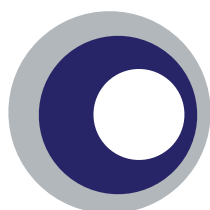


NABO

Business Building

Reports



National Association of
Business Owners

Accelerating your business success

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How To Attract Publicity At No Cost

Compared with advertising, getting media coverage with a press release has practically no impact on your bottom line. The only costs associated with press releases are printing and mailing. And if you're using electronic distribution like email, you can take mailing costs out of the equation.

Author Paul McCord described how his short press release (545 words) was published in 31 newspapers in America, India and the UK. From that, he was booked for two radio interviews and a print interview. The cost for all that free publicity? McCord said he spent \$10.

"What would advertising have cost to get the same exposure? I don't know, but I know I couldn't afford it," he admits.

"Press releases can help level the playing field for companies with limited budgets and resources. Various online distribution sites will release your press release for virtually nothing. A company called PR Web will send out your press release to tens of thousands of potential prospects and thousands of media sites for as little as \$80 (and as little as \$10 if you're willing to take fewer perks) – and provide you will a full array of statistics to give you a good feel for the effectiveness of your press release.

"If you supplement that with a faxed copy to your local media and a follow-up call, you can likely gain significant exposure for less than the price of a nice meal. In addition, if your company operates on a local level only, you can direct your press release to only local distribution.

"Of course, that still leaves the issue of what a small company can possibly say that is newsworthy. Actually, there's much that can be newsworthy. Have you taken on a new line of merchandise? Maybe you've just had an expansion? Possibly, you've just developed a new product or added a new service? Your company is about to have an anniversary? You're sponsoring an event, scholarship, or some other community-related promotion? All of these are newsworthy."

Both PR Web and PR Newswire services help distribute press releases. PR Web emails press releases daily to between 60,000 and 100,000 global contact points. Journalists, analysts, freelance writers, media outlets and newsrooms, as well as individuals are signed up to receive this information. It also distributes releases via FTP, XML feeds and through a network of its own websites. PR Newswire distributes

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directly into the central editing computers at daily newspapers, newsweeklies, national news services, trade publications and broadcast newsrooms. All releases are distributed to and archived in more than 3,600 websites, databases and online services.

Give Editors What They Want

The media makes a living by providing valuable news and information to its audience. Newspaper editors and TV's managing editors are bombarded every day with news releases from all over the world that they have to read, review, and consider for their readership.

Some small business owners have a strange sense of entitlement. They believe that if they write a press release that is newsworthy that there is an obligation on the part of the newspaper to publish it. Not only is this not true, but this kind of attitude can be detrimental to obtaining the coverage that you want. The media is fully autonomous in determining who and what will be covered, except in countries with state-controlled media outlets.

The media is not an extension of your marketing department, but if you are savvy, you can still attract their attention and get them to "do your bidding" while they serve their own needs. The key is to provide a compelling answer to the all-important question, "Why would our readers or listeners be interested in you NOW?"

The most basic public relations/marketing tool for every successful business owner, whether he runs a kitchen table enterprise or a company on the FTSE 100, is the news release or press release. The trick is not to make your article a commercial or advertisement. If you weave your business into a human-interest story people will read the article and remember your business.

What's hot and what's not when it comes to releases? Media outlets are always looking for stories that are newsworthy. That's their job. To be newsworthy your topic has to be controversial, strange or out of the ordinary, a human interest story, or tied to current events.

In general, information outlets are looking for

- Topical news releases relating to timely issues. The media is particularly interested in certain trends and your products and services, no matter what they are, can tie into one of those trends
- Community involvement releases sponsoring events or get-togethers
- Industry-specific projections and surveys that predict where a niche market is headed
- Executive-appointment releases announcing the appointment of someone to a new position

Generating news and information that people and the press will be interested in is not as difficult as it may sound. All you have to do

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is ask the question, "What does my target audience care about?" Asking this question will help to focus your thoughts and ideas. Conducting some research on a specific topic or question will help you get the answer.

All that stands between you and free publicity is your creativity.

How To Write A Media-Friendly Press Release

1. Begin with an attention-grabbing headline, advises Marketing and PR specialist Hilary McCarthy. Follow your headline with a factual and concise sub-heading that provides more information about your press release. This helps the journalist to decide if the press release will be useful and worth following up.
2. Make sure your press release makes sense. Rather than writing a story, it's better just to present the salient points in bullet format. Ensure your press release answers the questions a journalist will want to know about your story: who, what, where, when, how and why.
3. Don't be tempted to pad out the facts... go easy on the superlatives and stick to the story. The merest hint of a 'PR' spin and the journalist will bin your press release.
4. Do use quotes from your company's CEO and if your story makes claims, back them up with a few choice statistics and quotes from independent sources, Don't quote an entire report - just provide a reference to it so that the journalist can follow it up.
5. Do use your spell checker and then read your press release aloud before you send it. Have at least one trusted person in your organisation read it and check that all the relevant facts and contact details are included.

What Not To Do

1. Don't try and buy your way in. One sure way to get your press release rejected is if you mention to an editor how much ad money you have spent with the paper or offer to commit ad money if your story is run. Editors are not ad salespeople. They're journalists and they take pride in delivering unbiased coverage independent of outside influences. That said many local newspapers will accept a "trade" for an advertising commitment. Take advantage of this practice as much as you can, just be careful not to approach the legitimate press with any type of bartering proposal. It may destroy your chances of getting your releases accepted now and in the future.
2. Don't get too chummy in your emails or letters to journalists, particularly if you've never met them before. Communications specialist Brian Pelletier says business owners should keep things professional and polite.

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3. Don't fill your press release with jargon. If journalists don't understand what your press release is about, they'll bin it.
4. Don't make spelling mistakes. Remember to proofread and double, even triple check your press release before you send it out.
5. Don't assume anyone will want to use your story. Make your press release as interesting as you can... but don't presume it will be used.
6. Don't beg for your story to be included. You'll just destroy any credibility.
7. Don't send out emails en masse (with a hundred names in the 'To' list). Treat each journalist or editor as if he or she was the only person on your email list. Take the time to personalise your emails. Many emailing programmes allow you to personalise messages to individuals on a list.
8. Don't send your press release to anyone and everyone. Research. Make sure you send your press release to a publication that will be interested in your story (and that's read by your target audience).
9. Don't send your press release to the wrong person. Get the name of the reporter who covers stories about your type of business. Reporters cover particular areas or subjects. If your press release is about your new car cleaning product, a journalist on the beauty pages won't be interested (or impressed) with your story!

Once You've Sent It

If you don't get an immediate response, leave it a day or two and then telephone or email to find out if your press release arrived and if it will be of any interest to the journalist. (Do check the publication's deadline times - if you call just before a deadline, even the nicest and politest journalist won't be inclined to chat.) If the journalist tells you the story's not going to be used, it's okay to ask why. Maybe it's too similar to another story they've just used. Or maybe there were details in your press release that didn't make sense. Perhaps your story wouldn't be of interest to the readers. Find out what stories will interest the journalist.

Make it a habit to send out regular press releases. Make them "newsworthy" and keep them short (under 500-600 words if possible). Don't give up. You never know when your story will hit the target.

How To Competitively Price Your Product

Pricing is a key marketing tool at whatever stage of business you are in – whether you're just starting out, or an already established business.

Be aware of the worth of your product or service before you even begin to think about pricing (or changing your pricing).

What you can charge depends on what your customers are willing to pay which in turn depends on what they think – or are persuaded to think – your product is worth. Your customers will consider your product or service to be more valuable if it solves a problem for them (which then saves them money, hassle, or time); if it adds real value to their bottom line; if they believe it to be rare or in short supply; if your company has a proven track record; if your company offers something that none of the competition can provide; and if the product or service comes with a strong 100% no-quibbles guarantee.

Price is a key factor in people's perception of your product or service's value. Many consumers equate value and price as being equal. For that reason, if you set your prices lower than your competition, consumers may perceive your product or service as being somehow inferior.

Undercharge for your product or service and you'll end up sweating for peanuts... working extra hard for very little return. You'll have less time and obviously less money to devote to developing and improving your business.

Over-charge for your product or service and you may just price yourself out of your market (losing business to your competitors).

Consider the value of your product or service to your potential client. Estimate the impact it will have on their bottom line. Consider the market conditions in your industry. Find out what your competitors charge and what they actually provide. Work out the cost of producing or providing each product or service. Find out what consumers in the market want or expect and what they think about the product or service they receive. Is there a gap between their expectations and the actual product or service they currently receive? Can your product or service fill that gap? What will that mean in terms of your pricing structure?

Factors To Consider

Positioning

The price you set for your product or service must be consistent with your market position. How are you going to position your product or service in your market? Will pricing be a fundamental part of that positioning? If you are aiming at the budget end of the market, price will obviously be a major factor. If you are aiming at the quality high end of the market, then a low price could damage the perception of your product or service.

Demand

Consider the impact your price may have on demand for your product or service. Research your market: determine what percentage of customers would buy your product or service at a range of prices.

Cost

Calculate the cost of selling your product or service. Your price, fee or rate must have a profitability factor built in – your gross margin (price minus the cost of your product or service) must more than cover your fixed costs (rent, salaries etc) for you to make a profit.

Competition

What action might your competitors take in response to your prices? Be wary of triggering a price war.

Your Objectives

Decide what you want to achieve with your pricing and the long-term impact it will have on your position and profits: is it short-term revenue maximisation (to boost cash-flow), to maximise quantity (to increase market penetration), maximise profit margin, differentiation, or survival?

Once you've clarified your objectives, you can look at pricing methods. There are at least four ways to calculate your pricing structure:

1. Cost-plus pricing is calculated on the cost of producing your product or service plus an amount that you need to make a profit. This is usually expressed as a percentage of the cost. It is generally more suited to businesses that deal with large volumes or which operate in markets dominated by competition on price.
2. Value-based pricing focuses on the price you believe customers are willing to pay, based on the benefits your business offers them. It depends upon you being able to clearly define and demonstrate the benefits your product or service provides to customers.
3. Target-return pricing involves setting a price to achieve a target return on your investment.

4. Psychological pricing takes into account your customers' perceptions of your price, including positioning, popular price points (the point at which they are more willing to make a purchase), and fair pricing (what they consider to be 'fair').

Pricing Tactics

Discounting

Discounting can be a powerful short-term measure but it does carry some dangers too. You could use it to get rid of old stock or to encourage large orders. Consumers may balk at paying full price in the future or begin to perceive your product or service as somehow inferior to competitive brands. Discounting may send a signal to consumers that price is negotiable and that value can be given away. Trying to sweeten the deal by bundling additional products and services with the core offering can drive up costs (and decrease profits) and teach consumers that the product or service is not valuable.

Odd Value Pricing

If your consumers buy primarily on price, you can offer your products at a penny or two less than normal on bulk orders.

Low Pricing To Attract New Customers

You can sell a product at a low price with the sole aim of winning new customers.

Skimming

If your product or service is unique in the market, you can sell it at a high price. There's a danger that you could just price yourself out of your market.

Penetration

To gain market share, you can sell your product or service at a lower price and gradually raise your prices.

Conclusion

However you price your product or service, take time to measure the impact it will have on consumer perception and demand and of course, on your company's long-term profits.

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How To Reward Customers So They Keep Coming Back

You may have heard the business adage that it costs a lot less to maintain a current customer than to acquire a new one. Yet despite that wisdom, it appears that too much of most business marketing is geared towards acquiring "new blood". Many owners forget that the satisfied customers they already have and the referrals that those customers bring are the "lifeblood" of their business.

Don't make the same mistake.

The message I'm trying to convey to you is that you must capture, communicate (follow-up) and reward your customers on a regular basis. If you do this, you'll find them coming back and spending more money with your firm than ever before. You'll identify those customers that are the most likely to do more business with you. You'll find that 20% of your customers really do generate 80% of your revenue!

What ideas can you come up with to reward your best customers and keep them coming back for more? The steps are easy. Almost as easy as A-B-C, the steps to keeping and building your base of loyal customers is as easy as C-C-R:

- Capture
- Communicate
- Reward

If you'll do these three steps on a regular and consistent basis, this one idea alone will generate 25% to 100% more revenue and net profits for your business.

There are eight distinct occasions...eight Magic Moments...that you can enlist in your campaign to create a loyal, repeat customer. These are the perfect moments to communicate with them. If you pay close attention when you're doing business and watch out for these eight moments, and then go the extra mile at the right time... Bingo! You've changed a one-time sale into a lifetime customer.

MAGIC MOMENT #1

Pre-planned moments when you thank a steady, solid customer who never complains, but who always brings her business back to you. These non-

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squeaky wheels are the most neglected customers, but the most important to your business. Plan to do something special for these customers every quarter or six months. You'd be amazed at the results of a plain thank-you letter.

MAGIC MOMENT #2

The moment your customer complains. Believe it or not (and you'd better!), your customer has done you a great favour by complaining. It's not every day that a customer will take the time to let you know what they think. If they're dissatisfied, they'll usually just disappear into the night, never to be heard from again...until they show up at your competitor's doorstep!

Complaining customers give you a chance to regain their loyalty and goodwill by 'working' your customer service processes. They also help you to spot and fix problem areas in your service system.

Technical Assistance Research Programs Institute conducted a study that found that on average, 96% of unhappy customers never complain. The truth is that most customers don't like to complain - especially about little things. For every complaint heard, the average company has 26 other customers with the same problem.

An elephant never forgets and nor does a disgruntled consumer. The TARP study found that the average happy customer will talk about a pleasant experience for about 18 months. On the other hand, the average unhappy customer will remember the incident for 23 years.

How many prospects could they tell over that length of time? Don't you want to know immediately that you've got a problem with a customer? And don't you want to solve it n-o-w?

Fix your complaining customer's problem, and then let him/her know that you appreciate them as much, or even more, than other customers because of their complaint. Let them know that you appreciate that they cared enough about you to take the time to voice their opinion and give you the opportunity to correct what's wrong.

When a customer complains, think of it as a "jackpot". Look at the situation as an opportunity to make a customer for life. The most loyal customers are the ones that have been through the trenches with you and have emerged with satisfaction and delight with how you handled their unique situation.

MAGIC MOMENT #3

The moment one of your new customers comes back to place a second order. However big or small the order, a repeat order means a customer chose you to do business with again.

Do something to thank them for their vote of confidence.

MAGIC MOMENT #4

The moment a customer has thanked you. When someone goes out of their way to express their gratitude for something you've done, you have a tremendous opportunity to deepen and strengthen your bond by responding in kind. Send them a coupon for their next visit or a free movie pass.

Something that says, "I appreciate you, too."

MAGIC MOMENT #5

The moment one of your customers has been through a hard time because of a foul-up on your or even their part. Much as we wish they didn't, sometimes things go wrong. When you're at fault and your customer hangs in there with you, you have a great opportunity to go above and beyond the call of duty to express your regrets and demonstrate your commitment to their satisfaction. When you fix the problem, take it one step further and do something extra, free of charge.

MAGIC MOMENT #6

The moment a customer needs a favour from you. There are often times that your customer wants you, needs you to go the extra mile for them, or they find themselves in a jam and they need your help.

Tell them that honouring their request is against your policy and you don't usually do these types of things, but for them you will make an exception.

MAGIC MOMENT #7

The moment you see your customer in public. Have you ever walked right by one of your customers without saying hello? This should never happen! Can't remember your customer's name? Give yours, instead! "Hi, my name is Ms. Market. I'm the person who tripled your business three years ago. How's it going?"

MAGIC MOMENT #8

The moment your customer brings in a referral. This is GOLDEN TIME in Magic Moment-land! You have just acquired a new customer at no cost to you. You have just been given the lifetime value of a new customer for free.

Make sure your customers are aware of your gratitude and how much their endorsements mean to you. Send them a dinner for two at their favourite restaurant.

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And talking of rewards...

Customers will turn themselves in IF you offer the right reward and the #1 reward in the 'Information Age' is... information!

Once you know the questions your customers ask, it's time to develop some special reports that address those questions. A special report is one of your best vehicles for delivering your educational material. It is inexpensive to create and distribute, and 'brands' you as an expert information resource...as well as a generous friend who has shared a valuable free gift.

Special reports are generally a little longer than a brochure and a bit more detailed. However, your report can really be any length you want or need.

In my opinion, the more pages that are in a free information product, the better. Just take care that you include solid, useful information that your customer will find helpful. If you try to pawn off a lot of flash and filler with no substance as "valuable information" your prospects will see you as a scam artist who's trying to pull a fast one.

Reports generally focus on just one topic: how to keep a water pond clean, 10 tips for fighting sinus pain, where to meet girls. The purpose of your report is to provide valuable information that your customer couldn't get anywhere else. This will reinforce your value and integrity in the mind of your customer.

Be sure to include real life stories that drive home important points. This will create interest and keep your customer reading. And don't forget to include all your contact information including your personal name, business address, phone numbers, and website address.

Always put a price on the cover of your free reports. Even though you give them away for free, people will value them more and be more apt to hold on to those items (I know it sounds crazy, but it's true).

Simple Unbeatable Marketing Tactics To Send Sales Skyward

Is your marketing producing lacklustre results? Have the responses completely dried up? Use these simple yet unbeatable tactics to reinvigorate your marketing and to revive your customers' and prospects' interest in your product or service.

Whatever tactics you use, remember they must reach your most qualified prospects, put your marketing message in the right context and provide you with enough time and space to create a call to action (tell them what to do). Be creative but not weird: one marketer recommended fronting up to networking events or trade shows with your company name tattooed to your forehead (courtesy of temporary tattoos)... which we think would just scare most sane people away! Be competitive but not downright mean or illegal (another marketer recommend you pay someone to tear out your competitor's Yellow Pages adverts and remove their fliers wherever they were featured).

And talking of fliers, resist the temptation to plaster every car in your area with one of your leaflets... people see a flapping piece of paper on their windscreen and immediately think, "Parking ticket." Suddenly, their mood darkens ... they feel got at, hounded, and fearful... and they snatch the offending piece of paper from under the windscreen wipers to discover that instead of the dreaded traffic ticket it's your flier. Will they be relieved and happy to read it? Unlikely. You've made them worried and even angry... and so more often than not, they'll screw up your flier and toss it on the ground.

There are far easier and more effective ways to market your products and services...

Determine What's Worked Before

Carry out what's known as a 'marketing audit' to discover exactly what you've done, who you targeted, what media you made use of and how appropriate it was (or wasn't) for your target audience. From this, you'll know what is working and what isn't working. Discard anything that produces poor results and improve the areas that have worked.

Model Excellence

Look for examples of what's worked for other companies and adapt their techniques to your company, product, service and target audience.

Do something unexpected

Use the element of surprise to delight and astound your customers. Provide them with excellent service plus something useful and thoughtful when they do business with you. Good hotels leave guests chocolates on their pillow... but if they were to leave an eye mask instead, wouldn't that be something unexpected and more useful? In Canada, a company called Rogers Wireless launched a Christmas marketing campaign called 'Share The Joy' in which it provided golf carts to ferry parcel-laden customers from the shopping mall through dark car parks to their cars. An Internet-based company called Proporta.com which sells sturdy leather covers for mobile phones and mp3 players sends customers a free tea bag with their orders (presumably so they can enjoy a relaxing cup of tea while they contemplate their purchase!) and a 10% voucher that can be used by the customer or a friend on their next purchase.

It's not easy to keep coming up with ideas that will delight your customers but think of the alternative: losing your customers to your more imaginative, thoughtful competitors!

Focus On Your Ideal Customers

Once you know who your best customers are, find out what traits make them so ideal to your business. When you're clear what those key traits are, revise all your marketing messages with those traits in mind.

Lure People With Masses Of Appealing Benefits

If you know that your customers buy from you because your product or service either saves them money or time, make sure you let them know the many ways that your product or service will save them time and money. Go even further by offering a discount if they buy by a particular deadline.

Acknowledge your customer's order

Send thank you notes or emails to your customers when they order from you and then follow up with details of when they can expect delivery. Despite the many millions of people who buy online, many are still nervous about the 'risk' of providing their credit card details when they make a purchase. Sending an acknowledgement of their purchase with a 'thank you' and delivery details will go a long way to alleviating any remaining fears they might have. The internet can be a bit of an impersonal retail environment - *click here, fill in your details here, goodbye* - so your 'thank you' email demonstrates your gratitude and spreads a little warmth. It's equally important, whether you are

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selling offline or online, to make it easy for customers to find your Customer Service and Help phone numbers. Things go wrong sometimes - deliveries don't appear or your customers don't like the product or service you've provided or they simply have a question about it. Don't make it a frustrating exercise to find those important phone numbers.

And do remember to send thank you notes to your suppliers. You're not only generating goodwill but building your network.

Get Media Savvy

Compared with advertising, getting media coverage has practically no impact on your bottom line. The only costs associated with press releases are printing and mailing. And if you're using electronic distribution like email, you can take mailing costs out of the equation.

The most basic public relations/marketing tool for every successful business owner is the news release or press release. The trick is not to make your article an advertisement. If you weave your business into a human-interest story people will read the article and remember your business.

Generating news and information that people and the press will be interested in is not as difficult as it may sound. All you have to do is ask the question, "What does my target audience care about?" Asking this question will help to focus your thoughts and ideas. Conducting some research on a specific topic or question will help you get the answer.

News releases can be sent to every magazine, newspaper, television station, and online news service that reaches your market. Send the news release to the editor of the publication you think would be most interested in your news item, or to the editor of the newspaper section most likely interested in your information.

Ask Customers For Testimonials

Legendary marketer Ted Nicholas says testimonials are amongst your strongest marketing tools. However, most business owners don't get anywhere near the potential sales power from testimonials that they should. He says to achieve maximum impact from your testimonials you need to:

- Request written permission to use the testimonial in whole or in part
- Ask your customers for a photo to use alongside their testimonial. Nicholas says nine out of 10 people will happily send you a photo.
- Use your customer's full name and the city and country in which they come from (with their permission, of course).
- Use the testimonial exactly as they have written it. Don't even attempt to rewrite it.

Reward Referrals

A brilliant way to leverage your current customer base and to achieve marketing results without additional expense is through referrals. The first step is to create opportunities that will allow, or more importantly encourage, your customers to give you referrals.

The fact that you're selling a quality product will generate some referrals. Consumers who are pleased with your product and or services want to tell their friends and family about you. Everyone likes to say, "I know the best source." But you can generate more if you offer special inducements or incentives for bringing in referrals.

These include:

- Special incentives for referrals making their first purchase.
- Special rewards to referring customers

Referrals are not 'sold' customers, so don't treat them that way. A referral is only a targeted lead that is more likely to be receptive to your sales pitch. People want to buy from businesses and individuals that they know and trust, and a referral from a friend makes you someone they know...by association.

Referrals should be handled just like any other prospective customer. They must be made to feel special and educated about the benefits of the product/service you offer.

Make Buying From You A Breeze

Offer your customers a range of ways to pay for your product or service. Make it simple and easy to complete the purchase.

Keep Marketing Often

It's not easy but even while you're providing excellent customer service to your existing customers, you must also keep up with your marketing efforts. That way, you'll avoid the boom-bust cycle that many new businesses experience.

The 12 Most Effective Low-Cost & No-Cost Marketing Strategies

No matter what the economic climate may be, you still have to market your business. To succeed when times are rough and money is tight, however, you need proven strategies that provide maximum return on your investment. And there's no better way to achieve a good expense-to-income ratio than with the following 12 strategies.

Any business can pay for advertising to get their message out and many do, spending tens of thousands of pounds to reach consumers. A smart business with a marketing savvy leader, however, can achieve the same goal for free...if they know how.

Strategy #1 - The Power of the Press Release

Compared with advertising, getting media coverage has practically no impact on your bottom line. The only costs associated with press releases are printing and mailing. And if you're using electronic distribution like email, you can take mailing costs out of the equation. However, unlike advertising, you can't buy publicity, you have to earn it.

Strategy #2 - Referrals

A brilliant way to leverage your current customer base and to achieve marketing results without additional expense is through referrals. The first step is to create opportunities that will allow, or more importantly encourage, your customers to give you referrals.

The fact that you're selling a quality product will generate some referrals. Consumers who are pleased with your product and or services want to tell their friends and family about you. (Everyone likes to say, "I know the best source.") But you can generate more if you offer special inducements or incentives for bringing in referrals.

Strategy #3 - Internet Marketing

Internet marketing is not that much different than off-line marketing. You still need a good product or service. You still need customers. You still need to know your USP, and what your niche market is. You still need headlines and good copy.

Strategy #4 - PPC and Google AdWords

Google AdWords is an effective, budget-friendly way to advertise on one of the Internet's most popular search engines. It is currently the most popular pay-per-click (PPC) advertising program online.

PPC is a way to advertise where you pay only for the people who 'click' on your ad. So there's no minimum monthly charge with AdWords - just a nominal activation fee.

AdWords ads are displayed along with search results on Google, as well as on search and content sites in the growing Google Network which includes AOL, EarthLink, HowStuffWorks, and the increasingly popular Blogger.com. You can choose from a variety of ad formats, including text, image, and video ads, and easily track of your ad performance using the reports in your online account Control Centre.

Strategy #5 - Classified Ads and Fractional Page Displays

You've probably noticed the same tiny classified ads appearing in the want ads month after month and year after year. Why? Because they're easy and inexpensive. But what's cheap and easy isn't always what's good.

Many entrepreneurs naturally flock to classifieds because they're simple to create and relatively inexpensive. Classified ads easily carry all our favourite advertising must-haves: a headline, copy that is short but packed with benefits, offers, bonuses, reply mechanisms, and guarantees.

Classified costs are based on number of words of the "column size" of the ad. As a result, millions of companies use classifieds that are simply a headline and phone number. Then all that needs to be added is the charge for an electronic voice mail and classifieds become VERY affordable.

But the fact of the matter is that classified ads are responsible for more money lost by business owners than any other media choice. Classified ads definitely work... but often for the publishers, not necessarily for the advertiser.

Strategy #6 - Newsletters – You're Always The Cover Story

Newsletters are a great way to keep in touch with your customers and an effective way to promote additional products and services. Your customers will appreciate the information and your efforts to keep in touch with them on a regular basis.

Newsletters have a number of other benefits as well. And if you go the e-newsletter route, the chief benefit is: virtually no mailing costs.

Strategy #7 - Email Magazines or “Ezines”

An ezine is a magazine sent via email...simple as that. All the rules that apply to printed magazines apply here too, but in an electronic format.

Businesses are scrambling to build email lists and start their own customer ezines. And why not?

The average ezine response rate is 5% - 15% That's huge! Especially when you consider that the average response rate for average direct mail pieces is somewhere between 3% and 5%.

Strategy #8 - Telemarketing

Although it is often maligned and frequently misunderstood, telemarketing is one of the fastest growing forms of direct marketing today. It provides an opportunity to make one-to-one contact with the prospective buyer at a very low cost.

Telemarketing prices have been coming down while mailing prices have been going up. With the cost of hiring salespeople, training them, and getting them into the field, more companies will find the value in telemarketing.

Telemarketing can be used to take orders over the phone following up direct mail or direct media advertising. Products ranging from 25-pence fasteners to £10 million airplanes are sold over the phone.

Strategy #9 - Marketing with Flyers

Flyers can be an effective way to spread the word about your business. Generally, they are single sheets printed front and back, and used to announce a sale, open house or other limited-time event. Mail it, hand it out, hang it up, and leave it wherever prospects congregate—a flyer is among the least expensive, easiest to produce, and hardest working marketing tools.

Put them on local bulletin boards. Leave them in reception areas and waiting rooms (with permission of course) where people are looking to read something to pass the time.

Strategy #10 - Newspaper Ads

This is direct response advertising at its best. A newspaper ad is designed to create responses and generate customers. Every ad should always remind the reader of your unique selling proposition, even though you are featuring a particular product or promotion.

In creating an ad for newspapers, you should start by striving for an editorial rather than advertising style. People going through a newspaper won't read your ad unless they notice it. An editorial style will differentiate your ad from others in the paper.

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Remember: the more you tell, the more you sell. And approach your article as if you were a reporter who had just come on to a hot news item and wanted to share it with the rest of the community. Write it in this editorial fashion and people will read the ad.

Strategy #11 - Radio

Studies have shown that the average consumer listens to the radio almost two hours a day. This makes radio advertising a favourite for small businesses trying to get their marketing message in front of their target market affordably.

Compared with television advertising, radio advertising is much less expensive. Radio also allows you to use your advertising dollars in a mass communication format, but to a targeted type of demographic.

Radio ads need to create interest, build desire, and cause action. So, the top five copywriting elements should be included in radio advertising:

1. Use the same headlines as your newspaper ads or as your direct mail letters to create the interest in a radio spot
2. The first two or three sentences should capture the listener's attention
3. The "body" of the radio ad works the same way as a print ad - it fulfils your promise in the headline
4. Direct the listener as to what action to take
5. Have a measurable response to your ad

Strategy #12 - Television Advertising

It used to be that only those with massive marketing budgets could ever afford to place an ad on network television. However, there are some times in the evening when it is more affordable.

Turn 'Just Looking' Prospects Into Buying Customers

People buy when they know, like and trust you or your company. Many online businesses spend a lot of money attracting people to their websites but not enough converting those prospects into paying customers. They mistakenly assume that 'window shopping' prospects will be prepared to hand over truckloads of cash for high priced products or services without any prior experience or knowledge of the product or service being offered but they need more... much more.

Marketing experts say you must woo your prospects, offering them low or no cost samples, then something that is a little bit more expensive and so on until they are familiar enough with you and your company to consider your highest priced products. Doing it this way makes purchase decisions easier. As the relationship between you and your prospect develops, the objections he or she may have had initially begins to disappear.

To make the process easy, you need to have a range of products or services at different prices so prospects can gradually move toward the more expensive range at a pace that makes them comfortable.

One way to visualise this process is to imagine a funnel, wide at the top and narrowing to a point at the bottom. This is called a 'marketing funnel'. Its most important role is to help you to attract a huge audience (who come in at the wide end of the funnel) and to gradually develop their trust in you and your products or services so they move quite happily down through to the more expensive level of products and services. The funnel gets smaller at the bottom which symbolises the smaller number of clients, albeit higher paying clients. They are the ones who are buying your most expensive products or services. Although the number of clients is smaller, the amount of cash generated is the greatest. In other words, the amount spent is inversely proportionate to the width of the funnel.

The top of the funnel is where you want to get as many prospects as you can. You do this by spreading your message to as many people in your target audience as possible. This would include prospects, current clients and former clients. You want to target your message so that

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mostly ideal prospects enter the top end of the funnel. You can do this by offering something for free that will be of great interest to your prospects. Such free products include:

- Special reports
- Ezines
- Online courses
- Teleseminars
- Webinars
- E-books
- Audio downloads
- Video downloads
- CDs or DVDs

This introduces you and your products or services to prospects and provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate your expertise. To receive your free products or services, prospects provide you with their contact details (name and email address). This also means you can contact them again and again.

People will have slightly different preferences - some might prefer to read a free report, others to listen to the same material as an audio track on their computer while others might prefer to download it and listen to it in their car or on their mp3 player - so offer alternatives. If you cater to the preferences of as many people as you can at these early stages, you're more likely to help them move down your marketing funnel quicker than if you limit your product offering.

A mistake that companies make is expecting customers to make the jump from the free products straight to the high-end products. It's better to add a mid-level range of information-based products that gives your prospects an opportunity to sample your service or products at a low price and still at a relatively 'low risk'.

These information products can include:

- Books
- E-books
- Special reports
- Manuals
- Journals
- Workbooks
- Audio downloads

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- Video downloads
- Audio CDs
- Videos or DVDs
- Home study courses
- Teleclasses or teleseminars

This mid-level range of products becomes a source of passive income for you and your company. As you provide several opportunities for prospects to sample your skills and knowledge at lower price points, the middle of your funnel starts to fill.

Once prospects have experienced your expertise and start to know, like, and trust you, they are more likely to open their wallets and spend more money on your services and products. Each level of your marketing funnel represents increased familiarity and the potential for increased profits.

You offer your higher priced services and products only after they have sampled the lower priced options.

How It Works

1. Your 'window shopping' prospect decides to take up your offer of a free product or service. In return for your free offer, your prospect gives you his or her email address and therefore becomes part of your 'opt-in' list.
2. Once your prospect has received the 'free' product or service, you begin to provide additional value-added offers.
3. You may provide your prospect with a special offer on a product or service that is directly related to the incentive he or she received to join your list.
4. You continue to provide offers until he or she decides to purchase your mid-level products. He or she has now become a client.
5. Now that he or she is a client (and more trusting and knowledgeable about the quality of your product or service), you begin to offer higher priced products or services. At this level of the marketing funnel, your client is more likely to accept cross-sells, up-sells, and other packages you offer. Your client is now less resistant to the idea of buying your higher priced product or services, more confident of your ability to deliver what you promise. You are now in a much better position to sell that product or service.

When customers are happy with your product or service at any level of the marketing funnel, they are more likely to encourage others to join them.

Marketing Funnel Or Marketing Colander?

The smoother your funnel runs, the more efficient and successful your business is. Are there gaps in your product and service offerings? Are there holes where prospects can simply fall through? It could be that:

- Your free report (or any free product) isn't relevant to your target audience or to your products.
- You're not capturing traffic from your website. Make sure you have a way to

capture your visitors' contact information.

- You're not following up with people who request free information. Use auto responders to send out a sequence of lessons, tips or articles.
- Your follow-up messages don't have a call to action. Remember to invite people back to your website, to check out a particular product or service or to sign up for your teleseminar.
- Your free newsletter isn't up to scratch. Maybe it doesn't contain enough relevant information, takes too long to read or looks boring.
- Your website is too busy (too many products or services so visitors feel overwhelmed or confused and simply click away)
- Your website copy isn't effective in exciting customers to want to stay (or buy!)
- You aren't offering enticing bonuses that would help customers to take the plunge and buy
- Your prices are too high (or even too low)
- Your follow-up isn't effective (customers may be unaware that you have a range of products or services at different prices)

Once you've found the 'leaks' in your marketing funnel, fix them! Plug the holes by adding additional levels of product and service offerings and a range of pricing options.

Remember to keep moving your prospects through the funnel - don't stop your marketing efforts once your prospects have signed-up for a free product. That's only the beginning! And remember to pay equal attention to your existing customers!

Your marketing funnel can be your most basic marketing strategy but when used correctly, it can have a massive impact on your company's profits and success.

10 Catastrophic Marketing Mistakes and How To Avoid Making Them

As global markets tighten and customers become ever more discerning, you really cannot afford to blow your chances of a sale through making any one of the following marketing mistakes. They're simple mistakes to make but potentially fatal for your business.

1. No market research

A business based purely on your 'good feeling about it' or the support of friends and family is a risky one. You need to test your product and your potential market before you begin.

You need to be able to answer the following questions: Do customers want what you have and will they pay a price that will be profitable for you? What are your potential competitors doing to sell their product or service? How will your product be different from what is already available? Are there segments within your target market that are not being served? Is that segment of the market big enough for you to make a sustainable profit? Does that segment have the potential to grow? How much of that segment do you need before your business breaks even and moves into profit? Are there already too many competitors in that segment of the market? Is there a weakness in the way your competitors reach or serve customers that you could capitalise on? How do your potential competitors reach their customers? Who are their customers? Can you reach your customers easily? Can they afford to buy your product?

Market research at this stage will save you a fortune long-term. Define your product's 'Unique Selling Proposition', the quality that sets it apart from the competition, so you understand the benefits and problem-solving attributes of your product. Be clear and base this on evidence rather than instinct or good feelings so you know that customers will want to pay for your product or service.

2. No marketing plan

A marketing plan features the strategies you will use to reach your customers to sell your product or service. Without it, your activities

risk being reactive, inconsistent and probably ineffective, wasting your time and money. A good marketing plan gives you a clear indication of what you need to do to get to where you want to go. An excellent marketing plan makes it a journey you'll want to take! Start with your ultimate objective and then work backwards, deciding what you need to do to reach (or surpass!) each target along the way.

3. No marketing goals

Without goals, you won't know how successful (or unsuccessful) your marketing is. You need to have daily, weekly, monthly and annual goals for the number of leads, referrals, and clients your marketing will produce and to update those continually.

4. Following your competitors' lead

Model (not copy) what has worked for your competitors in a campaign, an advertisement or marketing strategy but only if you know it has produced results. It would be unwise to follow them down an expensive path if it produced no visible, viable results!

5. Not knowing your customers

Forget trying to sell to everyone - only a tiny percentage of the population will want your product or service and you need to identify who they are. You need to find a way of appealing to the people who are most likely to buy from you. Know their needs, desires, wants, and problems so that your marketing message can appeal to them directly. The result: you'll increase your sales, save money and time. Why do they need your product or service? What are their problems and how will your product solve them? Why would they buy from your company? What is it about your product or service that would appeal to them? How do you reach them on a consistent basis? Where can you reach them? What drives them - price, quality, prestige, etc. and does your product or service meet their criteria? This is crucial - if, for example, your product is a high-end, labour-intensive beautifully crafted product and your potential customers want lots of 'cheap and cheerful' easily replaceable products, you are just not going to sell enough to sustain your business.

6. Making your niche too small

It's a mistake to make your niche too focussed unless the price of your product or service is so high that it doesn't matter if only one or two customers buy from you a year. If your market is so small that only a handful of potential customers qualify, you need to rethink your product offering or choose two or three niches and market effectively to each (with different approaches - websites, newsletters, logos, etc).

7. Trying to sell to the wrong audience

Even if your product suits the needs and wants of a particular segment, it's pointless pursuing that market if no one in it can comfortably afford to purchase your product or service, particularly if you're hoping to create repeat business.

8. No marketing once sales kick in

Marketing is most effective when it's done consistently. Don't make the mistake many business owners make of abandoning marketing once it begins to bring in sales. If you can't cope, bring in more staff to handle the sales and provide excellent customer service while you continue to focus on lead generation and conversion. Consider outsourcing the areas of the business that focus purely on administration so that you can work on what you do best: promoting and selling your product or service but always, always be aware of what is going on in the lifeblood of your business: your accounts department!

9. Not following up on leads in a systematic way

Think of the cost of generating leads and how that will be utterly wasted unless you have a systematic process for follow-up. You must keep marketing to the people who have expressed an interest in what you sell. Remember, even if they don't buy today, they might buy tomorrow, next month, next year or in three or more years' time. Don't give up on them! Remember too that while they might not buy immediately, they might refer someone who will buy from you. Don't let that opportunity slip through your fingers - keep your product or service in their awareness by constant (and valuable) contact!

10. Ignoring existing customers to pursue new ones

Think of the expense of converting a prospect into a client and then ask yourself, why would you ignore your existing customers - people who have already demonstrated they like what you sell - in favour of chasing prospects? It's far cheaper to look after your existing customers and to work on retaining their loyalty and up-selling your products to them than it is to continually chase new prospects.

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How To Create Emails That Get Opened And Read

Email is still one of the cheapest and yet most effective marketing tools that you can use to communicate directly with your prospective, existing and past clients. You can respond immediately to their request for information, you can contact old clients, communicate with your existing clients, distribute press releases, and send invitations to prospects to visit your website, and alert prospects and clients alike about new products or services, sales, discounts, seminars, special events, and boot camps, etc.

However, the low cost-high returns and convenience of email marketing means that many other businesses are using it for the same reason. The result: your prospects' and customers' inboxes get clogged up and all but a few messages are deleted without being read.

Your challenge therefore is to create email messages that stand out amid the clutter of those crowded email boxes and that get opened, read and acted upon. What's a typical open rate? A marketing professionals survey recently showed an industry open rate average of less than 20%, and many marketers report that open rates are declining. B2B open rates, however, are in the 37% rate with many B2B marketers reporting rates of 30% or higher.

Increase your Open Rate

If people don't even open your emails, you'll never accomplish your goal, whether that goal is to stimulate a conversation, to educate, to create brand awareness, to sell, to invite or to complain, according to Opt-In News.

What is an open rate and how is it calculated? An open rate is intended to show the number (percentage) of people who actually opened your email and looked at it. If it isn't opened, it will never be read.

You know you'll never get 100% of recipients to open your emails. However, you can monitor from one email campaign to the next whether there's a difference in open rates. If it rises, you know you've got things right. If it falls, you know there's a problem.

The calculations for open rates varies: some systems might use the number of emails opened divided by the number of emails sent, or the

number of emails opened divided by the number of emails received. Whatever system you use, stick with it. That way you'll get an idea of changes in open rates over time.

What Influences Your Open Rate?

Many things can affect your open rate, things you may not be able to control.

1. **The source of your list:** Rented lists tend to have lower open rates than house lists, but a house list that has not been used in a while will have a lower open rate than an active one.
2. **Your audience:** A recent user survey showed that business-to-business (B2B) email campaigns generate higher open rates than business-to-consumer (B2C) campaigns.
3. **Your email format:** As a rule, email delivery systems can only track open rates on HTML emails. People who get your email in plain-text format for whatever reason - because you send only a text version, or they requested text only, or they have an email client that cannot read HTML - will not be counted in your open rate calculation, but may, in fact, have opened your email.
4. **The email client used by your readers:** When your email is viewed in the preview pane of a client like Microsoft Outlook (the most popular email client today), it will be counted as an open. The recipient does not actually need to click to enlarge the email, and it doesn't matter how long your email stays in that preview pane. (This may be why B2B marketers get higher open rates - their readers are more likely to use Outlook.) If your readers use a Web-based email reader like Hotmail, they usually have to click on the 'from' field or subject line to open the email. This is counted as an open and is probably easier to justify as a "true" open.
5. **Your recognition factor:** The 'from' field is the most important factor motivating consumers to open emails. People are more likely to open an email from a sender they recognise.

How To Improve Your Open Rate

There are things you do have control over that can help you increase your open rate: the 'from' field, the subject line, and the timing.

1. Customise your 'from' field for maximum recognition

Take advantage of the customisable 'from' field in most email delivery systems and make it work for you. Here are some tips:

- a. **Got a brand? Use it.** Will the recipient recognise the name in the 'from' field? It may be the only name they see in their inbox, so don't send your newsletter from sales@mycompany.com. If you work for a company with a great brand name, consider using the company

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name to leverage that brand. If your readers are people with whom you have a more personal relationship, consider using a person's name.

- b. Keep the 'from' field the same over time. If you're just starting out, your open rates may be low because you're unknown. As you develop email relationships, keep the 'from' name the same over time so you can benefit from the brand you've built thus far. This should improve your open rate.
- c. Know what's happening in the spam world. Right now a lot of spam comes from female names - usually just a first name, no last name. People often delete email from unknown women more quickly than any other mail.
- d. Customise the 'from' address, not just the name. While most email delivery systems will let you customise the 'from' field, some email clients (like AOL) display only the actual email address from which the campaign was sent, not the name. Use your 'from' name in the email address as well - some email marketing software will do this for you automatically.

2. Personalise Your Emails

Organisations that use email personalisation techniques achieve 57% higher average order values than those who send generic emails to everyone on their mailing list, according to a study carried out by research company The Aberdeen Group. These personalised emails incorporate customer profile information, segmentation or demographic behaviour, channel behaviour, purchase history, personalised product or service recommendations, online activity and other attributes from customer databases.

The study, 'Email Marketing: Get Personal With Your Customers', revealed companies that personalise email messages are more than twice as likely to target small customer segments using data collected about customers. Campaigns that use segmentation techniques allow companies to improve customer retention rates by 5% and opt-in rates by a healthy 18%.

3. Personalise The Email Subject Line

Writing personalised subject lines (which use the name of the recipient) almost doubles the likelihood of your email being opened, according to a study carried out by marketing research company Marketing Sherpa.

Internet Marketer Derek Gehl says sending out an email with a personalised subject line is the equivalent of calling someone's name in a crowd: it has that same power to grab their attention.

"Instead of a subject line that says something like: 'I have the information you're looking for'... you could try something like this: 'Dave, I have the information you're looking for'," suggests Gehl.

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"If you wanted to take personalisation one step further, consider adding another personal detail to the subject line, like the city your customers live in (you'd need to collect that data from them, of course)," he says. "Start with a subject line that looks like this: 'Want to get out of the city this weekend?' and then make it really compelling by adding personal details: 'Janet, want to get out of Tucson this weekend?'. The great thing is that, as long as you're collecting your visitors' first names (and any other data you think is useful), there are plenty of tools out there you can use to automatically merge their names and personal details into your emails."

One survey showed that 35% of people cited the subject line as the main factor in determining whether they would open the email. It makes sense: other than the 'from' name, the subject line is often the only thing people see in their inbox.

4. Experiment with your subject line

Try different subject lines and see what works best. Some experts recommend using numbers in the subject line to increase readership and response rates.

Consider putting a common element in all your subject lines. It's another way to be recognised - not all readers start with the 'from' field, and when they are flying through their emails, deleting all the junk mail, they may delete yours accidentally if they don't see a word that's familiar.

5. Avoid 'promotional' words or phrases

"Special offer", "Free", "Limited time", "Buy now" - these are certain to get trapped by a spam filter or deleted by the reader (accidentally or not) along with all the real junk mail with those words in the subject line.

6. Keep your subject line short and snappy

Two reasons here: (1) many email clients limit the subject line to about 30 characters anyway, and (2) it's just good marketing sense to make your point in as few words as possible.

Gehl says subject lines that are less than 35 characters had HIGHER opening and click-through rates than those with subject lines longer than 35 characters.

"So keep it short and sweet! You don't need to explain in detail what the email is about in the subject line, you just need to give enough information to make people want to open the email to read more.

"And if you REALLY want to increase your open and click-through rates, make sure you put your benefit, offer, or most important element right at the beginning of the subject line.

"That way, if someone's email programme cuts off the end of the subject line (which is pretty common) you'll still get your main point across."

7. Know your readers and tune your subject line to them

Industry standards convey that most men prefer subject lines that communicate news or compelling information, while most women prefer discount offers. Leverage current market research to fine-tune your subject line.

Author and web expert Christine Rickman says your subject headers need to be interesting, compelling and concise, so that the prospect has to open the message. For example, "Web marketing tips to help you double your online business" would be better than "Frank's site update".

8. Send your email to yourself

Send an email to yourself and pretend you are one of your readers. How does it look in your inbox? Would you open it?

9. Make it easy to 'white list' your emails

Consider including a common word, perhaps your newsletter name, in square brackets [Splash] at the beginning of your subject line so readers can use a filter based on that word, or clear your emails with IT or their ISP, to avoid sending your emails into the spam bucket.

10. Be aware of timing

If you publish your email in the early hours of the morning, it will appear in your recipients' in-boxes first thing in the morning - along with possibly hundreds of other emails. If you publish too late in the day, you run the risk that your recipient will delete it in the rush to leave the office. Ask your readers what time is best for them.

Why You Should Use Telemarketing

Although it is often maligned and frequently misunderstood, telemarketing is one of the fastest growing forms of direct marketing today. It provides an opportunity to make one-to-one contact with the prospective buyer at a very low cost.

Telemarketing prices have been coming down while mailing prices have been going up. With the cost of hiring salespeople, training them, and getting them into the field, more companies will find the value in telemarketing.

Telemarketing can be used to take orders over the phone following up direct mail or direct media advertising. Products ranging from 25-pence fasteners to £10 million airplanes are sold over the phone.

What Telemarketing Can Do For You

Telemarketing can be used to:

- Expand the current customer base
- Improve the monetary amount per sale
- Improve the company's customer service image
- Provide an opportunity for follow-up sales
- Generate leads for outside salespeople
- Sell a product directly over the phone
- Provide an incoming service for people to request additional information

Most businesses will not get this aggressive in telemarketing, but more and more, small businesses are realising its potential. Here is a story that illustrates why:

A material distributor in Chicago used telemarketing to go through their 12,000 name customer list. They found out the history of these accounts and learned that key accounts made up about 2% of the list. Thirty percent of the customers were eliminated from the list because they had gone out of business or changed business. The remaining accounts were prioritised as A, B, or C accounts. The "A" group was made up of those accounts purchasing a certain amount annually.

The result? When the programme was developed to update the customer list, it resulted in sales. The owner indicated they generated a five-figure order from an account that would have otherwise remained inactive.

You can see why it's important that you get comfortable with the idea of telemarketing.

Sifting the Nuggets from the Dust — Prospect Qualifying

Telemarketing can be effective in calling from a cold list and screening those prospects that would not be interested in your product. Then only those qualified can be followed up with a mail campaign or with a phone call from an outside salesperson. You can take time to qualify the prospect as to interest level, time period for purchases of products like yours, and income and age qualifiers.

What a great way to make contact and appeal for additional sales! If only one out of 10 agree to additional products - and if your telesales team is good, it will be more than one in 10 - you can see how a telemarketing campaign can greatly increase sales.

Telemarketing with Direct Mail Follow-Up

Direct mail by itself can receive anywhere from a 3% to 5% response. When included with a telemarketing follow up however, response has been as high as 25% to 30%. Direct mail can generate incoming telemarketing calls and the operators or salespeople can contact prospects after initial literature has been sent out (the double whammy).

One of the best uses of telemarketing is for a small business that has a customer base they are working with.

Retail salespeople can be utilised during slow times to make follow-up phone calls to the priority customer base. Salespeople can be assigned certain customers (who become the personal responsibility of those salespeople). The sales team can then follow up 'their' customer contacts regularly.

Each mailing that goes out and each promotion announced presents a new telemarketing opportunity. The telemarketer follows up a direct mail piece with the following phone solicitation.

"Hi, Mrs. Wiggins, this is Susan with Four Paws Pet Food. We wanted to follow up on the mailing you just received describing our new promotion this month.

"I would like you to know that our President has authorised me to offer you an additional preferred customer discount on your dry food purchase this month. If you take advantage of our offer this week, we will subtract another 10% from the special indicated in the mailing.

"In view of this extra value for our preferred customers and their pets, I hope I can take your order now and report to the President that we've offered you a deal you couldn't refuse.

"Your business is important to us, Mrs. Wiggins. Thank you for being a preferred customer with Four Paws."

A great advantage of telemarketing is that the business owner can combine it with a direct mail test on a small scale. Prior to any direct mail test, a phone script can be developed which will test the interest in the marketplace. If there is an interest in the survey of the product offering, then a direct mail test would be warranted.

The 7 Faces of Telemarketing

Telemarketing can be morphed into a variety of forms to be an effective direct marketing tool for a wide range of business owners:

1. *Communicating With Current Customer Base*

This can be an effective use of telemarketing in following up with direct mail offers to current customers. This is a very inexpensive way to increase customer loyalty, and improve response to any offer that is mailed to the current customer base. This is part of one-on-one marketing.

2. *Retail/Wholesale Promotion*

Whenever a company wants to promote a certain product, telemarketing can be used as a great testing tool. Telemarketers can call out to current customers, as well as use lists of complementary businesses with similar customer bases to test the response. The telemarketer can be following up on ads currently being placed and used in media or a separate promotion. They simply invite people to take advantage of the opportunity by coming down to the store or company by a certain time period to receive the product.

3. *Appointment Setting*

Telemarketing can be utilised as a way to save outside direct salespeople time and energy. Individuals can be hired from the home as well as through large scale telemarketing operations. They can set up appointments for presentations and for people responding to direct mail campaigns, as well as book appointments for estimates and free consultations.

4. *Service*

Telemarketing can be a valuable way to communicate to a customer your company's emphasis on service. People love communication and when they get a telephone call letting them know about a particular service, it builds a loyalty towards you, your company and products/services.

5. *Customer Follow Up*

Not only should the telemarketer check on how the product is doing for the customers, but he/she should offer additional products maybe two

or three weeks after the initial purchase. This will not only enhance the sale, but will let that customer know that they are an important part of your company's business.

6. Marketing Surveys

A marketing survey is a very useful tool in determining demand for a product line. Especially if the product is for business, the telemarketers ought to make preliminary calls before a lot of money is spent trying to farm industrial clients that have no interest. A survey questionnaire can be developed which determines if there is demand or interest in the product.

7. Price Testing

Telemarketing is an effective and very inexpensive way to determine if the price set for your product is one that will work in a direct mail campaign. Call different segments of a list with different prices. Find out which area of the country is the most responsive or which price works best in each sector.

Ignorance Is No Excuse Under the Law

Many new laws are popping up around the country regarding the practices of telemarketers and telemarketing. Ensure that your script and your plans are in compliance.

The following help you streamline the process and improve the results you achieve with your phone campaign:

Telemarketing Scripts And Why You Should Use Them

It is recommended in all telemarketing objectives that a script be provided for the telemarketer.

There are several benefits to having a written script.

• Consistency and Accuracy

Management needs to be able to make certain that the same message is getting presented each time. It helps the telemarketer to stay on track and reduces the risk of misrepresentation. By having a written script, telemarketers are more comfortable in what they say.

They are not sidetracked by offhand remarks from customers. They are not tempted to drift into unknown and uncharted waters.

• Accountability

Each of the scripts can be used to test different offers and work with different telemarketers. When results are tallied, the scripts can be evaluated and changed to reach maximum performance.

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Making the same written script available to different telemarketers can be a powerful indicator of weak performance. The unsuccessful marketer cannot blame low sales progress on a script that is being delivered effectively by successful people.

• *Measurable Daily Activity*

By having a written script, the management can begin to determine how many sales solicitations should be made per day. They know exactly how long the script is, and this helps in determining the number of calls and sales that should occur. This brings predictability into the equation. This helps in hiring and knowing the sales results in advance.

This also helps in getting scripts and telemarketers to the point quickly and politely. Scripts mean less time per call and more calls per hour.

Scripts can be designated as closed or open. A closed script is simply one that allows for no other responses beyond "Sale" and "No Sale." A charge card order is taken or it is not.

An open script is one where there are several responses that can be recorded. This could be a response for an order, or more information, or a salesperson to call. These responses are tracked and passed on to the appropriate next caller or salesperson.

In writing a script, very similar rules apply as to a direct mail sales letter.

- There should be a clear objective as to what the phone call is designed to accomplish, and simple conversational language to convey the message.
- The language should be neither technical nor evasive, but straightforward and as honest as possible.
- Don't attempt to confuse or mislead the prospect. In preparing the script, overcome as many objections as possible, as honestly as possible. Answer routine questions and objections before they are voiced over the phone.
- Keep the telemarketing script as brief as possible, but not so brief that customers do not understand the nature of the call and the reason for the call.
- Pose questions that may be answered with "yes" or "no" rather than opening the door for the customer to ramble on in his answer.

Please Remember Courtesy Counts

Include a thank-you phrase at the close of every telephone script used.

How To Attract And Keep Customers

Customers today have an infinite number of buying possibilities literally at their fingertips - one click of a mouse button and they are on the Internet and being tempted by a global market crammed with sellers jostling to win their business - a few finger taps on a mobile phone and they can reach any company, anywhere on the planet. They are knowledgeable and sophisticated which means you have to work harder than ever to attract and keep them buying from you. This relies far more on your relationship-building rather than your selling skills. How do you capture their interest, their purchasing power, their loyalty?

By telling them your product or service is better than anyone else's?

Even if this is true, it's unlikely to be a sales clincher. Why not? Well, your product or service might not be what they want or need. You won't know of course until you stop telling them about your marvellous product or service and begin to take an avid interest in what they might want or need.

By inundating them with information and bombarding them with daily phone calls and emails?

You're not a stalker of prey - you're not a hunter and this isn't a jungle. You're not a soldier and this is not a war. You're not a baseball player or football player and this is not a sports game. It's a relationship and a long-term one at that. Banish terms like 'conquering', 'winning', 'losing', 'vanquishing', or 'dominating' and think 'mutually beneficial' relationship.

By manipulating or tricking them into buying from you?

Not wise. They might be fooled once but hell hath no fury like a consumer wronged. Read the feedback forms and forums on the Internet, and you'll know that companies no longer get away with shoddy service

or products, broken promises, poor delivery, and a lack of after-sales care. In pre-Internet days, a dissatisfied customer would on average tell 40 people about their negative experience. That was potentially crippling to any company. Today's disgruntled customer doesn't even need to call a friend/business colleague to complain - they can simply log onto the Internet and leave a scathing report about their bad experience and it will be available online possibly forever to be read by anyone who might be considering buying the same product or service. What company can really afford that kind of catastrophic publicity?

By slashing your prices so that you are the last company standing?

While it's true that customers are price-aware, probably more so today than ever before, they are not necessarily price-driven. Sure, your product or service might be the cheapest but does it deliver? Does it really solve their problem? What will you do next week when your competitors retaliate by going even lower? Can your business really afford to cut prices any further? How will you raise your prices in the future?

By preparing a one-size-fits-all list of benefits that will astound anyone who reads or hears them?

What motivates your customers to buy? Is there anything on your list of benefits that is relevant to them? If your customer wants a mobile phone that she can use to keep in contact with the office, does she really care that it comes with a camera that can capture moving images? Not as much as she'll care about speedy Internet access and the ability to read and send email messages wherever she happens to be. But you won't know that if you are too busy pushing a long list of benefits that begins with '3 GB mp3 player' and finishes with 'free ringtones'.

By dazzling them with statistics, clever PowerPoint presentations or a printed report? By talking at length about your product or service and providing a comprehensive demonstration?

This might work if the statistics are completely relevant to their problem, if the PowerPoint presentation is specifically about how your product or service will meet their actual needs or the report contains relevant information about how using your product or service will enhance their company... otherwise it's probably going to seem like a big waste of their time and patience. Unfortunately, boring someone to death really doesn't work as an effective sales strategy (although many have tried!).

By asking them tons of questions?

Only if you listen and respond to their replies. And only if the questions reveal that you have done your homework and understand

their company and its needs. If the information you ask is readily available on a website, in a company report or through newspapers, you'll be treated more like a time-waster than someone they'll want to do business with.

By giving your best-ever, well-rehearsed sales pitch?

Work out how much of their time you are taking with a sales pitch and then ask yourself, how much of what you talk about is relevant to their business and their problem? Will they perceive your appointment as an enhancement or as a cost?

By making big claims and huge promises about what your product or service can do?

In the rush to clinch the deal, it's very tempting to talk your product or service up but it's far better to under-promise and over-deliver, not the other way around - otherwise you're setting both yourself and your customer up for future heartbreak.

By jumping in with clever responses whenever they offer an objection?

Selling doesn't have to be like a boxing match with jabs and counter-jabs. It can be a conversation in which you listen more than you speak - a conversation that leads to a sale today or tomorrow and which leads to another sale and another and so on.

By demanding they pay the way you want or else?

Make it easy for your customers to pay - offer them as many alternative payment methods as you can. Some people are still reluctant to pay over the Internet - so allow them to pay over the phone or by cheque. Make their lives easy.

By leaving them alone once they've bought from you?

Do this and you're missing not only the opportunity to show them how much you really do care about the relationship (and naturally, their purchase and their on-going business with you) but also to ask for referrals and testimonials. Forget your feelings of shyness, of not wanting to be 'too pushy' and think only of your customers - they want recognition and acknowledgement: they need to know you actually care they have spent money with you.

By deciding to focus on finding new customers and assuming your existing customers will be patient?

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No one likes to feel they are being taken for granted. Customers today won't accept it - there are companies all around the world vying for their business so there is no need to accept second-rate treatment. Ensure your business has the technology and staff to cope with providing the technical support, the requests for information, the after-sales care and customer service that all customers have come to expect.

How To Get More Customers Online And Offline

Generating sales leads doesn't have to be an expensive or lengthy process. As these sales and marketing experts explain, there are plenty of rapid low or even no cost ways to get tons of potential customers, whether it's online or offline.

Business start-up consultant Doug Brown says "Lead generation doesn't have to be expensive if you don't want it to be. There are methods you can use to take your company up the ladder. Implement these ideas and you will see the difference it can make."

Direct Mail

One of the most powerful lead-generation tools around is direct mail, says copywriter Dean Rieck. "Even successful online businesses are discovering that direct mail is essential for growth, since newer marketing tactics, such as SEO, social media, and email marketing, often have limitations because of the rapidly changing rules and technical issues involved," he says. Although direct mail isn't as exciting as a viral video, it remains one of the most reliable ways to reach people either at work or at home. "Its reach is wider and deeper than any other medium's. Plus, there are few restrictions on format and no message filtering or blacklisting headaches that plague email marketing."

SuccessTrack Founder Jonathan Jay says direct mail will deliver the same message to thousands of targeted customers at the same time. "By using direct mail, you can contact many people with the same sales message. Your potential customers all read it within the same 24-hour period and react. They say, 'Okay, do I want it? Or don't I want it?' In fact, up to that point, it's the same as if you were right in front of each of those people! If they're interrupted, they can return to your letter later on. They can pass your letter onto other people - which they can't do with a sales call."

Yes, it can get pricey if you make your mailing an elaborate affair. But simple, cheaper formats can sometimes work better, according to Rieck. "That's because the purpose of a lead-generating mail is not to tell the whole story but just to say enough to get people to ask for more information."

Quick and inexpensive direct mail tools include sales letters, postcards, flyers, or invitations.

Sales Letters

"The letter is one of the simplest and most effective direct-mail tools available," says Rieck. So long as it's well-written, it is one of the very few types of advertising that people will actually read from beginning to end. To use it as a sales lead generator, it's vital that you offer readers something for free: a brochure, a sample, a demonstration, an evaluation, a report, or an information pack.

Jay says a successful direct mail letter encourages potential customers to take action immediately through the use of incentives. "You offer your readers a huge incentive to take action, to make the purchase or make the booking."

Rieck says, "There's no need to get fancy when writing your letter. Keep it simple. Identify a problem, present your solution, and offer to send your freebie. Doing so allows interested prospects to identify themselves and gives you or your salespeople a 'foot in the door'.

Your direct mail sales letter could just include a one or two page letter with a reply card. Although you can include something else with the letter, remember the point is to get people to respond, to ask for more information, not to close the sale. "Less is more," says Rieck.

Postcards

Postcards are easy to print and cheap to mail. Jonathan Jay launched a multi-million pound business with 10,000 postcards - for a cost of £145. He didn't even need to pay for postage - a joint venture publishing partner agreed to include the postcards within the pages of his magazine and then he mailed them out to his list.

Rieck says small businesses can even get postcards printed through online printers and then do the stamps and labels themselves. "Just be sure to talk to your printer first to determine the most efficient size for printing so you get the most for your money. Postcards are particularly good for generating a quick phone call or for driving people to your website."

With the limited space on a postcard, it's important to make the offer simple and direct. The website address and the phone number need to be printed in bold to ensure they stand out. "Telling people what you want them to do and how to do it is the best way to maximise response."

Flyers

Flyers are another simple and cheap form of direct mail. "Print up a flyer on ordinary paper, fold it, affix a mailing label and a stamp, and throw it in the mail," says Rieck. "This kind of guerrilla tactic is dirt cheap and can produce fantastic results for all kinds of businesses." When people's letterboxes are filled with glossy brochures and thick catalogues, a simple flyer from a local business can really stand out, he says.

Invitations

Mailing invitations to prospects is a clever way of presenting an offer in a personalised way. Whether you choose to send the invitation via a letter, postcard or flyer, you just need to begin with the words 'You are invited to...' and then provide the details of the event. "The key is to make people feel that they are special and not everyone is being invited," says Rieck. "Once they get there, your salespeople can go to work."

Follow-up

Once you've got the leads, follow-up is essential, says Jay. "Give people the information they request quickly. If you respond fast, people are impressed. You get the edge on your competitors because they probably won't send out the information quickly and they probably won't follow-up."

Rieck agrees. "No matter what direct mail tool you use to generate leads, remember to follow up quickly once you get the lead. Hot leads cool off quickly. Give your leads to the salespeople and make sure they understand what was offered so they can follow up with a phone call."

Press Releases

Business consultant Doug Brown says press releases can literally jumpstart your online business in no time. "These pieces of seemingly plain text help create a buzz around your company and products. You could choose to highlight a particular product or concept which is unique and sellable. Then proceed to centre your press release on this concept. The good thing about press releases is that they are completely free of cost and can be circulated to a large audience in a very short time. Also, since news spreads fast, people will want to know more about your website in a short time."

Affiliate marketing

If you want to see a surge in the amount of traffic to your website, consider affiliate marketing, advises Brown. "You can easily find a vast number of affiliate marketers who will be more than willing to promote your products for you. Plus, since you only pay them once a sale is made, you stand to gain."

Free Ezines & Reports

Offer your website visitors free reports or ezine subscription in return for their email addresses. "By asking users to opt-in for such downloadable material, you can greatly enhance your customer base," says Brown. Besides this, you can also improve on the traffic volumes that visit your site each day.

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Business Coach Marcia Bench says starting an email newsletter or ezine is most effective if it's sent out at least monthly - this enables you to continue to educate your current customers, potential customers, and new prospects about your business and the value you can provide them. "Remember, your customer/prospect always wants to know 'What's in it for me?' - so keep the focus of your email newsletter on solving your customer's problems. You don't want to use the whole publication as an advertisement for your business. Instead, and much more effective, would be to subtly showcase your expertise. Use case studies, client examples, occasional testimonials, and your own expertise and knowledge to make your newsletter one that people eagerly sign up for and can't wait to receive.

"The advantages of email newsletters are that they are inexpensive to produce, easy to send out, and offer a means for customers to click through to your website or sales pages if they would like more information."

Search Engine Optimization

By using high quality, strategic keywords on the site content as well as optimizing Meta tags and Title tags, you can easily attract hordes of traffic to your site, says Brown.

Pay-Per-Click

Pay-Per-Click advertising is another great way to jumpstart the volume of qualified leads entering your site. "The good thing about PPC lies in its ability to attract relevant visitors to your site," Brown says. "Since they are already partially interested in your products, you stand greater chances of improving sales conversion rates."

Free (Tele)Classes or Workshops

Offering a free "sample" or "taste" of what you can do is a great way to showcase your experience and generate interest in your business, says Bench. "A free (tele)class or (tele)workshop enables you to easily make contact with many interested prospects at one time, saving you the time and effort of arranging individual meetings. These classes or workshops can be on any topic you feel is valuable and informative to those you wish to serve.

"Use these classes as a platform for sharing your knowledge, helping build your visibility, and increasing your credibility among your target market. It's a proven psychological fact that the more people know you, the more they will like you (if they are predisposed to do so) - so the more you have contact with people, the more they will like you, and ultimately, will buy what you're offering.

"Have some way of tracking who attends and offer something valuable as a "thank you" for attending - this will activate prospects and move them further into the sales cycle. Workshops and classes are a great way to create a fast inflow of new leads into your business."

How To Overcome Objections And Sell More

No matter what product you sell or service you provide you must think about customer education.

Maybe once upon a time there was a sucker born every minute, but not anymore. Twenty-first century prospects are more educated and have more information and research available to them at their fingertips than ever before. This is in large part due to the internet's information superhighway. But it is also a result of the bright light that media commentators shine on marketing, alerting consumers to manipulative techniques.

Fear is the greatest roadblock to many purchases, especially high-ticket products or services. It is an emotion that takes many shapes:

- Fear of overpaying
- Fear of looking stupid
- Fear of buying a lemon
- Fear of not buying the best
- Fear of buying it when they really didn't need it
- Fear that they won't get the benefits that were promised
- Fear that you won't stand behind your product
- Fear that they won't be able to obtain a refund if they made a wrong choice

Joel Martin, author of *Closing The Sale: Successful Strategies That Overcome Buyer Resistance* says that sales objections are a normal part of the selling process. Many new salespeople fear and dislike them, believing they are somehow a criticism of the way they are doing their jobs. But more experienced salespeople know that most of the time objections help make the sale.

Sales trainer John Boe says top producing salespeople not only expect objections during the sales process, they anticipate and welcome them.

Objections are either an indication that the prospect is truly not interested, in which case, you save valuable time. The quicker you

get to the objections -and determine that they are valid and that you cannot overcome them with your product or service, the quicker you can move on and spend your time prospecting elsewhere. They may also be a stalling technique by the prospect because they are still unsure that they want to buy your product -or buy the product from you. In this case, you should look at the objection as an opportunity to engage the prospect -and start building rapport.

Consumer writer Debra Hahn Schofield said you're almost guaranteed to get objections if you've failed to establish need, rapport, credibility or trust. You need to qualify the buyer and determine their need and interest.

8 core objections to buying

There are eight basic objections, according to Joel Martin. He says it pays to be prepared for these eight core objections and have a response ready for all of them. He warns against trying to "wing" it - salespeople must anticipate what prospects might say and be prepared to respond. Here are the most likely objections salespeople will hear and have to deal with smoothly:

1. "I have a friend/relative in the business who can get this for me."
2. "Your company is too small/too new."
3. "I'm not interested."
4. "I'm too busy to talk now."
5. "We are overstocked and have no room for a new line."
6. "I'm satisfied with my present product."
7. "We have no demand for your product."
8. "Your price is too high/I can get it cheaper somewhere else."

8 ways to overcome objections

Fortunately, Joel Martin has also identified eight basic rules for overcoming sales objections. These apply to each of the eight core objections above.

- 1. Avoid generalities when answering objections.** The prospect has raised a specific concern and the only way to successfully remove it is to address it head on. To avoid it will only cause the objection to stick out in the prospect's mind and give them a reason not to buy. You must never leave a prospect with what he can regard as a legitimate reason for not buying.
- 2. Probe for the real reason for the objection by asking 'why' and 'what' questions.** Keep the conversation going (in a non-threatening way) so that you can find out more information.

3. Listen with sincere interest, don't interrupt, and hear the prospect out.

Interrupting a prospect will intensify the objection and cause them to become preoccupied with it. If you listen, the prospect will often reveal the real reason for not buying. They will continually volunteer new information that will help you to better understand their needs and desires. Allow yourself to hear the complete objection. Resist the temptation to anticipate what the prospect is going to say. Sometimes, after prospects hear themselves voicing the objection, they realise themselves there is no substance to it!

Sales Trainer John Boe says it's crucial when your prospect voices an objection that you treat it with respect and hear them out. *"Interrupting when you should be listening is a significant factor in the loss of trust and rapport,"* he says. *"Even though you may have heard that same objection many times, avoid the temptation to begin addressing their concerns prematurely. Before you begin your response, it is vitally important that you understand your prospect's specific concerns. Otherwise, you run the risk of shooting yourself in the foot by voicing an objection they had not even considered."*

"Pay attention to your prospect's non-verbal communication. Research indicates that 65% of all communication is non-verbal. Therefore, it is vitally important to pay attention to body language and listen for voice inflections. In addition to observing your prospect's gestures, you must also learn to be mindful of your own non-verbal signals."

- 4. Restate the objection in your own words.** Joel Martin suggests you ask *"Do I understand you to mean that...?"* This helps ensure that you understand the objection completely. It gives you an opportunity to restate the objection in a more favourable way. *"As I understand it, you feel that..."* Restating ensures that the prospect will know that you have taken an interest in, and understand, the objection. Prospects will be more inclined to listen to you when they know you have listened to them. If you have a strong response to a particular objection, consider emphasising the objection when you restate it, so you will make a greater impression when you respond to it successfully.
- 5. Never argue with the prospect.** You might be right and the prospect might be wrong. However, winning the argument (and embarrassing the prospect) ensures that you'll lose the sale. Never come right out and tell the prospect he or she is wrong.
- 6. Answer objections briefly.** Don't harp on. Use as few words as possible when answering objections, then return to your sales presentation. Dwelling too long on an objection will amplify its importance. Your answer should be just long enough to satisfy the prospect. The objection will become more significant in the prospect's mind the longer you focus on it. A wordy answer will dilute the strength of the response.

• Sales Growth •

7. **Don't guess at an answer.** If you don't know, admit it. Say: *"I'm sorry, I don't have the answer to that question, but I promise to get the information to you."* This type of honest answer can be quite disarming and evoke a positive feeling towards you!
8. **Anticipate and prevent objections before they are raised.** You will be able to anticipate certain objections that almost always come up. Make an effort to deal with them in your sales talk. This is much more positive than having them raised and answering them. To do this, you must be prepared. Make and keep a list of your most common objections. Write answers to them and address them in your sales talk. After each presentation, conduct an analysis to recall any new objections that may have been raised, and any new answers you've thought of to these objections. Always try to determine why the prospect did, or did not, buy.

The important thing to remember when you hear such sales objections is that you can overcome them with the right sales techniques - or that they are good signals that you should move on to a new prospect and not waste your time anymore. An objection is nothing more than a request for additional information. As a general rule, prospects are hesitant to commit to purchasing a product or service until they have convinced themselves they need it and that they are getting it at a fair price

John Boe says objections are a good sign and you should actually look forward to them. *"If your prospect weren't somewhat interested in your product or service, they wouldn't be asking questions."*

How To Entice Customers To Your Website

A permission-based email programme can drive traffic to your website or online store, increase sales, reinforce familiarity with your company, and build trust and loyalty. It's no wonder that internet marketing experts say email marketing can be one of the most cost-effective marketing tools in your arsenal. It costs little more than the initial purchase price of the email marketing software (don't even think about using an email programme like Outlook etc - it just won't cut it) and you'll be able to communicate in an instant with all the people on your 'list'.

First Build Your List

If you don't already have a list of customers, then now is the time to start building one. Be warned: it's not just about collecting a zillion email addresses on a crazy ad hoc basis but about very careful targeting. You need to find the names and addresses of people who are interested or could be interested in what you have to offer. And the acquisition of the email addresses is only one part of the whole. It's the beginning of what could be a very valuable relationship. Tread lightly and with care, and your relationship will blossom. Blunder in and you risk ruining the relationship after the first 'hello'.

So, building your email list entails three stages:

1. The acquisition of the email addresses (where and how you collect them)
2. How you welcome your new subscribers
3. How you behave once your subscribers have opted in (how you manage your list)

A note of caution: Before you even add any email address to your database, make sure you obtain the owner's permission. The US has a strict law CAN-SPAM to regulate commercial email... and the UK may follow suit... but even without the threat of legal action, it's plain bad manners and bad practice (and a waste of time for both of you) to add people's email addresses to your database without their permission -

they'll get fed up and spread the word that your company is intrusive. You could find yourself being reported to your server as a spammer. Bad news all around.

How To Acquire Email Addresses Online

Place a sign-up form on each page of your website. People won't always land on your home page so it's wise to put a sign-up form wherever they touchdown. Demonstrate just how valuable signing up will be for them by providing examples of the emails you'll be sending their way, along with testimonials from some of your happy customers.

Use paid search to reach higher positions in the search engines and post the link to your sign-up page prominently on the landing page.

Advertise your website address in other companies' ezines (that reach your target audience).

Entice them to take the plunge and sign up by offering free downloadable or mailed reports or future discounts that are only available for online subscribers. Make sure that you place opt-in boxes on your special reports and any registration forms. This has a major impact on conversion rates.

Optimise your website to ensure you receive a high ranking on the search engines. Optimise your newsletters to increase traffic and the number of subscribers. If you are paying for search services like Google Adwords, include your email subscription details on the landing page.

You've probably seen 'Send this ezine to a friend' buttons on the newsletters you receive. Why are they there? They help to generate leads with little effort on your part PLUS people are more likely to open messages from someone they know than someone they don't.

When someone buys your product or service, use it as an opportunity to promote your sign-up box and add a link to your opt-in page.

Make sure your email signature (and those of your employees) includes information about your email newsletter with a 'sign up now' link.

If you can write free articles for online article sites or for offline newsletters, magazines or newspapers, make sure it includes mention of your ezine and a link to your site.

How To Acquire Email Addresses Offline

When you advertise in printed publications, make sure all of your advertisements carry details of your website and an invitation to sign up for your emails.

If you employ a sales team or telesales team, encourage them to ask customers for their permission to send email offers or newsletters and obviously, to obtain the customers' email addresses.

Send letters to your customers and direct them to your website, explaining you'd like their permission to send them free reports or details of your online discounts.

When you send out press releases, make sure you include details of your website and a link to your online newsletter. In fact, include your links (and a teeny-weeny summary of the benefits of signing-up) on all your marketing material - business cards, flyers, printed advertisements, online advertisements, and customer feedback forms.

Your First Encounter

It's a sad fact that people now often view emails as a distraction... they've become accustomed to emails that promise the world which means your email has to work incredibly hard to be appealing enough to be opened and then read. How do you overcome this lethargy or suspicion? How do you make your email the one that they wait for?

It needs to be enticing... interesting..

Begin by explaining on your sign-up page the wonderful benefits your emails will bring. If you've done your research, you'll know exactly what triggers to pull, what buttons to push, to get your potential customers interested, even excited about your emails.

When you ask for their details, keep it fairly simple: ask for their email address, first name, last name and what format they prefer (HTML or text). You can add optional details like how often they want to hear from you, where they live, their interests and preferences but honestly, you don't need to know their blood types or the name of their first dog. Make it too complex and you risk making them suspicious that you're going to sell their details on to third party sources.

Make sure you include a 'thank you for subscribing' page.

Internet marketing experts recommend you send a confirmation email to validate the address you've been given (a double opt-in - an email that says "Click on this link to confirm your subscription"). It can also repeat and expand on the benefits you're offering to your subscribers.

Keeping The Relationship Fresh

Once you've received the confirmation of your subscriber's address, the real work begins. If you've promised to provide useful information, you must deliver it. If you don't, you'll receive a whole load of 'unsubscribe' notices and know that you've let your subscribers down.

If you want to change the number of times you contact your subscribers, change the content of what you send them, or rent your subscription list out to third parties, you must obtain your subscribers' permission. Don't take them for granted!

• Internet Marketing •

Be aware of sudden changes in subscription levels - if you provide an offer and it stimulates a barrage of 'unsubscribes you'll know that something is seriously wrong with your offer. [When subscribers opt out, you can even set up a query to find out why - if they're not too cross with you, and decide to take this option, take note of what they tell you... in marketing terms, this is gold! Treat it as such and change whatever needs to be changed to avoid losing more people in the future!]

If you find that there are people who've not opened your emails or responded to your offers in months, take action. Make them an offer to return to 'the fold' or to unsubscribe.

Conclusion

Email marketing a powerful marketing tool but it does take time and effort to perfect. It will seem at times like you are pushing a boulder up a mountain, so much hard work for so very little effort, but remember like any successful relationship, it's worth it!

How To Overhaul Your Website To Attract More Leads, More Sales

Ed Ravis is the UK's leading web marketing expert for small business owners looking to use the web to dramatically increase sales and maximise profits. He spoke with Jonathan Jay, SuccessTrack's Founder, about what business owners can do to ensure their websites attract more visitors, more leads, and more customers.

Jonathan Jay: *How does someone turn a website that isn't producing the results they want into one that is? What is the method for making that change?*

Ed Ravis: "You've actually used the number one secret in the question! It's what do you want your website to do? What's the primary objective of having a website? Obviously this varies from industry to industry. For example, the primary objective of an e-commerce website -like Amazon - is to get as many online sales as possible. The main purpose of a website run by a service company that perhaps sells financial services to other businesses is to generate sales leads or enquiries which can then be followed up offline by telephone or with a face to face meeting. In both cases, the companies need to look at their website with fresh eyes and say, "Is every page on this website leading visitors to accomplish our primary objective rather than just browse around."

What's the next thing a business owner can do to make their website more effective?

"Once you've defined the primary objective the next thing is to build traffic to your website. By 'traffic' I mean the people who are actually visiting your website. Statistics are absolutely crucial: if you don't know how many people visited your website in the last month or the last three months, then how do you know if the website is effective? How do you know how much money to spend driving traffic? How do you know whether to change the website if it's not working?

"You've got to know how many unique visitors - not hits - go to your website. You will then know whether your website is working or not. You'll be able to work out something called the 'conversion rate'."

What's the difference between 'hits' and 'unique visitors'?

"Let's say you've got a web page that has three graphics on it and if I go and look at it, that will register as four 'hits' because your web page is a composition of four separate elements - the three graphics and the web page itself. When I look at a web page, it is delivered to my computer in little bits. The web page logs the fact that I have 'hit' the page four times."

So does that mean if you've got one of those web pages that has four different elements to it and someone says you've had 1,000 hits, it might only be 250 unique visitors?

"Yes, or even less if you've got lots of different pages on a website because on average visitors look at three web pages on a site."

What else can a business owner do to improve the effectiveness of their website - preferably without spending any more money?

"The conversion rate is one of the most critical statistics that people should be tracking. To do that you need to know how many visitors your web pages are attracting. A great piece of free software called Google Analytics lets you install code to each page to track how many people are visiting your website.

"Let's say you're a business to business service company and you want a website simply to generate a hot sales lead or inquiry that your telesales team can then follow up. You have 100 visitors over the next seven days and if you have one inquiry then that would be a 1% conversion rate. In other words, from 100 unique visitors (not hits) you get one enquiry which means you have a 1% conversion rate. With that information, you can start to optimize your website: you can change pages and do things that you hope will improve it and then you can track whether the conversion rate actually increases over the following seven days... you could have 100 unique visitors and 10 enquiries then you've obviously made a very good change to your website and you can start to get feedback on how your website is helping your company."

What sort of changes could people make to their website?

"Find ways to capture and keep the attention and interest of their website visitors.

"One of the biggest mistakes most websites make is making the brand the star of the website. The first thing visitors see is a corporate logo that takes up two thirds of the page. It might be animated with the message 'Welcome to our website' and there might be some text saying how long they've been in business. There might be a telephone number... but at that point, the visitor has no reason to stay on the page. The website hasn't captured their interest.

"If the brand is the star of the website they will just hit the back button on the browser. In fact, tests have shown that the 'back' button is one of the most used features on a web browser.

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"When somebody lands on your website you need to keep them on the page and hold their attention. Two of the best ways to do that is to add compelling attention grabbing headlines and pictures of people's faces or some sort of relevant image (not the brand or logo).

"The speed at which the page loads is another critical factor. If the page takes quite a long time to load because there's a very large image on the page then people will click away. People have a very short attention span - you have three seconds or less to capture their attention. Make sure every page on your website loads quickly."

How do you get someone to visit your website in the first place?

"To get more traffic - a flow of people visiting your site - one of the common things people talk about is search engine optimization which is where you get your page to the top of Google. So if I go to Google and type in 'widget' and I'm a widget business owner, I would think it would be great if my website comes to the top of the Google results page. Some companies say they can guarantee your website will get top search engine ranking. I have quite a big problem with companies that promise that sort of thing - first of all Google is in charge of the results and no one can really control how to get a website at the top of Google. Secondly, it's a mistake for companies to spend all of their money changing their website or to do things to get to the top of Google.

"I understand the principles of tweaking a website and doing things like link-building where you try to beat the system and get your website to the top of Google but I don't because I know the fastest way of getting targeted qualified prospects into the front door of my business is through far more proactive measures. For example, I've run adverts in business publications that advertise a specific web page and that web page offers something like a free report and that can get thousands of people into the front end of the business.

"At the front end of your business you're trying to attract brand new customers or clients and at the back end of your business, you're selling existing customers or clients more products or services... the back end is where all the money is to be had.

"When we talk about getting traffic, we're really talking about front end marketing. There are so many ways of doing front end marketing but I would advise people to look at Google Adwords, which is where you pay Google for adverts and within 15 minutes you can get on the front end of Google. It can be expensive but that's why knowing your numbers is so important. If you know the conversion rate of your website is 3% and you pay Google Adwords money to get people onto your website, then you know that for every 100 people Google send, you'll hopefully have three brand new customers or, if you're looking for sales lead generation, then three new enquiries. So Google Adwords, advertising specific web pages in traditional magazines, print adverts, press releases for specific web pages..."

So if someone is running adverts on a regular basis, they should put their web address on the advert?

"Not the home page."

It's a specific web page that's relevant to the advert?

"Absolutely. The problem is many companies advertise the web page to get traffic to the website but if they're running adverts in five different places - maybe doing print adverts, radio, even TV - how will they know which of those different things is actually sending the most profitable and the most quantity of traffic to the website?"

So if you've got a page that's referenced on a particular advert, then you can see exactly how many people have visited that web page as a result of that advert?

"Yes. If you're trying to generate sales enquiries, you can take it a step further - I created a completely different website from my corporate website that asks for a name, email address and the code that I put underneath the web address in the advert - I say something like "Go to this website and type in this code to get your discount coupon/free report/ white paper." That way, when I advertise, I not only know how many people have responded to the advert but also which specific publications have generated the most responses. Further on in the sequence, when those people have moved to the back end of the business and are buying additional products from me, I also know the lifetime value of each specific publication."

So you've got to measure what's working and what is not working so you know where to focus. Can you tell us about blogging - is it a good way of getting traffic?

"In the past, you'd put up a website and change it every so often. People would visit your corporate website and read it and they might have responded."

"Blogging is interactive - it's almost like a community website. You get visitors on your blog and you might be talking about your products or services, making comments about the industry you work in, quoting facts or figures or talking about third party research and so on. It's really like an ongoing conversation."

"Blogs are fantastically powerful for building and increasing customer loyalty or customer retention - you're involving customers and inviting their feedback."

"It might not be for everyone - you have to have time to blog or you might want to delegate it to someone who is very good at writing and who knows your industry inside out."

What I've noticed about blogs is that Google ranks them very quickly.

"We're always being told that we've got to refresh the content of our

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websites and it's quite hard with a 'corporate website' to change that 'welcome to our website' bit at the beginning. With a blog, you can do that easily.

"The great thing I found about blog software is that it is almost always free, it's very easy to use, which means that the content is self-managed and you don't need a web designer once it's been set up for you.

"I used to phone a web designer and say, 'Could you please change the date on that piece there, could you add this, and put in a new photo' and they'd say, 'Of course we will and that will be £100 - send us the money and we'll make the changes.' But with blogging software it's designed for everyone to use so you can do all that yourself - all the instructions are there - so that means it saves you money and it gets you better ranked in the search engines. It's far more modern to have a blog website than it is to have a standard static site. And you can change it on an hourly or daily basis - you're completely in control.

"One of the best ones is WordPress - it's a superb piece of software. I should say this is something called Content Management and you can get Content Management Systems so you can edit corporate websites but with blog software you can have the best of both worlds.

"One of the best things about blogging is that it can fuse the front end marketing - the acquisition of new customers and clients with ongoing dialogue with back end customers and clients. Rather than email marketing which only goes out to people on your list, with blogging not only do your existing customers and clients get those communications but brand new customers and clients who haven't yet done business with you can go to your blog and read about the latest special offers and innovations. It's one of my favourite aspects of blogging."

The Key Elements Of Internet Marketing Success

Whether you have an existing product or service or intend to create one, successful marketing on the Internet requires that several crucial factors be in place. Get them right and your website will attract more people and increase sales. Here are the first five key elements of Internet Marketing Success.

1. Research Your Market Online

It seems obvious but it's still worth asking: do people want to buy your product or service? Research your market online with as much objectivity as you can muster... do other people besides you really want or look for your product or service on the Internet? Is your product or service sufficiently different from everything else to garner any sales? A website is an expensive luxury if no one is interested in what you are hoping to sell. Be clear about who your customers are and how you will grab their attention on the Internet. Investigate the sites they visit, where they spend and how much they spend. Find out how they search for products or services like yours (what words or phrases they use). Check out what your competitors are doing. Be aware that you may need to re-think how you present your product or service on the Internet to attract massive sales. Being realistic now will save you money, time and heartache. Create a plan for your website that incorporates what you've learnt about your market online (and includes your competition's approach!).

2. Search Engine Ranking

You need to ensure your website attracts top ranking on the major search engines and one way to do this is through 'keyword marketing'. Keywords are the exact words or phrases that Internet users type into search engines such as Google, Yahoo, or MSN to find the web pages containing the product or services and information they're looking for on the Internet. Incorporate the most popular of those relevant keywords or phrases into every aspect of your website so that when someone types in that phrase, hey presto, your website

pops up the next time someone searches for a product or service like yours! The more dominant your search engine presence, the more potential qualified clients you attract.

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Choose different variations of keywords and keyword phrases that potential visitors will use when performing a search. It's important to choose keywords that not only result in more traffic to your site but lead to conversion and sales. Keyword research is therefore vital. When someone searches for a keyword or phrase, the search engines retrieve a list of related web pages and display them in the order of most relevant to that search. In other words, the pages that best match the keyword or phrase are ranked highest on the list. Be aware that every search engine or directory has a different method for ranking webpage relevancy - and that those methods can change on a whim! It's crucial that you take a lot of time considering your keywords before you submit them. Put yourself in your customer's mind: what words would they use to find a product or service like yours? [Note: You can find the most popular search terms via sites such as GoodKeywords.com and Wordtracker.com. You can also find out from these how many times people type in those search terms each month. Don't let it put you off though - remember: it's a guide!]

Use the most popular keyword or phrase in the title of your website, your URL and in the first and last paragraph of your website. Use your keyword phrases at least three times but no more than 10 times in your text. Use the top 10 keyword terms or phrases through the rest of your copy.

Keywords are the difference that makes the difference... get them wrong and you may as well close up shop today because no one will find your website. Get them right and you can expect to have a massive increase in the number of qualified visitors to your site.

3. A Professional Looking Website

First impressions are crucial: consumers make up their minds about a website in less than three seconds - they judge it on appearance. So the design

- the presentation, the typeface, the layout, the imagery - must convey professionalism, and trustworthiness.

However, the graphics should not distract visitors from the overall purpose of the site - to sell your product or service. Keep it simple and eliminate anything that distracts from this purpose, whether that's elaborate graphics, banner ads or links to other companies' websites. Graphics will slow down the loading of your website so only keep those that are highly relevant to your product or service. Speed things up by reducing the file size of graphics on the page, specifying the dimensions of a graphics file in the HTML code, reducing the number of unnecessary graphics and cutting the number of files on the webpage (both the graphics and HTML). If your website is slow to load, they may give up and go somewhere else!

4. A Website That's Easy To Use

Keep your home page (the one that potential customers arrive at) as simple as possible. Ensure your language is understandable: use simple words and short paragraphs. Make sure you convey your core message: this product or service will solve your problem and here's how.

Make it easy for visitors to navigate through your website. Have plenty of text links or icons on every subsequent page so they can move easily between pages.

Don't be seduced into using the 'latest' graphics... unless they are proven to generate sales. Selling the product is more important than winning a 'cool Internet site' award.

5. An Easy Buying Process

Ensure the benefits of your product or service are clear in your copy. Make your copy as alluring and persuasive as possible - think seduction! If you have a long sales letter, insert 'buy now' links at the top, mid-way and at the end so those who have been persuaded can make their purchase when it happens.

Make it very simple and quick for customers to order. Provide your visitors with as many ways as possible, both online and offline, to purchase your product or service.

Top Seven Ways To Generate Traffic and Build Your List

You can have the greatest most saleable product in the world but it's all but worthless if nobody sees it. Generating online traffic (visitors) and in turn exposure for the products you've chosen to promote is a challenge. However, this guide will enable you to begin to generate targeted visitors and potential customers immediately.

1. Ezine Advertising

If you have your own list of opt-in newsletter (ezine) or mailing list subscribers, you can write an informative ad or personal endorsement letter for the product or service you're promoting (whether it's your own or an affiliate product) and blast it to your list.

Tip: You can double or even triple your results by sending out your letter several times and using a different subject line for each mailing. For example, you can send out an ad on Tuesday for a particular product and then follow up on Friday with the same ad and a subject line that simply reads: '[FirstName] did you get this?' Often, the second and third mailings can outperform the original.

If you don't have your own list of subscribers, you can pay a small fee to advertise in other people's publications.

Some ezine publishers post limits to the number of lines your solo ad can contain but nearly ALL of them will make exceptions for longer ads when you ask. Make sure to request first name personalisation in the subject line (for example, Dear [FirstName]...).

2. Website Advertising

Obviously if you have a website related to an affiliate product you're promoting, you can post an ad for that product in a prominent place on your website. You could write up a full page product ad or endorsement and link to it from a main page. You could post an attractive graphic accompanied by a catchy headline. Remember to customise the ad with your unique affiliate/referral link.

You could even create a multi-part training course (follow up course), throughout which you insert tasteful plugs for the affiliate product(s)

you're promoting. Rather than sending prospective customers directly to the affiliate site, you get them on your newsletter or mailing list and then introduce them to the affiliate product. In doing so, you potentially produce critical repeat product exposure, which can mean a much higher conversion rate for you.

Tip: This 'two-step' advertising approach is highly recommended regardless of what type of advertising method you use... whenever possible first get people onto your list and then promote to them.

3. Pay-Per-Click (PPC) Search Engine Advertising

Pay-per-click search engine advertising is one of the fastest ways to begin bringing traffic through your website URLs and affiliate/referral links. The web's premier pay-per-click search engine programme is Google Adwords. Before you list your ad, spend some time familiarising yourself with the Google Adwords programme. Take the Google Adwords tour.

There are a variety of e-books and online resources available on the topic of Google Adwords and other pay-per-click advertising services. A quick Google.com search on 'pay-per-click search engine advertising' and related keyword phrases will provide a list of such resources.

Tip: To get unlimited examples of pay-per-click ads that you can refer to as you write your own, do a Google.com search on the keywords and phrases of your choice and to the right (under the search results), you'll see a list of current Adwords ads. If you see the same ad running week after week, that's a great indication that the ad is making money. You can't copy the ads you see but you can certainly use them to help brainstorm and get ideas for your own ads.

4. Forums and Message Boards

An outstanding way to advertise your own website and your top affiliate/referral links is by participating in online message boards and forums, responding to posts and writing your own posts.

Most boards don't allow blatant advertising. However, most will allow you to include a few lines to promote whatever you wish - which can generate a great deal of exposure and click-throughs for you.

There are two main keys to message board promotion:

Key 1: Participate only in message boards that are related to whatever you wish to promote.

Tip: Ask people on the message board or forum to recommend other popular boards or forums. The question could even be your first post.

Key 2: Participate only in popular boards (in terms of visits and traffic). The more popular the board, obviously the more exposure your posts will receive. For the most part, the popularity of

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a board is common sense. If posts are up to date and numerous, chances are you've found a popular board. You can further determine board popularity (or the popularity of any site for that matter) by searching it through Alexa.com.

The more time you spend participating in the forums, the more exposure you'll receive. Certain topics and posts will generate more exposure than others. After a while you'll get a feel for what topics attract attention.

Your signature file can consist of just about anything you wish, as long as you keep it fairly brief. Study the 'sig files' of other message board posters to get a feel for how you can promote your website and affiliate links. Remember your signature file is really a mini advertisement so make it as powerful and irresistible as you can to generate those all-important click-throughs.

5. Email Signature File

In the same way that you can use a signature file to promote your favourite website and affiliate products through message boards and forums, you can use similar or the same sig files in your daily outgoing messages.

Tip: Use your email provider to create your signature file.

6. Article Submission

Write and submit short (350-500 words) applicable articles to ezine publishers (with ezines that are related to the product you're promoting) with a 6-10 line 'resource box' (including your website URL or referral link) attached to the bottom of the article. This is a win-win situation as the ezine editor receives informative content to send to their subscribers and you receive exposure in exchange. One article can go a long way using this technique.

Tip: There are a variety of other resources and directories you can submit to. Do a Google.com search on the phrase 'submit your article' for a list of options. Remember, if just a few website owners post your article (along with your resource box), it can lead to years of free traffic and click-throughs.

Important note: When offering 'reprint rights' to your articles, specify that your article must be reprinted exactly as it is.

7. Co-Registration (Pay Per Subscriber) Services

You'll need your own online newsletter - ezine - for this strategy. Utilising co-registration services is truly one of the ultimate weapons in online advertising. Capturing the contact information of your prospective customers is your initial primary objective. The money is the list - that is, your opt-in list of ezine subscribers.

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Co-registration, also known as pay-per-lead or pay-per-subscriber services offer a guaranteed way to build your opt-in list for a fee.

Using these services will not only enable you to build your opt-in list for future promotions, you can also send each new sign-up your autoresponder series (training/ follow-up) course through which you tastefully promote affiliate offers, your own offer(s), your affiliate programme, or any combination of these options.

With co-registration services, your advertising dollars work exponentially on your behalf. You're building your list while potentially advertising affiliate products, your own product, your affiliate programme, etc.

You can start slowly by purchasing a small number of subscribers. As you cultivate your list by regularly sending your subscribers free articles and information to their benefit, your list will become profitable.

As well as incorporating plugs (ads) within your follow-up email series, you can place 'top sponsor' style ads in your regular ezine issues. Once or twice a month, you can send out special solo offers (where the ad is sent alone without an article).

Tip: To learn how to run your own profitable online newsletter, subscribe to six or more online newsletters related to your area of business then study how they present their material and run ads and apply what you learn to your ezine.

10 Ways To Write Adverts That Sell

Follow the advice of the world's great advertising copywriters and watch your sales soar!

1. Target Only Those Who Can And Will Respond

Forget trying to attract the world to buy your product or service and concentrate on those who can and will respond to your offer. Know your audience and write directly to them. Make your offer as appealing and persuasive for those people as you possibly can.

2. Write To Sell Not To Impress

Put the thesaurus away. The point of your advertising copy is to increase sales and profits not to make people gasp in astonishment at your cleverness. America's top copywriter Gary Bencivenga says, 'Effective copywriting is salesmanship in print not clever wordsmithing. The more self-effacing and invisible your selling skill, the more effective you are.'

3. Sell One Thing At A Time

Don't try to sell the entire shop in your copy - offer just one product, one service or one idea. You can always tell customers about all your other fabulous products and services later.

4. Tell Your Customer What To Do

This may seem obvious but it is so often forgotten... too many advertisements do a great job of educating and persuading customers but leave out the most important bit - the part that tells the prospect what to do... so tell your customer to buy now and then lead them through the buying process.

5. Provide Compelling Reasons

Your copy must provide compelling reasons why your product is better than any others, why prospects should believe what you say is true and why they should act IMMEDIATELY.

6. Perfect Your Headline

The most crucial part of the advertisement is the headline... it's the hook that captures your customer's attention and motivates him or her to continue reading. It's the first step you take in persuading anyone to buy your product or service. The late David Ogilvy, one of the world's greatest advertising copywriters, said, 'When you've written your headline, you have spent 80 cents out of your dollar.'

A headline, according to copywriting expert Robert Bly, not only gets attention, it selects the audience, delivers a complete message and it draws the reader into the body copy.

To determine whether your headline is strong enough, use the '4-U's' formula created by copywriting expert Michael Masterton: ask yourself whether your headline is urgent, unique, ultra-specific, and useful. Rate your headline on a score of one to four for each of the four 'U's. If it scores less than a three or four on at least three 'U's (urgent, ultra-specific, useful or unique) you need to rewrite it.

7. Make It Easy To Understand

Keep your customer in mind when you write your advertising copy. Always make it personal: use the word 'you' throughout to emphasise the point that you are addressing the reader directly.

When you've finished, put the copy aside for a few hours or even a day if possible then pick it up and read it aloud. Does it still make sense? Do you stumble over phrases or words? Can you take out some long words and replace them with something shorter or snappier? (For example, instead of 'in order to' use 'to', instead of 'employ', say 'use', instead of 'facilitate' use 'help'.) Have you used any jargon or technical language that your customer will not understand? This of course depends on your target audience: if you know all of them will understand your jargon (and possibly ignore your advertisement if you don't use it, then by all means cram it in!) For example, people in the corporate and life coaching profession prefer the word 'facilitate' and dislike the connotations of the word 'help' so if you were writing copy to appeal to that audience, you'd deliberately use the word 'facilitate' wherever possible.

8. Don't Bury The Treasure

If you have a great offer, reveal it (or at least make mention of it) at the beginning... don't be too coy and make your reader wait until the end to discover your great offer because they may not bother reading that far and you'll have lost an opportunity for a sale.

9. Write Like A Thriller Writer

Keep your words, your sentences and your paragraphs short. It makes it easier for your reader to understand what you are saying and retains their interest. Think of how the authors of best-selling thrillers

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construct their chapters - each is about three pages long. The reason: they want readers to stay reading, to keep turning the pages... to retain their interest. Whatever you think of those books, they sell hundreds of thousands of copies a year. It obviously works... so don't fight it! Use what works!

Long words and jargon just get in the customer's way. Ask yourself, do you want your reader to reach for a dictionary to understand your fancy language or do you want them to grab the phone to make the order?

Break your copy up. Great chunks of copy look intimidating and even boring. If you're writing a long sales letter, break your main points up with catchy interesting sub-headings. Make liberal use of bullet points, numerals, dots and dashes - anything that makes it more visually appealing.

10. The Most Powerful Word Is 'Free'

The word 'free' is still the most powerful word that you can use in advertising. Everybody wants to get something for free. Dan Ariely, a professor of behavioural economics at Duke University discovered the word 'free' acts like a drug for many people. In his book, *Predictably Irrational*, Professor Ariely says, 'It's no secret that getting something free feels very good. Zero is an emotional hot button - a source of irrational excitement.'

Robert Bly says other powerful words or phrases include: 'how to', 'why', 'sale', 'quick', 'easy', 'bargain', 'last chance', 'guarantee', 'results', 'proven', and 'save'. Don't be put off using them just because they are so frequently used, he says, adding that they are used because they are so powerful. 'Grade your performance as a copywriter on sales generated by your copy, not on originality.'

Source:

'Two for One'... 'Free Delivery'... Hooked Yet?' by Alina Tugend, *The New York Times* (July 5, 2008) Quoted Professor Dan Ariely, author of *Predictably Irrational*.

The Advertising Experts quoted in this report:

Robert W. Bly, Michael Masterton, Herschell Gordon Lewis, the late David Ogilvy, and Gary Bencivenga.

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The Most Powerful Headlines & How To Use Them... Plus A Headline Creation Template

Headlines will do 80% of the work of any of your advertising so it's crucial you get them right. Following are the names and functions of the most common, most powerful types of headlines:

The Simple Headline

This headline is the simplest one of all. The only thing you need to do is write your #1 benefit right up front. Tell your prospects exactly what's in it for them. Simple headlines are the easiest to write because it is just your best product benefit.

- *This Amazing Secret Will Save You a Fortune on Your Taxes*
- *You Can Take Three Strokes Off Your Handicap in One Hour*
- *Lose 25 lbs in 7 Days!*

The How-To Headline

This headline is frequently used to sell information products because it gets right to the point.

- *How to Earn...*
- *How to Quickly and Easily...*
- *How To Make Money...*
- *How To Avoid Depression...*
- *How To Conquer Low Self-Esteem...*
- *How To Improve Your Reading...*
- *How To Enjoy Life...*

The Discount Headline

This headline is exactly what it sounds like... It's an announcement of a sales discount. Whenever you write a discount headline you must include the reason WHY you are offering such an awesome deal.

- *Our Buyer's Mistake Is Your Good Fortune*
- *Save 50% On New Salesman's Samples*
- *50% Savings - We have To Make Room For New Inventory*

The News Headline

Why do people read the papers? Is it for the ads? It's for the news. So, put news value in your headlines. The News Headline is best used for a brand new product or a revolutionary new system of doing things. I also like it for advertising in newspapers specifically because it has a NEWS feel to it.

- ***Announcing New Sure-fire 12-Step Secret System...***
- ***Revolutionary New Product Helps...***

Favourite News Headlines

One of my favourite newsy headlines is "Fishing Breakthrough Catches Too Many Fish - Banned in Some States." That ad ran for about three years.

Another one of my favourites is "Local Cemetery Owner Reveals How You Can Cash in on Your Own Funeral." It is a great ad and ran successfully for a long time.

The Guarantee Headline

By putting your guarantee or your offer, right up front, it can often increase your response rate dramatically.

- ***100% Guaranteed Way to Relieve Your Stress By 232% In 7 Days or Less or Your Money Back, No Questions Asked!***
- ***Earn Up To £345 Daily Before Lunch or Your Money Back, No Questions Asked!***

Testimonial Headline

Testimonial headlines work best when the comments you use are quite different from most other testimonials you see around. They're the actual words of a satisfied customer, so testimonials carry the benefit of instant rapport and increased believability with new prospects.

- ***The XYZ Company Changed My Life by...***
- ***I Was Sceptical At First, But After Just Three Weeks...***
- ***I Have Known About This For Years, I Wish I'd Acted Sooner***

Question Headline

You need to ask questions of the prospect that make him or her want to read on in order to discover the ultimate answer. Questions that are of particular interest to a targeted audience are even more involving for those readers to whom the message is directed. The purpose is to get the reader to quickly assess his situation or to start to think about his current condition.

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Involve them and they'll be drawn inside (If you build it...they will come)

- *Would you like to...?*
- *Do you know how to...?*
- *Are you sick and tired of...?*

I recommend you try using this type of headline in your ads. It can work wonders, but ONLY if you know exactly what your prospects are thinking. Be brave. Be bold. Give it a try!

Problem & Solution Headline (aka the “Scary” Headline)

This type of headline can be EXTREMELY powerful, and just as tricky. You use it to shake your prospects out of their comfort zone and make them feel the pain of their situation. Then... you give them your answer. (Clever you.)

Sometimes people refer to these types of headlines as negative headlines, but whatever you want to call them, they work. FEAR is the most powerful motivation you can use, if you use it correctly.

Fear often has to do with the loss of:

- *Sex appeal • Friends • Youth • Money • Health • Jobs • Status*
- *Family • Home*

Beyond these common fears, your targeted market might even have other specific fears to work on. (Teens worry about peer acceptance, for example.)

If your product or service is designed to meet your prospects' needs, then you will sometimes have to jar them out of their complacency by using fear as a motivator. Open the eyes of your prospects to their painful situation. Then, show them how easy it is to receive the answer they need to solve their problem(s).

- *What Would Happen If Your Home Was Invaded? If You Own an ARF Security System, It Never Will*
- *I Never Thought This Would Happen to Me But Because Of Helping Hands Food Programme, My Family And I Will Be Fine*
- *What Would Happen To You If You Lost Your Job Today? Let Fidelity Insurance Give You The Security You Need*
- *Don't Let A Migraine Keep You Down! Call Dr. Doktor To Eliminate Your Pain Forever*

If you understand your prospects, there isn't a more powerful type of headline than the problem-solving headline. Put a sense of urgency in your problem-solving headline.

Use words like *now, finally, and, at last.*

Ultimate Headline Creator: Simply Fill In The Blanks To A Great Headline

Here is a fill-in-the-blank formula that will get you on your way to writing fantastic headlines. This formula is amazingly simple to use. Just take any or all of the samples provided and adapt them for your own use.

Fill in the blanks with appropriate descriptions, expressions, action words or benefits that apply to you.

Examples are provided immediately following each headline format.

HOW TO (BLANK)

How To (get, have, acquire, own, profit from, etc.) The (biggest benefit your product delivers)

Examples:

- ***How To Solve All Your Money Problems Forever!***
- ***How To Make £87,000 Per Year As A Magazine Writer!***
- ***How To Easily Get All The Credit You Could Ever Want!***
- ***How To Increase Your Profits In Any Economic Climate!***

SECRETS OF (BLANK)

The Secrets Of (the ultimate benefit your product delivers)

Examples:

- ***The Secrets Of Living In Style Without Any Money Worries!***
- ***The Success Secrets Of The Most Prolific Magazine Writer***
- ***The Secret To Getting All The Credit You Ever Wanted Even If You've Been Bankrupt!***

With your "ultimate benefit" you can plug in other possible formats as well. Fill in the blank spaces below with your biggest benefit.

- ***The Complete Programme For...***
- ***The Complete Guide To...***
- ***The Quick And Easy Way To (do something) For Fun And Profit.***

STACKED BENEFITS

How To Get (Benefit #1), (Benefit #2), And (Benefit #3)... In Just (actual time period required) Guaranteed Or (your money back, double your money back, it's free, etc.)

Examples:

- ***How To Grow Your Business, Gain More Free Time And Profit Like Never Before After Just 3 Easy Sessions—Guaranteed!***

The Stacked Benefits format can be adapted to suit any application you have in mind. Not all components are absolutely necessary. For example, you may have two benefits instead of three as used in this example. Or

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perhaps the time factor doesn't really apply, or the guarantee doesn't fit. Adapt the message as you like to suit you and the application.

PROBLEM/SOLUTION

No More (major pain or anxiety). Here's A (quick & easy, remarkably simple, little-known, etc.) Way To (achieve the ultimate benefit)

Examples:

- ***No More Nervousness! No More Fear! Learn The Tricks Pros Use To Speak With Ease To Any Size Of Audience!***
- ***No More Lost Sales! Here's An Automatic System For Timely Follow-Up With Every Prospect!***

HOW TO/GUARANTEED...

How To (get the ultimate benefit) Quickly & Easily 100% Guaranteed!

Examples:

- ***How To Comfortably Write Your Own Book In 2 Weeks Or Less - 100% Guaranteed!***
- ***How To Save An Extra 20% On Every Book You Order Automatically - 100% Guaranteed!***

This format can also be used with an implied "how to".

GET BENEFIT FAST, REGARDLESS...

(Have, Get, Be, Enjoy, etc.) the (benefit) in (specific time period) Guaranteed, No Matter What (your age, condition, bank account, skill level, etc.)

Examples:

- ***Get Fit In Record Time Guaranteed, No Matter How Out Of Shape YOU Are!***
- ***Speak Fluent French In 28 Days 100% Guaranteed - Even If You've Never Taken A Single Foreign Language Class In Your Life!***

SOLVE A PROBLEM...

(Beat, Overcome, Laugh at, Master, etc.) A (major problem or anxiety) With This Little-Known (secret, solution, remedy, cure, etc.) From (some unusually simple or mysteriously exotic source)

Examples:

- ***Eliminate Your Money Worries Forever With The Simple 3-Step Formula Developed By A Desperate, Nearly Evicted, Housewife***
- ***Overcome Any Fear Almost Instantly With This New 2-Minute Technique Revealed By A World-Famous Speaker***

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VISUALISE IT...

Imagine... You're (someone with a "dream" i.e., famous artist, millionaire entrepreneur, skilled, in-demand computer technician, etc).

- **Imagine... You, A Millionaire Real Estate Investor!**
- **Imagine... You On Top Of The Best-Seller List!**

WAYS TO/REASONS WHY...

(Specific number) Ways To (dramatise the big benefit)

Examples:

- **Take The Bite Out Of The Coming Tax Increase**
- **Knock The Socks Off Inflation, Make More Money From Home With Your Own Internet Business**

(Specific number of) Reasons Why You Should (major warning or stacked benefit)

- **9 Reasons Why You Should Immediately Be Concerned About The Quality Of The Water Flowing Through Your Taps**
- **47 Reasons Why It Not Only Saves You Money To Use Our Advertising Services, But It Actually Puts More Cash In Your Pocket – 100% Guaranteed!**

PROBLEM SOLVER...

(State the prospect's problem as a question). Here's a (proven, time-tested, 100% safe, guaranteed) Way To (get the ultimate benefit)

- **Stressed Out Every Month By Nagging Bills? Here's a 100%-Guaranteed Way To Live A Worry-Free Life And Enjoy All Those Things You Thought You Never Could Afford!**
- **Finding It Impossible To Keep Off Those Extra Pounds? Now You Can Stay In Great Shape And Still Enjoy All Those Foods YOU Really Love!**

IF...THEN

If You're (describe the prospect's want or need) We Offer (Benefit #1), (Benefit #2), (Benefit #3)... AND... (Bonus Benefit)

- **If Your Car's A Wreck And You're Thinking About Another Used Vehicle, This Free Report Will Show You A Guaranteed Way To Get The Best Price And How To Avoid Getting Stuck With A Lemon!**
- **If You're Looking For One Convenient Source For All Your Business Needs, We Offer A Huge Selection Of Office Supplies, A Fully-Equipped Print Shop – Even A Postal Outlet Right On The Premises... Plus, Ridiculously Low Everyday Prices.**

How to Get More Referrals

You may love or loathe asking for referrals but they are the best form of advertising for your company. Think about it: the customer who comes via a referral is already convinced of the value of your product or service

- someone else has done all the hard work of educating, persuading and recommending. It's the best form of advertising possible and all at a very low or no cost to you.

So how do you get more referrals?

Word-of-mouth

Deliver an outstanding service or product so that customers want to recommend you to others. When they do that, thank them for the recommendation - people like to be acknowledged. It doesn't have to be an extravagant gesture: a simple phone call or personal note to acknowledge what they have done will have enormous impact. If you have the budget for bigger rewards, then by all means offer something more.

Offer A Guarantee

Allay the fears of any potential clients by offering a satisfaction guaranteed claim. Let your clients know that you offer this guarantee so that they are more likely to take the risk to recommend you to their clients.

Ask For Referrals

Timing is everything: ask the customer at the point of delivery when they are feeling most euphoric about your product or service. 'Is there someone you know who also has [the problem your product or service is resolving]?'

Ask In Writing

Expand your referral process: at the end of your printed material, emails and website say, 'We appreciate referrals' to remind your customers that you like referred business.

Send Referral Letters

Write to your clients and ask them to refer a new customer to you. In the letter, tell your customer that you consider them to be one of your best clients and that you would like to find other quality clients just

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like them. Strengthen the letter by offering the customer bonuses or incentives for their referrals.

Create A Referral Form

Design a referral form and include it in your mail outs, with your newsletter, ezine, and post it on your website. Since people are often unsure whether their contacts will find your product or service useful or relevant help them by asking questions that relate to the benefits your product or service provides (for example, 'Who do you know who would benefit from...?' or 'Who do you know who needs help with [the problem your product or service is resolving]?')

Offer an incentive for returning the form. Reward the people who do return the form with a discount on their next order of your product or service.

Reward Customers For Referrals

People lay their reputation on the line when they recommend a product or service. Reward them for doing it. Offer incentives for referrals that turn into business. Rewards can range from a free estimate, sample, or consultation to a discount on future purchases to extra goods or services at no additional cost.

Note: Do your sums before you begin a reward system. Don't pay beyond what the referral is worth - experts suggest a reward worth no more than 15% of a project's revenue.

Offer A 'Finder's Fee'

If your budget can take it, offer customers or other businesses a 'finder's fee' for the referrals they send. Offer a set fee or a percentage off their next purchase from you when that referral becomes a paying customer.

Offer Discounts for Referrals

If you can afford it, offer discounts on future purchases to those who refer your company to others. For example, offer the referring customer 10% off the next job order if they refer someone to you and that individual uses your services. Offering discounts is a great incentive for many to refer companies to potential clients.

Swap Referrals

Set up a system to swap referrals with businesses you deal with. Offer to send referrals to them and vice versa. Concentrate on businesses whose clients are likely to need your service or whose service your clients might need. Establish a way of tracking the referrals you send and receive. Give leads in return. It's one of the best ways to get referrals. Kick-start the process by providing referrals to other businesses and customers. Only recommend businesses that you know will deliver a quality product or service - your reputation is on the line too!

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Swap Referrals With Rivals

Pass along jobs or contracts your company can't handle to your competitors and ask them to do the same.

Remind Your Suppliers

Ask your suppliers for referrals. Send out brochures or samples of your work to your suppliers and remind them that when your business prospers, so does theirs.

Bring-A-Friend Event

Invite your best clients to an event at your premises (or a nearby venue), and ask each of them to bring a friend along. On the invitation, include a list of the type of clients you help which will help them to know who to choose to bring along.

Use Your Website As A Referral Tool

On your website, have a 'click here to earn cash' button which takes customers through to a page that explains how their referrals will earn them cash rewards. Use 'invite your friends' or 'send article to your friends' buttons on your website. Have an automated email referral system that your customers can use to email to their friends. The emails will come from your customers not you so are more likely to be opened and less likely to be regarded as spam mail.

Start An Affiliate Programme

An online affiliate programme means you pay others a set fee for their referrals.

Query Customers Who Pass

Find out why potential customers passed up the opportunity to do business with you. Even if they don't want your product or service, they may know others who will so do ask them for referrals.

Train All Your Employees

Train your staff in the value of referrals and how to get them. Offer bonuses and rewards for those who generate new ways of getting referrals.

Track Referrals

Keep track of where and how you are getting successful customer referrals. By tracking referrals, you will know what works and what doesn't work. Target your top performing customers, the ones who make the most referrals, and reward them lavishly. Find out why and how they make their referrals. Use the information to increase referrals from other customers.

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How To Profit From Social Networking Sites

To really profit from social networking sites, you must optimise your website not just for search engine rankings but for high visibility on social media sites too.

Implement changes to optimise your website so that it:

- Is more easily linked to
- Is more highly visible in social media searches
- Is more visible in custom search engines (i.e. is more frequently included in relevant posts on blogs and podcasts)

Social Media Optimisation (SMO) should be a priority for website businesses. Many sites are "static" - meaning they are rarely updated and used simply for a storefront. That's a waste of technology and a waste of an incredible opportunity to get more eyes on you.

In SMO-ing your website, the five main rules to follow are:

1. **Increase Linkability** - To optimise a site for social media, you need to increase the linkability of the content. One way is to add a blog. There are, however, many other strategies such as creating white papers and thought pieces, or even simply aggregating content that exists elsewhere into a useful format.
2. **Make It Easy To Tag and Bookmark** - Content features like quick buttons are one way to make the process of tagging pages easier. Make sure that all pages include a list of relevant tags and look for places to insert a link (which comes up automatically when you go to tag a site).
3. **Give Rewards For Inbound Links** - Inbound links are paramount to rising in search results and overall rankings. They're also a barometer for the success of a blog (as well as a website). Similarly, listing recent linking blogs on your site provides the reward of visibility for those who link to you.
4. **Put Your Content on the Road** - SMO is not just about making changes to a site. When you have content that is portable (such as PDFs, video files and audio files), you should submit them to relevant sites which will help your content to travel further, and ultimately drive links back to your site.

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5. **Be A Mashup Supporter - Share the wealth!** In the freewheeling internet world, it pays to be more open about letting others use your content. Although there is definitely copyrighted material out there, YouTube's idea of providing code to allow visitors to cut and paste so they can imbed videos from their site has fuelled their growth. Syndicating your content through RSS (Rich Site Summary) also makes it easy for others to create mash-ups that can drive traffic or augment your content.

RSS is a format for delivering regularly changing web content. Many news-related sites, weblogs and other online publishers syndicate their content as an RSS Feed to whoever wants it. That makes it a cheap, easy, and very dynamic way to reach your audience.

Blogs and RSS represent the rise of social networks and communities that are exercising great influence on the minds and purchasing decisions of consumer groups all across the internet. Your markets are now comprised of a living and vibrant community of voices that you can no longer speak to but now you must speak with. The number of sites offering RSS feeds is growing rapidly and includes big names like Yahoo News.

And no wonder. There are lots of benefits to using these tactics:

- **RSS Is Safe** - This distribution system brings content to consumers who prefer to remain anonymous and don't want to offer up their contact information to subscribe to a newsletter
- **RSS Gets Through** - Consumers opt-in to receive RSS feeds so they easily bypass spam filters, firewalls, and avoid spreading viruses
- **RSS Can Fly Solo or In A Group** - RSS content can replace your current communications campaign or be an additional channel for distributing the information you're currently sending via email, newsletter, or ezine
- **RSS Is Popular With Search Engines** - Search engines love websites that provide fresh content on a continuous basis. Adding an article feed will provide that fresh content and help improve your ranking

10 Social Marketing Tips To Bring Customers Running

1. Use Social Networks to Build Your Brand

If you have a brand that people like, chances are they will want to be your friend on these various different social networks that are out there. These days there are more and more MySpace and Facebook profiles based around businesses, podcasts and important people on the Web.

2. Make New QUALITY Friends

Find like-minded people and friends and add them to your lists via the different social networks out there. This way you are building a little network of people who are just like you and probably will enjoy

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anything you write or post about. Don't just go adding a million random people just for the sake of adding people. Find people that you think would have an interest in what you have to say.

3. Share A Lot

Use the message posting and sharing services they provide to your advantage. MySpace has the "Post a Bulletin" where you can market your goods. Facebook has the "Share a Link" function that does much of the same thing. Post teaser links (giving a little 'bit of information') and a link to go back to your own website.

4. Take Advantage of Gadgets

Some of the RSS gadgets out there can be added to places like MySpace to spread the word about yourself. One option is FeedBurner's headline animator. Another is SpringWidgets where you can put a flash powered RSS reader right on your profile.

5. Add a Link to your Forum Signature

Forums were social networking tools before social networking had a name. Adding a few links to your signature (if allowed via the forum rules) is a good way to get some links coming back into your website too.

6. Add Your RSS Feed to Facebook

On Facebook you can plug your RSS feed right into your profile. Just edit your "Notes" section and include that they should be importing from your RSS feed of choice. Word of warning: if you post 20 messages a day, you could be getting yourself into trouble.

7. Stumble Yourself on StumbleUpon (and get others to stumble you too!)

Make sure you get your most popular content and websites listed on StumbleUpon in one way or another. This is a prime source for a boat load of traffic (if your content is good).

8. Include a URL on Your Profile Picture

Create a profile icon or picture for the services you sign up for that has your URL on

it. This might sound like a cheap form of advertisements - but the more often you

can get people to see that URL, the more likely they'll give it a visit or at least have it stuck in the back of their head to use at a later time and date.

9. Add a Link Back to All of Your Various Projects

More likely than not, all of these services allow you to list at least one link back to your website or project. Take advantage of that. Make

• Tactics and Strategies •

sure you include your links and give them descriptions as well so that people know what they are clicking to.

10. Don't Forget Your Subscription Links

When you include your link to your website on one of the social networks out there, make sure that you list your RSS feed as well. You might put that little orange icon next to each link so people know how to subscribe to your content. You might also include the "Add to Google" or "Add to My Yahoo" type subscription buttons as well to make it easier for people who look at your link to subscribe via their subscription method of choice.

The Secrets Of Successful Networking

Although he's spoken in front of large crowds around the world and faced classes of students, copywriter Bob Bly admits he loathes networking so much he sends someone else to do the job for him.

"I'm only comfortable if I'm giving the seminar. I'm horribly uncomfortable if I'm in the same large group when I'm not the speaker. I can't mingle. In the cocktail hour, I'm just awkwardly outside the circles of conversation. I'm not good at it. When you're the speaker it's easy to network because everyone is focusing on you - you step down from doing the speech and they come to you. It eliminates the need to walk up to a bunch of strangers."

Bly is not alone: many businesspeople find networking a daunting prospect. Yes, it's great for making new contacts and starting to build relationships and promoting your business but it's still scary! How can you feel the fear and do it anyway? Use the secrets revealed by networking experts... people like entrepreneur Christine Comaford-Lynch who says one way to overcome your fear of networking events is to practice striking up conversations with strangers.

"Build your networking momentum," she suggests. "Talk to people all the time, in line at the shop, at the salon, on an airplane. I've met amazing mentors, started businesses and made new friends simply by striking up a conversation. Not sure how to start? Offer a compliment. There's always something attractive or admirable to notice about a stranger. Be sincere about it."

Entrepreneur Josh Bradley agrees. "Perhaps the biggest part of networking is convincing yourself to be social and not just a wallflower."

Put your fear of meeting new people in perspective, suggests author Nigel Risner. "When was the last time you heard of someone being attacked in a networking event?" He makes the point that if you want to expand your business you need to make new contacts and you can do that through networking.

According to the experts, successful networking has a lot to do with planning.

Before The Event

Mentally rehearse your success

Each day before the event, take a few moments to imagine yourself there. Think of it like a movie playing inside your mind. 'See' yourself looking confident, smiling and meeting lots of interesting people. 'Hear' yourself sounding confident and talking with ease. Make the mental picture as vivid as possible. If you find that you are imagining the worst, stop the 'movie' and start from the beginning. Keep doing it until you have a completely positive 'movie' in your mind.

Rehearse your 'elevator pitch'

This is what you can say about your business in the time it takes to get from the ground floor to the top floor in an elevator. It's a one sentence summary of what your business is about and how it can help your prospect. Zita Gustin, aka The Savvy Networker, says your elevator pitch should break the ice and start a conversation flowing. Would you prefer to talk to someone who says "I'm an accountant" or someone who introduces themselves with the line, "I help companies save money on tax"? Same person - different approach.

Decide on your goals for the event

What is your purpose for attending this particular event? To meet certain people? To find prospective customers? To find a resource you need? Meet a new friend? Nurture existing relationships?

Check your business cards

Ensure your business card accurately describes you and what you do. People might not remember you, but your card might be enough to get them to phone you. Print on the back of cards, and do something so they stand out. Internet marketer and author Joe Vitale hands out business cards that say "Ask me about the monkey". He knows that people will be so curious to find out about the monkey, they'll get in contact with him.

Pick the right event

If you need to meet plastics manufacturers, for example, find out where they meet and go along. Look up trade associations or check relevant trade media.

Research

Try to get hold of a list of people who will be at the event and look them up. Identify your targets so you can bring some focus to the event.

At The Event

Arrive early

If you arrive early, the group will be smaller and more manageable.

• Tactics and Strategies •

Look positive

Enter the room with a smile. No matter how nervous you feel and however much you might be quaking inside, do your best to at least appear confident. Breathe! When you meet someone, smile and offer them a firm handshake. Make lots of eye contact (but not in an unblinking scary kind of way).

People do business with people they like, says Gustin. "And you will be judged by others, like it or not, based on their first impression of you."

If you have a smile on your face, you will be perceived as approachable, enthusiastic, and friendly. (And you'll feel a whole lot better, too!)

Work the room

Make sure you mingle. It's too easy to stay talking with friends or colleagues but make the effort to meet new people. Move around. Spend no more than 5-6 minutes talking with any one person.

Ask your host to introduce you to people that you want to meet, or to get you started in a group where you know no one. If they have a Greeting Committee or Ambassadors, find out who they are and ask for help with introductions. Reach out to people standing by themselves, introduce people to each other.

When you meet a person, shake hands, and repeat their name. This not only helps you remember it, but it shows that you're making an effort to hear the name properly. Gustin says don't ignore people you recognise if you've forgotten their name. "Smile and ask a provocative question like 'What is the most exciting thing that's happened to you since we met?', 'What is your biggest recent success?' or 'What are you most looking forward to?' And never feel afraid to say, 'The last time we met, we had such a great conversation. Will you remind me what your name is?'"

Wear a nametag that is easy to read and is descriptive of you. Wear it on your right shoulder so that people can easily see it when they shake your hand.

Listen

Listen more than you talk. Remember that there is nothing more flattering than someone who listens carefully and shows sincere interest in other people.

Ask open-ended questions

Author Stephanie Speisman recommends you ask open-ended questions. "This means questions that ask who, what, where, when, and how as opposed to those that can be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. This form of questioning opens up the discussion and shows listeners that you are interested in them."

Focus on other people

People will be far more receptive to you and the idea of using your product or service if you begin by focusing on their business. Find out what is going on in their industry and their company so that you can get a good grasp of what their needs are. This will help you to decide if your product or service can solve their particular problem or challenge or if you know of another business that would meet their needs.

When you're asked how someone can help you, have an answer ready. Be able to articulate what you are looking for and how others may help you. Too often people in conversations ask, "How may I help you?" and no immediate answer comes to mind.

No hard selling

Forget trying to 'sell' your business or using the event as a hard-sell opportunity - it's very off-putting. There's nothing worse than a pushy salesperson trying to sell you something at a networking event. Use the opportunity to sound out potential leads, not convert them. If they're interested, arrange a further meeting. If they're not interested, don't blow the contact - this person has a network of people you may never meet. They could become your best referrer.

Learn how to strike up a conversation

After a few events, you will soon learn how to move around a room and introduce yourself to new people. Study the body language of people talking - if they are facing each other and passionately debating a point, they are unlikely to welcome your intrusion. But two people making light chitchat and scanning the room are ready to meet someone new.

Keep the conversation going

The best networkers listen intently, and always have something to talk about. Read relevant media to keep up-to-date with industry news. And when a conversation is over, don't be scared to politely leave to meet others. It feels unnatural to work a room in this way, but it's what everyone is there for.

Do it often

Like any marketing, networking builds momentum over time. If someone sees you at two or three different events, they are much more likely to remember you and pass your details onto someone who needs your service. You will probably not generate business from your first networking event, so don't wait until you desperately need the work before you get out there.

After The Event

When you return home be sure to write out information on the back of the card or a sheet of paper that can be stapled to the card. This way you can maintain and build rapport for a future meeting, email or phone call.

Follow-up

Drop an email to the four or five people you meet at events. Don't blanket email everyone who was there - they won't appreciate it! It's also good to mention a detail you remember and suggest that they keep in touch with you.

Many busy business owners get caught up and forget to follow through on networking promises. Don't disappoint your new networking associates. Follow through if you want to receive good referrals from your peers.

If there's an obvious win-win connection with someone you've met at an event, call them up and invite them to lunch to explore the connection further.

When you look upon networking events and business functions as an opportunity to meet new people, do some market research, and find potential clients, it can become a joy instead of a chore. Going in with a game plan makes you feel like you can really make the most of the event.

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