

Snippets, Tidbits and Creativity

A Business Casual Guide to Marketing

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Snippets, Tidbits and Creativity
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Dedication

To my bride Lynn for being the best business and life coach ever.

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Strategy & Planning

Three Turnaround Ideas

Is your business struggling? Here are three ideas to start on the path of recovery:

Free Marketing: Take advantage of “free” marketing on the web to position yourself and your company as the industry expert, the guru, in the products and services you offer. The idea is to become the go-to person for questions about the kinds of solutions you provide.

Focus on New Accounts: Keep your sales effort focused on building relationships with potential new accounts. You may not land these accounts right away, especially if you are in a down economy, but you will have eliminated or minimized your competition by building a relationship with these prospects that marks you as a value-added resource.

Trade Articles: Quadruple the number of prospects you meet through email by trading articles on a monthly basis with three other non-competing companies serving your market. By having your article appear in your own electronic newsletter as well as three others, you reach a broader market. At the same time, you increase the value of your newsletter by including information from the other companies. Be careful, this only works when all four companies write value-focused articles rather than sell copy.

Abraham Lincoln, CEO

Of the characteristics a company should look for in a CEO, Abraham Lincoln possessed them all. His vision was clear – to preserve the Union. He displayed enormous courage to stand by his convictions through our nation's darkest hours.

What are some of the characteristics of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) that Abraham Lincoln embodied?

How about:

- Honesty
- Humility
- Humor
- Perseverance
- Conviction
- Passion
- Intelligence
- Creativity
- Faith
- Courage
- Vision

Lincoln's honesty was legendary even in his lifetime. Do you have the honesty to tell your customers the truth about their orders, your prices, and your ability to deliver on time?

Lincoln's humility goes without saying. Do you know yourself well enough to be able to recognize your

shortcomings? Knowing your weaknesses allows you to adapt, compensate, correct and otherwise work around them.

Lincoln's humility was a source of his great humor. Do you have the ability to laugh at yourself? So many things in life are not funny, humor makes up for them. Humor is the key to keeping your sanity.

In the darkest moments of the War, Lincoln continued to persevere in his goal to preserve the Union. Others advised compromise, but Lincoln would accept no plan that did not keep the Union intact. Do you have the perseverance to hang in even when everything is going against you? What you do when all doors appear closed determines if you pass or fail the test of perseverance.

If you know your course is right, stay with it. Lincoln was absolutely convinced of the rightness of his course. That made him a winner. What about you? Will you stand tall while others around you fade away?

Before you can stand, you have to know what you are standing for. Lincoln had a conviction that unified his mind, heart and spirit. There was no way he was going to fail. What do you stand for? What are your convictions?

When you have conviction, you bring a passion that puts you heads and shoulders above your competition. Where are your passions? What are you willing to fight for? To die for? What are you willing to get out of bed for every morning and stay up late to complete?

Before you can march off to battle, you have to see the victory. Before you know which way to march, you have to

know where you want to go. Lincoln was fixated on success and had the intelligence to envision success first. He planned and achieved second. Of these three activities, envisioning, planning, achieving, envisioning is the most important and requires the greatest intelligence. Do you have the presence of mind to envision your success?

Lincoln was a creative genius. Read any of his speeches to see this fine mind at work. Some people are naturally more gifted than others with creativity. However, we all have some level of creativity and we can exercise this gift. For the CEO, business success is dependent on your ability to respond creatively to the challenges you face. Where is the innovative thinking going on in your organization? Find it, encourage it, and succeed with it.

Lincoln was a man of great faith who was never shy about invoking the deity. Even though he often thought of himself as unworthy of the challenge, he had faith in himself and his abilities to achieve. And he trusted his team. Lincoln stood by his competent generals and let them prosecute the War. (The incompetent ones he got rid of.) What about you? Where do you place your faith?

Lincoln was a man of courage. When you have convictions backed by faith and vision backed by intelligence and sense of purpose, courage follows. Do you stand up when it is time to be counted? Or do you shy away from confrontation?

Lincoln was a man of vision. He took his role as President seriously and dedicated himself to achieving the goal of preserving the Union. He also foresaw the need for

healing after the War, but was assassinated before he could move forward with his plans. Do you have vision? Where are you leading your company? You have to see the place you're going before you can get there.

It's never easy to be a CEO, but it is easier to be a CEO during the good times when sales and profits are on the upswing. In the darker times of business, I like to think of Abraham Lincoln, the CEO for troubled times. Are there going to be layoffs and cutbacks? I'm reminded of his phrase "with malice towards none and charity for all..."

Is their division in the ranks? "A nation (*or company*) divided against itself cannot stand."

Do you need to rally the troops? How about a simple exposition of the facts followed by a call to action? You could choose no better model than Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

Lincoln had the courage to not be politically correct. When someone complained about General Grant's drinking whiskey, Lincoln is reported to have responded by ordering a case of Grant's favorite whiskey sent to all of his generals. How do you respond when someone attacks one of your team members?

When the war ended, there was great celebration in Washington. The story goes that someone asked President Lincoln if he had a favorite song that the band could play. The President is reported to have replied, "Dixie." How do you speak about your competitors? Would you have the courage to ask the band to play *their* battle hymn?

There is much we can say about Abraham Lincoln, enough to fill many books. But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow his memory. Through his life he has consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what Abraham Lincoln did for us.

CEOs especially owe Lincoln a debt, for in Lincoln's life, we find a role model not only for leadership, but also for greatness.

Growth Thoughts

Looking to grow your company this year? Consider the following requirements:

Willingness to change: Nothing good happens without changing for the better. Abandon thoughts like: “That’s not us.” “We don’t work that way.” “It won’t work for my business.” Instead, embrace change. Look for better ways to do things. Invest some of your downtime in thinking about how to serve your customers in new and better ways. If you do nothing else, make a commitment to change.

Uncontested selling space: Find, discover, invent or create a unique selling space in order to marginalize competition while dominating an exclusive marketplace. To become the market leader you have to invent the industry. Rapid growth requires innovation. True innovation either re-invents the selling space or creates a new selling space. How do you find that elusive uncontested selling space? Start with a commitment to change. Then look for opportunities to change your business in ways that eliminate or marginalize your competition.

A value proposition people want to tell their friends about: If you think about it, this is the business purpose of social networking. To attract customers and achieve that elusive viral passing on of information that builds your business, develop an offer package so attractive that people become excited by it. Be careful, if your offer sounds unbelievable, it probably is. The idea is to make a believable offer that is exciting enough that people want to talk about it.

A business organized and driven to support your value proposition: Are you organized for success? Your outstanding value proposition becomes possible and believable if you organize your company around your ability to deliver extremely high value.

The ability to attract prospects and close sales: If your offer is good enough, it is saleable. However, sales do not happen until someone makes them happen. Selling is an everyday part of business ownership. Long-term, sustainable growth requires that the owner become the chief selling officer of the company. Sales training is essential.

Hunting Elephants in Business Casual

Elephant hunting depends on having an elephant wander onto your path. While you would like to eat the elephant, you know an animal that large will control the exchange. While waiting for the elephant to happen along or while you are traipsing around in search of one, consider another source of survival. In business long term survival requires something you have control over – that delivers a harvest of many small things. Ever wonder why agriculture was invented?

By developing a large number of small clients or customers, you won't need that big elephant account parked on your desk. The irony is that a field filled with edible little plants will attract the elephants and other plant eating animals. The plant eaters will attract the meat eaters. When that happens, your challenge is to kill and eat your elephant before he eats your crop. You also have to eat your elephant before the lions attack.

When done right, you will have an abundant harvest from your small seeds and plants – plus a few elephants that become overly curious about your success. You'll be well-fed. When the other meat eaters come around, you'll be able to afford a fence to keep them out.

Plant your business. Fertilize it with wisdom and street smarts. Plant seeds of success with your customers. Work diligently so you can reap a great harvest.

Peak Experiences

When you're half-way up a 12,000-foot mountain, the thrill is not found in sitting on top. The fun is happening where you are right now on the side. Your joy includes those bumps, bruises, cuts, scrapes and scratches you pick up along the way because they teach you how to become a better climber.

Optimism is the watchword of business success just as it is the source of the mountain climber's grit. There's no profit in pessimism. Failure is only a misstep on the road to success. If you're not having fun while experiencing the bumps and bruises along the way, you're climbing the wrong mountain.

If the past year has been a rough climb, at least you didn't fall off the mountain? Feels that way when you lose your job or when your business fails. When a mountain climber falls off a mountain, they usually don't get up again. Business failure isn't like that. You climb again because you have to. A mountain is the only place you can have a peak experience.

Selling Your B2B Business?

Put your marketing house in order first

An investor seeking to purchase a company will understand that your sales may not be what they were before a recession, but the buyer will be less interested if you have been doing a poor job of marketing, especially if you are not prepared for the coming turnaround. With a professional marketing communications effort, you not only attract people to buy your company, you also generate leads for your products and services.

Here are some things people are looking for when purchasing a company:

1. A written marketing plan that details activities for the year.
2. Attractive, professional print sales literature
3. Trade show booth
4. Website optimized for lead generation
5. Aggressive use of direct mail and opt-in email campaigns
6. Comprehensive public relations effort that addresses online media as well as the traditional trade publications.
7. Social Networking. This is new enough that many companies that sell business-to-business are not yet taking full advantage. By adopting an aggressive posture, you will make your company more attractive to a buyer – and you may even find a buyer along with new customers.
8. Database to support customer relationship management.

Think Big to Grow Big

An interesting study would be to determine if most business people are doers or planners. Think about it. Which are you? Are you more comfortable charging ahead to get the work out? Or do you find yourself thinking and planning before you act? The reality for most small business owners I meet is they appear so hands on in the business that they don't take time to plan. But you need to do both to succeed.

A business owner is more likely to ask a marketing professional about creating a website or new brochure than ask about how to generate more sales and leads. Yet, the driver for making the marketing spend is almost always the desire for more leads and sales, not more brochures or another website redo.

Thinking ahead applies to all areas of your company operations, but it is often the last thing the owner spends time doing.

Where Real Growth Happens

Strategy is where the real growth happens, not tactics. Think about the life cycle of a company. You start your business at the zero sales point with an innovative product or service and an entrepreneurial business model. On a percentage basis, you grow extremely fast during this phase as your sales, if you are successful, take a sharp ride up.

At some point, you hit maturity. As a mature company you invest in growth and turn the business over to a professional management team by filling in the C-Level seats on your organization chart. However, your sales have leveled off for a

variety of reasons, most having to do with organizational issues related to past growth and the entry of fierce competition into your market space. Success breeds competition. Theoretically, you can continue forever at the mature level growing roughly at the same pace as the economy. Without a new innovation, you will not experience the exhilarating ride up you enjoyed in the beginning.

As your company ages, and other people introduce newer, better ways of doing things, you may find yourself in the harvest and divest side of your “growth” curve. This is where the bell-shaped curve turns the wrong way. The best strategic move at this point may be the old-fashioned “take the money and run” solution.

Where is your company in this cycle? Are you riding the escalator at a rapid pace to the top? Or are you on the great plain of flat growth that can run on for a long time before curving south into oblivion? Or are you trending downward on the wrong side of the growth curve?

Knowing where your company is on the growth curve... and knowing where your industry is on the growth curve... determines the strategies you should be taking to grow your company.

Here are some strategy ideas to consider depending on where you are on the growth curve:

Entrepreneurial Model

You’re currently on the high growth track. Your success is being built on a solid base of an innovative product or service with little or no competition. Your creativity and innovative thinking as an owner are the driving forces of your success.

Strategy: Ride the wave up, but on the way, gain an understanding of where the top of the curve is. Plan for one of two actions as you reach maturity:

1. **Turn the business over to professional managers** to free you to explore your next great adventure. Entrepreneurs are trailblazers. We shouldn't allow ourselves to become bogged down managing growing corporate structures. For example, Bill Gates stepped down from running Microsoft so he could focus on innovation – where he could provide the highest value to the company and achieve the greatest personal satisfaction.
2. **Sell the company as soon as you see the top coming.** Selling out allows you to devote your full-time energies to building your next company and riding that exhilarating curve to another top. This is the life of the serial entrepreneur. This is the 3M model, except they do it with products rather than the company itself. They invent a new product and take it to market. When the market for the product matures, they sell out. The advantage of this model is it keeps you always on the rapid growth upswing side of the cycle. If successful, your return on investment will be extremely high over a long period of time. The downside is not every good idea succeeds so you have to be prepared to bail out if the curve up doesn't increase fast enough.

Mature Company Model

During the mature phase, your business is successful but you are no longer experiencing the high growth you enjoyed earlier. A typical example is the company founder who began an at home business on a shoestring and built it up to become a full-fledged corporation with annual sales of \$3 million or more.

Somehow that \$3 million has become a plateau or glass ceiling that you never seem able to grow beyond.

Strategy: Depends on what you want to do. Here are some options:

1. **Keep up the good work.** If you are happy running your \$3 million dollar company as is, do so. You've got a great business and there's no compelling reason to change.
2. **Invest in growth.** You have to spend money to make money as the cliché goes. This is a two-step process. The first step is to bring in an outside expert to go over your operations to squeeze every nickel you can out of your overhead without sacrificing quality or service. The second step is to re-invest the savings into a more aggressive marketing and sales effort. I recommend involving outside help for both the operations work and the marketing because an outsider will look at your business with new eyes. One of the reasons you may be stuck at the \$3 million dollar level is you are too close to your own business to see a clear path to higher revenues.
3. **Leverage your position.** If you're an entrepreneur stuck in a manager's role, it may be time to leverage your company ownership for something you really want to do. This strategy may involve buy, sell or recapitalization strategies.

Declining Company Model

If your company is in decline and you see no prospect of a turnaround anytime soon, here are some strategy options:

1. **Confirm the Diagnosis with a Second Opinion.** Bring in an expert to evaluate your company at the strategic level. As the owner, you may be too close to your business to see its

full potential. If the expert confirms your diagnosis, it's time to move on.

2. **Harvest.** Do not invest precious resources in your failing or downward spiraling business. Instead, sell what you can at the highest price you can still command.
3. **Divest.** Sell the company or liquidate its assets. Use the funds you recoup from the sale to fund your next venture. If you are a high risk taker, you may want to invest in a new venture with a lot of upside potential. Otherwise, you may want to consider a company that has completed the risky rise to maturity and take charge of keeping that company highly profitable through effective, professional management.

Why Join a Business Growth Group?

Opportunities are all around us – but we need to recognize and take advantage of them in ways that render our competition irrelevant.

Business Growth Groups create a synergy that develops naturally from the power of the group. These synergies allow us to identify opportunities we have been missing in building our businesses. The value proposition of our growth groups is extremely high when you weigh the small investment required against the significant impact participation in the group will have on your sales and profit performance.

Power of the Group: Like-minded business owners committed to extremely high growth will lead to synergies that cannot be imagined in advance of the group's formation. These synergies will strengthen each member through the commitment and power of the group.

Purpose: Rapid, sustainable and appropriate growth

1. **Focus:** Strategy – at the 50,000-foot level
2. **Goal:** Maximum income while maintaining life balance and remaining faithful to our values
3. **Recognition:** We're living in a new world – Post Great Recession
4. **Meeting Rules:** No selling, no competition and no promises – Your growth depends on you!

What You Can Expect

1. **Increased Sales** – No promises but it is why the Growth Groups exist.
2. **Safe Choices** – You’ll understand what to do and why – so you minimize risk
3. **Maximum Convenience** – meetings nearby, half-day per month, facilitators available close by.
4. **Affordable** – low cost with no add ons or up-charges.
5. **Turnkey Solutions** – making you a better business person with strategies and tactics you implement on your own with no requirement for additional financial investment in the group.
6. **Reliability and Performance** – Facilitators have proven track records of success. They are available for additional services if you need them.
7. **Build Trust** – With other business owners and advisors (to maximize synergies)

Winston Churchill – Strategist

Winston Churchill – Strategist

In the early days of World War II before the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the entry of America into the war, Britain alone remained of the western alliance. Most other European nations allied against Hitler's Germany had been conquered. All that kept Hitler from marching in a victory parade in downtown London a couple of miles of water called the English Channel, a few very good fighter planes with determined, capable pilots and Winston Churchill. That Churchill led the British nation to victory is a matter of history. Achieving that victory began with a strategic plan like none the world had ever seen. Business leaders have much to learn from Churchill.

Winston Churchill: A Role Model for Success

In the darkest days of the war, when those around him contemplated surrender to Nazi tyranny, Winston Churchill smiled, raised his hand in a V for Victory sign and declared, "We will never surrender." Churchill knew what challenges he faced and he knew his vision for success. As you contemplate your own vision of success, consider how clearly Churchill understood his situation. In a series of speeches in the early days of the war, he eloquently stated his mission, his goal, his strategy and exactly what he was willing to invest to make it happen. He also stated how he expected his team to perform. What more could you ask from a plan for success?

Mission and Goal

Churchill's mission and goal (he called them his policy and aim):

“You ask, what is our policy? I can say: It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival. Let that be realised; no survival for the British Empire, no survival for all that the British Empire has stood for, no survival for the urge and impulse of the ages, that mankind will move forward towards its goal. But I take up my task with buoyancy and hope. I feel sure that our cause will not be suffered to fail among men. At this time I feel entitled to claim the aid of all, and I say, ‘come then, let us go forward together with our united strength.’”

This quote contains only 184 words, yet Churchill packs an amazing amount of information into it. Churchill not only states his mission and goal, but also calls his people to unity and action. Without unity of purpose, your team will fail. Without a clear call to action, your team will fail. Even if your team at present is just yourself, you will fail if you are not clear on your mission and goal. To begin the road towards success, call yourself to action and unity of purpose. You cannot succeed if you are pulled in different directions. Pull yourself in just one direction: up towards success!

Churchill paints a word picture of the consequences of failure. He recognized that failure meant the British Empire would go the way of the dinosaurs. That is also your alternative

to success. Do not brood over or ponder failure, just be aware that the consequence of not winning is failure and failure leads to extinction.

Notice also how Churchill tells his people how he finds his strength. “But I take up my task with buoyancy and hope,” he declares. Such a statement itself gives his listeners buoyancy and hope. Tell your team (and tell yourself) that you are confident in your success before you step off on the journey. Winners win not so much because they know how to win, but because they do not know how to fail.

Strategy

Churchill went on to describe to his people how he and they would achieve their mission and goal:

“We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this Island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God’s good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.”

Personal Investment

What did he personally bring to the table? Churchill said:

“I would say to the House, as I said to those who have joined this government: ‘I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.’”

What are you willing to invest for your personal success? Anything less than “blood, toil, tears and sweat” will not do. Also add a sense of humor, brainpower, financial resources and your faith in yourself and God.

On-the-Job Performance

Here’s what Churchill had to say about the way he expected his team to perform:

“Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, ‘This was their finest hour.’”

Are You Ready for Your Finest Hour?

You do not achieve great success without a real struggle in the physical world where obstacles block your path and may threaten your survival. The struggle is also spiritual for there are evil forces lined up against you that want to blind you to the path of true success. If you believe the path to success is paved with dollar signs, then you are experiencing spiritual blindness.

Marketing

The next five pieces use the story teller's art to deliver a business message. The idea is to entertain and inform. For an added challenge, I decided to use haiku for the titles. Haiku is a stylized Japanese poetry form. In its original Japanese rules, the poet uses lines of five, seven, and five syllables. Haiku makes heavy use of nature. American haiku poets place less importance on line length in order to free themselves for better expression. American poetry is all about breaking the rules. I chose to stick with the five-seven-five format as part of the writer's challenge.

Snow falling on steel Place where happy sales come from

Our town Chicago

From my window, I see the snow falling on another February day, wondering if this winter will ever end and the Cubs return to their quest. The Sox too are on a quest but today the snow falls and we wait.

Where do sales come from? Why do clients choose us? I sip my coffee, take one last look at the snow falling on the city, and smile.

I turn and my friend Frank looks me in the eye. “You’re smiling. You know, don’t you?”

I drop the smile long enough to speak. “One of the keys to marketing success is the concept of added value. While your product or service may offer value above and beyond what your competition offers, you miss the point – and maybe the sale – if you limit yourself to the added value features and benefits of your product or service.”

Frank removes his glasses and rubs his eyes. “So you are saying that closing a sale has to do with something besides a product’s features and benefits? You’re talking about price and service, right?”

I pick up the coffee mug and take a long sip, giving my friend time to consider that maybe the answer goes deeper than tired words like quality, price and service. “While sellers

typically are clear on the added value of their product or service compared to competitive offerings, buyers are less likely to see a clear distinction. Often it's the little things you do above and beyond the call of duty that clinch the deal.”

Frank locks eyes with me again. “For instance?”

“These extras are the essentials of building a good working relationship, things like your personal expertise, the expertise of others in your company, your network of contacts, your willingness to be flexible and your company's flexibility. And your ability to listen.”

“Maybe we should take these one at a time.” Frank reaches for the brew pot.

My fingers itch to dance across the keyboard. “Let’s talk about one of them. Then I have to get back to my billable work.”

“Right, you told me about that sale you made. Good job.”

Your personal expertise

I let Frank pour me another cup of java while I swipe a glance out the window at the snow falling on cold concrete, glass and steel. “Do you have any special experience or knowledge that will help your prospect close the deal?”

“What do you mean?” Frank uses his expertise in scooping sugar into coffee.

“What do you know above and beyond product knowledge?”

“You mean like baseball scores?”

I give Frank the cold stare. Then I smile remembering when I was young and eager. “For example, you might have a situation where the customer would close on that new coil processing line if only they had room in their plant. You perform a site survey that can show them how to reconfigure their plant to find the space they need. You know they can’t buy without the space, so

the extra work will payoff. It's not your expertise in coil processing that counts in this case, it's your knowledge of plant layout and design."

"Yeah, that makes sense. But I sell services." Frank flashes that "gotcha smile" of his, the pencil-thin one that starts up near his left ear, drops down at a forty-five degree angle towards his jaw, makes a quick horizontal line across his face and then climbs another forty-five degree angle towards his right ear.

I'm not about to let Frank off the hook. "On the service side, I've helped clients select the appropriate hardware and software products needed to set-up their own in-house graphics work stations. What I lost in art production for basic marketing communications materials, I made up for later in high-end creative assignments the client wasn't able to handle in-house and consulting fees for marketing program evaluation and planning."

"Nice trade off." Frank hides his face with an uplifted coffee mug.

"We'll talk more next time, Frank." I take one last peak at the snow falling before the real work begins.

Wind blowing on glass
Place where writing is business
Our town Chicago

The expertise of others in your company

The Hawk stirs dust creating swirls of brown that sweep into the ash tree outside my window, making the branches dance in a syncopated rhythm. Robins and cardinals dot the higher branches where strands of grass hang from their beaks. A bright red male cardinal sings a tune that sounds like he's asking his mate if it's time to make eggs yet, but his tune is not mournful or bluesy. It's a happy song because he knows the answer is yes. Along the back fence, two squirrels dance.

Frank hands me a cup of joe as I turn back from the window. "Spring's coming,"

I smile at Frank before blowing air across the top of my mug. "It's like that feeling you get before closing a sale."

"Speaking of sales, you were going to tell me about how I should be taking advantage of the expertise of others in my company." Frank sips his coffee while staring at me with wide eyes.

I lean back in my antique oak office chair and put my feet up on the old gun-metal gray desk with the linoleum top. "One of the ways you add value for your prospect is the team you bring to the table. Your prospect may have narrowed a choice down to your transformers or the transformers manufactured by one of your competitors. In addition to your product, which has to compete in terms of quality, price, and service, what do you bring to the table?"

Frank's eyes rolled towards the ceiling and then back down to meet mine. "I've built a solid relationship with them, so they trust me."

"That's good as far as it goes." I start bouncing a pen on the desktop.

"It gets them free tickets to the Cubs."

I flip the pen end over end into the air and catch it as it falls. "When the Cubs are back in town that will mean something to them. What else?"

"What else is there?" Frank asks.

"How about a team of in-house engineers who developed your special technology and who are available to solve problems? Perhaps one of your colleagues is a widely published author and nationally recognized expert on transformer technology. Who on your team can you bring to the prospect to clinch the deal?"

"Well, if I was selling transformers, that might be a good idea. But I sell a service, or did you forget that?" Frank smirks before taking another sip of coffee.

"Didn't forget. Just wanted to include a manufacturing example for the readers. Never know who is in manufacturing."

"Readers? What are you talking about?"

"Readers. Some of them might be into service sales also. Here at Zuk-Lloyd Associates, we build teams of independent, senior-level experts for each assignment who will be the people who actually perform the work. This gives us a significant competitive edge over other creative services firms that sell projects at the partner level, and then pass the work down to a team of less experienced, junior-level employees. We include biographies in the proposal document, and may bring some or all of these experts to a meeting with the prospect."

“That’s impressive,” says Frank. “So you use senior people even though you could hire less experienced talent and make a few bucks?”

“We earn our money by building long-term relationships with clients who trust us to deliver quality work.”

Frank took another sip of coffee, picked a pencil up from my desk and flipped it into the air where it bounced off the ceiling and then plummeted to my desk top to take three short hops before skidding to a stop. The pencil point remained in place.

“Didn’t break,” I say.

“About as impressive as that example you’re going to give me about how you bring together senior-level teams.”

After another sip of coffee, I say, “In one assignment, we knocked out three competitors simply by bringing in the team that would actually be doing the work. These seasoned pros were able to answer the prospect’s questions on the spot, drawing on their 20-plus years of experience each. The prospect kept raising the question of each person on the team: ‘...and you will be the person who actually performs the work?’ The ‘yes’ from each team member reassured the prospect and clinched the deal.

“So where do you find all these senior people?” Frank asks.

“Let’s talk about that next time. We both have work to do.” I shake my mouse to loosen up the screen saver. The sweet strains of the cardinal’s spring song fills my office as Frank heads for the door.

Rain falling on street Place for meeting new clients

Our town Chicago

Your flexibility

My friend Frank handed me a cup of something dark, rich, aromatic and hot. He took a sip from his own paper cup of designer coffee and then opened up. “We’ve been talking about the importance of adding value – going above and beyond the call of duty to close a sale. We discussed how my personal expertise was essential as well as the personal expertise of others in the company. What’s another dealmaker that I should keep in mind?”

“That’s what I like about you, Frank. You don’t beat around the bush. We haven’t talked about personal flexibility yet, have we?”

Frank pulled his glasses off and stared out the window for a few seconds before answering. “Not yet but I can be flexible.”

“But do you have the personal flexibility to meet with the prospect on a Sunday afternoon? Can you pick up the customer at the airport? Will you go to bat for your customer with your management and with the customer's management? Just what are you willing to do to become personally involved?”

“Sure, I can do stuff like that. It goes without saying.”

“It’s good to say something to your customer or prospect about your flexibility. As a business owner, I’ve made a point of

offering personal and corporate flexibility as a marketing advantage. One example on the personal side is the client who was stressed for time due to workload. Would I be willing to meet for breakfast before the business day as a regular condition for doing business? ‘Of course!’ I said. For the next 15 years, I met two or three times a month with this wonderful client for breakfast. For most of those years, we met at the client's expense in the exclusive Metropolitan Club on the 67th floor of Chicago's Sears Tower. Great breakfast, great view, great client. I don't remember who the competitor was who said no to this simple request and neither does my client.”

Frank smiled before taking a sip of his coffee. When he put his paper coffee shop cup down, he said, “So the idea is to look for ways to meet the customer’s needs that make me stand out from my competitor.”

“You got it, Frank.”

Flowers in vase Place where solutions are born

Our town Chicago

Your company's flexibility

My friend Frank bolted through my office door and knocked over a vase of English lavender and delphiniums.

I looked at the spreading puddle and the flowers making a display of themselves with their stems exposed in front of the filing cabinets. “The water will be good for the carpet.”

Frank flopped to his knees, handkerchief in hand in a vain attempt to sop up the liquid. I picked up an old shirt that’s been hanging on the back of a spare desk chair since mid-winter and tossed it so that it half landed on Frank and half draped in front of him to the floor.

While Frank dabbed with the dead shirt, I poured the coffee. “You surviving the economy?” I asked.

“I’ve been putting into practice everything you’ve been teaching me.” Frank stood up and grabbed his mug, steaming with the dark brew. “But I have another question for you?”

“What’s that?”

“We talked about how I need to be flexible and I’m cool with that, but what about my company? Shouldn’t they be prepared to flex?”

“Absolutely. It’s a huge advantage for smaller companies because you don’t have to deal with the bureaucracy that often

gets in the way of deal making. Your company's willingness to be flexible eliminates competitors who either can't be bothered or can't get a decision made quickly.”

“Okay. So the company has to be flexible to stay in the race?”

“As a business owner, Frank, I will meet any reasonable request of my clients. And I can make the decision right on the spot. Why would anyone want to do business any other way?”

Frank stooped down to pick up the flowers. “With a little added flexibility, my company should be flowering soon.”

Sun warming the earth Place with opportunity

Our town Chicago

Your ability to listen

The sun was high in the southern sky despite the late afternoon. I handed Frank a glass of iced tea with a sprig of mint from the garden. If you look out my office window, you'll see the mint near the back fence. On a good day, you'll watch squirrels dancing along the fence tops and cardinals adding their flame red color to the green of the ash tree.

"It's time for me to hit the road." Frank sipped his iced tea like he wasn't planning to go anywhere.

I stared at him until he smiled.

"Yeah, I do have one more question." Frank waved his iced tea in the air gathering thoughts. "We've talked about where sales come from, how you have to rely on the expertise of your team, and how I need to flex to meet customer demands and so does my company. But it seems like something is missing."

I poured another iced tea while absorbing what Frank was saying. By the time I had the lemon slice tucked neatly into my glass, I had an answer. "One thing we haven't touched on is listening. When you listen, you hear things that help you understand the problem the prospect is trying to solve."

“That part I think I understand. If I’m rushing ahead trying to make my pitch, I’m may miss something important the prospect is trying to tell me.”

I nod. “This has obvious implications for the product or service you are selling. It also provides valuable information for distinguishing yourself from your competition in the ways we’ve talked about.”

“What do you mean?”

“Listening lets you know that you have to be flexible in your company's terms. Listening tells you that the prospect has interests in another part of the world where you know someone who can be of service. Listening allows you to eliminate your competition by offering to meet your client over breakfast instead of during the regular business day, if that's what it takes to seal the deal. Listening lets you know what problem the prospect is willing to pay to have go away.”

“Pays to listen, as they say.” Frank smiled. If his hands would reach that far, I’m sure he’d be patting himself on the back.

“If you are passionate about business success, take your selling effort to the next level by looking for the little added values that you can bring to the table. Deals are made or lost in the arena of "added value" rather than product features and benefits. And it all begins with listening.”

How to Jumpstart Your Marketing

We're in an age characterized by a new economy and new ways to communicate messages. In reviewing your sales and marketing activities consider the following as a starting point. It is developed for small to mid-size companies. Adapt and add to the list to meet your unique situation:

- What is the single most important marketing problem or challenge your company faces?
- What are three things you can do immediately to solve this problem or meet this challenge?
- List the people who are going to perform the tasks involved in doing the three things you will commit to doing immediately to solve your biggest problem or meet your biggest challenge.
- List the budget you are dedicating immediately to accomplish the three things you are committing to do to solve this problem or meet this challenge. (Budget enough to get the job done.)
- List the specific actions your people will take in the next 30 days to address this problem or challenge.
- List the hard deadlines for accomplishing the actions your people will take in the next 30 days.
- Set a date and time for a review meeting 30 days from now to review the status of the problem or challenge you are facing and to plan additional steps that need to be taken. Develop a 12-month calendar of activities. Continue to meet monthly until the problem or challenge is resolved.

- Meet to review your marketing program again. Depending on how your company is doing, schedule the meetings monthly, quarterly, semi-annually or annually. Attack another marketing problem or challenge by repeating the process.

An Idea is Like a Crystal Glass

Picture a crystal wine glass. Other dishes may be stacked around it, but they don't glow like this goblet. Your product or service should stand out against the competition like this.

A crystal wine glass begins with a glob of glass hot from the flame. Next, the glassmaker shapes the hot goblet into the desired shape. Ideas work the same way. They start as a blob from the hot furnace of your mind, and then you refine and shape it into something special.

The glassmaker shapes the glass to give it a base that is flat and will not wobble; with a stem that is thin, tall and eloquent; with a bowl that is delicate, yet holds water. When tapped, the crystal glass rings true.

Think Clearly

Your business idea works in the same way. Shape it under the heat of clear thinking. Your idea has to have a logical base to stand on so that it will make sense to your target market. Why does your idea solve the problem? Why should anyone care?

Promote your idea

Shooting out of the base is a tall, thin eloquent stem that represents the effort you put into your idea. Let the world know immediately your idea is no ordinary mug.

An idea that holds water

At top, your idea must hold water. Shape it so that it has a practical application in the market. When a prospect taps your

idea, it has to ring true. This happens when your product or service is the best solution to the problem at hand.

Market one good idea

Having an idea is not enough, for in the rough it is like a glob of glass and can shatter easily. Refine your idea so that it has a solid base to stand on, a simple, direct way to reach out into the marketplace, and a validity that will hold water and ring true to the prospect.

Develop one such business idea and sell it over and over again. Make sure your idea has a high perceived value and solves a real problem. Your solution has to be better than an ordinary mug.

Once you have your idea crystallized into a product or service that meets a need in the marketplace, you are ready to go to market with it.

In a Dream I Was Playing Basketball

In a dream I was playing basketball. But there was a problem. The league I was playing in had a rule that if you didn't feel like playing, you could place a marker on the court representing your position. The marker looked like a little evil gargoyle sitting on the floor so that you had to be careful that you didn't trip over it as you went up and down the court. In this particular game, I discovered three of my teammates had placed their markers on the floor and were now sitting out the game. I and one teammate had to defend against the onslaught of the other team. Things looked gruesome for us.

When I woke up, I realized that the basketball game represented the game of life. Think of your business life. Are you sitting on the sidelines waiting for the economy to change? Or are you out on the court playing hard, doing your best to build your business? We can't win while we're sitting on the sidelines and we can't win if our teammates are sitting on the sidelines.

Have you placed your marker in the game, but are not participating? Do you say you have a business, but are not marketing? Do you have a team member helping you build your company's sales?

But the game of life extends beyond business, doesn't it? Are you engaged in your marriage or have you just plucked down your marker and are sitting on the sidelines? How about your role as a parent? As a citizen? What have you done for your local community lately? Is your spiritual life lagging because you've thrown a marker into that game also?

For Immediate Action: Conduct a checkup to make sure you are actively engaged in all aspects of your life. If you have a marker out on that basketball court we call life, take it away and let's score some points.

Marketing in a Down Economy

The temptation during a tough economy is to bide our time and wait (and hope) something happens to turn things around. With this way of thinking, we stop spending on plant improvements, freeze salaries, stop marketing and reduce sales staff. All of these steps, while prudent on the surface, actually contribute to the downturn. Societies come out of recessions not by withholding expenditures, but by spending their way out. That doesn't mean you shouldn't be prudent or that you shouldn't cut back. What it means is you shouldn't do so as a knee-jerk reaction to the current economic crises.

Sales – Keep on keeping on

During a downturn it's unusual for the market to totally stop purchasing. The problem for sales is there are a lot more "Nos" between the "Yeses." Successful companies retool their selling effort with two goals in mind:

1. Find any and all business that's out there during the downtime to stay alive
2. Position the company for rapid growth during the recovery

Finding business in a down economy

Here are some strategies that have helped companies survive past recessions:

1. **Look for Success:** Some companies, industries or organizations are thriving during the downturn. Find ways for your products and services to fit in with their needs.

2. **Narrow your niche:** The temptation during a downturn is to expand your niche in order to increase your prospect base. You confuse the market when you do that. By narrowing your niche, it makes it easier for the buyer to identify how your products or services meet their needs.
3. **Out service the competition:** If you're going to cut back staff because business is slow, make sure you eliminate anyone who is not service driven. You can't afford a gruff voice on the phone or a vague email from the service department in a down turn. Instead, get rid of those grumpy folks and hire those who are people friendly and service driven.
4. **Communicate More:** Increase your communications flow to customers and prospects using "free" services like email blasts, blogs, twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.
5. **Review your policies and procedures:** Make changes so that it is easier for customers and prospects to find you, learn about your products and services, and make purchases.
6. **Use downtime wisely:** Increase your visibility in trade organizations and the business community by serving on boards or other voluntary activities. This not only helps these organizations when their own funding sources are low, but also helps you network with potential customers.
7. **Focus your R&D on immediate results:** Find out what the biggest problem your customers are facing and then develop a solution to that problem. This could move you from a product focus to a service focus (or vice versa), but that's okay as long as you are bringing in revenue during the downturn.
8. **Don't give away your services:** The temptation in a down economy is to give away your services in hopes of making a

bigger sale later. An example is doing a free consulting project to help the customer plan how to best use one your products. Stay focused on delivering high value and service along with a quality product. A little free consulting can go a long way to seal a deal, but a customer looking to you to perform a major consulting project for free is just using you. If the project has high perceived value, the customer should pay for it. If it doesn't, the customer doesn't need it. Often the problem in these situations is the sales rep has failed to sell value and has instead focused on price.

9. **Adjust price only according to marketplace realities:** If your costs have not gone down, then you can't reduce your selling price without reducing your profit margin. Hold the line on your selling price by emphasizing value. Look to your supplier network and your product design team to find ways to reduce costs so you can pass these savings on to customers. If the customer needs to lower the price, then the customer needs to make some sort of trade off so you can stay profitable. For example, you may be able to offer a lower price in exchange for a longer term contract or an exclusive vendor arrangement.

Down Economy: Position Your Company for Rapid Growth

If you wait for a clear upswing in the economy before investing in marketing and sales, you will miss significant opportunities to land new accounts. Near the recession bottom is when businesses begin preparing for the coming turnaround. Often, this includes replacing suppliers with faster, leaner, and more economical sources so they are better prepared for the upswing.

Consider the following strategies while you are in the down cycle so that you are positioned for rapid growth even as the market is still in a downward part of the cycle.

1. **Take advantage of “free” marketing:** Use the web to position yourself and your company as the industry expert, a guru, in the products and services you offer. The idea is to become the go-to person for questions about the kinds of solutions you provide.
2. **Focus on new accounts:** Keep the sales force focused on building relationships with potential new accounts. You may not land these accounts until the recovery is in full swing, but you will have eliminated or minimized your competition by becoming the go-to person for these prospects.
3. **Emphasize Public Relations:** Take advantage of “free” public relations opportunities through article placements and press releases for trade publications and business media. Most traditional print magazines are now heavily focused on their web e-zines and blogs. So even if they don’t print your

story in the print magazine, the chances are high that they will use a well-written, newsworthy piece on their website.

4. **Form Alliances:** Look for ways to partner with non-competing companies that serve the same market you serve. The idea is to create a bundle of products and services that meet the customer's needs. This will double your sales effectiveness (and theirs) allowing you both to cast a wider net for new business.
5. **Reach more prospects:** Quadruple the number of prospects you meet through email by trading articles on a monthly basis with three other non-competing companies serving your market. By having your article appear in your newsletter as well as three others, you reach a broader market. At the same time, you increase the value of your newsletter by including information from the other companies. Be careful, this only works when all four companies write value-focused articles rather than sell copy. Also, there is no magic to having four companies in this little cooperative. Even if you share articles with just one other company, you will double your reach, assuming you both have the same size email database.

Down Economy: Focus Your Message

In a downtime, focus on honing your key messages to make it easier for prospects to identify how you fit in with their needs. Here are some strategies you can deploy during a recession to sharpen your marketing focus:

1. **Survey competitor websites:** Identify how they present themselves to the market. What can you learn from your competition? What are they doing well? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Who are they selling to? What is their pricing? What else can you learn from their website?
2. **Review trade publications:** Learn how the industry perceives the products and services you offer. How frequently are your competitors mentioned in the trades as opposed to how often your company appears? Can you identify any marketing trends that you can sell into? How is the industry changing as a result of the recession? What issues are industry members concerned about? What can you do to help with these issues?
3. **Examine your brand:** What is your unique value proposition? Do you have a clearly identified brand? How can you tailor your brand to make a stronger statement to the marketplace?
4. **Review your pricing strategy:** What can you do to deliver higher value to your customer without sacrificing profitability? Sometimes the answer is a higher priced product that solves more problems by being a faster, smarter, more complete solution. See if you can adapt a product to fit

this higher priced category. At the same time, look for a way to reduce value so you can offer a lower priced product.

5. **Prepare a Marketing Calendar:** List specific activities for the next 12 months. Include the tasks, who will perform the tasks, and the budget required.
6. **Clean your contact database:** Don't waste precious resources trying to contact a bad list. Define clearly who your target market is and build a list of the right people to contact in that target market. Stop contacting companies if you don't have a contact person's name. Do not send email to companies that have not opted in to receive it.
7. **Build an opt in email database:** Effective email campaigns require a clean list of people who have expressed an interest in receiving information from you.
8. **Build a list of "must air" points:** These are the key statements you want to make every time you communicate with your customers, prospects or the media. You don't use all the points all the time, but you stay focused on these points.

Achieving success in a down economy involves working smarter with less. The ideas expressed here will help you prepare for the realities of a down economy. In addition to sharpening your marketing and sales focus, evaluate your sales team to identify training needs and to make certain you have the right people in the right place – so that you are staffed appropriately for success. Also do a careful analysis of the products and services you are delivering to customers. How can you improve them? The better your solution, the easier it is to sell.

Marketing to an Upscale Audience

Your best return on investment (ROI) for reaching an upscale market will come from marketing strategies and tactics that are tailored to this audience.

Strategies

1. **Focus on Perceived Value.** With the upscale market, factors other than price become important. This is good news in that you can achieve higher margins. Your challenge is to keep the upscale customer focused on your product or service and not on the price. So strategy one is to focus on perceived value rather than price. Perceived value is the way your customer values your product or service. Your actual cost is not an issue. The only issue is the degree to which your customer believes your product or service is important in satisfying a desire. (Upscale shoppers are more about wants or desires than needs.)
2. **Emotion first, logic second.** Focus on the emotional reasons for making the purchase rather than logical reasons. The golden rule of sales is the customer buys on emotion and then justifies the decision after the fact with logic.
3. **Brand the Experience.** Upscale shoppers don't simply shop at their favorite boutique and they don't simply eat at their favorite restaurant. They are on a first name basis with the owner of the boutique and they request their preferred waitperson at their favorite bistro. You're not just selling a product or service, you are selling an experience.

4. **Build Top of the Mind Awareness, Brand Loyalty and Repeat Business.** The ideal marketing program will achieve some results right away but the real payoff comes over time. In the short run, you are asking people to take a chance on you when they don't know you very well. Over time, you are building a foundation of satisfied repeat customers and constantly adding to your list. Your customers are never as loyal as you want them to be or think that they are. Your competition is struggling constantly to take your customers away, even as you are taking theirs. You have to defend your existing customer base while at the same time expanding it.

Tactics

Here are some tactics that typically fit into a small business upscale marketing program. The actual tactics you deploy depend on your budget.

1. **Emotional Copy:** Focus on the emotional appeal of your offering rather than logic. Your copy goal is to make the customer feel the joy of your offering. Make this person desire offering, build a yearning in the heart. Capture the heart and the mind will follow.
2. **Stimulating Graphics.** This is a challenge for the small business because an upscale audience is best approached with upscale materials ... usually full color, glossy, heavy weight paper. Lots of photos and art elements. Use the stuff provided by your sources as much as you can. Supplement it with fine personal stationery. The look you want is "understated eloquence."
3. **Thoughtful Gifts.** We're starting to brand you as an upscale marketer. The next step is the reminder items. People forget about you so quickly. However, people love it when you

remember their birthday and send a Holiday gift. The gift should be consistent with the “understated eloquence” theme and absolutely upscale. Try to find three or four times a year to present such a gift. Present it in person if practical. Otherwise mail it. While you can do some cold mailings with these items, the real value is as a relationship builder with current customers and contacts. Your name can appear in an understated way. The gift items do not need to be expensive, but they need to be attractive to an upscale professional.

4. **Eloquent E-Newsletter.** The idea is to make a strong statement to the customer consistent with the “understated eloquence” theme. The look can be startling if done right and definitely upscale. This is about as low cost as marketing materials get. Ask for the e-mail address of your customers and contacts. Then send them regular email newsletters. Be brief with valuable information that the reader will appreciate getting. The focus is on news not self-promotion. You are becoming a resource for the customer.
5. **Branded Website.** To effectively build your brand, you need your own website to become more intimate with the upscale customer. A simple, understated eloquence look can be achieved at a modest cost for a five to ten page website. Pages can be modified or added over time as needed. Your personal branded website will provide a valuable resource for customers and prospects who want to know more about you.
6. **Networking/Networking Support.** Networking is an art and science. The chambers and other organizations sometimes bring in specialists in networking techniques to help develop skills in this area. In addition to your smiling face and

understated eloquence business cards, you can carry a handout. The idea is to give the person you meet something extra to remember you by. Once you gather a bunch of business cards at a networking event, it's time to go to work developing the relationship. This is where the networking support tactics come into play. One example might be to call the people you have met and invite them out for a one-on-one at a local coffee shop. The other thing you can do is to invite a group of networking contacts to your own after hours gathering – “Just a few people over for an after work networking get-together where we can learn more about each other and perhaps exchange leads.”

7. **Public Relations.** A monthly press release program for publications serving upscale consumers can yield excellent results. The upscale publications will be interested if you provide real news and information, not promotional material.
8. **Partnering with Upscale Retailers.** Networking the chambers will lead you to the owners of upscale boutiques and possibly art galleries. Partner with them to cross market to each other's customers with special offers.
9. **Finder's Fee Arrangements.** Why should you do all the selling alone? As you network, you will meet a lot of sales people who love what you sell. Why not partner with them in some way. One way is to offer to give them a finder's fee on any business they send your way.

Optimism

Optimism is the watchword for surviving and thriving in an economic crises. People purchase products and services when three things exist:

- They have a perceived need or want
- They are willing and able to make the purchase
- They have a positive relationship with the supplier

Without optimism you may have a prospect with one or two of the requirements met, but not all three. A person may know they need your service, but if they are afraid of the economy going south, they won't buy. If a person is pessimistic about the state of the economy, they are less likely to want to spend money no matter how important a product or service is to their success. Without optimism you can't build a positive relationship with a prospect. Bottom line: pessimists make lousy sales people. Optimists speak success into existence one sale at a time.

For action: Check your attitude. Turn away from negative thoughts and put yourself on the optimism path. What's interesting about economic turnarounds is they happen at a surprising pace. Now is not the time to worry. It's time to get busy building those relationships that eventually will lead to increased sales. Some people are going to be caught with their pessimistic pants down while the optimists are riding the leading edge of recovery.

Marketing Communications

Does Your Company Have a Story to Tell?

Whether to celebrate an anniversary, motivate employees, or generate customer interest, telling your company's story – the history of your founding up to the present – is a great way to generate excitement about who you are and what you do.

You can tell your story in a wide range of media. Many companies have a brief history page on the web, for example. But the most impressive ways to tell your story include:

- Book
- Documentary DVD

Your book and DVD combine to make a great public relations tool. Use them for:

- Recruiting
- Orientation
- Trade shows
- Sales calls
- Event handouts

Writing and publishing your history in print

The simplest way to put your history into a book-length story is to self-publish. Conventional publishing is not likely unless you are a large, publicly traded company or have an unusual story that will be of interest to readers of business books. A conventional publisher is interested in selling books while most companies are interested in giving away copies of their history for promotional purposes.

Begin the self-publishing process by having a professional writer work with you and your team to gather information about your company and to write your story. Length can vary depending on your story, but a typical book containing words with no visuals may range from 50,000 up to 100,000 words. If you have lots of photos and other visual elements, your word count can be less because the visuals will help tell your story and take up space.

Newer companies or those with a limited budget can tell their history in a smaller format such as brochure. These can be printed and bound by a local commercial printer in the same way you prepare your sales literature.

Engage the services of a professional graphics designer to achieve the look of a fine published book such as you would find in your local bookstore. The cover design is extremely important as is the inside layout.

For a book length work, use the services of a print on demand (pod) house using a quality paper in your choice of colors. With pod, you can order as many or as few copies as you desire.

Consider making your company history book available as an e-book. It will be easy to download direct from your website and saves the printing costs.

Creating a documentary DVD

You've seen history documentaries on public television that cover important moments in time, such as wars and presidential politics. The producers of these documentaries use historical photographs, paintings, artifacts and re-enactments to create a dramatic adventure that both entertains and informs the audience.

The same techniques used to create these televised documentaries are available to create your company's history on a DVD. A professional script writer can interview key people, gather existing materials and work with a producer to develop a script ready for production. The production team will turn the script into a finished DVD with professional narration, music and creative use of visual elements so that it has the look and feel of the documentaries seen on television.

A book and DVD allow you to tell your story in a dramatic fashion that entertains and informs. By appealing to both the heart and the mind, you build the basis for establishing a strong relationship that eventually can turn a prospect into a customer.

Marketing Communications Checklist for E-Commerce Website

Thinking about an e-commerce website? Here are some check points to keep you on track.

Website

- Easy navigation
- Simple, easy to understand copy
- Attractive graphics
- Make it more than a “catalog” with value added content
- In addition to your shopping cart solution, offer an additional level of transaction safety with PayPal or other 3rd party payment option that eliminates the need to enter credit card info into your checkout form.
- Provide all the information a customer needs to make a buy decision
- Include special offer at checkout
- Don't ask for any information you don't absolutely need to complete the transaction and ship the product

Promotion

- Use social networking to drive traffic (free advertising)
- Build word of mouth advertising with outstanding customer service
- Bundle products into special offer packages with high perceived value and high profit

- Turn your warehouse into a brick and mortar “outlet” store and promote on your website.
- Use public relations to drive traffic through print, broadcast and online media outlets
- Use email marketing to promote the site
- Promote “Made in USA” if applicable
- Know your target market – gather demographics and psychographics – and promote appropriately to please your market
- Price for fast inventory turns and profit – think like a big box retailer
- Use customer-friendly, service-oriented store practices – think like a small retailer.

Events Marketing

- Develop a series of online “events” that draw traffic to your website
- Include special offers
- Tie into weekly and monthly themes (National Health Awareness month, Administrative Assistant week)
- Make up themes (“Rock and Roll Weekend” with trivia questions posted throughout your site for a B2C website. Or “Think like a Pro” for a B2B website with quotes from famous business gurus.)
- Cross sell with another online marketer by trading or combining product offerings.
- Use puzzles, games and contests to build your email list

Fulfillment

- Offer 800 number payment option
- Offer same day order fulfillment

- Offer fast shipping options
- Offer free shipping on larger orders (unless weight/size makes this prohibitive)

Marketing Communications Planning Guide

A practical approach to marketing communications requires that you:

1. **Plan:** Put together a brief written plan and calendar covering the next 12 months including both in-house and outside support activities.
2. **Maintain a Single Point of Contact:** You are better served when you manage one supplier rather than four or five. Your point person can be an independent practitioner or someone from a small firm, but be certain that you hire a leader with a support team of experts to call upon. The idea is that this person will manage your marketing communications vendors to save you time while minimizing costs.
3. **Allow Time to Succeed:** Marketing communications works over time so it's best to have a program that includes doing something every month. Designate a 12-month budget and work within it
4. **Focus on Generating Leads:** Support the selling effort as your top priority. Branding, corporate image and other marketing concerns are easier to deal with when sales are moving forward.

What's working today?

Mid-size and smaller companies involved in business-to-business sales are finding the following activities to be effective in generating leads and building their networks. Please feel free to add to the list.

Print Media

- Brochure for use at trade shows, events and sales meetings
- Post card campaign to drive traffic to your website
- Sales letter to introduce yourself to prospects
- Proposal document to tailor for quotes

Electronic Media

- Website acts as the center for your marketing communications
- Search Engine Optimization to draw traffic to your website
- Google Ads to draw traffic to your website
- Blog supplements the website with a personal online experience
- Business Social Media to serve your networking activities
- E-Newsletter to maintain contacts

Other Activities

- Public Relations to keep your name in the trade journals and general business press
- Peer Advisory Groups to expand your network in a non-competitive way
- Trade Shows to expand your network within target industries
- Events to expand your network through personal contact, to feed into your Peer Advisory Group, to expand your e-newsletter list.

Questions for Marketing Communications

Questions to ask about your advertising and promotional copy:

1. Do you have a Unique Selling Proposition?
2. Who are you?
3. Why should I care?
4. If I hire you, how will my life be better?
5. Did you get me excited yet?
6. Did you move me?
7. Where's the offer?
8. Did you ask me for the order/next action?

Creative Styles

- Understated Eloquence
- Bold & Flashy
- Loaded with Attitude
- Strictly Business
- Humorous

Selecting Your Public Relations Firm

Here are some thoughts on hiring a PR person or firm:

1. **Compatibility:** Do you like the person or team you will be working with? This is the most important question. A good match of personalities is essential to a long-term relationship and PR is a long-term commitment.
2. **Writer or Media Pro:** Is the PR person a writer or a media placement specialist? In other words, does the PR person understand that the assignment is more about working with the media to obtain placements than simply a writing assignment to generate press releases and articles? While all PR people can write, not all of them understand how to contact the media to sell a story idea. Ask the PR person how they go about the placement process.
4. **Reasonable Fees:** Is the PR person flexible on fees? Can the PR person perform a reasonable, results-driven effort on a shoestring budget? You can't buy a full-blown effort for less than it costs, but a good PR person can help you accomplish a result within budget. If you lower your budget, you have to lower your expectations.
5. **Flat Rate or Hourly:** Are the fees based on a flat rate with no time accountability or will you be charged for actual time up to the limit of your monthly budget? If paying for time, some months may be lighter and some heavier depending on what opportunities become available. Do you prefer a level, equal billing amount each month or varying amounts based on actual work performed? Is your PR person or firm willing to accommodate your requirements?

6. **Experience and Contacts:** Yes it is to your advantage if the PR person has experience in your industry and knows all the editors serving your markets. However, experience and contacts are usually overvalued by clients. A good PR person with no experience in your industry will come up to speed very quickly. The criteria above are all more important to you than industry experience. If you have a good story to tell, a good PR person will get your story into the right hands even if the PR person has never met the editor. That's because of the power of the story itself. On the other hand, it doesn't matter who your PR person is or how good your PR person is, he or she is not going to be able to get an editor interested in a story that is not right for the publication.
7. **Value:** Is your story getting covered by the media. In the end, the measure of value for your PR team is their ability to get your story told in the right media to reach your target market. It's up to you to follow-up on a story with other marketing communications and sales efforts.

Prepared for the Turn-Around?

I wrote this piece for publication during the Great Recession, but it serves as a good reminder during any recession. If you find yourself in a recession, or if your business is failing while the rest of the economy is soaring, these tips will help.

What you should already be doing

Here are marketing tactics I'm deploying – and you can too:

1. Stay optimistic
2. Focus on making a sale today
3. Build relationships with prospects
4. Build your network by asking who can connect you to a prospect
5. Help others succeed by connecting them to their prospects within your network

For Immediate Action

1. **Marketing Inspection:** Review marketing materials to be sure they are on target with your key messages. Do your marketing materials support the sales force? Is your website optimized? Are you generating leads? Are you delivering a consistent brand message and image? What are your current "pain points" and what resources are you committing to resolve the issues? Are you prepared to support a sales call today? Are you building relationships now that will pay dividends during the recovery?
2. **12-Month Marketing Communications Calendar:** Do you have a calendar of marketing activities covering the next 12

months? Your calendar should include key dates, activities, assignments (both in-house and outside support), budget and expected outcomes.

3. **Develop Key Messages for Public Relations:** Compile a list of facts about your company and its products/services for use in media contacts and your marketing communications.
4. **Social Networking:** The business world is moving beyond websites and Google searches. Are you ready to generate leads and sales through Linked In, Twitter, and Facebook? Do you know why a YouTube video can do more for you than a white paper posted to your website? Are you ready to blog, vlog and start an e-newsletter?

Acquiring New B2B Clients and Customers Made Easy

Three phases occur whenever you attempt to sell a complex product or service to a new client or customer. These phases can be expressed in the question most likely to be in the prospect's mind at the beginning of each phase.

Who Are You?

Since business-to-business selling is relationship driven, start with the relationship itself. From the prospect's point of view, that means learning who you are. The challenge is you have no relationship at this point. If you meet a prospect at a trade show or other event, the odds of that person remembering who you are five minutes after your encounter is low. As a result, your job in phase one is to focus on building a personal relationship with the prospect.

Yes, your company needs to do all the marketing communications things that inform, persuade, and motivate a prospect to action over time, but in addition, your sales team needs to be about the business of adding value on a personal basis. This involves offering advice, helping to solve problems, answering questions and when the time is right, offering invitations to networking or non-business functions. The idea is to become a business friend to the prospect. At some point, this personal relationship building process slops over into Phase 2...

Are You Still Here?

Once you have built a reasonable business relationship with someone – they know who you are and are usually willing to speak with you or respond to your e-mails, you are ready to focus on selling your products and services. At this point, you are feeding into the prospect’s natural reaction when reminded about you – “Oh, are you still here?” or “Oh, are you still in business?” During this phase you are continuing to build the relationship while building prospect awareness of how you can be of service through the products and services you offer.

In addition to direct marketing activities that build awareness of your company, you can build relationship with credibility building marketing communications activities such as publicity placements in trade publications and online activities. Now that the prospect knows who you are and what you do, you want them to start seeing your company name frequently in the business world.

What did you say you do?

Okay, the prospect now has some degree of trust in you and your company as a viable potential resource. The final question arises when the prospect is ready to make a purchase. Notice that the prospect is in command, not you at this point. The question on the prospect’s mind involves clarification of how you may be able to solve the specific problem at issue. “What did you say you do?” The prospect is looking for confirmation that you can solve the problem they need fixed.

In complex sales, the communications materials don’t always line up with the problem as the prospect perceives it. In this phase, the focus is on your ability to customize and sell a solution that solves the problem at hand. Think of this as the

proposal stage if you like, although the idea is to bypass the normal bid process as a single-source provider.

If done right, you'll notice that price is not the main issue. Solving the problem is. If you attempt to rush the process... or if the buyer is rushing the process... without going through these three phases, the focus is more likely to be on price rather than solution. That's because the buyer won't have the confidence, trust or knowledge to recognize the value proposition you are offering. Why? Because your value proposition includes you as an individual and your ability to instill confidence that your proposed solution will indeed solve the problem.

Creativity

Don't Poop in the Bath Water: Business Lessons from a Two-Year Old

Here is a list of the business lessons learned from my grandson when he was two years old:

1. Don't poop in the bath water.
2. When you're full of crap, get someone to change you.
3. When you're hungry, ask for the order.
4. If you spit in someone's face, expect a big time out.
5. Share your stuff and others will share with you.
6. A hardy laugh makes everybody happy.
7. A temper tantrum doesn't make anyone happy.
8. No hitting, especially if the other person is big.
9. A little padding softens the blows.
10. The best cure for when you feel sad is to give other people lots of hugs.
11. Eat your vegetables if you want dessert.
12. When something stinks, check your own butt first.

Okay, so I was getting the little guy ready for the bath. Filled the tub. Temperature was right. Bath toys handy. Remembered the washy stuff and the wash cloth. Just as he was about to clamor over the side and into the tub, he stops, looks me in the eye, raises his pointer finger and shouts, "Don't poop!"

I think he was reminding himself, but he sure looked like he was talking to me. Anyway, the lesson is obvious. Put your crap where it belongs and deliver clean, clear quality to your clients.

Driving Business Success with a '57 Chevy

A 1957 Chevrolet Bel-Air two-door hardtop – one of those iconic automobiles for antique car collectors – became mine when a friend alerted me of its availability at an exceptionally low price. On the way to have the title transfer notarized as required by Pennsylvania law at the time, I bounced with excitement.

Passion, like that youthful excitement, drives success. Having fun yet? You are if you pop with enthusiasm at times in your business.

Your passion drives the “ready, fire, aim” marketing concept. Don’t wait until everything is perfect. Go forth boldly, tweaking your plan as you go. If you act with passion, you will succeed when you fire because you’ll be aiming where your heart leads you.

Build a platform for success.

My '57 Chevy formed the platform for my social life as a young adult. The guys thought it was cool. The girls enjoyed its like-new condition, thanks to the previous owner who rarely drove the car out of her garage.

What’s the platform for your business success? Build it with many sturdy planks. To the plank of passion and excitement, add one for classic eloquence and beauty so you can take pride in your work. Attach a plank of faith and hope for your success so you can see the way to go. Nail down a plank of love that will drive service. Affix a plank for value so that you can build long-

term win-win relationships. Insert a plank for friendship to uphold a large network of business connections.

Now you're ready. Fire away. Take aim. Is that your success staring back at you?

And if you prefer the Ford over the Chevy – well, I too was once a driver of Pintos.

Evergreen Tree

Christmas is the time of year when people bring evergreen trees into their homes to celebrate the season. To do this, you have to first tie the branches down so that you can fit the tree through the doorway. Once you have the tree safely in its stand, you can cut the twine and allow the branches to expand to their natural width.

Success is like that tree in that you must not restrain that which needs to be expanded. Expand your mind, your heart and your spirit this holiday season. Let nothing hold you back. Seek new adventures in opportunity.

The decorations on the tree are like talents. If applied improperly, you constrain success and assure failure like the twine left on the tree when you brought it into the house. Talents used properly create a situation where success can happen.

Like a well-lighted holiday tree, let your talents shine. Let your good actions be like presents wrapped in colorful paper. Give gifts of love, kind acts and generosity decorated for the holiday season. This is the ultimate form of networking – that you give yourself away.

May this holiday season bless you with the spirit of the child whose birth we celebrate.

The way is paved for your success. Simply wait for it like a Christmas present.

The evergreen tree doesn't turn itself into a Christmas tree by itself. It waits patiently for the owner to decorate it. Then it lights up the room giving joy and hope to all who see it.

Old Knob

Sometimes we see the parts of life without seeing the whole. Picture a knob with a shaft running through a piece of metal. It might be a drawer pull or an adjustment knob on a machine or old radio. What is this thing that is so curious? And what's it good for? Should you turn it clockwise or counterclockwise? Left or right? Will things get better if you turn it up or if you turn it down? Does it do anything or is it just sitting there not connected?

Sometimes we ask ourselves questions that have no answer other than "Try it and find out."

Are you called to live somewhere else? Try it and find out.

Are you called to become an entrepreneur? What kind of business? Try it and find out.

Is it time for you to try another line of work? Launch a new product? Go back to school? Change the baby's diaper? Try it and find out.

There is no virtue in sitting and moping or complaining when things are not going well for you. You can stare at that knob all day and nothing will happen. Turn the darned old knob and see what happens. Perhaps you'll hear beautiful music or the sound of a machine warming up. Perhaps that knob is the secret to life and you won't know until you try it.

Which way do you want to turn it? It doesn't matter. It turns both ways. If it doesn't work one way, try the other. Now, there's a lesson to hold on to – If it doesn't work one way, try another."

The Inspiration of Heroes

Come with me on a schooner out of Chicago across Lake Michigan and down the St. Lawrence Seaway to the Atlantic. Sail past the great cities of Boston and New York. Wave to the bathing beauties and hunks as we pass the beaches of New Jersey. Now, let's sail up the Delaware Bay into the Delaware River past Chester and up to Philadelphia. Hang a left and sail up the Schuylkill River (which requires a native Pennsylvanian to pronounce and spell). About 20 miles up this river, we tie up the schooner on the west bank and go ashore. When we touch the ground, our world changes as suburbs turn into farmland and baseball caps to tri-corner hats.

Our friends have a splendid horse-drawn carriage covered in filigree and stylish painting and varnish waiting to take us the rest of the way. Admire the gently rolling hills of this country. Enjoy the view of the farmland with its apple orchards and vegetable gardens. This is a plush land in summer. It's a hot July day and so the breeze coming in the carriage is warm and humid, yet refreshing somehow. The carriage pulls up to a stately house and a servant opens the carriage door and salutes us by removing his tri-corner hat and bowing. "You are just in time," the servant smiles. "We are about to celebrate our nation's birth, for on this day twenty-three years ago our nation declared its independence."

We follow the servant a little way down the hill, passing by the decaying remains of many tiny log huts and wonder what purpose they served. The servant anticipates our question by

saying, "These were the log shelters our men stayed in during that horrible winter."

We stop at one of the huts and peak inside. It smells of mildew and dampness. This one is in a little better shape than the others, perhaps protected by the natural contour of the hillside. Inside we see the log walls. The walls bear the marks of nails and boards. Mushrooms grow on the bottom logs that make the low wall.

"This is where the men slept, four to a cabin," the servant declares. "I know it must be hard for you to imagine for you have come from a great way off in time, but this is what remains of Valley Forge. Many of the men who wintered here are still alive today. You can see some of them lined up for the flag ceremony."

Sure enough we come to a crowd and the servant clears a path for us for we are special visitors. We come to the front of the crowd and see a group of Revolutionary War veterans, old men mostly, in ragged, faded clothes, too worn to call uniforms. Could these be what they wore then? Proudly they come to attention. A fife and drum band begins to play and from off to the side comes a group of perhaps a dozen, no, it's thirteen young soldiers each representing one of the original colonies. Their bright blue uniforms, freshly starched, make a strong contrast to the rags worn by the veterans. The thirteen young soldiers are carrying a huge flag, so big that all thirteen are needed to support its weight. The flag is much too big for them to carry easily and so the circle of thirteen stars on a blue field and the thirteen red and white stripes wave and dance about to the cheers of the crowd.

As we look about we see not a dry eye in the crowd. We realize that these are a people who know about life and death

struggles. These are a people who know how to sacrifice. These are a people who understand what risk taking is all about.

As the flag waves joyfully and as the cheers and tears continue, we feel the moisture in our own eyes and a choking sensation keeps us silent as we, too, are caught up in this celebration of July 4, 1799.

The vision fades and we find ourselves on the shores of Lake Michigan once again and in view of the mighty skyline we call Chicago.

Celebrate the memory of the great ones who have gone before us. Remember the soldiers of Valley Forge. These were tough warriors indeed. There's no way to wimp your way through a Valley Forge winter.

Celebrate the fighters who crossed the Delaware with General Washington that winter of 1776. Though freezing and half starved, they crossed the icy Delaware River to defeat the Hessian army. Did they also claim the Hessian rations? Was that one of the reasons Washington attacked, to obtain rations for his starving men?

Celebrate the army that defeated Lord Cornwallis and sent the British Army home.

Celebrate the army that survived the bloody, horrible war for American Independence.

Celebrate the victory that came after years of struggle. Thank God that the effort was worth the price.

Is there yet another victory in your life? Another time to celebrate just waiting to happen? What is the Winter of Valley Forge in your life right now? What is your struggle for Independence? Are you striving and seeming to go nowhere and are you blind to the victory waiting around the corner? Or do you already taste the ashes of defeat?

Celebrate the victory that comes through your faith. Celebrate the little triumphs of life. The child who smiles at you. The spouse who loves you. The school that educates you. The job that pays you.

When the great victory comes at the time of harvest, celebrate, for in victory after a hard struggle comes the greatest joy.

White Dress

At first the white dress grabs your attention. Its delicate lace seems out of place on this six-year old girl who normally can be found climbing trees or skipping rope in her play clothes. Today she is wearing the white dress with all the frilly lace. She has on her white knee-highs and white shoes with the straps that pinch. She doesn't like when they pinch but she thinks she looks pretty in her dress and she is right. Her favorite part, and the part that catches your eye next, is her crown of wild flowers. The flowers include a mixture of whites, yellows and reds. If you look closely you can see the daffodils, poppies and daisies among the other lesser known varieties. Mommy told her it was her crown of glory.

“What’s a crown of glory without some flowers?” Mommy asked our little Susan.

“Do I need flowers in my life, Mommy?” Susan asked.

“Of course, my child. The flowers represent the happy moments when all goes well for you. Such times can include your wedding day, graduation, beginning a new job, starting a new business, or having a baby.”

“I think I’m too young for all that happy stuff, Mommy. I’m only six years old, you know. Do you think we should fill up all the spaces between the flowers with more flowers, Mommy?”

“No, little darling, you have enough.”

“Well, what are the spaces in-between the flowers for? That’s what I want to know.”

“Your crown represents the circle of life. Life is not just about the flowers. The empty spaces are the hard, lean times in

your life. It's easy to be happy with a crown full of blossoms in your hair; it's tougher to be a good little girl during the lean times.”

Mommy is making a good point to Susan. It is tougher in the lean times to succeed in life, yet the lean times are when the world most needs the saints among us. Without Calcutta, where would Mother Theresa have gone? Where is your Calcutta, the place where you can make a difference? How will you serve the people today? How will you give yourself away today? What is the boldest thing you can do today?

Ask these questions and you will begin to focus on your tasks and develop the discipline to go forth in a single united direction. You will follow through on the work you are called to perform because you will know the plan and feel the passion. When you are passionate about your work, the work is easier and the path is clear.

Focus on your passion today and on giving yourself away. Take a moment and write down your passions ... the people, things and activities you deeply care about.

Bring your passions into your networking. Discipline yourself by committing the time and effort to get your work accomplished. Get to know and understand the large flowers in your crown of glory. Think of networking as your time to bless others. How can you help someone find a job, locate a new client or identify a great restaurant? One of the secrets of networking is to understand that it is not about you. It is about the others. Then, like little Susan, you can celebrate the happy moments in your life while understanding how to deal with the lean times.

Wisdom

When I entered the coffee shop there was only one person in line. A wise decision to pick this location at this time to meet my business contact, I concluded. The lady in front of me was waiting for her order. Behind the counter stood three very attractive teenage girls, smiling and eager to serve. That they were attractive is important to the story as you will see in a moment, but not important in the long scheme of life as you ponder what truly is meaningful.

As it turned out, the lady in front of me was the mother of the first young lady behind the counter, the one on the left. When her daughter gave her mom the drink, her mother said something sweet, “Thank you, my blessed beauty.”

The girl in the middle brightened and chimed, “Hey, that’s what my mother calls me!”

The third girl, the one on the right, cast her eyes upon the floor and said, “My mom calls me her ‘blessed mistake.’”

We sometimes say things to our children as a joke or to tease them, not meaning the words to be hurtful, but we forget who we are in their eyes and how much our children look to us, even in their teen years, for approval and recognition. I felt bad for the young lady and could see she was hurt even through the forced smile upon her face.

When my turn came, the young lady on the left took my order and the one on the right, her mom’s “blessed mistake,” filled it for me.

Is there wisdom in keeping quiet at such times, giving my silent approval to a hurt upon a stranger’s face? I wondered, but

not for long. I could see her over the stainless steel machinery as she started making my drink, and she looked up at me. When she did, I said, “You were never a mistake, you were a gift. You go home and tell that to your mother.” She smiled and held back all but one tear that trickled down her right cheek as she whispered a hoarse “Thank you.” When she handed me my drink, I found I was blessed with the richest, most chocolaty café mocha I had ever tasted. So I guess we blessed each other that afternoon and there’s wisdom in that certainly.

When are our words blessed gifts and when are they blessed mistakes? Wisdom, it seems, is silent until the question itself is asked. Wisdom knows when to speak and when to refrain from speaking. Wisdom knows when to question and when not to question. Wisdom knows when to bless and when to withhold a blessing. Wisdom knows when to teach and when not to teach. Wisdom endures the bad times knowing good times will follow. Wisdom knows in which direction to travel and which path to take, for wisdom knows the goal and is steadfast in achieving the goal.

What is wisdom? Wisdom is not knowledge, for knowledge alone goes nowhere. Wisdom is not cunning for cunning alone does not bless. Wisdom is not intuition, for intuition alone knows no discretion. Wisdom does not reside in the head alone, but also in the heart. Wisdom is the product of a heart that seeks faith, hope and love for these are the true treasures of life. Above all wisdom seeks to love, for in loving, wisdom learns all that it needs to know and do to be happy. Wisdom teaches that you were never a mistake, you were a gift.

Networking

Alligator

Picture an alligator ready to pounce. An alligator is a strange looking monster from the depths of a shallow river or stream. Alligators are a study in contrasts. They are prehistoric creatures more closely related to the dinosaurs than any modern animal. They have a thick leathery skin that takes on a green hue to blend in with their surroundings. Is it part plant or does it just look that way?

What can you learn from an alligator? It waits patiently for opportunity to come by before it strikes. It has a thick skin so insults don't bother it. It has many teeth in a long mouth so that it can clamp down on an opportunity and hold onto it and not let go. This is true tenacity at work.

An alligator never gives up. It is deceptively fast, fooling its prey into complacency and then running it down in a quick chase. Small businesses can be the same way – running down big opportunities with patience and a quick strike that leaves competitors behind.

Be patient with your networking. Have a thick skin. Be tenacious. Never give up. Act quickly. Leave your competition behind. Unlike an alligator, however, be loving, gentle and kind. Seek your joy in the blessing of others. Outperform your competition through your generosity.

Big Toe

What's with the big toe? It serves as a foot pointer. Where are you headed today? Can you trust your big toe to point the way?

Big toes are not big enough to point the way, but God did not design your foot and toes as a pointing device. If you rely only on your big toe, which big toe would you follow? They point in different directions.

Your toes and feet are meant to support you by carrying the weight of your body.

Each element of your body has a part to play. It is the same with your team and your network. Each person in your network has a part to play in your life and you have a part to play in theirs.

Who are the right people on your team? And in your network? Start with a core group of people that you trust, like and enjoy being with. These people also should be:

- Thoughtful
- Knowledgeable
- Open to change
- Flexible
- Entrepreneurially minded
- Bridge builders, not destroyers
- Networkers

When you wiggle your big toe, it doesn't mean much, but when you use each part of your body for the right purpose, you move forward.

Remember, too, that success isn't about big toes. It's about your heart, mind and soul. Use all of your body parts in a carefully orchestrated, purposeful effort to achieve success.

When you are successful, the big toe is not the only part that succeeds, your whole body succeeds. In the same way, when your business succeeds, your whole team succeeds.

In networking, your success uplifts your network and serves as a model for others to follow. Within your network, you can become the one who points the way. On the other hand, you might be the heart or brains of your network. You might even be the kidneys that purify the network or the lungs that provide a breath of fresh air. Or you may be the foot with a big toe and little toes that provide the support for your network and help it move forward.

Are You Like Me?

Do you find yourself looking on while a stranger helps another stranger on the street? Do you sit while others volunteer their time and talents? We would have volunteered if we weren't so busy, right?

Fools stand by and watch while angels rush in.

Perhaps my biggest challenge has been to learn to bless others. Me, bless others? What's in it for me?

What do you mean, try it and find out?

While reluctantly starting to develop a servant attitude, I discovered the joy of giving. I bless others when donating money, but that's impersonal. The personal blessings I give to people are much more important. When a smile of appreciation appears on the face of someone I helped... ah, there's the joy!

I seek to bless others through my smile where once I never smiled... through a kind word where once I was silent... through a friendly touch or a hug where once I kept to myself.

Our challenge is to bless others on a personal level so that we may receive a mountain of blessings in return. The love and appreciation expressed by a smile or a tear of gladness is the blessing I receive in return for my actions.

I'm still learning. How about you?

Cable Connection

The cable that connects your computer to your printer or to your network is insulated so that the signal doesn't short out to ground. This assures that the signal is transmitted properly. Communication between people works the same way. When you send a signal to people in your network of contacts, the signal is more likely to be received and understood if you use a protected system of delivery. With a computer, protecting the signal involves making sure that the signal is neither shorted to ground nor lost due to a disconnected or broken cable.

In a network of people, protecting your system of delivery involves keeping the connections alive through active communications. This can involve personal communication through e-mail and voice. It also can include any other touch point such as a mailing, website, advertising, or publishing articles in trade journals. The more that a member of your network sees you, the stronger your network connection (assuming the contacts are positive).

A people network works much like a computer network. Your people network can be pictured as a cluster of random dots on a piece of paper. Connect the dots with lines. You are one of the dots. Notice that every dot you are connected to is a member of your network... and you are a member of the network of these other dots.

The lines connecting the dots are the lines of communication. Keep these lines connected by sending and

receiving signals. If you shut down the signal sending and receiving system, then you have shut down your dot on the network, rendering your network useless.

Keep the lines of communication flowing in your network by being active in your communications. What signal do you send when you are silent? What signal do you send when you communicate? What message does your network want from you?

Your network expects to hear from you. That's one of the differences between cold marketing and networking. When you meet someone and have a conversation, the two of you agree to exchange business cards and become members of each other's network. You both know it does not end with that meeting. Therefore, the signals you send to your people network are expected. They are welcomed if they are beneficial to the recipient. They are passed on if they are beneficial to others beyond your direct network.

What signals are you sending to your network and how are you sending them? Who are you sending them to? Who should you be sending them to?

BUT, PAUL, I'M NOT IN SALES: Not everyone is looking to sell a product or service through networking. You may be looking for career development opportunities, personal contacts for helping you get ahead in your career, professional friendships where you can share your fears, hopes, dreams and career aspirations outside of your company. Or you may be looking for a roommate or want to sell a used computer. Whatever the reason you attend networking events, you have a reason to meet people across your network. The secret of reaching across your network is the value-added service you bring to your network.

A Fishing Person's Vest

A fishing person's vest is filled with little pockets so that everything the fisher person needs is right at hand, even an occasional chocolate bar.

Organize your network around this same concept of keeping everyone and everything you need close at hand.

Use the vest pocket closest to your heart for your family. Keep each one close.

Put your money and financial worries out of sight in your wallet or purse. There's no room for financial worries in the fisher person's vest of life.

Put your customers in a big vest pocket, also near your heart so they will know you care about them and hold them close.

Keep your team in a special pocket near your heart so they will know where they belong and know they, too, are precious to you.

Scatter the rest of your network in the various nooks and crannies of your vest of life so they are in the right place at the right time when you need them... and they need you.

Keep your business tools handy in the various pockets and hooking places on your vest of life. Plan your fishing trip in advance by cleaning your equipment and making certain that everything is in excellent working order. When the fish are biting is not the time to organize and clean your equipment.

Include a chocolate bar or other treat in your vest. Hard work deserves its reward. Part of the reward is the profit including the fish you catch and the money that ends up in your wallet or purse. But the real reward during the busyness of your day is that

chocolate bar. Nothing goes better with hard work than a little treat.

About the Author

Paul R. Lloyd is co-founder of the marketing firm Zuk-Lloyd Associates, Inc. and co-founder of Growth Groups, a business strategy peer advisory service. He is available as a speaker.

Paul writes fiction, nonfiction and business communications. He is available as a ghost writer and editor.

In addition to publishing e-zines and newsletters for clients, Paul publishes Business Growth Ideas newsletter. Readers may subscribe by visiting www.zuklloyd.com.

Paul leads the Write Time Writer's Group in Geneva, Illinois and an online critique group. He is a member of the American Christian Fiction Writers. As a business writer and marketing consultant, Paul assists companies ranging from large global corporations to small start-ups to plan and implement successful marketing communications programs. He has proven abilities in orchestrating strategic alliances to provide research, strategic planning, database management, creative writing and art services, print and electronic media production, media relations, and training. Paul writes for web, print and multimedia.

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Zuk-Lloyd Associates, Inc.

Paul R. Lloyd is co-founder of the marketing firm Zuk-Lloyd Associates, Inc. and co-founder of Growth Groups, a business strategy peer group advisory service. He is available as a speaker.

Zuk-Lloyd Associates, Inc. turns ordinary business information into extraordinary stories through creative writing and art solutions. The company is a center for generating ideas and creativity for helping client companies achieve rapid growth. The firm provides traditional sales promotion and public relations services combined with the creative use of online marketing, including video and social networking. www.zuklloyd.com

Growth Groups

Growth Groups is a service of Zuk-Lloyd Associates, Inc. in conjunction with Advantage Business Concepts. Through monthly half-day meetings, we explore leading-edge solutions that members adapt for their business success.

www.growthgroups.biz

PromiseGarden.com

PromiseGarden.com, a division of Zuk-Lloyd Associates, Inc., creates books and other media that offer hope and strengthen faith. www.promisegarden.com

Books by Paul R. Lloyd

Plant What Others Throw Away: Career and Life Lessons in Ordinary Objects published by PromiseGarden.com

Using ordinary, everyday objects, Paul R. Lloyd shows how a proper view of success allows you to live in balance with God's call on your heart as well as your need to earn an income. Using Bible-based principles, Paul walks you through a seven-step process that will lead you to a better life.

Snippets, Tidbits and Creativity: A Business Casual Guide to Marketing published by Zuk-Lloyd Associates, Inc.

Books available online at www.plantwhatothersthrowaway.com and www.promisegarden.com

For quantity discount purchases of Paul's books or to schedule him to be your speaker, email books@promisegarden.com.