

Over 110 Keys to Business Success

Discover the Magic Keys to Small Business Success

*Get More Customers
Streamline Your Business
Make More Money*

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Introduction

Yeah, I know. This is the stuff you think you know. You've tried it all and it hasn't worked for your business. Your business is different.

Believe me, I know all about it.

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 the magic keys boil down to common sense, perseverance, creative thinking, and a bit of luck) until I was given the opportunity in 1996 to help with marketing communications and business development for a software startup, Embarcadero Technologies in San Francisco.

For the first two or three months, I floundered, trying to get my bearings in the shifting tides of the B2B software industry in the mid-1990s. Although I'd started a handful of small businesses, nothing had prepared me for the daily struggle to innovate that was the hallmark of a software startup, and in particular, that startup.

My other businesses had been *very* small businesses. Freelance writing, landscaping, a small graphic design company, a multimedia production company. Some people refer to these as **lifestyle** businesses. One or two person businesses that can provide you a living, if done right, and a poor wage or unemployment if done wrong.

I had to get over the intimidation of working for a CEO who was brilliant, mercurial, and more financially astute than I can ever hope to be. What it took was for me to apply my own experience to the challenge of getting more business for the company. And my experience up to that point had focused on building relationships with others. Coming from a large family, you can't help but learn how to relate, in one way or another.

So, rather than try to apply some textbook lessons in business development, I did what I knew how to do: engaged people in conversation, at user group meetings, trade shows, customer visits. I asked a lot of questions because I needed to learn what was bothering these people the most. What one problem did they want to solve?

I knew that if I could get that information from people, I was most of the way to providing them with a solution.

I'm a firm believer that about half of all small business problems can be solved by communicating more effectively with prospects, clients, employees, and vendors. The other half can be solved by defining and completing a set of tasks that lead to your desired outcome. Some people call this **goal setting** but I like to think of it more in terms of project planning and management.

You see, starting and running a business is a lot like other seemingly glamorous vocations, like writing or acting. Most people like the idea of being a writer or an actor a lot more than they like the actual tasks of writing or crafting a believable persona. The same holds true for business.

The idea of creating something from nothing and getting paid millions of dollars for it is very appealing to most people. But the actual tasks required to do just that seem to put most people off. But, they're not really difficult, you just have to commit yourself and take action. Simple stuff.

In this book, you'll find advice 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 suggestions in this book to those service providers, you'll have better luck, better communication, and a clearer grasp of your business.

I'm convinced that if you find two or three keys in this book to apply consistently to your business, you'll be a more confident business owner. Follow through and execute those keys faithfully, and I'm convinced you'll see dramatic results within a matter of weeks or months. Take action today, no matter how imperfectly, and you will see powerful results in the future.

Sell something people want to buy

This is such a fundamental idea that you probably wonder why I bother to mention it.

I bother because a lot of small businesses ignore this very maxim.

Let's face it, the first idea any of us has for a business is to do something WE love to do. WE love to write, so we'll become writers. WE love making gift baskets, so let's sell gift baskets. WE love designing websites, so let's start a website design company.

The real question is: Is there anybody out there willing to give you money in return for something you love to do?

Don't get me wrong: passion for a particular niche is a critical ingredient to success. **Passion and a compelling vision** will carry you a long way.

That said, running a business is its own activity, just like styling hair, or giving legal advice, or designing ads is its own activity. Running a business requires a set of skills that don't come naturally to most of us. You have to learn them. Just like you have to learn how to scrapbook, or take photographs, or how to dance before you can provide services or instruction in those activities.

One of the first business skills you need to learn is how to identify what people want and are willing to pay for. If you learn that lesson really well, you can probably skip the rest of this book.

Resources

[WordTracker](#)

[60-Second Guide to Creating a Market Niche](#)

[Business Owner's Toolkit on Niche Marketing](#)

Believe in your dream

If you have a dream, go for it. Don't let anybody stand in your way. Life is too short to settle.

But do what you can to **mitigate the risks**.

- Learn some basic money management skills. Money management and business are pretty much inseparable.
- Learn something about selling and communicating, verbally and in writing.
- Learn something about how your distribution model works, whether it's the Web, retail, wholesale distribution, or door-to-door sales.

That doesn't mean you need to work in a boutique for the next 10 years before you sell your handmade clothes from your website. But, it wouldn't hurt for you to spend some time hanging out in a shop, reading trade magazines, and also asking other people how they sell products on the Web.

Resources

[Etsy](#)

[43Things](#)

Focus on positioning, not image

Spend lots of time on defining your market and what you have to offer that's different from everybody else. Spend less time on your image. Lots of companies with hot images are in ashes. But companies who have spent the time to define and redefine their positioning and messaging are burning up the market.

When I was at the software company that wanted to grow from \$5.5 million in sales to somewhere north of \$20 million, we hired a PR firm to help us. For about \$7,500 a month, we got a handful of press releases (most of which I wrote) and a weekly 3-hour meeting with a great PR guy who forced us to refine our positioning, week after week.

After three months, everybody in the company knew who our customers were, what they needed, and how we met those needs.

It was excruciating work. Sometimes infuriating. And seemed endlessly repetitive.

But it worked.

Slogans are pointless. Spend the time to figure out what your ideal customer needs and how you can fulfill those needs more completely than your competition. When you can write it down in one sentence, then worry about your image.

Resources

[Positioning](#)

[The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing](#)

Write it down to make it real

Write down your goals using measurable, time-limited language. Review these goals at least weekly. To make it easy, schedule an appointment with yourself at the same time each week to review your goals.

Each goal should be stated as something like, “Increase customers from 50 to 75 by March 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 you may create on yellow legal pads, the backs of envelopes, or napkins.

I know it’s not always easy to set aside time to review your goals every week. Do it anyway. This is the hard work that pays off in the long run.

How valid is each objective for you, today? Things have probably changed since you first set that objective.

If it’s still valid, how close are you to accomplishing it and how are you going to get there from where you are now?

Write it down.

Resources

[MindTools](#)

[43 Things](#)

[Goals Guy](#)

[Moleskines](#)

[Getting Things Done](#)

Messaging is dead, so they say

To paraphrase Mark Twain, “Accounts of the death of messaging are greatly exaggerated.”

These days, and I suspect in many days to come, a number of consultants, writers, and pundits are making big bucks proclaiming that once again, “it’s different this time.”

According to those in the know, social networking, communities, and tools like Twitter and Pownce have all but driven the wooden spike into the heart of market messaging. The conversation dictates the message. The community will dictate the terms of engagement. Marketers beware. You are henceforth relegated to the status of order-takers and we’ll tell you what we want.

If we ever figure out what that is and what to call it.

Does anybody really believe anymore that Madison Avenue forces you to buy snacks and detergent and toothpaste that you don’t want? With the possible exception of mandated insurance coverage, I can’t think of anything you can’t refuse if you really want to. The same grocery store that sells empty calories and useless carbohydrates also sells fresh vegetables, egg substitutes, and tofu. The choice is yours.

Messaging is about communicating benefits and about differentiating yourself from the pack. Social networks and software tools don’t change the dynamics of trust. If anything, they heighten those dynamics, making it all the more important that you can clearly communicate the benefits of your service or product with credibility.

Resources

[How to Develop a Marketing Message](#)

[Action Plan Marketing](#)

[Marketing M.O.](#)

Create a marketing calendar

Every business, no matter how small, needs a marketing calendar. This can be something as simple as a paper calendar on which you plot out when you'll run your marketing programs.

A marketing program can be as simple as a plan to send out an email newsletter, or a postcard campaign.

The marketing calendar can help keep you on track when you lose steam.

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.

Check out my blog for an example of a marketing calendar.

Resources

[Eversmall](http://eversmall.com)

Make hiring harder than firing

Don'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.

It's better to be overworked than to deal with slackers and toxic employees. Trust me.

One of the first people I ever had to fire was somebody who perpetually came in late, if at all, and then turned out to be embezzling from the company. During her exit interview she said "That was the nicest firing I've ever had."

Background checks are a no-brainer. Check references. Check credit. Google their name.

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.

This goes for contractors as well. Get references or go through an agency who has already vetted them. If you use an online service like **eLance.com**, pay attention to their reviews and start them off with a small project first, just to see how they do. Check out some of the new online reputation management sites. Just don't overstep your legal bounds. Know the law.

Resources

[eLance](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

[RapLeaf](#)

[Privacy Rights](#)

Get a grip on cash flow

Controlling costs is at least as important as increasing revenues. Just because you're bringing in business doesn't guarantee that you're making money.

In the U.S. we take our shopping seriously. Owning your own business requires you to be a different kind of consumer. Here are two rules that will serve you well:

- Keep an expense journal with you at all times and write down everything you spend, every day.
- Tie every business expense to a project. For every \$100 you spend, you'll need to bring in \$150 in sales just to break even.

Learn the difference between profits and income, between revenues and cash. You can be making sales like crazy and go broke.

Learn how to create and understand a cash flow analysis. Read up on the subject:

- *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. This book is out of print but you can find copies on the various used book sites.
- *Understanding Cash Flow* by Franklin J. Plewa and George T. Friedlob. Good examples of tools for learning cash flow. Descriptions can be a bit technical for some people.
- *Small Business Cash Flow: Strategies for Making Your Business a Financial Success* by Denise O'Berry.

Or get advice from a **SCORE volunteer** or a paid business advisor. Learning how to do a cash flow projection isn't difficult, but it will change the way you think about your business.

Resources

[SCORE](#)

[Cash Flow Calculator](#)

Ask customers how you're doing

A few online services make it pretty easy to build an online survey these days. They also provide reports that you can use to analyze the basic results.

Build a form on your website or include in an email message. Either way, try to include fewer than 15 questions and make sure the results will provide meaningful info you can act on. If you want a higher response rate, offer the respondents a free gift for responding by a particular date. This could be a free report, or some other information product.

Make your survey 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 collect demographic information, then collect it at the end of the survey, not at the beginning. Demographics include things like age, gender, and income level.

Reassure your customers that you will not be sharing this information with anybody. Include your phone number in case they want to call you to confirm that you're on the level.

Resources

[Poll Daddy](#)

[SurveyGizmo](#)

[SurveyMonkey](#)

What's the real story?

Listen, but don't always act on your customers' suggestions. Some customers, even good ones, simply don't have good ideas.

Pay attention. Customers who are disappointed because they can't get your product to do something for which it wasn't intended have something to tell you. Somehow you didn't do a good job in your marketing materials, sales scripts, web content, or other collateral.

On the other hand, some of us just can't or won't follow directions and often want products to perform tasks they weren't designed to do.

Make sure your product or service does what you claim. If not, change the claim or the product.

If you find customers asking for the same thing you may have identified a new product or service opportunity. Run with it!

Resources

[Free Management Library](#)

[IdeaScope Blog](#)

Inexpensive motivation

Praise is inexpensive motivation, as long as it's believable. Employees and contractors who are working hard like to know that you notice.

Give **praise** when it's deserved. If it's never deserved, you need new employees or contractors.

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 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 and the good ones will go out of their way to help you succeed.

Now, that doesn't mean you can get away without providing tangible rewards sometimes. But even those can be as simple as a treat, a coffee, or a small, fun trinket.

Resources

[CafePress](#)

[Zazzle](#)

Engage employees

Give 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 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.

Resources

[Self-Employment IRS Resource](#)

[Independent Consultant vs. Employee](#)

Make bread pudding from stale bread

Finish 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 half 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. Rank your task priorities with a simple numbering system. You should accomplish your two highest priorities at all costs.

Lower priority items should be delegated or simply ignored.

Resources

[Ta-da List](#)

[30 Boxes](#)

[I Want Sandy](#)

[43 Folders](#)

Don't let the bread go stale in the first place

Once you commit to a project, follow through. The most costly mistakes in business come from one of two things:

- lack of urgency
- failure to execute

The failure to execute can be the result of many things: your own lack of skills, time, or money, bad luck, bad decisions, and weak plans. Or simply a lack of urgency.

A lack of urgency is only the result of a lack of emotional investment in the project or business.

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 websites below.

Resources

[International Coach Federation](#)

[Coach U Find a Coach](#)

[First, Break All the Rules](#)

Learn when to cut your losses

Don'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.

You could purchase a compiler that would do what he wanted 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.

Resources

[CCH Toolkit](#)

Martyrs never make any money

Take care of your physical and emotional health:

- Look away from your computer monitor at least once an hour.
- Drink at least 4 to 5 glasses of water a day.
- Eat several pieces of fruit and fresh vegetables 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. Joan of Arc may have changed the course of history, but she never earned a dime.

Resources

[Stretching](#)

[Mayo Clinic Stretching Demo](#)

[Wikipedia martyr](#)

It's not all about you

Write one note 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.

Resources

[Send Referral Cards](#)

[Cards Direct](#)

Multitask is another word for late

Stay 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 and we get bored.

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.

Some entrepreneurs resist the idea of focus, yet many are highly focused. They just think of it as something else.

Resources

[Getting Things Done](#)

[43 Folders](#)

It works for IDEO, maybe for you too

Use brainstorming and mind-mapping techniques to develop new ideas, new products, new ways of thinking about your business. IDEO, a world-renowned design firm, uses brainstorming as part of its core process. It can work for you too.

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.

Better yet, try any of the free or low-cost online mind-mapping and brainstorming tools.

Check out books by Tony Buzan, Roger von Oech, and Edward de Bono.

Resources

[MindTools](#)

[FreeMind](#)

[Tony Buzan's iMindMap](#)

[Mashable List of Tools](#)

[bubbl.us](#)

[Mindomo](#)

[MindMeister](#)

Free is not a dirty four-letter word

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.

Resources

[US Postal Service](#)

If you're new, it's all about tactics

Work on tactical plans before strategic ones. Many small companies and solo entrepreneurs waste valuable resources and energy on strategic planning before they are ready for that level of thinking.

Your tactics 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 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 running a 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. Start there and let the strategy work itself out after you've got some cash flow.

Resources

[Daniel Read on Tactics, Strategy & Business Intelligence](#)

And always wear clean underwear

Always remember to take four things to trade shows: 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 to this essentials list. 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.

Resources

[The Resource Queen](#)

[Body Glide](#)

[Trade Show Week](#)

[Trade Show Advisor](#)

Customers deserve your attention

Invite current customers to trade shows 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 make 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.

Resources

[Joel on Software, Remarkable Customer Service](#)

[How to Work a Room](#)

[Telephone Doctor Customer Service Training](#)

Learn public speaking and presentation skills

Seek 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 take on such a task if you can't follow through. Some classes take place over several weeks, and even a one-day class requires hours and sometimes days of preparation.

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.

Resources

[Toastmasters International](#)

[Teaching Sells](#)

Know the audience before you start speaking

Always write a speech or presentation several weeks prior to the engagement, if possible. Ask the sponsor for details about the audience: how many people, 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 to get to the point.

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 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 trade show floor giving informal presentations, practice makes perfect.

Resources

Audience Analysis

Presentation preparation

Mirror, mirror on the wall

Practice any presentation before a mirror. Or videotape yourself.

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 ties 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. 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.

Resources

[Toastmasters International](#)

[Dale Carnegie, Getting Rid of Public Speaking Fear](#)

Yeah, you look goofy, so what?

When 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 trick!”

It was hilarious when he did it intentionally. It won’t be so funny when you do it unintentionally.

Resources

[Presentation Zen](#)

[Thomas Roth Berghofer](#)

[Dale Carnegie High Impact Presentations](#)

[Toastmasters International](#)

[Presenting to Win](#)

[Beyond Bullet Points](#)

With conflicts, focus on outcomes

When 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.

Resources

[Bad Attitude Survival Guide](#)

[Nonviolent Communication](#)

[Awareness Ideas](#)

[Myers Briggs Training](#)

Change behaviors to change outcomes

Accept 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.

Resources

[Crucial Conversations](#)

[Crucial Confrontations](#)

Don't ignore signs of trouble

Violence is the number one cause of workplace death in America.

Deal with workplace violence immediately and without hesitation.

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 at a small company at which one of the contract employees received a box containing live bullets from his girlfriend's estranged husband. 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 company to the incident. Overreacting? Perhaps, but with all the workplace shootings that have occurred over the last few years, it was the prudent action to take.

Resources

[The Violence Prone Workplace](#)

[Association for Conflict Resolution](#)

[Violence in the Workplace](#)

Get out of the office

Wander 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.

Acting like a tourist in your own town can pay off in creative ideas and a new freshness toward your work.

Resources

[CitySearch](#)

[MSN City Guides](#)

[ThinkerToys](#)

[IDEO](#)

Be sincere, be honest

Put 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.

Resources

[ULine Suggestion Boxes](#)

[KeySan Suggestion Box](#)

Script outbound communications

Write 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.

And just because you script a call doesn't mean you need to sound like one of those automated systems. Learn the essential points of the script so you can say them in your sleep. Then make the presentation your own. Until you fully absorb the messages you want to convey and the questions you want to ask, you won't sound natural. Practice makes perfect.

Resources

[The Phone Coach](#)

[Custom Sales Presentations](#)

[VanillaSoft](#)

[Stephen Schiffman](#)

Limit calls

Limit 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.

Resources

[Ed2Go Assertiveness Training](#)

[American Management Association Training](#)

[The Assertiveness Workbook](#)

[When I Say No, I Feel Guilty](#)

Be specific and courteous

When 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.

Resources

[Apimac Timer](#)

[Online Stopwatch](#)

[Virtual Timer](#)

How to recognize fake bait

Recognize 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 really getting anywhere, move on to a prospect with greater potential.

Resources

[Smart Choices](#)

[SPIN Selling](#)

[Think Better](#)

Watch your pennies

Keep 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.

Make sure you collect receivables in a reasonable time frame. If you allow yourself to let payments slide, keep in mind that you are, in effect, lending money to your customers at zero percent interest.

Resources

[FindLaw on Cash Management](#)

[AllBusiness Cash Flow Articles](#)

[PayPal Products](#)

Celebrate the repeats

The 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.

Resources

[Customer service and repeat business](#)

Perfection is for losers

Don'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. If you just have a gut feeling that it's not the right thing to do, then don't do it. Do something else.

Resources

[Taking action](#)

Under-commit, over-deliver

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.

Resources

[Setting expectations](#)

Cover your contact bases

Always 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.

Resources

[Basic communication practices](#)

Write the press release, now

Write your press release, 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. Online press release services offer a variety of target markets to which you can send your release.

Resources

[PRWeb](#)

[Bacon's](#)

[PRNewsWire](#)

[BusinessWire](#)

Sounds stupid, but it works

Look 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 made you laugh.

Resources

Defer the jerks

In 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.

Resources

[Assertiveness](#)

Collect competitor communications

Get 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!

Resources

[Competitive analysis](#)

Read SEC reports of public companies

If your competitors are public companies, search out their SEC filings on the EDGAR database. 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.

Resources

[EDGAR](#)

Keep a diary of customer opinions

Keep 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-judgmental way.

If you *really* have guts and want to improve your business, keep one of these diaries about your own company too. Ask your customers if they've heard any rumors about you.

Resources

[Moleskine](#)

Scrapbook your competitors

Keep 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 which you should be subscribed to, relating to your business. If you want to get all of the clippings possible, hire a clipping service.

Also, use an online alerts system to email you when a story appears using either your company name or a competitor's.

Resources

[BurrellLuce](#)

[NewspaperClips.com](#)

[Clip&Copy](#)

[Google Alerts](#)

PR telephone follow-up

After 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.

Resources

[Telephone and PR Etiquette](#)

No attachments, please

Always 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.

Resources

[Press Release Mailings](#)

Follow the news

Read interviews with and stories about competitors' CEOs and other executives. 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 in your competition's management to your prospects.

Resources

[JustSell.com](#)

[Hoover's](#)

[BackPack](#)

Patently simple

Study 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 .

If you're in a business where your competitors and you don't really patent anything, look for other projects your competitors have completed. If you're a designer, can you visit a website, a physical location, or get hold of some of the print work your competitors have designed? Can you talk to former clients of the competitor? What did they like about working with the competitor? Dislike?

Resources

Always ask for referrals

Ask 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.

Resources

Make it easy to reach you

In order of appearance on your business card, your email address and phone number should stand out from your FAX number or mobile phone number (unless that's your primary business number).

Designers can 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.

Of course, if you're a designer you don't want to read this.

The fact is that people are lazy and they don't want to hunt for a phone number. If you think I'm stretching for tips, no way. As a VP of Biz Dev, I collected thousands of business cards. Some of them displayed the FAX number first in order. I got tired of hearing that screech on the other end and just threw those cards away.

Resources

[Tips on Good Design](#)

Overcome networking shyness

Networking 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.

Resources

[How to Work a Room](#)

[The It Factor](#)

[How to Talk to Anyone](#)

Buy a lunch, make a friend

Make 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. Only invite people to meet if you feel you have something to offer them or vice versa.

These days, it's not out of line to meet somebody for coffee. That saves you both the trouble of a lunch engagement, not to mention the cost. I've also arranged to meet with new contacts an hour before the next networking event.

Resources

[Building relationships](#)

Network with your client's network

Ask 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.

Resources

[Referrals](#)

Trade referrals

Always 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.

Resources

[Trade Referrals](#)

[Tips Groups](#)

Make yourself look nice

Have 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.

Don't know what a press kit is?

A press kit can be as simple as a glossy folder containing your business card, a one-page company backgrounder, one or more pages describing your product or service offerings, copies of press releases, copies of news or magazine clips about you and your company, and any other information about your company that might interest potential clients, media outlets, or investors.

Resources

[eHow to Produce a Press Kit](#)

[Press Kits on AllBusiness](#)

[101PublicRelations](#)

Get endorsements

Get 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.

Resources

Planning only takes you so far

Take action today. In other words, don't obsess 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.

Resources

[Taking Action](#)

Remember friendly mousetraps

If 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.

Resources

[Create a new category](#)

Work with retailers for counter space

Always 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.

Resources

[Retailing tips](#)

Trade journals

If 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.

Resources

[Encyclopedia of Associations](#)

Plan for publicity

Start 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.

Resources

[Publicity Plans](#)

[Keep and Share](#)

[Google Calendar](#)

[Zoho Mail](#)

[BaseCamp](#)

Bellbottoms are back, or are they?

Pay 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?

Resources

[TrendHunter](#)

[TrendWatching](#)

What part of the market wants what you have?

As 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.

Resources

[Crossing the Chasm](#)

Attrition is normal

When 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.

Resources

Pain is more valuable than bliss

Pay 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.

Resources

Then solve it

If 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 them 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.

Resources

[Crossroads Institute](#)

[Dumb Little Man on Learning to Listen](#)

Outsource sales

Even a single individual can outsource parts of business. One of the parts that seems to give people fits, especially creative people, is selling. So, hire a salesperson, or a company that can perform telesales for you.

If you just don't have enough need to justify outsourcing, see if you can't find independent reps who work other lines of business to your same customer base.

For instance, if you're selling web design services, is there a printing broker you've run across? Maybe he or she can be convinced to carry a few of your business cards. You can even have some made up for that person with their name on them. If you get a referral from one of those cards, you can compensate the sales rep.

Selling candies? Look for a wine sales rep.

Selling computer services? Hook up with a cleaning services company.

Selling business insurance? Get connected with a CPA or a business coach.

Resources

[MRP Manufacturer's Rep Profile](#)

[MyWorkTools Manufacturer's Rep Contracts](#)

[GoWholesale.com](#)

Focus on the influencer

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.

Resources

A fundamental pricing axiom

The 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.

Resources

Ask questions to answer them

Database 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 followup “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.

The information you gather 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?

Resources

[Steve Pavlina on Asking the Right Questions](#)

[Secrets of Question Based Selling](#)

Continuously improve your processes

Talk 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?

Resources

Help your customers pay you

Make 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.

Resources

If you believe in your business, don't be bashful

Send 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.

Resources

Toot your own horn

Hire 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.”

Better yet, do something noteworthy and get a local paper to cover the event. Then make copies of the resulting article and send those.

Resources

[eLance](#)

[Guru.com](#)

Follow the leaders

Have 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 a successful service business site.

Resources

Avoid coercive tactics

Always 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.

Resources

Simplify

Don'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?"

Resources

Mailing list madness

Unless 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.

Resources

Learn to add and subtract

If you can add and subtract, you can learn how to prepare a balance sheet and an income statement.

Do it at least once, before you turn it over to a bookkeeper or accountant.

It's not that hard, and it's worth understanding just what's in a snapshot of your business. If you think finances are a minor part of business, think again.

Knowing where you **are** financially in your business is critical to knowing **when** you've gotten to **where** you wanted to go.

Resources

[Ed2Go Everyday Math](#)

[Ed2Go Introduction to QuickBooks 2007](#)

Collaborate

Look 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.

Resources

Write about yourself

Write 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.

Resources

[Adobe Acrobat](#)

[Lulu.com](#)

[Blurb](#)

Make t-shirts

Do 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.

Resources

[Threadless](#)

[CafePress](#)

[Zazzle](#)

Join something

Join a service club like Rotary International, Kiwanis, or the Optimists. Volunteer to counsel with SCORE 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.

Resources

[Rotary International](#)

[Kiwanis](#)

[Junior League](#)

[Soroptimist International](#)

[Lions Clubs International](#)

[Zonta International](#)

The 80/20 rule

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.

Make your comparisons using a variety of criteria. Just because one customer brings in the highest gross revenues that doesn't mean they are your most profitable customer.

How long does it take them to pay their bills? How much of your time do they require? Do they demand frequent rework or revision?

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?

Most small business owners don't take enough time to analyze the profitability of each customer, both short-term and long-term.

Resources

Hire a coach

Hire 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.

Resources

[International Coach Federation](#)

[Coach U Find a Coach](#)

[Coachville](#)

Set your priorities

Learn 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.

Resources

Webinars reap multiple rewards

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.

Consider the success of infomercials. Webinars are essentially live infomercials that allow attendees to interact with the presenter. If you're selling an information-rich product or a complex product that requires more direct exposure to establish credibility or some sort of social proof, webinars might be the solution for you.

Resources

[WebEx](#)

[Yugma](#)

Run a teleclass

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. out www.teleclass.com.

Resources

[Intercall](#)

[Xiosoft Instant Teleseminar](#)

[ConferenceCall.com](#)

[PGiConnect](#)

[RentaBridge.com](#)

Record your podcast

Record 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?

Resources

[iTunes](#)

[Podcast.com](#)

[Podcast.net](#)

[MyPodcast](#)

[PodHoster](#)

[PodShow](#)

Keep your promises

Always 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.

Resources

Publicize your website

Send 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.

Resources

[VistaPrint](#)

[PSPrint](#)

[Zazzle](#)

[StartupNation's Postcard Marketing Tips](#)

[U.S. Postal Service Click2Mail](#)

Consider the holidays in advance

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.

Resources

[Celebrate Today Online](#)

[John Kremer's BookMarket Site](#)

[Chase's Calendar](#)

Make it easy to find you

If 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.

A sign maker in our area also does some beautiful art pieces that you can buy as posters. His shop is located off the beaten path, but he's managed to get a few of his signs mounted on nearby buildings and fences, with arrows pointing the way to his location.

Resources

[MeetMeMap](#)

[GoogleMaps](#)

[Yahoo! Maps](#)

[MapQuest](#)

Sponsorship

Find 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 you feel strongly about, or that has a close connection to your business.

For example, if you go to the Sponsor Anything website, you might find an opportunity to sponsor a Texas Redfish Tournament for \$2500. If you sell fishing lures, boats, camping supplies, travel arrangements, or a variety of other products or services, you might get a lot of publicity by sponsoring such an event.

Resources

[Sponsor Anything](#)

[ProMotion Marketing](#)

[ScholarshipCoach.com](#)

Establish your authority

Start 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 different types of fabrics should be cleaned and pressed.

Resources

[DoshDosh on Authority](#)

[Gordon Burgett](#)

[Pinny Cohen on Personal Branding](#)

[Frank Rumbauskas on Building Authority](#)

Make it easy to be a repeat customer

Even 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.

Resources

Start a membership club

Start 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 1st. 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 burning through one cord of wood 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.

Resources

Remember, over-deliver

If 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.

Resources

Win the argument, lose the customer

Don'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.

Resources

Let the customer buy what they want

If 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.

Resources

What big thing drives you?

You 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 .”

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.

Resources

Get a life

The high-tech boom of the 1990s made a lot of us feel like we had to work 12 to 15 hours a day just to keep up. The media promoted that lifestyle as “cutting edge” and a positive direction for American society, so much 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 working 12, 15, even 18 hours a day, seven days a week isn’t as productive as some people claim.

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, flip through some back issues of technology magazines between 1997 and 2000. In retrospect, many people are now 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, phoning friends at other mindless jobs, or were simply shuffling papers trying to understand why they could no longer focus on anything for more than a few moments at a time.

Starting a business demands a lot more time of you than working a regular job. But, your brain and body need time to rejuvenate for you to do your most productive and creative work. Your subconscious needs time to filter and synthesize data while you sleep. If you are only sleeping four hours a night, you’re shortchanging yourself and your business.

Get a life. It’s the best thing for your business.

Resources

Business is not a zero-sum game

Build a network of people who are in the **same business** you're in. 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 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.

Resources

Adjust the plan

Once 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** your ability to control events and trends that will affect your life and your business, and plan for as many contingencies as are 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

Embrace technology

Start a blog or at the very least, spend time on a selection of social networks that have groups that engage your target customer. Yahoo Groups, Google Groups, MSN Groups, Facebook groups, and many other sites provide targeted forums for just about every topic under the sun.

Become a member of one or more of those groups and become active in helping answer people's questions about your type of service or product. These groups generally don't allow advertising or other forms of direct solicitation, but you can use a signature link to give readers a way to get to your website, and you can include your phone number. If you become a trusted member of the group, you gain tremendous credibility and reach.

Resources

Specify the specifics

After you define your target market, define it again. Most people don't get specific enough. For example, let's say you're a web designer. It's not enough to say "I want to serve people who want websites designed."

Beyond that, it's not even enough to say "I want to serve small businesses who want websites designed." If you get down to the level of "I want to serve small service businesses who want websites designed," you're getting closer. Better yet is "I want to serve small service businesses in the wellness market, such as massage therapists, Reiki providers, and yoga instructors."

Resources

Put on a professional face

Upgrade your company image. There's no reason why any company no matter how small should project a junky, cheesy, or low-quality image. You can now order just about any design element or product you want online for a reasonable amount of money.

About 15 years ago, I paid almost \$1000 for a logo design to use on my letterhead and business cards. Today, you can get a professionally designed logo for between \$99 and \$400 from a number of companies. Purchase high-quality, professional blog and website templates for \$50 on up from sites like TemplateMonster. Or check out free blog templates at WordPress.net.

And, to avoid contradicting myself, make sure you've defined your market and your positioning and messaging before spending money on image.

Resources

[WordPress Themes](#)

[Blog and Website Templates](#)

[LogoWorks](#)

[Logo Design Works](#)

Give it away

Build your list by giving something away free (like this book) in return for your visitor's name and email address. Be responsible, don't spam, and give people something useful.

And make sure you use a good, solid service like AWeber, Vertical Response, CampaignMonitor, or SalesAutomator

Resources

[AWeber](#)

[VerticalResponse](#)

[CampaignMonitor](#)

[SalesAutomator](#)

Mark Smallwood is a writer and small business consultant. He has started five companies of his own, including a graphic design company, a gardening and landscaping company, an online help and multimedia development company, a greeting card company, and a marketing consulting firm.

He also co-founded several small companies and spent over 24 years in the software business working for such companies as Oracle, Unisys, Juniper Networks, Embarcadero Technologies, and Borland Software.

If you have comments, questions, or suggestions regarding this book, please share them. Write to: =mark.smallwood or visit <http://www.eversmall.com>