

101 Tips

# 101 Tips for Marketing and Running

*Your Really Small Business*  
Including Hyperlinked Resources

by  
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# **101 Tips**

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## 101 Tips

## 101 Tips

# *Acknowledgements*

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And of course, my family have been the greatest supporters for the longest time.

Most of all, thanks to Taffy for being there.

## 101 Tips

# Introduction

**O**h sure, this is all stuff you've read before. You've tried it all and it hasn't worked for your business.

Believe me, I know all about it. Because for years, I searched for the magic key that would unlock all of the mysteries of building a successful business.

I didn't learn the real secret (that there is no secret) until I was given the opportunity to help out with the marketing and business development of a small software company in San Francisco. For the first two or three months, I floundered around, trying to get my bearings in the shifting tides of the business-to-business software industry in the mid-1990s.

I'd started several really small companies before. I'd buried three of them and made a reasonably good living at the fourth.

And what, you might ask, is a really small company? A really small company is a one or two person business that may or may not

turn into something larger.. It's a company that does less than \$2 million in sales, in my opinion.

Sound like a lot of money? If it does, you have a really small company.

The standard definition of a small company in the U.S. is one that has less than \$20 million in annual revenues. Fact is, tens of thousands of companies earn less than \$500,000 each year. That makes them really small companies. Should you feel bad about having a really small business?

No way.

I believe that really small businesses are the wave of the future. Really small businesses employ tens of millions of people in the U.S. Really small businesses provide exchange and trade in major cities, countries, and markets around the world.

### **Positive Characteristics**

Positive characteristics of a really small business are: 1) one person, primarily takes on the responsibility of driving the growth and success of the company, and 2) the focus tends to center around cash generation.

Having one chief can contribute to decisiveness, which is often in short supply in all sizes of business. Cash generation is something that far too many companies neglect at their peril.

## **Negative Characteristics**

Negative characteristics of a really small business are: 1) one person, primarily takes on the responsibility of driving the growth and success of the company, and 2) the focus tends to center around cash generation.

Having one chief places a tremendous burden on that person to make the right decisions. Many really small businesses neglect the future and industry trends at their peril.

## **Non-Marketing Tips**

That's why, in this book, you'll find a handful of tips about running your business, controlling costs, and managing employees. Despite what you might think, you can't do it all by yourself. You may not hire somebody to help you, but you may contract with outside services to provide expertise you lack. If you apply the employee tips in this book to those service providers, you'll have better luck, better communication, and a clearer grasp of your business.

For the most part, you'll find marketing tips here. In my opinion, all business is about marketing, whether you're marketing to your prospects, existing customers, your employees, or your investors.

## 101 Tips

I'm convinced that if you find four or five tips in this book to apply consistently to your business, it will be a success. You must implement those tips and follow through. If you execute those tips faithfully, I'm convinced you will see dramatic results within a matter of weeks or months.

Here's one more tip. Don't dismiss ideas you may have read or heard before. Reading or hearing ideas doesn't result in the idea taking on life. Only action on the idea can do that. Take action today, no matter how imperfectly, and you will see powerful results in the future.

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**101 Tips**  
*Introduction*

## 101 Tips

# 1.

**W**rite down your business objectives using measurable, time-limited language. Review these goals weekly on the same day, same time. An objective should be stated as something like, “Increase customers from 50 to 75 by December 31, using telesales and networking at trade shows and industry events.” That’s measurable, specific, and points to the methods you intend to use, without going into the gory details. Work out those details in your specific tactical plans, which may wind up on yellow legal pads, the backs of envelopes, or napkins.

It’s not always easy to set aside time to review your objectives every week. I encourage you to do it. Set aside the time. Close the door, unhook the phone, and review them seriously, and with real questions about how valid they are for you today and how you plan to get there.

## 2.

**D**on't necessarily hire the people you like, hire the people who can get the job done. Skimp on background checking and you'll regret it every time. Give tests to prospective employees. Check out a testing company like [www.brainbench.com](http://www.brainbench.com). Try online background checks using a service like those offered at [www.knowx.com](http://www.knowx.com). Or look in the phone book for companies who provide background checks.

This doesn't mean you should hire jerks, just because they can do the job. After all, you have to live with these people and their actions, day in and day out. But don't hire people simply because they're attractive or funny or because they remind you of your favorite uncle Louie. Unless those are requirements of the job.

## 3.

Controlling costs is at least as important as increasing revenues. As revenues increase, employees (and employers) tend to get sloppy. Just because you're bringing in business doesn't guarantee that you're making money. Look for bargains, even when you're flush.

Learn the difference between profits and cash. You can show profits and go broke, believe it or not. Learn how to create and understand a cash flow analysis.

I recommend a book called *Cash Flow Problem Solver* by Bryan E. Milling. It gives real-world examples of cash flow problems in small businesses and how to solve them.

Get advice from a [SCORE](#) counselor or a paid business advisor. Learning how to do a cash flow projection isn't rocket science, but it will change the way you think about your business. See [www.score.org](http://www.score.org).

# 4.

**L**isten to your customers. They will tell you what you need to know about how to improve your product, service, and operations. If they aren't talking, don't assume everything's fine. Go out of your way to find them and ask them how you're doing. Make sure you ask as many of them as possible. Some people hire other companies to survey customers. If you can afford it, this can simplify your task. These companies provide a statistical breakdown of responses and can help you analyze and understand the results. A good book on writing and administering surveys can do the same thing.

While it may be more work, if you are running a really small company, you may be forced to do your own surveys. Build a form on your website, or better yet, create a form that you include in an email message. Include fewer than 15 questions, make sure they are meaningful for you, and offer the

## 101 Tips

respondents a free gift for responding by a particular date.

Your survey should be a combination of multiple choice questions and essay questions. Keep the essay questions to a minimum and always include a comment section at the end of the survey.

If you must know demographic information, then collect it at the end of the survey, not at the beginning. Demographics include things like age, gender, and income level.

Make sure that you reassure your customers that you will not be sharing this information with anybody, but that it will help you improve your services or products. Include your phone number in case they want to call you to check out whether or not this is for real. Remember, there are a lot of scams on the Internet these days and many people have become wary of filling out forms or surveys.

If you want to build online forms, check out the free form code snippets at [BigNoseBird](#) or at [Matt's Script Archive](#).

## 5.

**L**isten, but don't always act on your customers' suggestions. Some customers, even good ones, simply don't have good ideas. Customers who are disappointed because they can't get your product to do something for which it wasn't intended can tell you something about your marketing materials, sales scripts, or about new product opportunities. Or maybe not. Some people just can't follow directions or always want products to perform tasks for which they aren't designed. Just make sure your product does what you say it does, and doesn't do something else.

If, however, you find that lots of customers are asking for the same things, pay attention. You could very well have a new product or service opportunity. Or, you need to institute a training program, contract with an outside company to provide support, or partner with a company who can fulfill the request.

## 6.

**P**raise is inexpensive motivation, as long as it's believable. Employees who are working hard like to know that you have their interests at heart. Help them learn to work more effectively. And give them praise when it's deserved. If it's never deserved, you need new employees. On the other hand, I just read a newsletter article by a guy who claims that he's fired assistants who can't get his sandwich order right. He claims they're no good at details. My attitude is, "Get your own \*!%&\* sandwich." Treat employees like your personal slaves and you deserve all the disrespect and lawsuits you'll get.

If you work with contractors, remember that they are not your employees. More often than not, contractors consider themselves your peers. They too must manage their time, expenses, billing, taxes, and all the other little details of business. Treat them with respect.

# 7.

**G**ive your employees a chance to help improve the business. At least in their area of responsibility, they will look for ways to save money if you encourage them to do so. You may need to educate them on how to compare costs, such as the long term costs of storing inventory versus the cost of just-in-time manufacturing. Better informed employees have a stronger sense of pride and loyalty. They'll stay longer and help contribute to the bottom line.

Contractors can also help you improve your business. Just make sure that you have appropriate contractual arrangements. If your really small company generates some form of intellectual property, make sure your contractors sign non-disclosure agreements. Also, while contractors can be of great help, keep in mind that they have specific tasks to solve and that they should not become proxies for employees. If they do, the IRS will

## 101 Tips

come after you eventually. You may be liable for employment taxes if they determine that your contractors were really employees. What makes them employees?

Some of the criteria are that they have no other customers than you, that you dictate their hours and when they come and go, and that you dictate how they must go about accomplishing the task for which you hired them.

For a complete list, check out the IRS website, [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).

## 8.

**F**inish the tasks you start. It's sometimes difficult to complete large tasks, but letting them go stale is the best way to discourage yourself. See if you can get somebody else to help you. Break the project down into smaller pieces. Is there something you can ignore for now, and still get the project finished? I find that more than 60% of the things I get caught up in doing aren't all that effective, in the long run. It's important to learn what to ignore.

If necessary, prioritize your tasks using some form of ranking system. Use letters or numbers. The two highest should be accomplished at all costs. Lower priority items should be delegated or ignored.

## 9.

Once you commit to a project, follow through. The most costly mistakes in business come from lack of execution. Not only do you lose the money you've already invested in the project, but you lose valuable time-to-market. If you find yourself with several unfinished projects, consider two possible problems: either you don't spend enough time up front analyzing the value and feasibility of your projects, or you use new projects to stimulate your adrenaline and to avoid finishing the older ones.

If you have trouble getting priorities straight, consider hiring a business coach who can work with you on specific goals. To find a coach, ask other people you know if they know of one, or check out the website at [www.CoachVilleReferral.com](http://www.CoachVilleReferral.com).

# 10.

**D**on't be afraid to cut your losses. If you determine that a project truly is doomed to failure, or that the cost far outweighs the potential, let it go and move on. The opportunity cost—that is, the cost of foregoing another project or investment—is too high when you know you've got a loser.

A friend of mine took a job as a director at a large software company where I had once worked. The project he was assigned to manage was over 2 years behind schedule. One of the first things he did was get each developer alone in his office for an interview and a review of what they had been working on for the last few months.

It turned out that the project leader of the group of 12 programmers had split off 6 of the programmers and had them writing a compiler from scratch, because the compiler group wouldn't add new features that he requested. A compiler that would do what he

## 101 Tips

wanted could be purchased at a local software store for about \$500.

Eventually, my friend recommended to management that they simply cancel the project as they had missed the market opportunity already and there was no way to catch up. The project leader had made a decision that cost the company millions in both development costs and in opportunity costs.

Earlier oversight might have solved this problem. Every month that the company had allowed this situation to continue cost them a minimum of 6 person months worth of salaries and lost opportunity.

To learn more about project management, I recommend that you read books by Tom DeMarco, such as his fine work called *PeopleWare*.

# 11.

**T**ake care of your physical and emotional health. Look away from your computer monitor at least once an hour. Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of water a day. Take a 30 minute walk to clear your head and get some exercise. Learn some yoga postures and practice them daily. You can afford the time to take care of yourself. You can't afford the time to get sick or depressed. If you're ill, you won't do your best work, you may infect others, thereby decreasing their productivity, and you may miss important opportunities. Martyrdom is not a benefit of owning your own business. Or it shouldn't be.

# 12.

**W**rite one letter a day to a customer, a vendor, an employee, a partner, or a business acquaintance. Keep it brief, but make sure you express an honest thought about your relationship with the recipient. Thank them for their help in making your business a success. Order custom thank you cards or purchase several boxes of standard versions. Hand write the letters for maximum effect. Believe it or not, it will be as good or better for your emotional well-being as it is for the recipient's.

Despite the common usage of email for business communication, I encourage you to send a real, paper thank you note. Thank you notes can make a serious difference in how your customers and vendors see you.

You never know when you might need a little extra consideration from them.

# 13.

**S**tay focused. Keep your attention on your current project or objective. It's a myth that you can multitask. Humans can only concentrate on one task at a time. You will be tempted to try other approaches, other products, other services, before you have fully exploited your current commitment.

This frequently happens during marketing campaigns. Instant results are rare. Keep on keeping on.

If the word *focus* gives you fits, then think about it differently. Instead of focusing, concentrate your efforts on accomplishing your major projects. That may mean that you concentrate on delegating the tasks to contractors or vendors, making sure that the results meet your expectations. Many entrepreneurs resist the idea of focus, yet, many are highly focused. They just think of it as something else.

# 14.

Use mind-mapping techniques to develop new ideas, new products, new ways of thinking about your business. On a whiteboard or even a sheet of paper, draw an oval. Inside the oval write a word to indicate a topic of interest. Now, without censoring your mind, begin the process of free association. What other words does the first word bring to mind? If it is an attribute or an offshoot of the first, draw a line outward from the oval and write that word above the line. If that word stimulates additional words, continue to draw branches, note the word, and continue. Draw new ovals for completely separate or large concepts. See where this takes you. You will end up with many odd and quirky offshoots, but one or more will be of use to you. Check out books by Tony Buzan, Roger von Oech, and Edward de Bono.

# 15.

If you mail a lot of materials or small products, get your mailing supplies from the U.S. Postal Service. You can order literally hundreds of mailers, boxes, envelopes, and tapes every month, for free, as long as you are using the USPS as your mailing agent. This can save you hundreds of dollars. After all, you've already paid for it with your tax dollars, so why not take advantage of the benefits.

While you're at it, make sure you get a complete package of mailing information from the Postal Service too. The USPS publishes large informative books of information about bulk mailing, direct mail design, and other topics.

Check out their website at [www.usps.gov](http://www.usps.gov).

# 16.

**W**ork on tactical plans before strategic ones. Many really small businesses waste valuable resources and energy on strategic planning before they are ready for that level of thinking. Your tactical work must be effective on a consistent basis before you can put your efforts behind strategy. Really small companies often get hung up on large-scale strategy, which becomes a great way to procrastinate. That way, you can feel that you're working on something really, really important, as your company slides farther and farther down the slope of unprofitability. Those of us who start really small businesses do so most often because we're especially good at one thing that we like doing or that we think we can make a living doing. Running a business is another thing, entirely. Most likely, unless you've tried this before, you don't know much about the business of

## 101 Tips

business. Unless you are independently wealthy, you can't afford to spend time crafting complex strategies. You need to make money and fast. Tactical plans are narrowly focused, task-oriented, and time-limited. Cut your teeth on tactics first, the strategies will become apparent as the years go by.

Most important in your arsenal is your marketing plan. This can be quite simple, really. A one or two page description of the half dozen approaches you plan to take to market your business is all it takes.

Each approach becomes the catalyst for myriad details about how to execute your approach. Perhaps you'll perform a direct mail campaign once a quarter, telephone sales three days a week, two trade shows a year, and an email newsletter once a month. Each of these tactical approaches will require a list of detailed tasks.

Create a spreadsheet listing each detail on a separate line. Make each column a milestone, at which you will have completed each subtask. Do this for each tactic. You can even use nothing more than a pad of paper, if you like.

No matter how you do it, do it. If you find you've bitten off more than you can chew, eliminate one or more of your tasks. It's as simple as that.

# 17.

**A**lways remember to take four things to tradeshow: bottled water, talcum powder, business cards, and a fishbowl or small container. Drinking bottled water will help keep you fresh and healthy in the dusty, air-conditioned conference halls and convention centers. Apply talcum powder to your body before getting dressed in the morning, to eliminate perspiration and chafing. Business cards are meant to be distributed, not hoarded. Collect business cards from everyone you meet and put them in the fishbowl, whether or not you are offering a free giveaway. A bowl full of cards invites curiosity.

Some people add mints and lunch. There are lots of other things you might want to bring: scissors, strapping tape, marking pens, FedEx or UPS forms. Bring whatever you like. Just don't forget the four items I mentioned first.

# 18.

**I**nvoke current customers to tradeshow at least two weeks in advance. Send a letter or card, then follow up with a phone call a few days before the show. You are making the trip anyway, so it's always cost-effective to meet as many of your customers as possible while you are in their locale. At the show, if you've invited customers, make sure you set aside time to speak with them without interruptions. Either get somebody to watch your booth for you or set a time to meet your customer before or after the show.

Many trade show management companies have set aside areas for exhibitors and their prospects or customers. Take advantage of these locations. Check with the management company prior to the show, to see if you need to reserve one of these spaces or if they are open to everybody.

# 19.

**S**eek out opportunities to speak at a function or to teach a class. Many of these opportunities will cost you nothing. Some may even pay your expenses or a small stipend. Speaking and teaching provide credibility by establishing you as an expert in your field. Also, these opportunities expose you to potential clients or customers. Make sure you have something to talk about that's of value to your audience. Also, don't do this if you can't follow through. Some classes take place over several weeks. Teaching can get to be a grind, especially if you're not extroverted. Make sure you can handle it before making a long-term commitment.

If you have a partner or work with other people who can add value, see if you can arrange to group teach the class or seminar. Each person tackles their specialty, which cuts down on the time required for each.

## 20.

**A**lways write a speech or presentation several weeks prior to the engagement, if possible. Ask the sponsor for details about the audience: how many men, how many women, business affiliations, educational level, and so on. After you write your presentation aimed at the target audience, cut it in half. Most inexperienced presenters give too much information and take too long. Many times you can hear these new speakers cramming fifteen minutes of information into the last 60 seconds of their speech. It's always better to have time left over for questions or to mingle among the audience.

Even experienced speakers make mistakes. I put together a presentation on cash flow projection for a trade fair. Although I practiced the presentation, it wasn't until I was giving the talk that I realized I had repeated myself three times on one topic. If I

## 101 Tips

ever do it again, I will eliminate a third of the slides and expand the question and answer period. Live and learn.

If you want to learn more about public speaking, I encourage you to contact **Toastmasters International**. You can also hire a coach who specializes in teaching public speaking. Take my word for it, you cannot learn public speaking from a book. You can only learn it by doing.

As someone who has taught classes, given more than a hundred formal presentations, and spent more hours than I want to count on a tradeshow floor giving informal presentations, practice makes perfect. Also, check out Susan RoAne's book, *How to Work a Room*.

## 21.

**P**ractice any presentation before a mirror. Just as most of us hate the sound of our own voice, the vision of ourselves in a mirror giving a talk is a humbling experience. However, if you practice your presentation at least ten times before a mirror, you will overcome your own self-criticism and you will greatly diminish your fear of speaking before a crowd. You can use the opportunity to eliminate or change unconscious tics or mannerisms you have. Remember, smile.

Don't worry about your fears. According to psychologists, public speaking is the number one fear among adults. That means that most people would rather die than speak in public. Just remember that in virtually all cases, your audience wants you to succeed. They want to like you and they will cut you a lot of slack. Just be prepared and you and the audience will be pleased with the results.

## 22.

**W**hen practicing a presentation, it is useful to exaggerate your motions and gestures. Most of us hold back our personalities when speaking in public. Although you may imagine yourself to be clownish, it is more likely that your gestures and motions will be appropriate when you actually present. If the audience is large, you need to make bigger gestures for everyone to see. I once saw Steve Martin do his act before a large audience in L.A. At one point he said, “Now here’s something I’ve worked up specially for those of you in the back row...the disappearing dime act!” It was hilarious when he did it intentionally. It won’t be so funny when you do it unintentionally.

## 23.

**W**hen dealing with conflict in the workplace, it is useful to listen carefully to all involved. Do not judge, but determine which path to take in order to eliminate or isolate the problem. Focus on how the problem is impacting process effectiveness and work on improving the process. Avoid making it personal. Sometimes, it is enough to simply get the individuals involved in a conflict in the same room together. Let them each have five minutes without interruption to explain their point-of-view. Often, the answer to the problem will become apparent. Frequently, conflicts are the result of miscommunication.

If you have a conflict with a customer or vendor, ask if you can meet with them to discuss how you can best work with one another. If it becomes apparent that you can't work together, better to know it as soon as possible.

# 24.

**A** ccept the fact that there will be conflict in the workplace, but don't accept inappropriate behavior.

Conflict is unavoidable when people are thrown together in any situation. However, most of us have never learned effective techniques for conflict resolution.

Authoritarian demands or edicts hamper the effectiveness of your employees, and generally create resistance and rebellion where none existed before. Establish rules for workplace arbitration before a conflict arises. Reinforce the rules and your conflict resolution process on a regular basis by holding practice role-playing sessions quarterly or monthly.

Check out the book *Violence in the Workplace* by Anthony Baron, et al. for intervention techniques.

## 25.

**D**eal with workplace violence immediately and without hesitation. Violence is the number one cause of workplace death in America. Know your rights when it comes to recommending or demanding counseling or arbitration for your employees. While you should avoid jumping to conclusions, there is little room for weakness in this area. I once worked in a place where one of the contract employees received a box containing live bullets from his estranged girlfriend. The owner of the company made an immediate and correct decision, in my opinion, to terminate the contract and asked the contractor to leave the premises. He also alerted the building security as to the description of the girlfriend. Overreacting? Perhaps, but with all the workplace shootings that have occurred over the last few years, it was the prudent action to take.

# 26.

**W**ander through an art museum, a garden, or some other location that is visually stimulating and different from your everyday surroundings. Look for patterns and possible ideas for your own company. You may find ideas in the way objects are organized, in the way plants grow, or how other people navigate through these places. Be observant and let your mind wander without censoring your thoughts. Make a regular habit of visiting locations that are unrelated to your business.

## 27.

**P**ut up a suggestion box only if you intend to take the suggestions seriously. This doesn't mean you need to implement each suggestion, but you should consider the motivation behind each suggestion. Perhaps the suggestion points to something you have been ignoring. If you work by yourself, go ahead and put one up anyway. You can use it as a receptacle for ideas you can't initiate immediately for one reason or another. The box will help you keep track of ideas that might otherwise fall into the wastebasket or into the recesses of your harried life. Ask friends, family, and customers to contribute to a virtual suggestion box by submitting ideas to your website or via email. While not anonymous, these can provide real value.

## 28.

**W**rite a script for your telesales or prospecting calls. Nobody can wing it successfully. Each person on the other end of the line is different and can easily sidetrack you if you're not prepared. A script helps you cover the major points of your presentation. You can always deviate from the script. Scripts also support your calling efforts. You will get tired of calling long before you should give up, but the script becomes a way of making a few extra calls without feeling personally rejected or threatened.

Check out the book *Cold Calling Techniques* or other books by Stephan Schiffman.

## 29.

**L**imit the time you spend taking calls. If you get many calls from friends or relatives, ask them not to call you at work unless it's an emergency, or ask them to call you at specific times if they just want to chat. But be prepared to chat if you arrange those kinds of calling hours. If you run into talkative salespeople, ask them to get to the point or tell them you're not interested. Your business will not prosper if you spend half of your day fending off callers. You can learn to be firm and ruthless with your time without being rude.

# 30.

**W**hen you reach a live human being on the phone, always ask if they have a specific number of minutes to spare. Don't say "Do you have some time," or "...a few minutes to spare." To many people, these are code words for "...as much time as it takes me to get you to buy something." Instead, say, "Can you give me five minutes of your time?" If they agree, use your watch, your computer clock, or some other timepiece to keep track of the time and stick to your promise. You can always say, "Well, my time is up and I know you're busy. Is there a good time to call back?" The person on the other end of the line may tell you to just go ahead, or they may tell you to call back later, or they may tell you they are not interested. In any case, they will appreciate your honesty and the next time you have something to offer, they will be more likely to trust you.

# 31.

**R**ecognize that sometimes you just don't have the key decision maker on the line. You may be speaking to a vice president of a company, but he or she may not have the power to make a purchasing decision or a partnering decision. Sometimes, especially in really small companies, these roles are not well-defined and responsibilities are fuzzy. Sometimes, an autocratic CEO will, by default, make all important decisions, even if he or she claims to delegate the responsibility. If you've spoken with the person four or five times without getting farther in the process, move on to a prospect with greater potential.

# 32.

**K**eeep administrative costs to less than 10% of total costs. Even lower would be better, especially for startups.

There's nothing that will kill a small business faster than overbuying expensive supplies and hiring unnecessary office staff.

Outsource HR, benefits, and accounting functions. Don't let yourself get talked into "investing" in supplies at a lower rate, just for the sake of getting a deal. There are always deals on many types of supplies. Conserve your cash for the most important expenses, like marketing and product development.

# 33.

**T**he clearest signal that you have a real company is when you have repeat customers. Employees, expenses, office space, and taxes do not a business make. Customers, preferably paying ones who repeatedly purchase, are what make a company. Nurture your customers, make sure they are happy, and they'll buy again. Treat them like a commodity and you'll struggle to make ends meet.

# 34.

**D**on't try to do things. Just do them. Trying implies that you are leaving yourself a way out, just in case. By undertaking a task with the idea in mind that you intend to complete that task, you will complete it. Even if you complete it in a way that is ultimately unsatisfactory, you will be ahead of where you started. You will know where you stand, and how to avoid certain mistakes. If you repeatedly say you will try to do something, it usually means your heart isn't in it. Examine the real reasons behind your reluctance to do something. If it is only that you are afraid of attempting something new, accept the fear as natural and do it anyway.

# 35.

If you have a really small company with limited resources, commit only to what you can handle. Select one or two marketing methods a month, at most. Work out the logistics and perform the tasks necessary to execute your programs fully. Only after you have completed at least one full cycle of your marketing programs—and preferably three or four cycles—should you add another or replace one of the original programs. This doesn't mean you should throw good money after bad, but if you determine that running an ad in your local paper works for other companies like yours, then run those ads consistently enough to tell if they will work for you. If you only run an ad once or twice, it won't work. If you send sales letters but neglect to follow up with a call, a visit, or some other form of contact, you will get poor results. Don't overcommit.

# 36.

**A**lways include at least 2 contact names and numbers on a press release. If an editor or reporter calls, they have a better chance of reaching someone and getting the story. Give an evening number, even though you may not like getting calls at night. If you want the publicity, it's just something you'll have to live with.

# 37.

**W**rite your press release. Do it today. What is the most important point you want to get across? Turn it into a benefit. When you've succeeded at doing that, you'll have your headline. Include a quote in the second paragraph. If the release is longer than one page, cut it down. Start removing the least important information until it all fits on one page. Make sure it's newsworthy and target media who use that kind of news. Don't blanket the release, unless it has blanket appeal to a national audience.

You can find online press release services. You can also subscribe to [BusinessWire](#) or [PRNewsWire](#) for a reasonable fee—usually less than \$200. Each of these companies offer a variety of target markets to which you can send your release.

# 38.

**L**ook in a mirror and smile at yourself before you make a phone call. Even if you don't feel like it, forcing yourself to smile for one minute, or smiling several times before the call, will give your voice the proper uplift over the phone. When we're afraid or anxious, we tend to mumble and choose phrases that are negative. Even if you resist your forced smiling exercise, you'll probably find yourself laughing, because you look so funny!

Do something to make yourself smile and your phone calls will be more successful. Think about somebody you really like. Think about a joke you heard recently. Think about a funny movie that you really liked.

## 39.

**I**n a telephone negotiation, if someone tries to intimidate you into giving up too much in order to get something you're certain they want, tell them you'll need to discuss the situation with others in your organization. Tell them you will call them back. Wait three days. By then, you will have decided what you're willing to do and you'll be more sure of yourself. And they'll be somewhat off-guard. Waiting to speak with them shifts the balance of power. Usually, they will call you back before the three days are up. Often, they'll be more flexible.

# 40.

**G**et on as many of your competitors' mailing lists as possible. You'll get tons of information about sales promotions, name changes, acquisitions, pricing, and more. You'll find out who they are partnering with. If it works for them, it will work for you. Find competitors of their partners and suggest alliances. Or try to set up an alliance with one of their own partners. It can work, believe me!

# 41.

If your competitors are public companies, search out their SEC filings on the EDGAR database ([www.sec.gov](http://www.sec.gov)). If you're really interested, buy a share of stock in competing companies. You'll get annual reports, online notices of corporate events, and can even attend annual or quarterly shareholders meetings. Read the management's notes in the Form 10-Ks and 10-Qs. These often contain valuable information about debt, extra expenses, or extraordinary situations.

## 42.

**K**eept a diary of all rumors and opinions you hear about your competitors. Note the source and the date. Ask customers and prospects if they've heard any of these rumors or opinions and what, if anything, they think about them. Do this in a non-judgemental way. If you really have guts, keep one of these diaries about your own company too. Ask your customers if they've heard any rumors about you.

# 43.

**K**eeep a file or scrapbook of news related to a competitor. Review it at least once a month. Do the same for yourself. Compare your press and their market share with yours. Who is doing better? Get the names of reporters who consistently report on your competitors this way. Call them and find out why they cover the competitor but not you.

You can find clippings in trade journals you should be subscribed to, relating to your business. If you want to get all of the clippings possible, hire a clipping service like [Bacon's](#).

# 44.

**A**fter sending a press release, follow up by telephone with the ten or twenty most influential press contacts. Have something meaningful to tell them, rather than just, we sent a press release out on the wire today. Better yet, send an email message to each contact, with a personal message. Don't send to a distribution list. Most reporters want to get press releases in email nowadays, anyway.

# 45.

**A**lways copy press release text into an email message when sending to contacts. Many companies screen out attachments, what with so many email viruses delivered via attachment. All the more reason to keep your release pithy. And don't forget to spellcheck.

# 46.

**R**ead interviews with and stories about competitors' CEOs. You can often glean important information about how a top decision-maker thinks. For instance, is she more interested in boosting presence or branding than in controlling costs? If it's a new CEO, does he come from a corporate culture that's different? If so, then he may have problems fitting in or the company may be in for a revamping. Is he an engineering type? Marketing may suffer. A marketing type? Product development or support may take a hit. Use this information to your advantage by stressing the change to your prospects.

# 47.

**S**tudy the patents held by your competitors. Do they control a critical piece of technology in your arena? Or have they piled up a number of patents in a new area? If so, this is a likely area for expansion. How will that affect your company? Will it distract the competitor from your line of business? Will it change your industry in fundamental ways? Can you use your really small size to your advantage with customers and prospects? After all, smaller companies are often more nimble and can give more personalized service.

Check out the [Delphion](#) website.

# 48.

**A**sk for referrals. Do this in all correspondence and personal contacts. When sending any types of materials, invoices, statements, or sales letters, at least include a postscript (P.S.) reminding the reader that you appreciate any referrals. If you offer any type of incentive for referrals, make it a regular habit to remind customers and prospects of the incentives.

# 49.

**I**n order of appearance on your business card, your phone number should appear before and above your fax number or mobile phone number (unless the mobile number is the most likely number at which to reach you). Artists and printers sometimes suggest rather odd item placements, in order to add visual interest to a business card. Unfortunately, it's the little annoyances that drive business away. If people keep dialing your fax number because you listed it first, you will lose business. Count on it.

# 50.

**N**etworking can be difficult for many people. Members of a long-standing organization often know each other and have built up relationships. When you are new to such an organization, it can be difficult to break through the natural cliques that have formed. When attending an event, station yourself near the entrance of the event and introduce yourself to each person that arrives. While this can be uncomfortable at first, you will soon know everybody in the group and will be seen as a visible and important member by other new people. This way, you can make it easier for other new members and you'll develop a positive reputation among all of the members.

# 51.

**M**ake an appointment to meet with at least one person you meet at each meeting or networking event. Find out more about the person and their business. Although it may be irrelevant to your particular line of work, you will initiate a relationship and thereby spread your contacts farther. If you do this once a month, you will have initiated 12 new relationships. If each of those individuals talks to 12 people about you and your business, you will have contacted a minimum of 144 new prospects.

On the other hand, don't use entertaining as an excuse for not building your business. Personally, I dislike lunch meetings because they end up costing me half of the best part of the day, with travel time. I tell people I don't do lunch. But, I also tell them I'd be happy to meet them early, before the next networking event, so we can get to know each other a little better.

# 52.

**A**sk your clients who their vendors are. Develop a network among the vendors of your clients. Sell to them, using the common connection, and ask them to provide additional referrals. Offer to refer them to other clients of yours who are similar to the client you already have in common.

# 53.

**A**lways be ready with one or more referrals for those who provide them to you. If you don't have them handy, send them to your contacts within a day or two. Better yet, arrange to introduce them to your referrals either in person or by phone. Host a referral sharing get-together once a month at a local happy hour or at somebody's office.

## 54.

**H**ave top-quality photographs of yourself, your employees, and your product taken and reproduced for a press kit. You can also use these photographs for web sites, brochures, and other purposes. Do it now, when you don't really have an urgent need and you'll be prepared when you do. Unless you are a pro, don't just use the snapshots you took at the company picnic, or while walking around the office with your new digital camera. These pictures are often inappropriate for business use, unless you want to promote an extremely casual image to your prospects.

# 55.

**G**et endorsements from customers, vendors, even competitors. Sometimes, a competitor will funnel overload work your way. Make sure you return the favor. Better yet, provide your competitor with an endorsement in return for theirs. Look for ways that you complement each other, whether it be by product differentiation, locale, market size, or other criteria. Often, your competitors only compete in one small area, and you can both benefit by being able to recognize and exploit the differences in your businesses. Sometimes, you can manage to make the case for this when the economy is slow. When the economy is good, it's not always easy to do, but it's possible.

# 56.

**T**ake action today. In other words, don't get hung up on planning. Planning is important, but far too many companies use planning as a procrastination device. It's all too human but disastrous to a company's profits. Make decisions and act on them. If they don't work out, make another decision and act on it. Continue doing this until you get where you want to go. You'll learn and improve along the way. Don't let yourself get paralyzed by the enormity of choices out there.

# 57.

**I**f you are entering a mature market, look for ways to create a new category. Although a high percentage of customers are entrenched and unwilling to change vendors, at least 15% to 25% will be open to change, based on a variety of factors, including perceived lack of value in current vendor, changes in management, shifts in their own markets. Define your offering as something different from those of the large entrenched competitors. Sell it as something unique that solves the same problems but in cheaper, faster, or more effective ways.

# 58.

**A**lways consult with your potential distributors and retailers before designing or ordering point-of-purchase displays. Make sure these partners have the space and interest in carrying your displays, and that they can accommodate the fixtures. Design the fixtures to their specifications, if possible, to develop a partnership approach to display. There's nothing worse than coming up with a counter display to find that your retailers don't want to clutter up their counters. Remember, counter space and floor space in a retail location is all accounted for as a potential cost—if it's not producing sales for the retailer, it's wasted space. On the other hand, if it crowds the aisles, a display can be a hazard or can even detract from sales.

# 59.

**I**f you sell to members of a particular industry, subscribe to their trade publications. Read the articles and look for indications of problems people in those industries are facing. Try to find ways that you can help solve some of those problems. You must be informed about your own industry and products, but your prospects and customers are more interested in their industries and how you will be able to solve their problems. The saying, “What have you done for me lately?” has real meaning for all small business owners.

# 60.

**S**tart building your publicity plan now. Publicity takes time to develop into name recognition and requires a consistent application from month to month. One big event will not likely develop the kind of long-term reputation you want, although it may get you a customer or two. Still, events are costly and a handful of new customers won't justify the cost, unless the event is part of a long-term strategy. Be sure to read Tip #16. Make sure you come up with a publicity calendar that lists, by date, when you will make certain announcements and to whom you will make those announcements.

# 61.

**P**ay attention to changing roles in the society at large. Reading current magazines and newspapers can help you develop a sense of trends, if you pay attention and are able to step back from the details. Anybody who was paying attention would have noticed big changes in the current makeup of American society: the emergence of women as a buying force, the aging of the population, the dramatic rise in the Hispanic population. These are all trends that point to changing roles and buying patterns. How can you take advantage of these new roles?

## 62.

**A**s part of your target market profile, determine the stages at which the buyers in your market will be prepared to buy. Using terminology pioneered by Geoffrey Moore in regards to technology buyers, which of your buyers are early adopters? Which are laggards? You'll need to identify the various stages, so that you can adapt your marketing messages, pricing, even packaging and distribution to the different styles of these types of buyers. If you are selling to people who are laggards, you'll need to include lots of testimonials and credible references for your product to prove the value of the product. Early adopters want something new and exciting, something that will set them apart from the crowd.

# 63.

**W**hen attempting to develop additional markets for your product, plan on losing some of your current customers. But, to avoid destroying your customer base, make sure that your promotions and messaging to the new group are well-isolated from the existing base. Continue to support the current base and offer incentives and perks to keep your existing customer base happy. Too often, companies exhibit a certain arrogance about their control over the market, only to find that their control was little more than a fantasy.

# 64.

**P**ay attention to customer and prospect complaints, concerns, and stories. Other business owners will often provide you with valuable information about what is causing their company pain, if you will only listen. Far too often, salespeople are so focused on making the sale or overcoming the next objection that they really don't listen. Solving an organization's problems starts with solving an individual's problems. Many hidden objections are buried within the folds of a story or an anecdote the prospect tells you about their company or another vendor.

# 65.

**I**f a customer or prospect tells you that there is one thing they wish you could solve for them, listen closely. When they've described the problem, don't immediately dismiss it as not relevant to your product's capabilities or purposes. Also, don't immediately assume that you must solve the problem entirely by yourself. Ask the person if they have any ideas about how your company or product might be able to solve this problem. Chances are, the person may have a vague notion. Often, it will be unworkable, but by discussing it in detail, even over the course of time, your minds will begin to search for answers. Of course, if you can solve the problem easily, then don't wait to do so.

# 66.

Sometimes, it is important for your marketing messages to speak directly to a problem or concern of the target buyer. At other times, or with other types of products and markets, it may be more important to direct your messages to problems affecting somebody other than the target buyer, an influencer of the target buyer. Toy companies often succeed at getting children to influence parents. Business products and services that will be used by one group of buyers may provide strong benefits to the buyer's management, in terms of cost and time savings. When selling to larger companies, you often have to build support among the real target users, who can then send the message upstairs to the purchasing committee. You may need to help your users craft the economic justification for purchasing your product or service.

# 67.

**T**he higher the price of a product or service, the lower an individual buyer's authority will be. In other words, if you're selling large appliances to families, you will often need to address the objections of two or more individuals in the family, unless, of course, you are selling to an unmarried person. Nonetheless, a single person may have a significant relationship that impacts their psychological freedom to decide on a large purchase by themselves. In business-to-business purchases, the higher the price or the greater the commitment required, the more likely you will be faced with a committee purchase. Prepare for all possible objections by all possible purchasers.

# 68.

**D**atabase marketing is more than simply buying a mailing list. The best database marketers take advantage of the vast amount of information they gather from both sales and lost sales. Train salespeople to ask questions. Or hire follow-up “sales engineers” to call customers to find out how the product is working out, what could be better, and if expectations were met. These employees can also follow-up with lost sales prospects to find out what went wrong during the selling process. This information can then be mined to show various trends. If, for instance, you find that prospects in a certain region are turning your salespeople away, you’ll know that something is wrong there. Is a competitor beating you to the punch? Is there something regionally distasteful or culturally offensive in the product or the sales pitch? Is the salesperson obnoxious or ineffective?

## 69.

**T**alk to middlemen to determine if there is a more economical way for you to perform some aspect of your business. Can you use manufacturer's reps, factors, or distributors to handle your selling, shipping, and collections? Will it be cheaper and easier than hiring and maintaining your own staff? Sometimes it is. Or, it may be that you're in a business that is almost entirely serviced by independent reps. The greeting card publishing business, for instance, depends almost exclusively on independent reps to sell cards to distributors and retailers. You can attempt to do the job yourself, but your success will be limited if you do not take advantage of the highly developed and universally accepted distribution network. Is your industry similar?

# 70.

**M**ake sure that you have explored and defined as many financing options as possible for your customers. You can lose many sales by expecting your customers to figure out the financing for you. For small impulse items or items under \$100 this usually isn't an issue: most purchasers have the cash or a credit card. For big ticket items, however, providing some form of financing can close sales. This is particularly true in business-to-business transactions where leasing options are often available for business equipment and other big ticket items.

# 71.

**S**end a letter or email to everybody in your address book and explain that you are trying to grow your business and would like for them to pass along a brief description of how you can solve specific problems to as many other people as they can. If you need more business, do this with your existing or former clients or customers. You'll be surprised at how many of these folks will find some kind of work for you. One caveat, however: do not abuse the kindness and loyalty of your network. If you do nothing but send these letters, you'll lose business and friends. Make sure you work on other forms of marketing first and in addition to this technique.

# 72.

**H**ire a writer to write an article about you, then have it typeset and printed to look like it actually came from a magazine. Send copies of these to prospects, with a sticky note that has a personal message like “Thought you’d find this interesting.”

# 73.

**H**ave your website professionally designed, but make sure that it is aimed at selling, if that is your goal. Only huge companies can afford to get away with “identity” sites that do little more than promote their name recognition. You should study sites that you admire and sites that appear to be generating business. Review sites of companies who you know are successful, whether they are in your field or not. You can learn a lot about web marketing from watching others. Consider successful sites, like eBay or Classmates.com. These sites serve specific niches, which is key to their success. Check out Robert Middleton’s [ActionPlan.com](http://ActionPlan.com) for a successful service business site.

# 74.

**A**lways ask permission. Recently, I bought a new piece of accounting software. I paid for the software and installed it on my computer. I was then informed that I had twenty-five uses left before I would be required to register the software. How would the company do this? They would lock my data files so that I would be unable to get to my data.

Will I buy from this company again? Not a chance. Once I've purchased the product, it's really none of your business whether I register or not. If you want me to register, make it worth my while. Coercion is bad business.

# 75.

**D**on't expect prospects to understand your product or service, just because you've got great materials. Be prepared to explain the benefits to them, with a smile. After all, what is the goal? It is to sell products or services, is it not? Then, why are so many business owners and employees so quick to act disgusted or incredulous when a prospect doesn't "get it?"

# 76.

**U**nless you're willing to take a risk, don't buy "house lists" from list brokers. These are lists the broker has put together, as opposed to those they have leased from magazines or other vendors. The house list is often partly or wholly "compiled" which means that it has no relevance to a recent purchase. It's worth the extra \$5 or \$10 a thousand to purchase a qualified "response" list.

# 77.

**L**ook for ways to co-market with other companies. If you sell children's books, contact other folks who sell children's clothes, toys, or furniture. Brainstorm ways to work together, such as swapping coupons for in-store promotions. Offer to swap product displays. Create a "children's fair" at which you display products, provide refreshments, and entertainment. Offer a raffle, from which some or all of the proceeds from go to a local children's charity or school. Be creative. Get involved with others who cater to the same market you do.

# 78.

**W**rite a book about your business or your experience. Or hire a ghostwriter to pen the book for you. Print it up or create an Adobe Acrobat PDF file of the book and offer it for sale or download on your website. Send free copies to all of your customers.

# 79.

**D**o your kids belong to clubs or athletic teams? Make sure that the other parents all know what you do and how you can help them or people they know. If your child's club has a newsletter, offer to write some of it, publish it, or provide an ad or other support. Make sure your name and company name are mentioned in the copy.

# 80.

**J**oin a service club like Rotary International, Kiwanis, or the Optimists. Volunteer to counsel with **SCORE** or a local business organization. Join your local business association or Chamber of Commerce, but only if you intend to get involved. Just joining may not do a thing for you. Getting involved in one of these organizations will help you develop a network, and it will help others. Always a valuable exercise.

# 81.

Learn how to really use the 80/20 rule, or Pareto's Law. Applied to your business, it might mean that 20% of your customers provide 80% of your revenue. Likewise, you might spend 80% of your time servicing 20% of your customers. Are they the same 20% that are providing the revenue? Usually not.

Compare using a variety of criteria: just because one customer brings in the highest gross revenues doesn't mean that's your most profitable customer. How long do they take to pay? What's the profit margin on the work you do for each customer? How likely is it that any given customer will provide you with ongoing business?

## 82.

**H**ire a business coach who can help you focus on the essentials of both your business and your personal motivation. The right coach can make a tremendous difference to how much you accomplish each week. Short of that, set up a regular meeting with two or three people who you respect. We all need to be able to share stories and ideas. The life of the owner of a really small business gets lonely sometimes. Getting together with others regularly will improve your outlook.

# 83.

**L**earn to recognize and prioritize between things that are important and those that are simply urgent. We spend much of each day dealing with interruptions and urgent matters. In the final analysis, many of these events are just not that important.

Do like the great fiction writers do: they rewrite and rewrite, removing every word and sentence that does not directly contribute to the forward motion of the story. Evaluate your interruptions regularly and over time you will be able to “rewrite” your daily tasks, until you only pay attention to those that contribute to the forward motion of your business.

# 84.

Use webinars or web seminars to demo products to multiple customers or prospects at once. These services are mainly used by software vendors currently, but there's no reason why you can't use this multimedia display technology for any product. It's especially useful for highly complex products or services that require some explanation. Check out one of the services like [Webex](#).

You can book a one-time seminar for twenty people for about \$600 for an hour. That may sound like a lot, but consider that a direct sales call often costs anywhere from \$500-\$2500 these days. And, you have many associated costs such as travel and lodging that are eliminated with webinars. When you figure that a one-hour presentation costs about \$30 per prospect, it's actually very cost-effective for some businesses.

# 85.

Use teleclasses to promote your product or service. These are a hot new technology that use a “bridge” or a centralized phone switch that allows the presenter to host dozens or even hundreds of callers, who have two-way communication with the host. This is a great way to provide a discussion followed by a question and answer period. You can teach a class that somehow relates to your business. Publicize your teleclass on your website or on a variety of other sites.

Check out [www.teleclass.com](http://www.teleclass.com).

# 86.

**R**ecord an audio infomercial or a technical piece or motivational piece about your product or service using online software and your computer. [Microsoft](#), [Apple](#), and [RealNetworks](#), to name the three biggest, all offer free or inexpensive software for recording reasonably high-quality audio in the MP3 format, which can be downloaded or “streamed” over the Internet to many, many listeners. The beauty is, you can include your audio message as a link on your website and visitors can download or listen to it whenever they want, even while you’re sleeping. You do sleep, don’t you?

# 87.

**A**lways keep your promises. Follow through. If you say you're going to call someone back, do it. If you have overbooked or if something else has come up, go out of your way to call that person to tell them you won't be able to honor your promise. People almost always understand that circumstances change, but they want to be remembered and acknowledged. That said, you should call your regular customers at least once a quarter, just to check in, assuming you don't have thousands of customers. Let them know about new products or services you're offering. Of course, this means you have to come up with new products, new features for existing products, and new services. It's a great way to keep yourself on track.

# 88.

**S**end postcards emblazoned with your website address and phone number. Postcards are relatively inexpensive and an effective means of getting a simple message to customers and prospects alike. If you are running a promotion, use the postcard to notify your customers before you roll out the promotion to your prospect base. This will give your existing customers a chance to take advantage of the promotion first, before prospects. You can build a certain momentum with customers that helps carry you through to the prospect base. There are a number of online sites from which you can order postcards. Do a search or check out [Vista Print](#).

# 89.

Use holidays to your advantage. In the U.S. we are conditioned to sales on holidays. You don't have to run a promotion or sale during a holiday, particularly if your business bears no real relationship to that holiday. On the other hand, you can celebrate other holidays, oddball holidays that you can find in reference books like the *Chase's Calendar* or John Kremer's book, *Celebrate Today*. Check your local library's reference section or do a search on the Web. Check out Kremer's site at [www.bookmarket.com](http://www.bookmarket.com).

# 90.

**I**f your business has a retail or office location that customers can visit, make it easy for them to find you. Include maps on your website, in your marketing materials, and in radio or other media appeals.

Describe your location using the most obvious and well-known thoroughfares, even if they aren't quite as direct as a side street, which may be hard to find. Give people the distance in miles and tenths of a mile, if applicable. Use landmarks. One shop I frequent runs regular radio ads in which they describe their location as "On Riverside, exactly one mile off Highway 1, turn left as soon as you cross the railroad tracks."

That description couldn't be more accurate, and, if followed, brings you right to the doorway of the shop. By the way, most people claim to get their news from TV, radio, and newspapers, in that order.

# 91.

**F**ind a way to publicize your business through sponsorship of a contest, show, or other event. For instance, if you have an art supply shop, sponsor an art show, or a juried exhibition of local artwork, by adults and children. Sponsor an art program in the schools and donate supplies. Or, sponsor an art event, an auction, or classes for a local organization that supports the disabled, or residents of an assisted living facility. Yes, some will accuse you of simply trying to get publicity. So what? Don't sponsor something you care nothing about. Make sure it's an organization or a cause about which you feel strongly.

## 92.

**S**tart your own lecture series. Many bookstores have readings, and there's nothing stopping you, no matter what kind of business you run. Are you in a trade? Contact half a dozen other tradespeople and arrange a day long symposium on home repair or the economics of improving your property. Get a plumber to describe how people can save water and improve the aesthetics of their homes with new fixtures. Get a mason to describe how to improve access with new kinds of paving stones or redesigned paths and retaining walls. Ask a roofer to discuss the new kinds of roofing materials that can help insulate a home. Have a landscaper talk about improving drainage around the home. If you run a dress shop, get a designer to come in and talk about clothing design. Get a color expert to give a lecture about the emotional effects of colors. Have a dry cleaner come in and discuss how

## **101 Tips**

different types of fabrics should be cleaned and pressed.

# 93.

**E**ven if you have one of the most basic trades that consists primarily of manual labor, there are things you can do to improve your marketing and the predictability of your cash flow. For instance, I buy two to three cords of firewood from the same man every year. But every year, I have to call him sometime in the Spring or Summer to order the wood.

How difficult would it be to set up a schedule for people, whereby they pick the week they will take delivery of their wood, at the beginning of the year, back in January. Or, the woodcutter could keep a simple database on index cards of all his customers. In January, when it's wet and cold, he could spend a week or two making calls to arrange the deliveries in the summer.

# 94.

**S**tart a membership club. Hand out cards that allow your customers to get a discount or a free item after so many purchases. Many bookstores, sandwich shops, and other businesses use this type of approach to develop customer loyalty.

My chimney cleaner gives me a 10% discount card off my next cleaning, as long as I schedule it before January 1<sup>st</sup>. This allows him to make sure that people clean their chimneys twice a year, after each cord of wood burned. He knows the average consumption for our area and takes advantage of that knowledge to make his own job a little easier (it's a lot easier to clean a chimney after one cord burned than after two) and how to spread out his income. It also gives his customers peace of mind knowing that their houses won't burn down due to dirty chimneys.

# 95.

**I**f a customer prepays and you forget to do the job, or something else comes up that stops you from keeping the appointment, it's up to you to remind the customer. It's your responsibility to reschedule, return the payment, or somehow resolve the mix-up.

Don't force your customers to chase you down or continually remind you. You will not only lose that business, you will lose referral business as well. Eventually, you'll need to move away, because you'll have burned too many bridges.

# 96.

**D**on't ever argue or allow your salespeople to argue with customers. It's inappropriate. It angers people and you turn off other customers and even employees who may overhear. You will, undoubtedly, run into disgruntled customers. Any one of them can really ruin your day. But don't let them. Keep in mind that there are many other customers who are happy with your products and services and who pay what you ask. You may never hear from them, and so they fade into the background. But, they are the ones you are serving. They do not feel it necessary to compliment you, as much as you would like that. They have their own lives to lead and problems to solve. Even the angry ones are often looking for somebody who will help them, rather than fight with them or make them feel foolish.

# 97.

**I**f a customer finds and brings an item up to your register for purchase, it's best not to talk him or her out of that item, unless you have extremely good reasons for doing so. If you recommend another item which doesn't work out, you will have lost a repeat customer. If the same customer finds that the item they chose doesn't work for them, they will be disappointed and annoyed at having to return the item, but they will more likely than not consider it to be their problem. When salespeople convince customers to take an item instead of the one they want, particularly when the new item is more expensive, the salesperson is risking alienating the customer if the new item doesn't fit the bill. It's best to trust the customer, unless they ask for help or respond positively to an offer for help.

# 98.

**Y**ou need a vision and a mission. Many people claim these are worthless exercises, yet, if you pressed them to discuss their businesses, or even their jobs (if they are employees) they would eventually be able to articulate their personal vision and mission.

True, it might be quite simple and direct, such as “I help people find slacks that fit them.” Their personal vision might be something like “to find a way out of working retail for somebody else for minimum wage.” Ok, that’s not what I have in mind for you, because you have a business. But, the idea is the same. What problem do you solve for your customers? Are you a personal or small business coach, a therapist, or another member of a “helping” profession. Your vision might be to “make the world a better place by improving the lives of small business

owners.” Your mission might be stated as something like “I help small business owners learn how to quit feeling guilty about procrastinating by teaching them how to accomplish simple time management tasks.”

When you can define your business in such a way, you will feel much more comfortable about what you’re doing. You’ll be able to turn away potential business that doesn’t match your mission and focus more effectively on developing business that does.

# 99.

**T**he high-tech boom of the 1990s made a lot of people feel like they had to work 12 to 15 hours a day just to keep up. This kind of thinking was promoted by the media as something really “cutting edge” so that many people who weren’t even in high-tech businesses felt the pressure to conform to the rules of the so-called “new economy.” The fact is that many people in high-tech (speaking as a high-tech refugee of more than 18 years in the business) were at their jobs for 12, 15, even 18 hours a day, seven days a week, but they weren’t working all those hours and they certainly weren’t productive. Humans can only sustain that level of activity for short bursts. Before long, our effectiveness wanes, our energy drops, and we lose motivation and perspective.

If you need proof that thinking gets muddled under these circumstances, I encourage you to flip through some back

## 101 Tips

issues of the technology magazines and news between 1997 and 1999. In retrospect, many people are shaking their heads at the foolishness that was passed off as “thinking different(ly).” No, many of the high-tech workers who were at their desks for endless hours and days were playing games, reading and writing personal email, surfing the web aimlessly, phoning friends at other mindless jobs, or were simply shuffling papers trying to understand why they could no longer focus on anything for a few moments at a time.

The point is, promise yourself and your family and friends that you will knock off work at a reasonable hour. Take a day or two off each weekend. Don't work holidays. Have a life outside of work. Yes, starting your own business will demand more time of you than working a regular job. But, your brain and body need time to rejuvenate, for you to do your best, most productive and creative work. Your subconscious needs time to filter through the thoughts, synthesize data, and resolve problems while you sleep. If you are only sleeping four hours a night, you are shortchanging yourself and your business. Get a life. It's the best thing for your business.

# 100.

**B**uild a network of people who are in the same business you are. If you approach business as though there is enough for everybody, there will be. Because you all will seek out opportunities to expand your reach. One PR agent I know works in a network of about 15 other PR and marketing pros. About three of these people are very good at generating new business. The others are expert at some particular niche. When one of the three rainmakers comes up with a project, she sends a description to the other fourteen members of the group, with an estimate of how many people will be needed to complete which tasks. The other members bid for the elements of the project that interest them. Rarely is there a conflict, because invariably one or two people are on other projects already, or on vacation, or have other commitments and interests. It affords

## 101 Tips

them a reasonably consistent and sustainable workload and nobody feels guilty about bowing out of a potential project, because there is almost always somebody else to take over their particular role.

Check out some of the online forums for small businesses. I like [IdeaCafe](#).

# 101.

**O**nce you've completed a marketing plan, perform the following adjustments:

- Increase the amount of time each campaign will take by 50%.
- Increase the amount of money each campaign will cost by 50%.
- Decrease the expected result by 75%.

It's been said that optimists are healthier than pessimists, but that pessimists adjust more effectively to culture and social change. I encourage you to attempt the best of both worlds. Be optimistic that your company will succeed, that you will create value for your customers and the community, and that you will be rewarded financially, psychologically, and spiritually for your efforts. Be pessimistic

## **101 Tips**

about your ability to control events and trends that will affect your life and your business, and plan for as many contingencies as is economically, emotionally, and physically feasible. When it comes to marketing campaigns, plan for the worst, do your best, and remember, you can always improve on “best.”

# *Resources*

## Websites

ActionPlan Marketing

[www.actionplan.com](http://www.actionplan.com)

CCH Toolkit at [www.cch.com](http://www.cch.com)

Nolo Press at [www.nolo.com](http://www.nolo.com)

Entrepreneur Magazine at

[www.entrepreneur.com](http://www.entrepreneur.com) and

[www.bizstartups.com](http://www.bizstartups.com)

BigNoseBird Scripts at

[www.bignosebird.com](http://www.bignosebird.com)

Matt's Script Archive at

[www.scriptarchive.com](http://www.scriptarchive.com)

Direct Marketing Association

[www.the-dma.org](http://www.the-dma.org)

U.S. Postal Service at [www.usps.gov](http://www.usps.gov)

IRS at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov)

SEC at [www.sec.gov](http://www.sec.gov)

SBA at [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)

SCORE at [www.score.org](http://www.score.org)

## 101 Tips

Small business classes at [www.ed2go.com](http://www.ed2go.com)

IdeaCafe at [www.ideacafe.com](http://www.ideacafe.com)

Professional Employer Organizations at

[www.napeo.org](http://www.napeo.org)

## 101 Tips

# Index

## A

ActionPlan.com 90  
administrative costs 49  
annual reports 58  
arbitration 41  
arguing 114  
art museum 43  
audio infomercial 103

## B

background checking  
    employees 14  
benefits 83  
    be prepared to explain 92  
bottled water 33  
business  
    growing 88  
business card 66  
business cards 33

**C**

calls

limits on 46

category 74

cause marketing 108

CEO

autocratic 48

Chamber of Commerce 97

Chase's 106

Classmates.com 90

clients

vendors 69

clubs

kids 96

membership 112

service 97

co-market 94

coach

hire one 99

competitors

news about 60

patents 64

public companies 58

compiled lists 93

complaints 81

conflict

in workplace 40

contacts 53

costs

administrative 49

controlling 15

counseling 42

credibility 47

## 101 Tips

- customer visits 34
- customers
  - arguing with 114
  - listen to them 16
  - losing some of 80
  - repeat 50
  - testimonials 72
  - testimonialsz 72
  - trusting them 115
  - who are their connections 69
- customer's suggestions
  - use your judgment 18
- cut your losses 24

## D

- database marketing 85
- decision makers 48
- diary 59
- distributors 75

## E

- eBay 90
- EDGAR database 58
- Edward de Bono 29
- employees
  - counseling for 42
  - educate them 20
  - improving the business 20
- endorsements 72
- events
  - networking 67
- execution
  - lack of 23

## 101 Tips

### F

financing 87

fishbowl 33

focus 28

### G

Geoffrey Moore 79

ghostwriter

    hiring 95

goals 13

    measurable 13

### H

health 26

holidays 106

house lists 93

### I

important vs. urgent 100

inappropriate behavior 41

independent reps 86

### J

John Kremer 106

### K

key decision maker 48

Kiwanis 97

### L

lecture series 109

## 101 Tips

- letters
  - to customers, vendors 27
- list brokers 93
- location
  - directions to 107
- losses 24

## M

- mailing lists
  - competitor 57
- market 74
  - control over 80
- marketing
  - cause 108
  - database 85
  - trades 111
- marketing messages 83
- marketing programs 52
- mature market 74
- membership club 112
- Microsoft 103
- middlemen 86
- mind-mapping 29
- mission 116
- motivation 19

## N

- name recognition 77
- negotiation
  - telephone 56
- network
  - of people 120
- networking event

## 101 Tips

- making contact at 68
- new business
  - generating 88
- newsletter 96

### O

- opportunity cost 24
- Optimists 97

### P

- patents 64
- permission 91
- phone
  - etiquette 47
- phone number
  - order of appearance 66
- photographs 71
- planning 73
- point-of-purchase displays 75
- postcards 105
- praise
  - for employee efforts 19
- presentations
  - cut them down 36
  - exaggerate 39
  - practice 38
- press kit 71
- press release 53
  - copy into email 62
  - follow up 61
  - multiple contacts 53
  - write it today 54
- price 84

## 101 Tips

procrastination 31  
profits vs. cash flow 15  
promises  
    keep them 104  
psychological freedom 84  
publicity plan 77  
purchasing decisions 84

## R

RealNetworks 103  
referrals 65  
    giving as well as getting 70  
repeat customers 50  
resources  
    if limited 52  
Robert Middleton 90  
Roger von Oech 29  
Rotary 97  
rumors 59

## S

salespeople  
    talkative 46  
SCORE 97  
scrapbook 60  
script 45  
SEC filings 58  
seminars  
    on the web 101  
smiling  
    when you call 55  
society  
    changing roles in 78

## 101 Tips

speech  
    giving one 36  
sponsorship 108  
stories  
    about CEOs 63  
strategic planning 31  
suggestion box 44

## T

tactical plans 31  
talcum powder 33  
target market 79  
task analysis 22  
tasks  
    execute 22  
teach a class 35  
teleclasses 102  
telephone  
    etiquette 47  
telesales  
    scripts for 45  
thoughts  
    don't censor 43  
Tony Buzan 29  
trade publications 76  
tradeshows  
    four essentials 33  
    inviting customers 34  
trying  
    instead of doing 51

## U

urgent vs. important 100

## 101 Tips

### V

- violence 42
- vision 116
- Vista Print 105

### W

- web sites 71
- Webex 101
- webinars 101
- website
  - design 90
- workplace violence 42
- write a speech 36
- writer
  - hiring 89

## 101 Tips

## 101 Tips

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