to Get on to Your Customers' Top Bookmarks



What's your favorite website - the one you keep going back to day after day? Why is it your favorite? Does it provide you with information on a specific topic that's of interest to you? Is it easy and fun to navigate? Does it give you what you want at a glance? There are a lot of things that draw us to a website initially. We may be researching something for work, or trying to find the answer to a debate

we've been having with our co-worker. You want your business website to draw people to it, but you also want them to keep coming back. It doesn't really matter why they're coming back - just the fact that they are keeps them exposed to your business and all that you have to offer. Take ten minutes to do the following exercise: go to your favorite website and spend 5 or 10 minutes doing what you

usually do; then, take a moment to write down why you like the site. What happened when you were on it? What did you find interesting? What does it do to draw and keep your attention? Many small business owners think of their websites as just another checkout. If that's all your website does, you're losing a whole world of potential customers.

Web surfers are savvy and they want more than just another place to buy stuff. If you and your competitor are both selling the same goods on your websites, but your competitor offers that "something extra" that makes his website the customer's favourite, it doesn't matter how beautiful your site is, or how great your product is, the customer will default to the other site. Here are some ideas for making your website the favourite of your customers.

Offer useful, unique stuff - the checkout concept just doesn't work any more. There are hundreds (even thousands) of businesses online selling similar products to yours. People have lots of checkouts to choose from. To get to the top of their list, you must offer them more. Articles or white papers on topics they might find useful, a Q & A forum where they can post their questions and get answers from your "experts", tutorials (maybe a brief but informative tutorial that shows how to grout tile in a bathroom, if you sell bathroom tile), helpful links to other related sites they might find interesting, an opportunity to subscribe to your newsletter, a way for them to connect with other customers, and the list goes on.


A favourite site is www.ehow.com (subtitled How to Do Just About Everything). For some great ideas on ways to add interest to your website, take a look. It has a section on helping you find out how to do "just about anything". It has videos that show you how to do things. It has resources for you to research your topic further. It even has a section that tells you what some of the most requested topics are and offers its community the opportunity to write the articles to answer those questions.

The bottom line is - give your customers a reason to keep coming back by providing stuff they find useful. That's more than a checkout!

Increase your credibility - people can say just about anything on their websites and it's up to the surfer to figure out what's true. So, using industry experts who have nothing to do with your company adds credibility to your site. Get reprint permission for an article written by a highly respected person in your industry. Get quotes or use stories from community leaders who are relevant to your industry. Find an expert who is willing to write content for you. Find creative ways to use experts in your online community.

Keep your site working properly - there's nothing more frustrating (or that detracts from your credibility) than a site that doesn't work. Broken links, shopping carts that don't work, sales that are out of date, pages that don't load (or take forever to load), etc. Your technology should be seamless. Modern web surfers are not patient, and will quickly move on if your site causes too many frustrations.

Keep it interactive - web consumers want to be able to interact with you. Give them opportunities to enter contests, contribute content, share their experiences, ask questions, tweet or facebook (or a dozen other social media opportunities) and connect with other customers. Static websites are passé. With all the free social media tools available there's no excuse not to provide opportunities for interaction on your website.

Take note of what you like on the web, and think about how you can create the same experience on your own website. Make it your goal to have your website reach the status of landing on your customer's "favourites" bookmark bar, and watch your business exposure and sales increase. The more often your customer goes to your site, the greater your chances of enticing him or her to purchase from you again. 

Tap into Testimonials

The Marketing Strategy You May Tend to Forget

You've had it happen to you – you've just done an exceptional job of fixing something for your customer at a great price, and they can't stop raving about you. In fact, they're telling everyone in your showroom who will listen, how great you are. You stand there and smile, enjoying your moment in the sun and hoping that everyone who's listening will be influenced toward making large purchases. After your customer leaves however, the enthusiasm dissipates quickly and an hour later it's business as usual, and you're just another guy who does what you do along with everyone else. So how do you make the most of your customers' great experiences with your business? Word of mouth is the most powerful way to gain new customers. Capture that positive energy and put it to work for you through testimonials!

Marketing expert David Frey in his "Coaches and Consultants Marketing Bootcamp" says, "Testimonials are powerful. They create believability, credibility, and a sense of security for your customer. They help to break down the natural barriers and distrust that most buyers feel toward you and your business." Have you ever noticed how infomercials are loaded with customer testimonials? Why? Because they work! It's easier for us to relate to an ordinary person telling the story about how great the product was than it is for us to believe the words of the seller.

Here are a few tips on how to maximize the good things your customers say about you, and use it to gain new business every day.



Strike while the iron is hot (and your customer is happy)

Don't wait even for a few days to ask for a testimonial. Ask when your customer is most thrilled with your service – right at that moment. When they're raving about you, ask if they'd be willing to have you use their words on your marketing materials. When customers are in that state of satisfaction, they'll rarely turn you down, and those words will work for you as long as you have your business.

Write it for them

Some people would love to give you a testimonial but struggle with the writing part of it. If you have heard from them verbally and can translate that into a written testimonial, you're way ahead of the game. Simply send them a copy of what you wrote and give them the freedom to edit it if they wish (which they rarely do). This often saves a lot of time in waiting for them to get back to you.

Get testimonials for different aspects of your business from the same people.

Ask for three different testimonials specific to each of the areas of work if you offer 3 different services. That way if you're marketing the training aspect of your business, you can pull out the quotes that specifically refer to training, and when you're marketing the coaching aspect, the quotes relevant to that side of your business will be used. If you're asking for more than one quote, you may want to consider writing them for your customer as mentioned earlier.

Keep them short and specific

Ask for 2-3 sentences only. People can usually come up with a few sentences, but if you ask for something longer they may feel overwhelmed and not be as willing to do it for you. Also, provide guidelines to your customers as to what aspect

of your business you want them to comment on. Here's how you can phrase the request: "Can you please comment specifically on what aspect of the course material you found most valuable, and also what made me as a trainer effective in delivering the material?" You already know this person thinks you have done a good job because she emailed you after the session and told you so. Chances are they'll be more than happy to comply and send the quote within a day.


Use real names whenever possible and always use credentials

Always ask your customer if they feel comfortable with you using their real name, or if they'd allow you to use their first name and last initial. Saying the quote came from "Susan James, or Susan J., Associate Professor, Stanley College" gives more weight to the quote than just "Susan".

Always thank your customer for their testimonial

If your customer has agreed to give you a testimonial, make sure they know how much you appreciate it. Write them a thank-you note letting them know how valuable this will be to you in growing your business. Send a small thank-you gift or offer a discount for the next time they use your service.

Frey says "It's one thing to toot your own horn – people expect you to sing your own praises. Because of this there's an inherent disbelief in any marketing message that comes from you. But when other people who have nothing to gain from your success say good things about your products or services, your believability shoots skyward."

So get out there and start asking! You'll be amazed at how willing your customers are, especially after they've had a good experience, and watch your credibility to new prospects soar. 

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