



MARKETING STRATEGY COLLECTION

Naresh Malhotra, *Editor*

# **Smart Marketing**

*How to Dramatically  
Grow Your Revenue*

**Ahmed Al Akber**



**BUSINESS EXPERT PRESS**

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*Smart Marketing: How to Dramatically Grow Your Revenue*

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First published in 2015 by  
Business Expert Press, LLC  
222 East 46th Street, New York, NY 10017  
[www.businessexpertpress.com](http://www.businessexpertpress.com)

ISBN-13: 978-1-63157-234-0 (paperback)  
ISBN-13: 978-1-63157-235-7 (e-book)

Business Expert Press Marketing Strategy Collection

Collection ISSN: 2150-9654 (print)  
Collection ISSN: 2150-9662 (electronic)

Cover and interior design by Exeter Premedia Services Private Ltd.,  
Chennai, India

First edition: 2015

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America.

*To Olivia, Aino, and Ryan—this is for you.*



## **Abstract**

This book is designed to help organizations that already offer a great product or service to communicate its value to potential customers and sell significantly more than they do currently. You won't have a million dollar marketing budget or a team of professional marketers to help you get the word out. The truth is you don't need a big advertising budget to successfully market a product or service, and having a large team does not mean you necessarily have an advantage either. To be successful, all you need is to focus on the most important marketing and sales activities that generate the biggest impact for your business.

This book will appeal to CEOs, business owners, and independent professionals. It will also be very useful for marketers and sales managers. It is a "how-to" guide to help readers cut through the hype and get straight to what really matters for this audience—growing their business and revenue.

The ideas are brought to life in a framework called the Seven Principles of Smart Marketing that form the structure of the whole book. Readers will find it easy to follow as it is a step-by-step process, packed with practical ideas that can be implemented instantly in any organization with little marketing or sales knowledge.

## **Keywords**

closing the sale, the future of marketing, growing revenue, marketing, marketing mindset, marketing plan, marketing productivity, marketing strategy, messaging, sales, sales plan





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# Foreword

We live in the “customer age.” Today, customers are quite simply spoiled for choice as battalions of product and service providers fight to secure a share of the customer’s wallet. Not only are choices proliferating at an alarming rate, but the customer’s ability to secure detailed information on the range of offerings has also reached unprecedented levels—and we can be sure that this will only intensify. Thanks to online product comparisons to Facebook, and other social media posts on service quality (or experience), the power in the supplier and customer relationship is now firmly with the customer.

Indeed we hear much these days of organization’s spending large sums of money to understand the “customer experience,” and identify those “touchpoints,” that prove the differentiation factor is whether a customer buys or not and stays loyal or defects. Those in the financial services and telecommunications sectors are leading the way here, as they operate in industries where many argue customer loyalty is essentially a thing of the past. So they are investing heavily in understanding the nuances of experience that might entice the customer to buy and engender loyalty. Others are fast following suit.

But figuring how to engender a “great,” customer experience is not the preserve of the multinationals, or those with large marketing budgets. It is an equally pressing issue for those who manage small to medium-size organizations, or even the sole trader. Today, customers do not compare their service experience across suppliers of similar size, or even in the same industries but against the best experience they receive and from wherever that originates. An organization can get lulled into a false sense of security if they believe that simply “doing better,” than their immediate competitors is all that counts (often measured through customer satisfaction scores that often fail to tell the whole story). They are then often shocked when “their,” satisfied (and believed to be loyal) customers defect when a new competitor (and increasingly from surprising fields) enters their market.

The demands of the “customer age,” have significant implications for those involved in marketing (which is everyone who has a product or service to sell). Marketing, of course, has been around in some form since humans first started trading goods. It began to emerge as an established discipline in the early to mid-20th century when, thanks to competition caused by increased industrialization and commoditization, it became tougher to sell in increasingly saturated markets. Price became the differentiator. Toward the end of the century marketing departments began to focus on satisfying customer needs—the concept of the Customer is King emerged, and relationship marketing began to evolve. But even this is now outdated as it preceded the advent of the internet and social or mobile communications, in which organizations (of whatever size) are connected to past, current, or future consumers in real time and 24/7. Relationships have taken on different meanings and dynamics—it is no longer a “one way,” conversation from the supplier to the customer.

For marketers today, new mindsets and indeed paradigms are required. New ways to engage with and build winning relationships with customers—words such as trust, honesty, transparency, and empathy are becoming critically important and the primary focus has certainly switched to the “experience” the offering delivers rather than on the price or capabilities. A lesson Steve Jobs taught us well.

As we ease into the “customer age,” a new breed of thought-leaders are coming forward who are redefining how to think about and deliver marketing strategies for this new and uncharted “customer age.” Ahmed Al Akber, the author of this timely book, has thought long and hard about what successful marketing looks like in this new world. Importantly, his ideas have emerged from successful spells working on various continents for truly global entities as well as setting up and running his own business. He has distilled these experiences (both positive and painful) into a set of powerful, and interrelated, principles for smart marketing. Each principle includes useful tools, technique, checklists and observation that enables the reader to effectively position and market their products and services for the “customer age.”

Particularly pioneering about Ahmed Al Akber’s straightforward step-by-step approach is that he *doesn’t* start with the customer, which at first seems counterintuitive as we figure new ways to engage the customer.

Rather he starts with the importance of developing a “positive marketing mindset.” As he writes, “If your mindset is negative around building your business, for example, then your mind will automatically find reasons not to do it, and focus on other things. Ultimately, this leads to complacency, pessimism, and poor performance.” It is only through assuming the right mindset that the seeds are sown for building insightful and winning relationships with customers. Clearly, if you don’t believe in yourself or the value you deliver, then why should a potential customer believe in you or your offering? A positive marketing mindset is the first of the authors’ seven principles (or strategies) that an organization must get right to be successful in marketing their business: principles that then sequence through stages such as truly understanding the customer, using messages that stick, crafting a simple, actionable marketing plan, and being visible so that you are useful to the customer (something that is not thought about enough).

These seven principles are not in and of themselves revolutionary—neither do they require advanced marketing expertise or even the need to invest much money. But when combined into the framework described in this book they coalesce into a rich collection of golden nuggets of marketing insight and advice that will help deliver sustainable success to those struggling to make sense of the complexity of the customer age.

And in the final analysis, how the author has approached these challenges points to the ultimate strength of this book. The author has articulated a set of well thought-out, yet “simple,” solutions to today’s complex marketing challenges. Doing so requires deep knowledge and expertise. As Albert Einstein once said, “If you can’t explain it simply, you probably don’t understand it well enough.” Ahmed Al Akber clearly understands this field exceptionally well.

James Creelman

Dubai

May 2015



# Acknowledgments

Special thanks to James Creelman for his generous support and mentorship in writing this book.





# Introduction

## Why I Wrote This Book

When I left my nearly 10-year career with marketing and sales-driven organizations, I thought I knew more than the average person about how to market and sell something. I had worked on some of the biggest brands, presented in front of some of the most senior people, worked with multimillion-dollar budgets, and launched million-dollar products.

So, when I left to start my own business, that's what I thought I would sell: marketing and sales strategy consulting! Rolls off the tongue, doesn't it? I basically wanted to help organizations to become more competitive. So, I went out and tried to sell the idea.

When I first started, I remember setting up nearly a hundred meetings over a few months. In each meeting, I would explain to people (who at the time I thought were prospects) that I was a marketing and sales strategy consultant, and by way of my background, I would help them increase their marketing and sales results. I would almost expect someone would say, "Yes, please take my money and help me with my marketing strategy." Little did I know that I had a hard time ahead of me. Except for a few projects that I won by luck more than anything else, I had no strategy of my own for marketing and selling my services other than cold calling and *the prayer* strategy.

So, I decided to do a little research into the subject and started reading voraciously on how to market and sell professional services. I then realized there were seminars and courses I could take to further understand how to grow my business. Finally, I hired a very successful business coach to further refine my strategy.

The results I found were significant. Within a year, I had doubled my income. I was being contacted by people for my advice and asked to speak at their events. My business was well on its way to growth.

I know the ideas in this book work for several reasons. First, I have tried and tested all the strategies mentioned in this book. Second, I have advised dozens of organizations, big and small, government and private, and they have worked for every single one that has applied these ideas.

I wrote this book to help organizations that already offer a great product or service to communicate its value to potential customers and sell significantly more than they do currently. You won't have a million-dollar marketing budget or a team of professional marketers to help you get the word out. The truth is you don't need a big advertising budget to successfully market a product or service, and having a large team does not mean you necessarily have an advantage either. To be successful, all you need is to focus on the important things that generate the biggest impact for your business. Once you try and learn from them, you will know what works and what doesn't, and you will then be in a great position to see your business grow. That's the focus of this book.

## The Marketing and Sales Revolution

A revolution is taking place in how organizations market and sell their products and services. Twenty years ago, getting your product or service right was good enough. The competitive landscape is different now. Not only do you need to deliver on what you promise, but you need to focus a lot more effort on how you market and sell your product or service.

## Shifts in the Marketing Landscape

### *Media*

The channels once used to draw mass-market attention to brands don't have the same effect as they used to. According to Nielsen ratings in 1977, the most watched show by Americans living in households with TVs was "Happy Days," with 31.5 percent viewership. This was great for marketers as they knew where to invest to reach a mass audience easily.

Fast-forward to 2007, and the most watched show in America was "American Idol" with 16.1 percent viewership. These days, even the most watched shows are losing out as the number of TV channels and options has skyrocketed over the years. Marketers can't maintain the ratings they used to on TV, and therefore can't reach the same mass audiences through this channel.

Not only is this mass-market advertising approach set to decline further, but it is expensive, uses a shotgun approach, and customers can now

skip TV ads using DVRs and similar devices. The biggest problem with mass-market advertising is that it relies on customers remembering an ad for when they need it. But with so much advertising hitting us at all angles these days, no one has the attention span to remember things for when they just need it.

These days, when someone has a need to buy and is not sure what they want, they pick up a smartphone and search for options online. Suppose you are feeling hungry and want to get a bite to eat near to where you live. You want something different and you want options to choose from. Rather than having to think about restaurants you're familiar with or any of the advertising messages you can recall, all you need to do is Google "Restaurants in (your area)" and you'll have enough information in your search to enable you to make the choice you want.

This modern though very common way of buying has huge implications on how marketers draw attention to their brands. And being *online* is not the end of it; in fact, it's only the start.

### ***Shorter Attention Spans***

How many times have you heard someone say that they are the *leading*, *best*, *innovative*, or *top* company in their field? Search through the "About us" section of most corporate homepages and you'll find that many companies use that very same terminology. So what makes you different to the customer if you and almost everyone else use the same words to describe your business? Not a lot.

People make this mistake all the time when they introduce themselves. How many times have you been in a situation where someone tells you what they do for a living, only to leave you clueless about what they mean? "I'm a business development and operations leader" or "I'm a marketing strategy consultant"—most people don't know why those positions are needed or what they entail. And more often than not, roles with the same titles have responsibilities that differ from one organization to the other.

Those familiar with the terminology, concepts, and value of their own work (sometimes unknowingly) mystify it by using their own language and ways of communicating. This can make it difficult for people on the receiving end to fully grasp what it is that people do or what ideas they

have. Whether you are a CEO or a full-time mom, we all have ideas that we need to communicate: a new product coming to market, a strategy you want to sell your boss, values we are trying to instill in our children. But it can be very hard to transform the way people think and act.

The book *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* describes this phenomenon as the curse of knowledge. This happens when our ideas are masked by abstract ideas that fail to drive action: *becoming consumer-centric* or *world-class customer service* are along these lines. They may be very clear in the minds of the executives who advocate them, but the employees who are charged with implementing these general concepts won't really know what to do (Heath and Heath 2007).

## Shifts in the Sales Landscape

### *Empowered Buyers*

The old world of selling gave the seller the upper hand, as they tended to have more information than the buyer. This would generally be the situation when buying a used car. The previous owner would know whether the car was serviced and if it had any major accidents or repairs. The buyer, on the other hand, would have to rely more on an inspection and road test of the car to make a decision on whether or not to buy it. With this information asymmetry, the seller would be able to offer information on an as-needed basis, and generally in his or her favor. But in today's world of the Internet and the instant ability to retrieve information on just about anything, this world is ending. Information symmetry is shifting sales situations from *buyer beware* to *seller beware*.

In today's seller beware world, a buyer can arm himself with enough information about what he wants before even approaching the seller. A quick search on the Internet will have all the information he needs to decide what kind of car he wants that meets his budget and usage needs. He can also review the kinds of cars available at dealers in his area. Once there at the dealer seeing the car he picked out on the Internet, in most countries, he can do a quick search on his smartphone using the vehicle's identification number to see if its been in any accidents. They are, of course, not fully covered from any dirty dealings. This is where social media gives further power to the customer to voice any trickery he or she may have encountered to a few hundred friends online.

### *The Need for a New Sales Approach*

A survey by the Corporate Executive Board Sales Leadership Council investigated the contributing factors to customer loyalty, namely, what it took to choose one supplier over another. The results were as follows:

- Company and brand impact: 19 percent
- Product and service delivery: 19 percent
- Value-to-price ratio: 9 percent
- The purchase experience: 53 percent

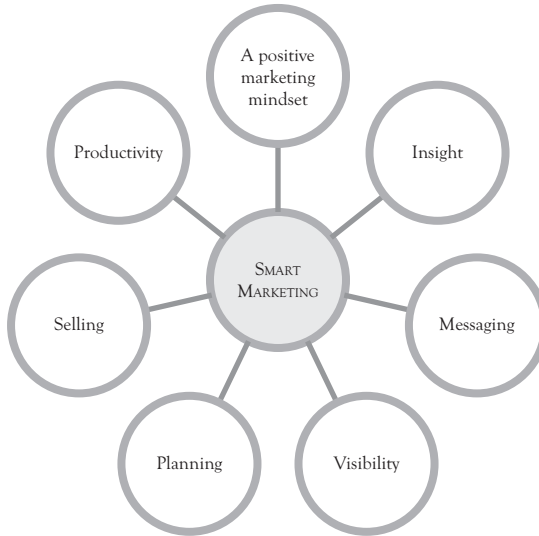
Some of the most fascinating insight from this research was that only 38 percent of customer loyalty is attributable to a supplier's ability to outperform the competition on brand, product, and service. This means that investments in improving your brand, product, and customer service will only get you so far. They are important, but not the key to success in B2B sales.

Furthermore, only 9 percent of loyalty is attributable to price. Dropping prices to win business is a deadly game. As far as loyalty is concerned, customers who want to buy the cheapest will probably continue to do so. So, you may be cheapest today, but a competitor can always drop the price, and provided your customer is fixated only on price, you will lose their business. Therefore, all those times you lowered your price to win a deal does not necessarily make your client loyal to you.

The most compelling piece of insight from this work is that the majority (53 percent) of customer loyalty is attributable to the purchase experience. In other words, how you compete out in the field during the sales call has more impact on customer loyalty than all other factors combined. So, improving your brand, enhancing your customer service, and dropping your prices may win you some customer loyalty, but none of those will matter if your sales team can't execute out in the field.

### **The Seven Principles of Smart Marketing**

Business leaders, marketers, and sales leaders need a new way to navigate in these challenging times. An approach to dealing with new forms of media, more empowered channels, more empowered customers, shorter



**Figure I.1** *The Seven Principles of Smart Marketing*

attention spans, and new ways of buying is needed. In working with government and private businesses, I see these same challenges.

While creating this framework, I looked for what organizations of all industries and sizes needed. It needed to tackle the marketing and sales issues that most organizations were facing. It also had to be simple enough that it could be easy to follow and communicate to management, marketing, and sales teams to get buy-in. Furthermore, no special expertise is needed to carry these principles out, only hard work and determination. And, most importantly, it needed to provide significant results.

### ***A Positive Marketing Mindset: Managing What’s In-between Your Ears***

One of the most common serious limitations people have revolves around self-defeating mindsets to do with marketing or building their business. The main problem when it comes to negative mindsets, whatever they may be, is that the mind tends to believe them. By attaching yourself to a negative mindset, it becomes an unquestioned truth—one that is lived and acted out. If your mindset is negative around building your business, for example, then your mind will automatically find reasons not to do it

and focus on other things. Ultimately, this leads to complacency, pessimism, and poor performance.

So, how do we get over these negative mindsets? By defining the problem, investigating it, and turning it around into a positive mental state. If we are wired to believe our mindsets, then disputing them and rewiring them to make them positive can bring about the energy and action needed to get the rest of the smart marketing principles accomplished.

### ***Insight: Understanding Your Customers***

Wikipedia, which was launched 20 years ago, officially killed the king of printed encyclopedias when *Britannica*, which first started in 1778, announced that it would stop its printed edition in 2013. Smart marketers realize that they must understand what their customers' needs are and how they are changing—but at a faster pace than we have ever known.

So, how do you stay on top of what your customers' needs are? Start by asking them for feedback. Asking customers what they want is a great way to minimize risk and learn what matters most to them. Asking them to comment on your products is even better. Doing this early on in the product development stage helps shape better products, lowers risk, and avoids wastage of time.

### ***Messaging: Using Messages That Stick***

To get customers attention, you don't necessarily need a large marketing budget—you need the right message. Marketing is about your customers and not about your business. You're messaging needs to reflect that. Powerful messaging speaks, in a very simple way, about customers' problems and pain points. That's when you hook a customer's attention and present a solution that's led with emotion. For example, insurance companies don't sell insurance, they sell peace of mind. According to the Pan Arab Research Center, \$1.58 billion was spent on advertising in the United Arab Emirates in 2012—that's over \$4 million every day of the year for a country with a total population of nine million people. There are hundreds of messages hitting us every day, and it's only the sticky ones—that is, the ones that touch us emotionally—that will influence customers.



***Planning: Using a Simple, Actionable Marketing Plan***

Marketing plans don't have to be the complex, long-winded exercises that your college marketing professor used to brag about. It's true that planning is a necessity if you want to be successful, but when it comes to marketing, every ounce of implementation is worth two of planning. In other words, it's far more important to get your marketing activities done than to plan them to the nth degree.

The funny thing is that there are some organizations I have come across that spend millions of dollars every year on marketing but don't have a plan. You do not want to spend too much time planning, but you still need a plan!

***Visibility: Being Useful to Customers***

This is mostly about capitalizing on today's universal access to information at the swipe of a smartphone screen. Previously, customers didn't have any choice but to ask sellers for information about what was being sold. This is no longer necessary. These days you can, for example, Google a list of all the stores within a 2-km radius from your location that sell the latest iPhone and compare prices.

Since customers are doing this anyway, businesses that capitalize on this trend will be able to build trust by being transparent about what they have to offer. An easy way to start is to list what your customers ask about most with regard to your products and then answer those questions on a blog, YouTube video, audio podcast, or any other online medium that customers use.

Being useful to customers is a form of smart marketing that can help your business by generating leads, educating customers, building brand awareness, and generating website traffic. It is also far more cost effective than traditional marketing.

***Selling: Using Effective Sales Techniques***

Once you have marketed your product or service effectively, selling becomes so much easier. But you still need to have a game plan to make sure you maximize your sales.

The most powerful element of selling is asking. The more thought provoking your questions, the more likely buyers are to think about what it is they actually want. They will introduce you to key factors that influence the sale or key buying motives. And once you know what motivates a buyer, you have a much better chance of closing a sale, provided you structure the conversation well.

### ***Productivity: Maximizing Your Marketing Productivity***

Successfully marketing a product or service can take a lot of time. In an average day, there are dozens of things that can distract you from building your business, such as answering e-mails, attending meetings, and dealing with many other things that can interrupt you. When this happens, you can end up putting in a lot more time and effort than needed.

The truth is that a lot of these things are either not necessary in building your business or may not need to necessarily be done by you. Sometimes they actually hold you back from achieving bigger and better things: things that may be more interesting to you, that you are passionate about, and which, in turn, will give you the freedom to further build your business.

## **The Benefits of Following the Seven Principles of Smart Marketing**

The benefits of using the seven principles can be breathtaking. Businesses that use this framework in the right way will enjoy the following benefits:

- *Improved sales performance.* You will spend less time with people who are not prospects and better quality time with people who are. You will learn to truly identify what a prospect needs and how to position your services to meet those needs.
- *A powerful marketing mindset.* Obstacles that used to get in the way of implementation will fade away. You will be in a position to get all your marketing done, with no excuses!
- *Better products and services.* You will offer better products, as you will know your customers and what they want better than you ever have.

- *Increased awareness.* Your messaging will resonate with your customers. It will be less about your products and services and more about their problems and needs. This powerful way of messaging will help accelerate the awareness and recognition of your products and services.
- *You will have a plan.* You will have a strong vision of where you want to take the business and what you need to achieve to grow it. You will be in a good position to execute on this vision.
- *Your marketing will help people and be rewarded for it.* Your customers will look to your marketing as a form of utility—your marketing will be helpful and thought provoking. When they need a product or service like yours, they will turn to you as they would remember how your marketing had helped them at some point.
- *You will achieve these results in less time!* You won't need to spend more time working than you already are—remember this is smart marketing, so you will be smart about how you use your time.

These are just a few of the many advantages of enhancing your value through marketing. Throughout this book, you'll see that when you market what you sell effectively, it can turn your product or service from something that has lukewarm interest into one that has passionate customers who are willing to buy.

These are the seven strategies you need to get right to be successful in marketing your business. All seven of them are not revolutionary, they are simply common sense. Many of these strategies require some skills that you need to develop over time, but all of them are easy enough to do quite simply, without the need for any advanced marketing expertise and certainly without the need to invest much money, if at all.

You may already have skills in some or all of them, in which case, this book will serve as a strong refresher, and the practice at the end of chapter may serve to provoke new thoughts around how to market your business in today's uber-competitive environment. If you are new to marketing, you stand a lot to gain—putting even some of these principles into your

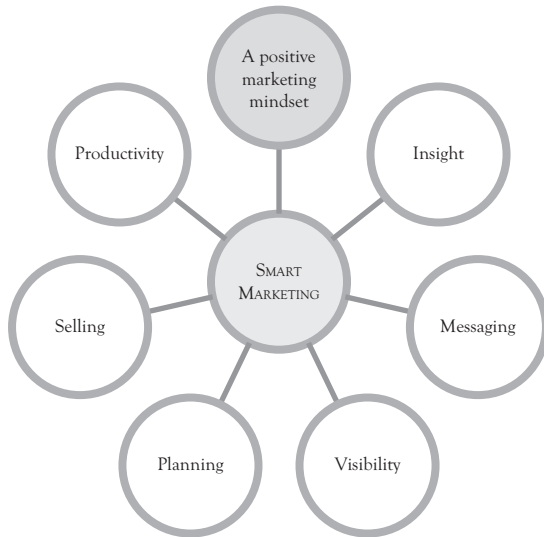
regular marketing routine will pay off significantly in a short period of time.

But wait a minute. I claim that using these principles is easy. So why isn't everyone doing them, growing highly successful businesses, living the good life, while sipping piña colodas on a beach somewhere? Unfortunately, there is a villain in this story. The villain is our own mindset, which has one of the most profound influences on whether our businesses succeed or fail and, sadly, has a tendency to let many of us down.



## CHAPTER 1

# Principle 1: A Positive Marketing Mindset— Managing What’s In-between Your Ears



### Introduction

Tony Robbins, one of the world’s best-known motivational speakers, attributes 80 percent of a person’s success to how he manages his own psychology.

While this statistic isn’t necessarily scientifically proven, my experience in working with organizations looking to increase sales tells me that one of the most serious and common limitations revolves around self-defeating mindsets to do with marketing or building their business.

People are constantly telling themselves that they are “not good enough,” convincing themselves that they don’t deserve better results with their business.

I can understand where this negativity comes from. Sometimes we are conditioned to it by our parents or by the negative people we have in our lives. The thing is that if you continue to believe these destructive mindsets, then you are only letting yourself down and robbing yourself of the opportunities and excitement that comes with running the successful business that you deserve. Illustrating how to overcome such mindsets is the goal of this chapter.

## The Marshmallow Test

In the 1960s, a Stanford professor conducted an experiment to test patience and self-control and its link to success in business and life. The experiment took nursery-school students, put them in a room one-by-one, and gave them a treat (they could choose a cookie, a pretzel stick, or a marshmallow) and the following deal: They could eat the treat right away or wait for 15 minutes until the experimenter returned. If they waited, they would get an extra treat.

Tracking the kids over time, the professor found that the ability to hold out in this seemingly trivial exercise had real and profound consequences. As they matured and became adults, the kids who had shown the ability to wait got better grades, were healthier, enjoyed greater professional success, and proved better at staying in relationships—even decades after they took the test. They were, in short, better at life.

Marketing works in very much the same way. You don’t know for certain what the outcome will be. You don’t know for sure that your business will have more clients, sell more, or be able to charge higher fees if you invest in marketing. There is always a chance that what you do won’t work. But one thing is for certain: By not focusing on marketing, your business will not grow. Unless you actively try, you won’t ever have a business that customers are passionate about. Even if you do fail in trying, the act of trying forces you to learn, and if you still have the will, as most successful marketers do, then you will come back again with insight that will lead you to achieve what you first set out to do.

Anyone who says that a brand “sells itself” has a very narrow understanding of how marketing works. I’ve heard some people say that Coca-Cola sells itself, for example. If Coca-Cola stopped marketing all at once, sales might be stable at first. But it would gradually start dropping off, and then nose dive as competitors would scramble to take advantage of the situation and kick their own marketing activities into overdrive. Similarly, consumers would probably start wondering why the company had given up on its brand and they would gradually switch to another.

A significant proportion of us tend to think of taking risks as a bad thing—that trying to solve something new may end in failure, and that it’s best to focus on being efficient with your day to day rather than tackling a new project that may or may not yield the desired results. What we have here is small thinking, and there is no bigger risk I can think of than that.

## How to Think BIG with Your Business

*If you’re offered a seat on a rocket ship, don’t ask what seat! Just get on.*

Sheryl Sandberg, COO, Facebook

Picture this: Company A is in the widgets business and becomes aware of an opportunity to open up a new line of premium widgets, which are a fast-growing segment. There are many other players in this market, but they have the capability in place to capitalize on this potentially lucrative new business. The management looks into the idea and tells themselves the following:

- Our company is too small to compete with larger firms.
- We don’t truly believe what we offer will be any different from what others offer.
- We don’t have the skills to create a plan for this new line of business.
- We’re not qualified (educated, experienced, and so on) enough yet.

With the small thinking mindset, mentioned earlier, Company A decides that the premium widgets business is a *no-go* and turns the business down.



Company B is also in the widgets business and has a similar setup. The only difference is their management has a big-thinking mindset. Instead of focusing on the risks and limitations of this new business offering, they do the following:

- *They give themselves time to think.* They move their day-to-day work to the side, which allows them to deconstruct the risks and uncover the possibilities of this new business. To do this, they book time in their calendars to think, and during this time they don't take calls, answer e-mail, or do anything else that could distract the big-thinking process.
- *They ask big-thinking questions.* "What problems would this new product solve for our customers?" "What is the opportunity we have with this new line of business?" "How could it change our level of success?" are the kind of questions that are asked. This helps visualize what it would be like to take the leap and launch the product, and helps anticipate any obstacles that could hinder a successful launch.
- *They look for outside ideas and help.* They realize that this is a decision that many other companies in other industries have had to make at some point. They look at case studies, ask their peers in other industries, and perhaps hire someone who has faced the same opportunity as they currently have for their opinion. In doing so, they find that there is a significant opportunity for them to launch into this potentially profitable market and grow their business.
- *They start small.* Once they have decided on moving forward, they don't bet the farm by taking huge risks. They start small, get feedback from customers, and progressively improve the new product until it's a viable contender for a sizable share of the market.

The difference between the approaches of Company A and Company B is their mindset. Company A is risk averse and is set on small thinking. Company B, on the other hand, is open to new ideas and realizes that there is no reward unless there is risk. They realize that without absorbing some level of risk, there is a high probability that their business will

become complacent and mediocre, and someday be outpaced by the competition.

So, instead of turning away from an opportunity, they make an effort to assess it and look at ways to minimize that risk through some planning, looking outward rather than inward, and starting small. They realize that there is a real chance of failing with any new venture, but with that comes a degree of learning and insight that can take their next attempt much closer to success.

How successful your business will be is directly correlated with how big you think. Integrating big thinking in your business will give it a competitive advantage over others still sweating away on the small stuff.

The rest of this chapter is dedicated to helping you get over any negative mindsets that may be holding you back from success. We'll review the characteristics of successful marketers and then go through techniques you can use any time your mindset is letting you down.

## The Five Traits of Successful Marketers

What traits make up someone who sells more, attracts higher-paying clients, and significantly reduces the amount of time it takes to market their business? Over the years, I've worked with a lot of people looking to achieve such things with their businesses and found that the most successful people have one or more of the following traits:

1. *They avoid perfection.* Nothing in marketing is ever perfect. Even Fortune 500 companies running multimillion dollar marketing campaigns and with billions of dollars at stake realize that their launches won't be perfect. Those that are successful look at what's most important to their customers and do everything they can to get that done.
2. *They launch when they are 80 percent ready.* Actor Woody Allen famously said "80 percent of success is showing up."<sup>1</sup> You don't need to be 100 percent ready to market your product or service. Many companies spend months and sometimes years designing and building a product until it's *just right*, only to find that it's not what

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/w/woodyallen145883.html>

customers wanted in the first place. Done in the right way, sharing your product or service with customers as early as possible will open up a ton of feedback and ideas on how to make it even better. If you are launching a new product, show even the most rudimentary versions of it with your ideal customers and ask them to buy and use it. If they won't buy it, what does that tell you?

3. *They are life-long learners.* Being successful in marketing is like being a top athlete. You need to train, rest, learn from mistakes, and try new techniques all the time. Marketing evolves constantly, and has had several major shifts in the last century. Successful marketers read, watch videos, attend classes, and ask other successful marketers for advice. They don't need to know everything, just what's important and what upcoming trends are around the corner.
4. *They believe in what they sell.* If you don't fully believe in what you are selling, it is going to be very difficult to try influence customers to buy. My experience tells me this is one of the biggest problems facing entrepreneurs and those looking to grow their businesses. Many times it's not what's out there, but what's between our ears that lets us down. Successful marketers have no doubt in their minds that what they sell is valuable and benefits their customers immensely.
5. *They see marketing as a game.* They know that every opportunity they take to reach out to customers and move them in the right way will pay off. They know that marketing has some rules to follow and they have fun playing the game and watching the results. We'll cover those rules in the rest of this book.

If you learn to overcome these negative mindsets, then you can overcome challenges that will come your way in building your business. You will succeed in achieving more and in spending less time thinking and more time taking action. The following is a technique you can use to overcome some of the most stubborn mindset challenges.

### Four Questions to a Positive Mindset

As I have mentioned previously, in my experience in working with organizations looking to grow their businesses, one of the most common serious

limitations revolves around self-defeating mindsets to do with marketing or building their business. As we've seen earlier in this chapter, people tell themselves all sorts of negative things, from not being good enough to not having enough education.

The main problem when it comes to negative mindsets, whatever they may be, is that the mind tends to believe them. By attaching yourself to a negative mindset, they become an unquestioned truth—one that is lived and acted out. If your mindset is negative around building your business, for example, then your mind will automatically find reasons not to do it and focus on other things. Ultimately, this leads to complacency, pessimism, and poor performance.

In helping my clients, I found many of them limited by their own fixed mindsets, making it difficult to progress with their business. I then came across the work of Byron Katie, in her book *Loving What Is*. Her process, which she calls “The Work,”<sup>2</sup> consists of describing a problem, asking yourself four questions, and a “turnaround.” The four questions get at the very heart of a mindset, and the turnaround helps to reverse that mindset, often permanently. Katie recommends writing out the answers to these questions by hand, being totally honest with yourself and how you feel.

*Describing the problem.* The following questions help define what it is that is holding you back or making you feel negative:

1. What is something you want but don't have now and feel stuck?
2. What are all your feelings (not thoughts) about not having this?
3. Was it your limiting thought, mindset, or belief regarding this?

*The four questions.* Answer the following questions to investigate your issue, whether it is factual or simply a mindset that affects your thoughts, actions, and results:

1. Is it true (yes or no)?
2. Can you absolutely know it's true (yes or no)?
3. How do you react or behave when you believe this is true?
4. Who would you be or how would things be if it were impossible to attach to this belief?

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<sup>2</sup> <http://thework.com/do-work>

*The turnaround.* Finding opposites to your original limiting statements identified in the first set of questions can lead you to powerful realizations of your potential:

1. Turn the original statement around to its opposite.
2. Is that turnaround just as true or truer than the original belief?
3. Write down your insights about doing the work on this belief.

Often what stops us from achieving our goals is our own mindsets. A fixed mindset is more focused on beliefs that can't change, while with a growth mindset, efforts are taken to learn and adapt in order to achieve. When faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges, we can follow the simple process, given previously, to define, investigate, and turn around challenges into paths to success. You can, of course, use this process on any aspect of your life, and particularly when faced with any brick walls with your marketing.

## Optimism and Its Link to Your Success

No one I have come across has done as much research on the subject of optimism as Martin Seligman. His ground-breaking book, *Learned Optimism*, changed the way a lot of people think about failure and how to overcome it.

A part of what makes his work so powerful is how well researched it is. Over the course of over 20 years, Seligman studied how optimism enhances the quality of life and success in nearly every profession, including athletes, insurance salesmen, and politicians. For example, he studied presidential acceptance speeches and linked candidates' success with how optimistically they were written. Those who dwelled on bad events, analyzed them, and proposed no action were less likely to win. Seligman found that the more pessimistic candidates had a darker style in their speeches, were more passive, were less liked by voters, and engendered less hope in the voters (2006).

All these consequences taken together predicted that the more pessimistic the candidate, the less likely they were to win. On the flip side, superior results were shown to benefit the candidates with a more optimistic style.

So, if optimism provides successful results in politics, sports, and other aspects of life, it will surely work in marketing. The starting point is to realize that we all have an explanatory style, that is, we have a way of describing the good and bad things that happen to us. Take a person giving a presentation that does not go so well. If a person was optimistic, she would describe the failure as temporary, narrowly focused, and not specific to herself. A pessimist, on the other hand, would describe the failure as permanent, pervasive, and personal.

The difference comes in how you view both success and failure. Seligman describes the following three elements of explanatory style that differentiates optimists from pessimists:

*Permanence:* A pessimist sees a failure as permanent—nothing he does will change the fact that he will fail, and it takes him much longer to bounce back from failure, or never recover. The opposite is true when something good comes along—success is seen by the pessimist as temporary—a short-term cause of success that is transient and will pass. Optimists are exactly the opposite—they see success as more permanent and failure as temporary.

*Pervasiveness:* A pessimist sees negative events in one area of life affecting other areas of life as well. Losing a potential bid with a client is seen as impacting the whole business, or worse, *spillover* areas, such as income, lifestyle, marriage, and so on. Optimistic people keep failure in check by simply keeping failures in siloes—it is not seen to impact other areas of life. Success, on the other hand, is seen to impact other areas of life—a positive result in one area spills over into other areas.

*Personalization:* Optimists blame bad events on external factors, whereas pessimists tend to put the blame on themselves. Optimists, therefore, may be more confident as they internalize positive events better, “The positive result was due to my efforts,” whereas the pessimists may think that “The positive result was due to factors outside of my control” (2006).

According to Seligman, anyone can learn optimism. Pessimists have the power to acquire the skill of optimism by managing their self-talk

(how they talk to themselves) to the mirror the way optimists do. Through regular practice, it becomes more natural to use, and the pessimistic *voice* softens, while the optimistic voice gets louder.

### *Developing an Optimistic Marketing Mindset*

Seligman's process of learning optimism is simple and trains a new way of responding to adversity. Namely, the person learns to talk to himself or herself through personal defeat. It begins with the Ellis ABC model of adversity, belief, and consequence. Adversity is the event that happens, belief is how that adversity is interpreted, and consequences are the feelings and actions that result from the beliefs. The following is an example:

1. Adversity: A client you are working with says he is not happy with the latest piece of work you have done for him.
2. Belief: You think, "This is terrible. I'm going to lose this client (pervasive). This always happens (permanent) to me (personal)."
3. Consequence: You become depressed, struck with pessimism, and you find it hard to come up with a solution to rectify the problem.

### *Arguing with Yourself*

Seligman adds to the aforementioned model that helps pessimists to change the way they view the situation. The first part is to dispute these negative thoughts, which centers on providing counter-evidence to the adversity, belief, or consequence. It also looks for the usefulness in staying with the pessimistic thinking.

Disputation might look like the following: "Is it really true that the client is not happy, or is she just having a bad day and taking it out on the only person she can?" "She may even be unhappy with our work today, but how many times has she been happy with our work?" "This might be a good opportunity to discuss other issues that she might be having, so that we can improve our relationship."

Over time, responses become more positive and help overcome pessimistic thinking. This leads to energization, the last step in Seligman's optimism model. Energy is drawn from the fact that you aren't weighed

down by the negative thoughts before they were disputed. You see things more positively now and are able to overcome the original adversity, if it still exists in your mind.

### *When to Use Optimism*

Seligman also describes when to use optimism, as it's not always ideal. If you are in an achievement situation (such as presenting to a client, in a sales meeting, writing an article you hope gets published, or a new marketing activity), use optimism. You can also use optimism when you need to lead a team or improve your marketing mindset in general. However, if you are going into a risky venture where the future is uncertain and could greatly affect yourself or others, you should not rely on using this model to improve your outcome. According to Seligman, the fundamental guideline for not deploying optimism is to ask what the cost of failure is in the particular situation. If the cost of failure is high, optimism is the wrong strategy. The investor thinking of putting his or her life savings in a new business will not have a better outcome due to optimism. Sound evaluation and judgment will help decide that.

## **If You Want to Sell More, Market Better**

Most of us have no issue in working eight hours or more five days a week to make sure our business run smoothly. Likewise, most of us wouldn't argue that we offer the best product or service out there—or that we at least deliver what we promise. We wouldn't even be in business very long if this wasn't the case.

But what tends to limit us is our marketing, which is where most of us have the greatest opportunity to grow our businesses. It's simply about effectively communicating what you already offer—with no deceit or hype. Marketing is about telling others what you are already doing—delivering results for your customers.

The unfortunate thing is that some companies that offer even fantastic products or services don't perceive themselves the same way their customers do. They worry that their services aren't as good as they promise. This way of thinking is not only negative, it's harmful to growth.



The best way to overcome this is to ask your customers what they think of your products and services (more on this in Chapter 2). Whatever they say will be more powerful than you or any company you pay can say about your products and services. Provided you have done a good job (and again you probably wouldn't still be in business if you didn't), the language and emotion your customers will use to describe your work will be priceless.

Once you have that valuable feedback from customers, you can share it internally so that your employees examine the value they're already providing. Your employees need to believe in what they're selling—and what better way than to show them proof from your customers?

You are then ready to share these powerful stories with others. To tell the world about how you have helped others and how you can help more. We'll discuss more about how to do this in Chapter 4.

The bottom line is if we offer a great product or service, then we owe it to ourselves, our families, our friends, and the eight hours or more we spend at work every day for us to tell the world about how we can improve people's lives and businesses.

## How to Create the Right Mental State to Sell

The next time you are going to face a challenge in your marketing, try visualization as a part of your preparation. This is particularly effective in implementing a tough new marketing activity, such as speaking in front of a crowd of people, or in a sales situation when closing a deal with a prospect.

Golfer Jack Nicklaus never hit a shot, even during practice, without visualizing it first. Professional athletes have used visualization to see their victories in their minds before they happen, preparing them, telling them what they want their bodies to achieve. Repeated experiments have shown that visualization physically changes the way your brain is wired, leading you to be better prepared for the event you are visualizing.

When marketing and selling in business, visualization helps you foresee obstacles, builds confidence, and reminds you of the outcome you wish to have. You will better anticipate objections in sales meetings and foresee issues with business strategies you are working on implementing.

In her book *The Charisma Myth*, author Olivia Fox Cabane outlines a great way to visualize an event:

1. Close your eyes and relax.
2. Remember a past experience when you felt absolutely triumphant—for example, the day you won a contest or an award.
3. *Hear* the sounds in the room—the murmurs of approval, the swell of applause.
4. *See* people’s smiles and expressions of warmth and admiration.
5. *Feel* your feet on the ground and the congratulatory handshakes.
6. Above all, *experience* your feelings, the warm glow of confidence rising within you (2013).

Most people feel more confident after their first visualization, others not so much. But keeping in practice with this exercise will, over time, help you develop this into a powerful skill.

A client of mine didn’t believe in marketing his business at first, but agreed to work with me as everything else he tried didn’t work. Before any activities were carried out, I asked him to visualize what achieving those marketing results would mean to his business. His eyes closed, he spoke of being able to talk to more prospects, having pride in owning a business that others recognized and higher revenue. This simple two-minute exercise got him thinking about success! Afterward, he was energized and ready to get going to build his business.

## Conclusion

If you have read this far, then you have completed reading the first of the seven principles of smart marketing. In this chapter, we explained the importance of having a positive mindset when marketing—it’s a prerequisite for success and can’t be overlooked. Too many individuals claim they are not good enough and, therefore, become so. With a little structured thought, you can develop the kind of positive approach to your business that opens up a world of opportunities, ripe for the taking.

We’ve reviewed several approaches on how to overcome negative mindsets and turn them into positive ones. These include Bryon Katie’s “The

Work,” which can be used whenever you feel complacent, pessimistic, or when a poor result lets you down. Martin Seligman’s Ellis ABC model of adversity, belief, and consequence is another great way to describe a pessimistic thought that is holding you back, followed by turning it around by disputing it and gaining energy and enthusiasm from the process.

Be sure to use these approaches anytime your mindset is not feeling as positive as you believe it should. Taking just a few minutes to practice them can change how you view a situation and thus let you handle it better.

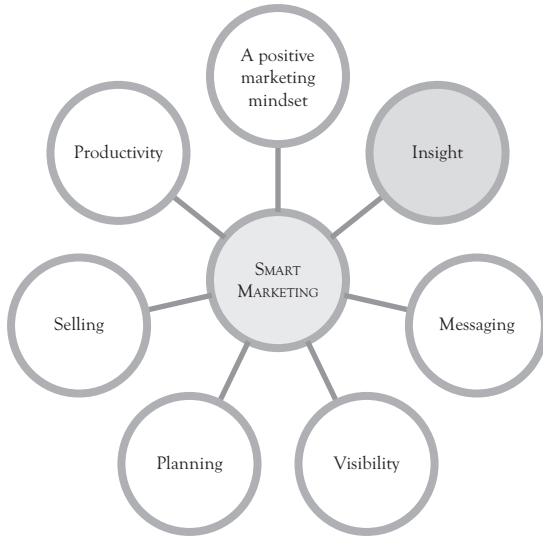
## End of Chapter Practice

Take a look at your own business’s marketing and ask the following questions:

- Do you get discouraged easily? Do you think you fail more than you think you should?
- What negative mindsets do you have that may be holding you back?
- Having just read the chapter, what exercise will you use to improve your mindset whenever you are not feeling positive?

## CHAPTER 2

# Principle 2: Insight—Understanding Your Customers



### Introduction

Understanding your customers is the second principle of Smart Marketing. Why second and not first? As we saw in the previous chapter, if you don't have a positive mindset, then no work you do will be good enough to improve your marketing and sales results. Imagine trying to understand your customers without actually believing in your product or service. It is best to develop a positive mindset first, and then move on to understanding your customers with that powerful mindset. You'll approach the search for opportunities for your business with an open mind that way.

Collecting customer feedback is one of the most important things management can do to improve their products and services. Feedback can help guide your decision making and point out subtle tweaks that may benefit what you sell. It's also essential for measuring customer satisfaction among your current customers. Yet many organizations either collect feedback on an ad hoc basis or don't collect feedback at all.

If you have regularly used data, insight, and feedback from customers to improve your products and services, then you probably can't even imagine how you could be effective without it. Anyone who has not will be amazed at how much easier collecting and using feedback regularly makes it for them to make effective decisions, obtain approvals, and improve results.

In this chapter, we'll review the process of collecting customer feedback and insight. The different *lenses* available to us will be reviewed, along with the steps you need to gather insight effectively. Once you've got it, we will go through how to use it so that the effort becomes as effective as possible for your business. Finally, we'll review a simple model to help you develop a product before its ready for launch.

## Gathering Marketing Insight: The Second Step Toward Successful Marketing

In my experience, what puts off people the most about research is the false impression that the word *research* is associated with: endless piles of data and complex reports. When done right, market research should be simple. All it takes is a concerted effort, and it should be done on a regular basis.

Valuable marketing insights can be collected by looking through three different lenses: your customers, your competition, and your market. The following is what to do for each:

- *Talk to your customers.* By asking customers what they think of your current product or service offering, you can understand their current needs, how they use what you sell, what competing products they have tried, and what they may need in the future. If they praise your product, you walk out knowing

what your strengths are, and with their permission you can use what they say as testimonials to convince other customers to buy your product. If they are unhappy with your product, this gives you an opportunity to follow up aggressively and fix the situation before they switch to a competitor. Either scenario presents an opportunity to improve and build relationships with customers.

- *Size up the competition.* This also does not need to be complicated. Buy and use their products, walk into their store, visit their website, and talk to their customers. Now, do the same for your product or service. How do you measure up?
- *Know your market.* These days there is a ton of data available online on just about any market. Take a look at the size and value of your market, where global trends relevant to your industry are headed, and what its most important competitive factors are, such as price, quality, service, or distribution. In the packaged consumer goods market, for example, visibility and promotion are key. In the commodities business, price and service may be more important.

## How to Collect Customer Feedback

Here are some steps that any market research project should go through, either internally or with an independent agency. To understand how to use each step, I have listed questions that should be asked.

1. *Determine the purpose.* Remember, the whole point of any market research effort is to make better decisions than you would without the information. “What decisions need to be made?” and “Why are we doing this?” are questions that should be asked right at the start.
2. *Identify informational objectives.* Here you determine what you need to know—this helps in setting the stage to develop the right questions to ask and in deciding whom to ask. “What don’t we know?” or “What do we wish we knew?” are good questions to ask. Be clear on your objectives behind collecting customer feedback. Before running a survey or focus group, be clear on the business goals behind

collecting feedback. If your business is losing customers, you may want to use the survey to ask important, existing customers what they think and then ask a few past customers why they left.

3. *Determine the audience.* This is about determining who you want to collect data from. If you want to increase the uptake of a particular service, you may want to ask current and potential customers. “Who do we want to ask?” is the right question here.
4. *Select the research technique.* There are a variety of different ways to collect data—from *conventional* (face to face, telephone, mail) to *modern* (online, e-mail, and so on). The best thing to look for here is what techniques will satisfy your informational objectives at the lowest possible cost. “What is the most effective way to gather this information?” is the question to ask here, and make sure the independent agency you are using helps you to answer this question.
5. *Be specific with your questions.* You want to minimize what you ask as much as possible. Customers value their own time as much as anyone else, so limit your questions to a focused set that asks the most important things that you are willing to take action on. Anything else is *nice to know* and not essential. Avoid double-barreled questions that pack two or more ideas together, such as “How satisfied are you with our website and call center services?” (on a rating scale, this would provide unclear results on how the website and call center are perceived).
6. *Field the research.* From this point on (and perhaps even earlier), your agency is probably leading on the project. You would want to ensure they give you regular updates on how the project is going, along with ensuring that you have provided them with whatever information they need (such as your customer database or other information they have requested). Depending on the size and scope of the project, you should expect communication on project updates and troubleshoot any problems along the way.
7. *Analyze the data, and report and present recommendations.* Once the analysis is done, you want to ensure that the results are presented to the management as quickly as possible to get the recommendations discussed and approved. Remember, the whole point of conducting research is to assist in making decisions on taking action—whether

it is to improve your current products or services, or to launch a new product. Ideally, communicate the main findings of the research to employees who are directly involved in actioning the recommendations so that they fully understand why they are doing it.

8. *Close the loop.* It's amazing how many organizations don't follow up after a customer survey to tell them what happens next. If a customer complains about a particular aspect of your product or service, then use this feedback as an opportunity to get back to him or her and rectify the situation. Tell the customer what you'll do to improve your offering. He or she will appreciate it, and more than likely remain your customer.
9. *Track results.* Once you have taken action, you'll be able to improve your offering and use future feedback initiatives to continuously improve your offering. Today's feedback results will be tomorrow's benchmark to improve upon.

With the previously mentioned points in mind, the following are some things to think about when considering market research as a tool:

- *Research costs money.* All market research projects need resources such as time and money. Many organizations debate whether it is better to use that money to improve the product rather than generating data. However, without fully understanding what to improve, investing the *savings* of not doing research directly into enhancing a product may be completely futile. I recommend setting aside a portion of your marketing funds, say 2 to 5 percent for larger organizations, on market research.
- *Think about how you will use the data.* Many organizations hire an independent agency that a few months later comes back with two-inch-thick reports with tables, dozens of pages of explanations, and large findings summaries. Collecting feedback on even some of the most complex products or services does not need to be so complicated. Wherever possible, focus should be put on assessing the few main elements that make up the most critical need for assessment.



- *Acting on time.* Many market research efforts are *point in time* studies, with feedback collected at a specific period in the year. The downside to this is that the research has a diminishing value as time goes by. Once that research is collected or assessed, organizations should review, decide, and act on the findings as soon as possible.
- *Hire a third-party customer feedback provider.* The best way to get objective, nonbiased customer feedback is to hire a professional to help you obtain it. Doing it yourself will be painfully inefficient and divert your attention from what you are supposed to do. Consultants can run customer feedback projects much quicker and more effectively, saving you the time and energy that you need to focus on other core aspects of your business. In hiring any good consultant, you should expect a good understanding of where you stand in terms of your customer experience and an actionable set of recommendations that will significantly improve your business situation.
- *Taking action.* The fundamental success factor in collecting feedback is what is done once it's received. A customer may say that you don't have a big enough range of products, so you can then work on expanding your inventory. Another customer may say that your staff are too slow, in which case you can offer training and provide them with the tools and incentives to make them more productive.

Actively listening to your customers and obtaining feedback is a must for any business looking to improve and stay competitive. But what if you don't have customers yet? How can you collect feedback when no one has even bought what you sell?

## How to Develop a Product that Customers Value

A vast majority of new businesses fail. According to *Bloomberg*, 8 out of 10 entrepreneurs who start businesses fail within the first 18 months. Similarly, the vast majority of new products fail.

While this can go wrong for many reasons, a lot of the time it boils down to a delay in shipping a product because of unnecessary analysis and guess work. In fact, some businesses spend months and sometimes years perfecting a product before it is shared with potential customers, only to find out that what they assumed would be of great interest to customers was not the case.

With any product launch or upgrade, there is a very real element of uncertainty. While analysis and focus groups can help understand customer preferences, they only go skin deep and don't uncover actual behavior.

In 2011, social entertainment website IMVU made \$50 million in revenue, but the company didn't start out that way. Formed in 2004 with a team of highly motivated high-tech entrepreneurs, they spent six months researching and forming their product before its launch. Under huge pressure from investors, employees, and their own families, they speculated and predicted how customers would use the site and built their product accordingly.

When the big day of the launch came, their fear of low customer uptake was realized. Their first and second months of sales amounted to \$300 and \$350, respectively, coming mostly from their friends and family.

In follow-up tests with users, IMVU wanted to gather perceptions of their product. One feature that IMVU was particularly worried about was the fact that their avatars couldn't move around their virtual environments as fluidly and intelligently as competing software products could. The time and money to develop the technology to allow avatars to walk, avoid obstacles, and take the most intelligent path to a destination was simply out of their reach at the time.

Feedback from customers was consistent—they wanted the ability to move their avatars around. But before IMVU committed to that path, they tried a low-budget shortcut: They changed the product so that customers could click where they wanted their avatar to go, and the avatar would teleport there instantly. No walking, no obstacle avoidance. The avatar disappeared and then reappeared an instant later in the new place. They couldn't afford fancy teleportation graphics or sound effects.

The developers couldn't believe their surprise when they learned that customers *liked* the idea of teleporting. They weren't even asked directly about this feature, as the developers were too embarrassed and perceived

it as a real weakness in their product. But customers consistently listed the teleport feature as one of the software's best characteristics, outperforming much more expensive and time-consuming features of the software!

Risk and uncertainty can be reduced significantly, as identified in Eric Reis's book *The Lean Startup*. Many businesses fail when they start by asking, "Can this product be built?" as opposed to "Should this product be built?" According to Reis, the best way to answer this question is to develop what he calls a minimum viable product (MVP). This is a very basic form of the product that allows customers to interact with it before it is finished and launched.

When you develop an MVP, your business can then assess if this product is what customers would want (and, more importantly, would pay for). By getting customer feedback early in the development process, businesses minimize the risk of the unknown and increase their chances of making an amazing product.

A friend of mine opened a retail store three weeks ago. As he was new to the industry, I asked him what he had learnt in the process of creating and launching his business. He replied, "I've learnt more in the last three weeks than in the one year it took to set up the business. I wish we launched sooner."

A successful launch is simply about confronting the unknown, in a low-risk way rather delaying shipping by overanalyzing. A *Harvard Business Review* article entitled "New Project? Don't Analyze—Act" shares how this can be done in the following three simple steps:

1. *Take action.* Even if you don't go in exactly the right direction at first, you at least get started. You move forward, with eyes wide open to any looming dangers and possibilities.
2. *Learn.* By sharing features of what you want to sell to customers and not the finished product, you gather feedback that can be used to build even better future versions.
3. *Build.* Repeat steps 1 and 2 until you accomplish your goal, realize you can't, or opt to change direction on the basis of new information. (Schlesinger, Kiefer, and Brown 2012)

To see how this process works, the article shares an example from Mary Jo Cook and Suzanne Sengemann, Vice Presidents at Clorox's laundry

and home care division. As committed environmentalists and mothers of small children, they wanted to change their company's involvement in natural, greener products, which, in 2005, represented only 1 percent of the industry's \$12 billion in sales.

Their goal was to produce an effective, marketable, green cleaner. They started out by playing around with products at home, and reached out to other working moms who shared similar interests in the idea behind their vision of the product. Their work attracted interest from Clorox's new ventures group, opening doors for them to test existing green products, which turned out to be mostly ineffective.

By convincing their bosses to allow for some time and a small percentage of an existing budget to work with, and without making any promises, they went to work with their R&D team and eventually produced a formula that was 99 percent free of petrochemicals and worked as well as the company's chemical-based products. But, instead of investing heavily in market research and figuring out how to sell it, they opted to prototype the product with a small group of consumers, which kept within their low-risk product development methodology.

Many of these users rated the product as highly effective. It also didn't change their opinion of the company's other chemical-rich offerings—they already knew those contained chemicals—but it did change their views on the efficacy of natural products: If Clorox was behind an environmental-friendly brand, it must work. Cook and Sengelmann now had early results on which to build. This eventually led to a product launched as Green Works, which in 2012 was a \$60 million brand for Clorox (Schlesinger, Kiefer, and Brown 2012).

Launching a new product or business does not need to be a high-risk venture. The key here is to learn as fast and as early as you can. Customers don't care how long it takes to build a product, they only care if it serves their needs.

## Conclusion

Using customer feedback on a regular basis can help you stay on top of what your customers want and are expecting from you. It can help you determine what features your product or service should offer, how much customers are willing to pay for it, where and when they want to buy and

use it, and determine the most effective ways and channels to promote your offering. In this chapter, we've seen what the steps in the research process are, along with what obstacles you'll likely face when conducting research. A great starting point to better serve your customers is once you have a better idea of what they want.

We've also seen how understanding your customers better helps to minimize the chance of launching a product or service that won't be successful. By assessing customers' satisfaction with your product or service and what messages and campaigns are most effective, you can significantly improve the rollout of a new and improved phase of what you offer.

In the next chapter, we'll focus on communicating how you can help your customers so that they understand the benefits of your product or service easily, no matter how complex it is.

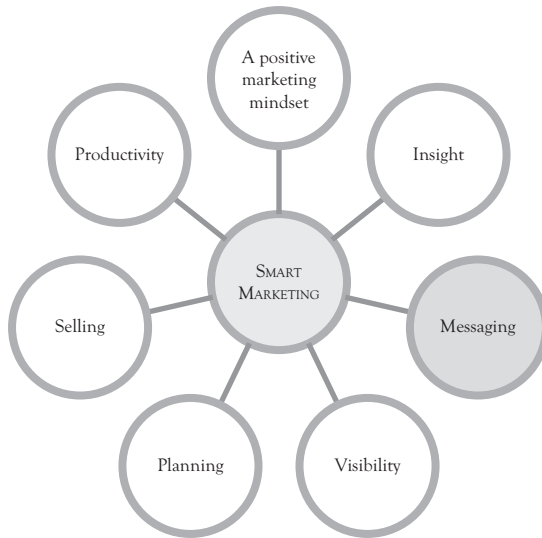
## End of Chapter Practice

Take a look at your own business and ask the following questions:

- What do you know about your customers?
  - Who are they?
  - What do they do?
  - What do they buy that you can sell?
  - Why do they buy?
  - When do they buy?
  - How do they buy?
- Why do your customers need you?

## CHAPTER 3

# Principle 3: Messaging—Developing Messages That Stick



### Introduction

Wouldn't it be great if prospects easily understood what your business was about? And what if your customers really knew all the hard work and intricate details that you need to master in order to deliver your product or service? Surely they would then begin to appreciate what you sell—so much so that they would buy from you. I hate to be the one to break it to you, but the truth is that it does not matter one bit.

Customers don't care about what you have to sell. Customers only care about their problems, their revenue and profit issues, productivity issues, and the stress those problems create. The trick is to get them to understand how you can help them. Unfortunately, the majority of

companies get their messaging wrong, and it's the goal of this chapter to help you understand why and what to do about it.

## Marketing Message Mistakes and What to Do about Them

### *The Messaging Disconnect*

The object of your messaging is to convince a prospect to do business with you. To do this, you must use different means to relay the message: words, presentations, pictures, video, and anything else that helps get the message across. The message has to be clear, differentiated, and free from technical jargon. To be effective, it needs to be memorable. It needs to stick.

Contrast this description of high-quality messaging with the messages we are receiving every day. Prospects give marketers their attention, albeit for a short while, and we turn around and tell them what we do. *Exactly* what we do. Along with a description of the company, what services it offers, how great the company is, and the features and benefits of what you sell are mentioned somewhere along the way. This is a missed opportunity.

Following are some examples of low- and high-quality messaging:

Low quality: I sell insurance. High quality: I sell piece of mind.

Low quality: I'm in advertising. High quality: I help companies to raise awareness and change their customers' behavior.

Low quality: I'm an architect. High quality: I help people design their dream homes.

Low quality: I'm an accountant. High quality: I help companies to save time and focus on the core aspects of their business.

Do you see the difference? It's much more powerful to speak along the lines of what your customers want, not what you sell.

The messaging disconnect can be overcome. The first step is to identify why your messaging isn't working. Here are some reasons why your message may not be as effective as it should:

- *Your message doesn't appeal to your target audience.* There is no point in talking to someone who will not buy from you.

Similarly, if your message does not resonate with your target customers, they will not buy from you. Those whom you believe are the most likely to buy from you are the ones your message needs to appeal to. If you are not sure whether your current message appeals to target customers, try sharing it with your current customers. Ask them what they think and feel when they come across your messaging. Ask them if it adequately represents what your product or service stands for. If they could change your messaging, what would they change it to?

- *Your message talks about you and not your customers.* “Our products do this...” and “Our service does that...” Again, your customers don’t care. They care about whether you can solve their problems. They care about how much time they are wasting with slow equipment or processes. They care about meeting or exceeding their revenue and profit targets. They care about making sure that they achieve their tough goals, all within stringent compliance standards. Your messaging resonates much with what’s already on the prospects mind. In other words, make sure you talk about those problems! What problems does your product or service solve? What keeps your customers up at night? Now take your answers and build it into your messaging.
- *Your message is not differentiated from others.* Using a me-too statement that everyone else uses will not get you separated from the pack. How many times have you heard someone explain that their product or service is the *leading, best, first, largest,* and so on. Everyone’s product cannot be the *leading* product or service in their category—that’s impossible. Someone has to be second or third best! Use a message that is different from the mundane.
- *Your message is not consistent across the board.* Your website says one thing, but you say something else. Your proposals say another thing. Other elements of physical evidence, such as how you are dressed, say another. In order for the message to stick, it must be uniform across the different touch points



your prospects are exposed to. It needs to look and feel like it came from the same place. Consistency is part of how prospects judge what you sell. If you are consistent in the way you sell, that must reflect on how reliable your product or service is. It will provide reassurance to a prospect who is evaluating what your company is offering versus alternatives.

- *Is not constantly reviewed.* If you're not getting the kind of response you want from your message, then change it. Customer needs change all the time, and so does what you sell. So, how you sell it should be no different. Furthermore, most messaging is agreed to in meetings. Everyone in the room has their say on what the message should be, and then it is usually signed off right then and there. Where most companies fail is that they think the message is final and will change again when they next have a messaging meeting (maybe when they have a need to create a new set of collaterals). But what should be happening right after the message is agreed is that they go out and share the message, and collect feedback. What are prospect's reactions when they hear it? Do they ask for more information about how you can help them or do they look at you with a clueless deer-in-headlights expression on their face?

Messaging is not something to be taken lightly. It is the tip of the arrow as far as your marketing efforts are concerned. If your messaging is sharp enough, it will guide the rest of your marketing efforts and will eventually hit its target.

## How to Successfully Position Your Product or Service

If your business did one thing well, what would it be? Is that one thing recognized by your customers as something that is done better by your business than by any other? This is what positioning is about—being positioned in the prospect's mind. Positioning is about fanatical focus on doing one thing really well.

To reinforce your position in the prospect's mind, you must sacrifice. You must let go of anything that may detract from the core positioning of your product or service in the mind of the prospect.

No company can create its own position. A position is in the mind of the customer. All you try to do is to influence that position. In the classic book *Selling The Invisible*, Harry Beckwith asserts:

... your positioning is a place, and someone else puts you there: your prospects. Even services that do nothing to market their company have a position. A prospect simply takes what he knows about the company and positions the company accordingly. (2012)

Beckwith goes on to explain the difference between position and a positioning statement:

A *position* (or statement of position) is a cold-hearted, no-nonsense statement of how you are perceived in the minds of prospects. It *is* your position.

A *positioning statement*, by contrast, states how you *wish* to be perceived. It is the core message you want to deliver in every medium, including elevators and airport waiting areas, to influence the perceptions of your service. (2012)

To understand where you are *positioned*, the best way to start is to ask your current customers what they care about most when it comes to choosing a product or service like yours. These are the critical factors on which they will compare your business to others. Then, ask them to rate how your business performs against these critical success factors. Finally, ask them to rate other competing companies along the same lines. How is your business positioned in your customers' minds?

Doing this has two distinct advantages. The first is a reality check—is your positioning statement believable or completely out of touch? Are you claiming to be something that your customers don't perceive you are? Companies fall in this trap all the time. They claim themselves to be the *leading*, *first*, *best*, and other exaggerated superlatives without really being

that at all (a lot of the time they also don't take into account whether prospects care for dealing with the leading, first, or best).

The second advantage is that in understanding where the gaps in your *positioning* versus your *positioning statement* are, you'll be in a better position to narrow that gap. The trick is to narrow this understanding of how you are *positioned* with how you desire your business to be positioned (your *positioning statement*). Narrowing this gap will bring you closer to what you desire to be.

Take the example of Long Island Trust Company, a bank that Al Ries and Jack Trout wrote about in the marketing classic *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*. A new banking law allowed for less restrictions for big city names like Citibank and Chase Manhattan to enter the Long Island market. Long Island Trust Company was the biggest bank on the island and stood to lose a lot from the influx of large competitors.

To help develop a competitive position for the Long Island Trust Company, formal positioning research was commissioned to map the prospect's mind. Prospects were given a set of six attributes and asked to rate them on a scale of 1 to 10. These included (1) many branches, (2) full range of services, (3) quality of service, (4) large capital, (5) to help Long Island residents, and (6) to help Long Island economy.

The results of the first four traditional attributes (traditional reasons for doing business with a particular bank) were not looking good for Long Island Trust Company. In fact, out of six banks that they were compared to, they fared the *worst* on these first four factors.

However, they fared the best on the last two factors, which were specific to Long Island. This meant Long Island Trust Company had a strength—a better connection to Long Island than the big city banks. So they decided to leverage this strength, developing advertisements that had the following theme:

Why send your money to the city if you live on the Island?

It makes sense to keep you money close to home. Not at a city bank. But at Long Island Trust. Where it can work for Long Island.

After all, we concentrate on developing Long Island. Not Manhattan Island. Or some island off Kuwait.

Ask yourself, who do you think is most concerned about Long Island's future?

A bank-come-lately with hundreds of other branches in the greater metropolitan areas plus affiliates in five continents?

Or a bank like ours that's been here for over 50 years and has 33 offices on Long Island. (quoted in Reis and Trout 1981)

Further ads ran as follows: "If times get tough, will the city banks get going? (Back to the city)."

Fifteen months later, the same research was repeated. Long Island Trust Company went from lowest to highest in two of the four traditional attributes and made solid gains in the other two.

The success in improving the positioning of the Long Island Trust Company is an example from a large, established company, one with large resources. What about smaller companies? How can small companies position themselves in the market?

In my experience, people who sell in small businesses are most likely to face an inferiority complex. Their business is small, so they link that to their sense of self-worth. "You are small, so you must be lesser in many ways" is what many small business owners tend to think. But there are significant advantages that prospects can benefit from in choosing to work with a small company. The following are a few benefits:

- *Greater access to the owner or head of the company.* Most large companies bring in their senior most staff on occasions, usually in the selling process. These senior people tend to disappear once the deal is signed, leaving less experienced staff to fend for themselves and deliver what was promised. In dealing with a small company, customers usually get greater access to the head of the company, who will make sure that the job is done well and customized to fit the client's needs. This is a significant advantage and should not be overlooked!
- *Smaller companies are faster.* There is less bureaucracy involved, which means they can make quicker decisions and, in turn, serve their clients better. The quicker you can solve a client's

issue, the more money and time you will make or save for the client.

- *Better understanding of customer needs.* Small businesses tend to have more face time with their clients, which means they can understand their clients needs better than larger businesses can. Understanding the issues your clients face (and helping to communicate that back to them) is one of the single most valuable things you can do for a client.
- *Excitement.* Due to its high capacity for risk, there is a lot of adventure around the innovation, change, and challenge of running a small business. You never really know how it will turn out, and this can be very exciting. This will keep your employees excited too and they, in turn, will be motivated as their efforts help shape the company, which reflects well on the service they deliver to your clients.

As a small business owner, building these strengths into your marketing is a great way to influence your position in the mind of your customer. It requires focus and attention to detail that takes a lot of work but is worth it in the long run.

## The Six Principles of Sticky Ideas

How do you make an idea stick? Mark Twain noted, “A lie can get halfway around the world before the truth can even get its boots on.” Meanwhile, people with valuable and important ideas struggle to make their ideas stick. In the book *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, Chip Heath and Dan Heath write about six principles to make your ideas stick and help you get your point across.

Having a good idea is not enough. Some fantastic ideas will never see the light of day. Entrepreneurs and inventors develop fantastic products, only to be disappointed that people don’t buy them. Prospects have too little time and attention to spend trying to understand what their product does and how it can help them. According to the Heaths, there are a set of six principles that successful ideas play by that make their messages *sticky* (Heath and Heath 2007).

### *Simplicity*

The essential core of the idea needs to be explained. Arguing a set of 10 points, even if they are very strong ones, would not be as effective as one outstanding, universally understood point. The Heaths cite a military concept called Commander's Intent (CI), a succinct high-level statement of objectives that accompanies any plan or order. A sample CI might be "Break the will of the enemy in Sector A," which would then be translated into more detailed CI statements at the lower tactical levels. This clarifies what the soldiers at the lower levels should do, without requiring step-by-step instructions from their leaders. While working toward completing the objective, if an unexpected obstacle presents itself, they are then free to decide how to course-correct in order to achieve it.

The goal of simplicity is to boil ideas down to their absolute core. Southwest Airlines does this when they claim to be *the low-cost airline*, so much so that they have been consistently profitable for decades. What happens when a marketing idea like serving complimentary Greek Salads is offered up to management? The person with the idea is reminded of their mission, which makes the decision to say *no* much simpler.

### *Unexpected*

How do we get an audience to give us their attention? We need to shake up conventional ways of thinking. Telling them what they already know won't work here. It needs to be unconventional, surprising, and even disruptive. It needs to get them curious to the point where they ask for more information.

One of the most powerful speeches by Ronald Reagan was the speech he gave at the Berlin wall, trying to unify Germany, which had been a divided country. The most memorable words of that speech came when he said to the president of the then USSR the following: "General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization, come here to this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tear\\_down\\_this\\_wall!](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tear_down_this_wall!)

### **Concreteness**

Making your ideas clear is another principle of sticky ideas. Concrete ideas have no room for the abstract and too much detail. The following is an example:

A simple mixture of salts and sugar—oral rehydration therapy—in water can save lives in the developing world. Instead of giving facts and figures about how many can be saved, its promoter carries with him a packet of the powder and whips it out to, say, a group of Prime Ministers and says “Do you know that this costs less than a cup of tea and it can save hundreds of thousands of children’s lives in your country?”

To make ideas concrete, use sensory information. Describe the sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. For years, KFC was known for its slogan “Finger lickin’ good” and M&M’s used “Melts in your mouth, not in your hand.”

Saying that the Moon is 384,000 km away from the Earth may sound like a lot, but it’s difficult for the average person to appreciate how far away that is. We tend not to deal with those kinds of distances on a regular basis. By making it more concrete, it can be understood better. Saying that if you drove that distance at highway speeds, it would take you 145 days of solid driving to get there. That makes the concept more concrete, as it is easier to imagine.

### **Credibility**

Another challenge in effective messaging is to get people to believe in your ideas. Sticky ideas need to be credible, and credibility comes with providing proof. Why do we need proof to begin with? Because we group together in society. When we see someone doing or choosing something, especially if they are similar to us or in our peer group, then we tend to make the same choices they make. That’s why high school teenagers dress alike.

Similarly, when we look to make a purchase decision, we look for evidence before we decide as to whether the decision to buy is a right one. That’s why product reviews on amazon.com are so critical to many. In selling more complex services, testimonials and case studies are a way to provide credibility. These are *highlight reels*, showing what other people who were just like you are now experiencing as a result of making a decision to buy something that you have the option to buy too.

Facts and hard figures are important credibility tools. How much money does your product make or save your average client company? Using this in your communication will greatly enhance your credibility.

### *Emotions*

Why should people care about your ideas? We buy with our emotions, so our ideas should trigger emotions. Emotions make your audience care.

Think of advertisements you have seen where a charity portrays someone in need. They share their hardships with you. Then they share facts and figures about how many people have these same hardships. Finally, you are told about how you can make a difference by contributing in some way.

Business guru Alan Weiss says “Logic makes people think. Emotion makes them act.”<sup>2</sup> Speaking only to people’s logical mind is the mistake that a lot of marketers make when they lead with the features of their products and services. Deemphasize those and make the emotional benefits stand out.

### *Stories*

This is where you empower prospects to use an idea through a narrative by telling stories. Hearing stories acts as a kind of mental flight simulator preparing us to respond more quickly and effectively. A prospect can understand how you can help them far better through a story than a detailed explanation of what your product or service does. The following is the difference:

1. “This is how we help people. First we do this, and then we do that.” Communicating like this is very subjective and doesn’t always trigger the kind of interest that you would want from a prospect.
2. “This is how we helped one specific client. They had these kinds of problems, and we did this and that to help solve them. They then had these kinds of results.” Communicating with stories helps prospects to understand how you can help them much better.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.alanweiss.com/balancing-act/december-2000.php>



We'll go over how to shape your messaging in the following section.

## Demystifying What You Do—Avoiding the Curse of Knowledge

How many times have you been in a situation where someone tells you what they do for a living, only to leave you clueless about what they mean? “I’m a business development and operations leader” or “I’m a marketing strategy consultant”—most people don’t know why those positions are needed or what they entail. And, more often than not, roles with the same titles have responsibilities that differ from one organization to the other.

In marketing your business these days, you have but mere seconds to communicate to and influence prospects. Despite this fact, most people don’t have a clear marketing message—that is, concise statements about how they help others. This often leads to missed opportunities as prospects don’t understand their services or perceive them as too complex or unnecessary.

As we’ve seen earlier in this chapter, those familiar with the terminology, concepts, and value of their own work (sometimes unknowingly) mystify it by using their own language and ways of communicating. This can make it difficult for people on the receiving end to fully grasp what it is that people do or what ideas they have. Whether you are a CEO or full-time mom, we all have ideas that we need to communicate—a new product coming to market, a strategy you want to sell your boss, values we are trying to instill in our children. But it can be very hard to transform the way people think and act.

Chip Heath and Dan Heath describe this phenomenon as the curse of knowledge. This happens when our ideas are masked by abstract ideas that fail to drive action: *becoming consumer-centric* or *world-class customer service* is along these lines. They may be very clear in the minds of the executives who advocate them, but the employees who are charged with implementing these general concepts won’t really know what to do.

In 1990, a Stanford PhD dissertation was carried out by a psychology student named Elizabeth Newton to further understand the curse of knowledge. As part of the research, she created a game where a

group of people were each assigned one of two roles: *tapper* or *listener*. Each tapper was asked to pick a well-known song, such as “Happy Birthday” and tap out the rhythm on a table. The listener’s job was to guess the song.

Over the course of Newton’s experiment, 120 songs were tapped out. Listeners guessed only three of the songs correctly: a success ratio of 2.5 percent. But what made this research worthy of a Stanford PhD dissertation was the answer she received when tappers were asked what they *thought* the success ratio would be. They predicted 50 percent! The tappers got their message across in only 1 out of 40 taps, but they thought that they would get it across in 1 out of 2. Tappers were busy tapping away while singing the songs in their heads, but it was coming across to the listener as a series of taps similar to Morse code.

It can sometimes be very hard for professionals to get away from this mysterious coded language and communicate the value they provide in a way that makes sense to the listener. One way to do this is to think like your audience and ask: “What’s in it for me?” from their perspective.

When you have an effective marketing message, grabbing a prospect’s attention becomes easier and you cut through a lot of the details and get straight to the heart of your product or service’s value. It’s the primary reason why a prospect should buy from you. It helps explain, in layman’s terms, how you solve problems, deliver specific benefits, and are different. It helps you stand out from competitors and move away from speaking about your product or service like it’s a commodity.

Once you have a clear and concise marketing message in place, it is easier for prospects to understand how you can help them. For instance, if you are trying to sell car leasing services, you could easily say something like “we lease cars.” But that does not explain how you solve a prospect’s problem. The prospect may not realize that they need to lease a car in the first place and may think that they are happy with their current setup. But once you start speaking to their issues, such as “we help companies to save money and improve productivity with their vehicles,” then you are speaking on a whole other level—one that will gain the attention of a target prospect much quicker.

## *Developing a Marketing Message*

With a little thought and structure, this can become a very powerful way to speak to people. Robert Middleton, owner of Action Plan Marketing, offers the following structure for those looking to attract new clients, seek out a job, or simply be known for what they actually do.

### *Target*

Who ideally do you serve or sell to? Based on your capabilities, interest, and objectives, what niche should you be targeting? Define who the best clients are for your services. This includes identifying clients' demographics and psychographics.

“Our average client company is based in Westchester County and is losing between one and five hundred thousand dollars each year due to outdated equipment.”

### *Issue*

What problems, issues, or challenges do you solve? Why do your clients need your services in the first place? Why do they need you? What's frustrating them? What are they struggling with? What's missing for them?

“These costs are mostly for maintenance, repair, and lower productivity due to downtime and add up to an average of \$1.2M per organization every year.”

### *Outcome*

You promised ultimate outcomes. What exactly will your clients get if they use your services? How will they benefit?

“We provide a turnkey equipment overhaul program that is guaranteed to cut downtime by 40 percent, saving our average client \$750K in the first year.”

### *Story*

Case studies, stories, or proof: perhaps the most powerful kind of marketing communication is stories. Not only do stories communicate who

you work with, what problems you solve, and the outcomes you deliver, but also the format of a story makes this much more real and much less conceptual. Who has used your services and what results did they get?

“I worked with a client who was losing \$1 million a year due to downtime. The client was working hard to reduce this figure but was not making much progress. We worked together to understand their maintenance issues and have the problems fixed. Now, instead of losing that money on downtime, it is being fed into the client’s bottom line.”

### *Answering “What’s In It For Me?”*

The target, issue, outcome, and story framework are simply a matter of putting your marketing communication in the right order. When your marketing ideas follow this order, they more clearly answer the question “What’s in it for me?” to your audience.

There are three things to keep in mind when developing your marketing message:

1. *Use the right language.* Your marketing message needs to use language that is familiar to your prospects. It should speak to the prospect the same way the prospect is thinking. The best way to find out what language to use is to ask your current customers. Using social media is another way to understand the way prospects speak about the problems you can help them with.
2. *Develop a structure.* There is no one way to structure your marketing message. I have just shared one structure previously, but if you are not comfortable with that for whatever reason, another way to do it would be to have an attention-grabbing headline that summarizes the ultimate benefit of a prospect working with you. I sometimes use the line “I help companies to dramatically improve their marketing and sales results against clear and aggressive goals.” I then have a series of short points after it in support of the headline, and then steer the conversation toward getting the prospect to talk.
3. *Testing.* The first time I developed a marketing message, I went out and tested it and had people almost laugh at me. In other words, it wasn’t very effective! So, I refined it a little (basically I toned down

the language and made it more concise) and went out and tried it again. The results were much better and it got prospects talking to me about working with me much quicker. What I advise doing is having more than one value proposition and testing it until you find what works best. You can test it offline in networking and in one-on-one meetings, and online by measuring click-through rates on Google AdWords or Facebook ads.

We can all prevent ourselves from getting too caught up in our own understanding of what we know by avoiding the curse of knowledge. Often this can be done by simply reviewing the ideas we want to communicate and structuring them in a way that makes them easy to understand. A simple framework like the one given previously can be an effective way to structure your message and sell big ideas and attract new clients.

## How to Get Prospects to Take Action

One test of an effective marketing effort is how your communication influences others to act. The best way to maximize the impact of any marketing effort is to include an effective call to action (CTA) and have it built into your message.

An experiment in the 1960s involved testing how students at Yale University reacted to communication about how deadly the tetanus bacteria can be and what to do about it. It ran a campaign that highlighted the dangers of not keeping up to date with the tetanus shot and listed where to go on the university's campus to get it.

The results were largely ineffective, with only about 3 percent of those exposed to the communication taking action by getting vaccinated. The next phase of the experiment involved adding a map with the health centers highlighted clearly, including opening and closing times. That simple addition changed the results of the communication to 28 percent.

When executed well, a CTA can be the game changer that makes a marketing effort a success. A CTA can be placed anywhere in your marketing—on your website, in an e-book, in an e-mail, said out loud in a networking situation or at the end of a speaking event, or even at the end of a blog post.

When you're very focused on the other elements of your marketing, it can be easy to lose track of what you want your customers, users, or audience to do. To save you time and effort, here's a quick checklist for the essential elements of a quality CTA:

- *Be clear on the objective behind your message.* What action do you want people to take? In a networking situation, you may simply want a prospect's permission to call them next week to discuss how you can help. On a website, it may be for users to sign up to your newsletter or request a quote by clicking somewhere prominent on a page.
- *Offer a clear marketing message.* As we've seen earlier, this should clarify why it is of benefit for customers to respond in the way you want them to. Similarly, they should know what should happen when they do what you ask and what they get in exchange for their efforts. As with your marketing message, a quality CTA should essentially answer "What's in it for me?"
- *Make it easy for customers to respond.* What options do customers have to respond? Do you want people to log onto your website? Or go buy your product at the nearest branch of a retail chain? The simpler this is and the less effort required from the customer, the better. If it's a report or blog article you want them to read, it's best to send it to them rather than asking them to log on to a website to download it.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen the typical mistakes that are made when communicating a product or service's value. Prospects ask us what we do and we tell them! To be effective, we need to take a step back and look at what the benefits of our product or service are, boil those down to their core, and communicate that. We've seen in this chapter that doing so takes out a lot of the complexity in what we do and makes it easier for prospects to understand. We've gone through a marketing message structure that helps you to do that by speaking about what matters most to our customers and not to ourselves.

Keeping Chip Heath and Dan Heath's six principles in mind when communicating ideas or concepts to do with your business may also help trigger even more ways of enhancing your communication. We've used the example of the credibility principle highlighting that providing proof that you do what you say you do can be very important. By using testimonials and case studies to showcase how you help others is great way to develop credibility.

In the next chapter, we move onto the fourth principle of smart marketing—visibility—which will help further communicate value to your prospects without the hype.

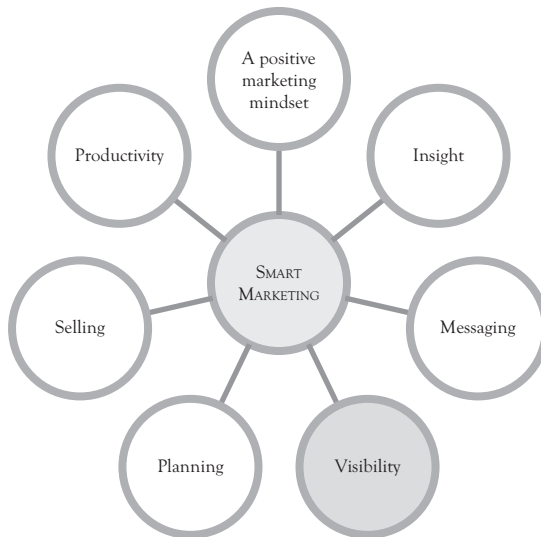
## End of Chapter Practice

Take a look at your own business and develop your own marketing message. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Who do you sell to?
- What problems, issues, or challenges do you solve?
- What exactly will your clients get if they use your services?  
How will they benefit?
- Who has used your services and what results did they get?
- How can you use the answers to the previous questions in your marketing?

## CHAPTER 4

# Principle 4: Visibility— Being Useful to Customers



### Introduction

People will only buy from you if they know you exist. To achieve this, you must get in front of buyers. But how, given that they are bombarded by so many messages? We need to be smarter about how we build visibility, not only because of our customers' selective listening but also because building awareness takes time and effort. It also requires a plan.

The first part of this chapter shares concepts that you need to know to build visibility and get yourself in front of more buyers. This involves communicating less about your products and services and more about your customers' problems, which, in turn, entices interest in a much more powerful way.



I'll then share the different ways in which you can disseminate your message, using different smart marketing tactics that you can choose from based on your own preferences and skill sets. All the tactics mentioned in this chapter cost next to nothing or are free. The aim of this chapter is to get you thinking about which activities you'll choose to grow your business, which will set us up well for the next chapter, where we'll talk about planning all your chosen activities.

## Being Helpful with Your Marketing

The best marketing helps people. The old way of marketing focused on pitching and selling a product or service to an audience. It was very much focused on what was being sold and did not necessarily speak to what the customer wanted. In the previous chapter, we talked about the truth that your customers don't care about you, your products, or your services. They care about themselves, their own issues, and their own needs. So, one of the most powerful ways to get their attention is to create interesting information that your customers are passionate about so that they pay attention.

The following is the difference:

1. We sell therapeutic shoes. Here they are. Aren't they lovely? They cost \$50 a pair, and are available in red, blue, and brown. Buy before the end of the month and you'll get 10 percent off!
2. Here is some information that includes 10 surprising causes of back pain and how to alleviate them. You don't have to live a life limited by lower back problems! Download our free checklist so that you can start living a fuller life immediately. One of the points is about wearing the right type of shoes. Should you want ideas for therapeutic shoes, we happen to sell them.

Basically, the first piece of communication is about selling. It is product and price-focused, and is trying as hard as possible to get the customer to buy now. It is great if the customer is ready to buy now, but most of the time, this is not the case. Like most industries, there will be plenty of similar messages from competitors also trying to get the customer to buy

their product, and they will most probably be using similar product and price tactics.

The second piece of communication is about helping. It is customer focused and is trying to educate them about how to get over a problem they have. Which one will instill more trust in customers? Don't make the mistake of thinking that this type of communication serves no marketing goal. This type of communication is all about achieving your marketing goals, but in a way that some people may find counter-intuitive. This type of communication is about gaining the attention of your target audience and making them look forward to being marketed to. Hence the expression, "nobody likes to be sold to, but they like to buy."

Helping customers without expectation makes them feel that when the time is right, they will remember how you have helped them, and feel more compelled to choose your product or service over those of others. They will have already spent time on the information you have sent them, learned more about how to better use your product or service and, therefore, be comfortable in sticking with you at the time they want to actually buy.

## The Transparency Strategy

Have you ever wondered what's inside a McDonald's Big Mac? Log on to [yourquestions.mcdonalds.ca/](http://yourquestions.mcdonalds.ca/) and you can now find out, including asking some pretty tough questions that would give most Fortune 500 executives sleepless nights.

The following is an example of just how tough some of the questions McDonald's Canada gets: "When you say 100 percent beef, do you mean the whole cow: the organs, snout, brain, kidneys, etc etc, or just the plain beef we buy @ the grocer?" McDonald's reply to this question: "Hi Jani. We wouldn't call it plain beef, but it sure is beef. We only use meat cut from the shoulder, chuck, brisket, rib eye, loin and round. In fact, our beef supplier is Cargill, a name you might recognize. They're the biggest supplier of beef in Canada."

This form of extreme transparency is being embraced by more and more companies in an effort to answer customer questions and be more

helpful and useful to them. And by doing so, McDonald's is able to show-case just how much effort they put into their products and build a stronger relationship with their customers along the way.

Having a platform to directly communicate with customers is also a great way to avoid the rumors that many large companies can fall victim to. The following is an example of another post: "Dating back to at least 1978, the rumour claims that McDonald's restaurants use earthworms in their hamburgers. Is this statement true?????" This gives McDonald's an opportunity to address these rumors head on. Their reply: "Absolutely not, Kasra. This is a myth. Our hamburger patties are made with 100 percent pure Canadian beef, with no fillers, binders, or additives."

Customers have always wanted to know about how products and services work. The difference is that we now have near-limitless access to information, and technology has just facilitated marketers' ability to provide information about what we sell. This can apply for large and small businesses in virtually any industry, and those who choose to be transparent and share details of what they sell will be in a position to build trust, communicate value, and win customers.

## **The Case for Content—How to Develop Engaging Content that Wins You Clients**

Content marketing has been around as long as anyone can remember. So what's all the hype about and what does it mean for business?

According to an annual survey conducted by the Marketing Professors at Content Marketing Institute, the biggest challenges B2B marketers face with regard to content marketing is producing engaging content.

I can see where those problems can arise from. The key word there is *engaging*. In the United States, 9 in 10 businesses use content marketing. As of this writing, there are nearly 175 million blogs. There is far more content out there for any of us to read. We all have a threshold of how much content we can consume at any given time. Consumers these days need to be selective with their attention spans. Meanwhile there is a lot of content being created, and, therefore, if everyone is doing it, it becomes

hard to differentiate. Just because you create an article, video, e-book, or other piece of content, does not mean it will be read or even appreciated as valuable or thought provoking.

According to Google's *Zero Moment of Truth Research*, the number of pieces of research customers engaged with before making a purchase decision has risen from 5 in 2010, to 10 in 2011. There is definitely a good business case to creating content, but not any form of content—it needs to be thought provoking if you really want prospects to take the kind of action you are looking for.

Research carried out by the Corporate Executive Board looked into what contributes most to customer loyalty in B2B selling. They found that the sales experience, that is, the way you sell your product to your prospects, was far more important than other aspects of customer loyalty. And what part of how we sell describes what a world-class sales experience looks like? Take a look at the following top answers:

- Rep offers unique and valuable perspectives on the market.
- Rep helps me navigate alternatives.
- Rep provides ongoing advice or consultation.
- Rep helps me avoid potential land mines.
- Rep educates me on new issues and outcomes.

This research blew my mind when I first came across it. Here are buyers (CEOs, purchasing managers, department heads, and so on) saying that they are not as interested in *what* you sell as *how* you sell it. In other words, they are interested in being educated by their suppliers about things related to their business that a supplier may be expert in. They want to learn something new that changes their conventional way of thinking about their business. And with this new way of thinking, it should make or save them time or money.

So, clearly, it's a case of not just producing more of the same content, but producing content that is engaging and changes the way your prospects think about their business. According to Mathew Dixon and Brent Adamson, authors of *The Challenger Sale*, this comes from using insight that your business may have that highlights issues that the prospect didn't

know they had. Their basic model of engaging a prospect goes like the following:

1. Here is some information about challenges peers in your industry (and possibly your business) are facing.
2. Here is our solution to those challenges (how we can help) (Dixon and Adamson 2011).

But where do we get the information about their industry and their challenges? Where do you start to make such thought-provoking insight? The starting point should be a review of what you already have.

Joe Pulizzi, in his book *Epic Content Marketing*, describes what he calls the visual content audit (2013). It starts by gathering all your printed and electronic marketing content and spreading them out on a table. Then asking yourself what point of view the content you currently use has. If it's mostly about your products and services, then it's too *me-focused* and will not be engaging to prospects. If it wouldn't be shared by your prospects or searched for online, then it definitely is not going to be of any use to them. If it is about your customers and their problems, then it has taken the right point of view and you have a great starting point.

If you already have a lot of good content, taking stock of it will help make using it more manageable. I use a simple spreadsheet to keep track of all the articles I've written. This includes when it was posted on my blog and on social media, and if I have sent it to other publications that have posted it. I see creating content as an asset for the business, so keeping track of it is a good way of managing those assets.

If you are starting your content strategy from the scratch, the best starting point is to assess what kind of value you provide to your clients through your products or services. Asking what you are good at will help generate a direction for where your content should focus. Then, ask yourself how you can challenge prospects' assumptions or conventional ways of thinking about their business. For example, if you sell vehicle tracking services to companies that have large fleets of vehicles, you could create some content about how these companies are losing a lot of productivity due to incorrect driving routes. Buyers may not be aware of this, but you are educating them through your content. And once they realize they have that problem, you'll be in a good place to position your solution to them.

The following are some great examples of companies that have strong content marketing strategies.

### *River Pools and Spas*

Prior to 2009, Marcus Sheridan's swimming pool business was in shambles. With a tanking U.S. economy, the need for luxury items such as swimming pools was simply unnecessary. The company was also heavily in debt. In March 2009, Sheridan asked customers to post their questions online, and he would answer every one of them: which pool types to buy, what materials are best, and so on. In sticking with his smart marketing strategy, Sheridan turned to being even more useful to customers by blogging about pools. His website now also has free educational DVDs, free downloadable pool guides, videos, and other content, all designed to educate and build trust with customers.

The results speak for themselves: Sheridan generated more customer leads in 2011 than in the previous two years combined. By then the company was free of debt and, even better, was on its way to becoming one of the most sought-after pool companies in the United States.

### *Open View Venture Partners*

Open View Venture Partners is a venture capital firm focused on helping entrepreneurs expand their companies. Their website is packed with useful content for entrepreneurs and includes content that speaks to the kinds of issues that entrepreneurs face every day: things to do with marketing and growing their business, improving their products, finance, and leadership. Their content takes many forms such as e-books, articles, videos, special reports, podcasts, and infographics.

Open View's results are amazing. They have had 18,000 newsletter sign-ups in three years, and they are now found much easier by entrepreneurs with innovative ideas who are looking for help.

### *Alan Weiss*

Alan Weiss is well known around the world as the Million Dollar Consultant. Alan is a great example of what a one-man company can do as far

as content is concerned. He has published over 55 books in 12 languages. He has hundreds of articles, videos, podcasts, and other useful content that help independent professionals like myself to succeed.

Because of his strong, provocative content, Alan's business has thrived. He has a loyal following of thousands of people around the globe and makes over \$3 million a year. Not bad for someone who works from his home!

I had the opportunity to have a conversation with Alan about how he attracts clients, gets so much marketing done, and how he has built a million-dollar consulting brand and business.

### A Conversation with Alan Weiss, President of Summit Consulting Group

**Ahmed Al Akber:** What would you advise someone starting early in their career selling professional services?

**Alan Weiss:** When you start to sell professional services, you have to let people know you are there, and you have to provide an obvious example of your value. So you have to find what your good at doing in terms of marketing and do it. For example, I'm a lousy networker: I don't like to network, I don't like small talk, and I don't like to gather in groups. But I'm an outstanding writer and speaker. So when I started my business, I wrote and I spoke and wrote and spoke! And everywhere I did that I spoke for free. It didn't matter, because I wanted people to hear about me, and I wanted to put my value in front of them. And then I made sure I was provocative and contrarian (so I made people think differently).

**AAA:** You make several million dollars a year working from home. What do you think the key to your success has been?

**AW:** You have to be a thought leader, and you have to own your space. So there is a big distance between starting out and being the thought leader. For example, I "own" solo consulting, just like Marshall Goldsmith owns coaching. Just this month, there was an interview published with me in *Speaker* magazine, a magazine that's all about how you can speak better, and how you can get more speaking opportunities. They asked me what's the future of the speaking profession, and my first response was, "Its dying! Its

not going to look like this in the future. So stop calling yourself a speaker.” So with all of my work, with Fortune 500 companies through to individuals, I provide value by helping people to look at things in a different way.

**AAA:** Marketers have a big choice of options for marketing their businesses. If you had to pick three to grow a business, which would they be, and why?

**AW:** I think the best way to grow a business is in speaking, writing, and using technology. You have to get yourself in a position where you are in front of many buyers at one time and not just one to one. It’s the difference between fishing with a rod and a reel and catching one fish, and a net where you can catch thousands of fish. So if you can speak to large groups, where you might have a 100 buyers in the room, or if you can write where 10,000 potential buyers are reading you, and if you use technology to amplify those things that you have written and spoken and send them to prospects (such as online videos, and blogs), then you have successfully utilized those three tools.

I would add to that: that you need to have a very strong brand. People need to know who you are and how to find you. And so your ultimate brand is your name; so that you are always moving towards prospects saying, “Get me Alan,” as opposed to a prospect saying “Get me someone who...”

**AAA:** Some businesses sell complex products and services. What advice do you have for someone to make their products and services better understood by prospects?

**AW:** Simplify them. Sellers make things too complex. If you walk into Best Buy in the United States, there will be thousands of televisions on display, and there will be way too many options for size, screens, price, and other factors. So people don’t end up buying them. You have to simplify this. You have to ask prospects what space they have to put it in, how they will use it, what kind of shows do you prefer watching, and so on. You can then reply by saying, “I have a TV that will really suit your needs over here.”

People shouldn’t go around saying, “I have a complex sale.” They should think about how to make it simple for people to understand, so prospects can make a quick and easy decision.



**AAA:** You write and speak extensively, are very active on social media and on your forums, run workshops all over the world, and so much more. How do you manage all your marketing activities?

**AW:** Like anything, you break it down into chunks and you schedule it. The problem with most people is they don't schedule it. And they feel they'll get around to it. Or they think about it and say "Yeah, I need to do that," and leave it at that.

You need to put it in a calendar so that you can see your whole year, where your vacations are, where your family obligations are, where your projects are, and you can see your next month, week, and next day. Let's say you wanted to speak. You wanted to get in touch with some people that may let you speak in front of their organizations. You put down that at 2 p.m. that you are going to call these people to arrange to speak. You do that just as sure as you would if you had a client engagement, and you accept no excuses. If you do what you schedule, you'll get things done. You have to break it down into chunks. I never said I wanted to sit down and write a book. I said I'm going to write the first part of the first chapter at 10 a.m. tomorrow morning. And here I am more than 50 books later.<sup>1</sup>

## Powerful Ways to Attract Clients

There is a profound difference between nagging prospects to convince them of how good you are and them coming to you telling you how they have heard of the value you can provide and curious about how they can work with you.

The latter situation puts you in a position of strength, has the lowest client acquisition costs, and gives you the ability to charge higher fees. In the following, you will see there is a lot you can do to pull clients toward your business. You don't need to use all of them (though many businesses do), but be aware that if you don't use any of them, you are probably in the wrong business! The best thing to do is to start with one tactic, become comfortable with it to the point where it becomes habitual and

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Alan Weiss, 2nd January 2015.

automatic, and then move on to using other tactics. Remember, people are receptive to different forms of communication, so having as many tactics in your arsenal as possible is a good thing.

The following are some of the most powerful tactics.

### *Asking for Referrals*

Customer referrals are a great (and often underutilized) source of new business. Once in a while I get a call from a prospect who tells me that he or she has been referred to me by a client of mine. When this happens, I've found that there is a significantly higher chance of converting the prospect into a client.

According to Forrester Research, 71 percent of online shoppers read reviews before buying. Other studies also show that customers also say that referrals are of utmost importance in determining who they buy from and what they buy.

Given the huge potential of referrals, it makes sense for businesses to consciously include referrals as part of their plans for growth. There are four distinct stages that outline how to get a positive result from asking for referrals. Success in referrals comes partly in following the below four stages but also in the effective use of language.

1. *Mention the importance of referrals at the start of the relationship.* Once you have secured a new client, mention your desire to earn a referral right from the start. That way it won't be a surprise to them later when you ask for it. At this time, mention that you are going to work very hard to produce the results you have promised them, and once they see those results, when the time is right, you will want to request their help with introducing you to other prospects.
2. *Do a good job.* It goes without saying that you will make your client happy and provide real value to them. That way they won't have any problem with linking their name with what you are selling.
3. *When the time is right, ask.* It's important to use language that is confident and reflects your mindset: If you truly believe that referrals are important (and they are), then you should relay that in your

choice of language. The following are some examples of powerful ways to ask:

- As I mentioned, when we first started the project, referrals are an important part of how I do business. Who else do you think I should be talking to who can benefit from this approach we are applying to your organization?
- I'm very glad to hear that my work is providing the value you wanted. Who else do you think would benefit from the same value and approaches we have used?
- You had mentioned someone else I could meet who could use the same kind of results. Are you willing to introduce the person to me now?

4. *Follow up with a thank you.* Whether the referral leads to any business in the end or not, remember to thank the person who got you in front of another potential client. That same person could introduce you to another new business opportunity in the future.

## Networking

Business networking is a quick, valuable way of expanding the number of people you know, generating leads, and learning from others. If you have just moved to a new market and want to build connections there or want to tell more people about your business, business networking is a great way to do that. The following are some of the other benefits of networking:

- *Gain more leads.* Business networking, when done right, gives you the ability to be in the same room as qualified leads. Talking to many high-quality leads at one time allows you to increase the selling opportunities for your business.
- *Get advice and insight from knowledgeable people.* You may be looking for some answers on how to handle a particular goal or problem with your business, and meeting other like-minded people through business networking gives you the ability to get such advice.
- *Build confidence.* Like most things in life, the more you network, the better and more confident you become at it. The

first time I went to business networking groups, I was quite unsure of how to introduce myself. Over time I built up the confidence to introduce myself to large groups of people that I didn't know. It teaches you the difference between small talk and learning to have meaningful conversations, and how to learn from people's experiences.

- *Get collaborators, suppliers, and supporters on board.* Sometimes you will meet prospects, other times you will meet people with whom you can collaborate. Those may be suppliers or people you can hire or whose relationship you can leverage at a later stage.

The following are some things to keep in mind in order to get the most out of business networking:

- *What are your goals behind business networking?* Who is it that you want to meet and where can they be found?
- *Target the right networking groups.* Make sure the people you want to meet are at the right business networking groups. Most business networking groups publish their members on their websites, sometimes with their contact details.
- *Do more listening than talking.* Ask questions about people's lives, careers, and aspirations. Ask them for suggestions to do with your goals and circumstances.
- *Offer something valuable.* Try to make the connection as beneficial as possible to the people you have met. Send them some of your articles and information that you think will benefit them.
- *Follow up.* Networking takes time and resources and should have clear desired outcomes for your business. Always go to a networking event with the mindset that you are using it to improve your business. Follow up immediately after each event. If you're not following up, you are wasting your time.
- *Keep in touch.* I keep a list of people I have met that I believe would be beneficial to keep in touch with. Every once in a while I drop them a line or send them some useful information that I believe would be helpful. That way when you actually need them, it won't be hard to ask.

## Newsletters

One of the most frequent questions I get asked is “how to keep in touch with clients on a regular basis, so they can keep us in mind?” To achieve this, some call their clients, some send e-mails, some send letters (by post!), but much of this is as ineffective as it is time consuming. Besides, there are only so many “thinking of you” or “happy holidays” e-mails you can send before prospects start to feel like you’re fishing for business.

One tactic that is seriously underutilized is electronic newsletters (or e-zines). This is simply a way of distributing your interesting content to customers and prospects directly to their e-mails. This could be articles on your blog that you have written about issues to do with your niche, tips, industry news, research, customer stories, reports, and a whole bunch of other content that position you and your company as trusted leaders in your field.

The great thing about e-zines is that they are cost effective and automate the process of keeping in touch with your clients. Suppose you meet a prospect and don’t close a deal with him because he’s not ready. Rather leaving it at that and letting the relationship turn cold, you can offer to send him a free report or some relevant research your company has carried out through your e-zine. That means that however often you decide, he’ll get regular e-mails from you with interesting, valuable content. He may not be in buying mode just yet, but when he is, you can be assured that he won’t forget you.

There are some things to keep in mind when implementing an e-zine, and they are as follows:

- *Have good content.* It all starts from here: articles, videos, and audios on topics that are of interest to your customers. This content should be related to what you sell, but not necessarily promote it.
- *Choose your tools.* There are tons of e-zine software applications out there, from free to paid monthly subscriptions. Speak to your web developer about which ones work best for your needs—but the important thing is to keep it simple and not focus on too much enhanced functionality when starting out. A weber costs about \$20 a month, and it works seamlessly.

- *Be consistent.* Having an e-zine is a commitment. Once you start it, your customers will come to expect its delivery on a consistent basis. We suggest to start small and build up. A monthly e-zine broadcast that's delivered consistently is much better than a weekly one that is sometimes not sent out.
- *Build your list.* There is no marginal cost to adding subscribers to your e-zine—once its set up, it costs the same to have 1 or 1,000 subscribers. In other words, once you start your e-zine, you should focus on signing up as many relevant subscribers as you can. Offer it at every opportunity—on your website, after meeting a prospect, to current clients, after a public speaking opportunity, and so on.

### **Public Speaking**

For those of you looking to establish yourself as a recognized authority in your field, one of the most powerful and quick ways to do that is through public speaking. Public speaking is an effective way to get in front of multiple prospects at once and showcase your services.

Provided what you say and how you say it is good, you can quickly establish credibility and trust almost instantaneously. It's also a great way to give a room filled with the right people an experience of what it might be like to work with you.

It's important to note that public speaking doesn't necessarily work when trying to promote mass market products. It works best when you are selling a niche product or service in a vertical market such as accounting services for small and medium enterprises or wedding planning services. This way you would want to keep in mind where you speak and who your audience is to maximize impact.

The following is how to maximize the effect of your next public speaking opportunity:

- *Find opportunities to speak.* You would be amazed at how many trade associations, charity meet-ups, and other networking groups are out there looking for decent speakers with something interesting to say. In my experience, many

of these associations struggle to secure good speakers for their regular sessions. Simply calling them up or e-mailing them is sometimes all it takes to get your first speaking opportunity booked. Have a 100- to 200-word outline of your talk prepared to provide further information when asked.

- *Create opportunities to speak.* Another way to do it is to conduct a self-hosted event. Here you book and pay for the location of the event and invite potential prospects to attend. Some five-star hotels and business clubs will even help you secure attendees by inviting people on their database.
- *Be an interesting speaker.* No one likes a boring, lecture-style speaker. People have short enough attention spans as it is! You will need to practice your speaking skills and constantly work on how to do it better. Practicing at Toastmasters is a good start—you can learn to speak in an environment where the audience wants you to perform better and will give you feedback on how to do that.
- *Focus on providing value.* No one likes to attend a speech where they are being sold to. Remember, the goal is to position yourself as a leader in your field. Deemphasize what you sell and emphasize providing interesting, valuable information on a topic that relates to your speciality but is also of great interest to the audience.
- *Have a call to action.* Here's where you can convert some members of the audience into prospects and paying clients. Offer a way to keep in touch or, even better, continue the dialog on a one-to-one basis. You can achieve this by offering handouts with even more valuable information or have the audience sign up to your newsletter so they keep getting value from you on a regular basis. If you are in professional services, you could take this one step further by offering a free 30-minute consultation to all audience members who bring you their business cards. If you are selling a product, offer a free trial.
- *Post a video of your speech on YouTube.* This is where you can widen the reach that speaking has by recording your speeches and posting them on YouTube. This is a strong credibility builder and a must if you take public speaking seriously.

While the initial setup, invitations, and delivery can be time consuming, they do take progressively less time to prepare for and you'll find that in no time you'll be a better speaker. And very soon after that, you'll be one with a lot more paying clients.

### *Testimonials*

Testimonials are an extremely effective way to establish credibility and trust and do it in a way that is not too salesy. When done right, they can communicate what benefits your product or service offers without having to be pushy or use hype.

No language you use will be more powerful and moving than what your current paying customers say about what you sell. Customers tend to use language that's familiar to them and this appeals to other potential customers. And, not only is using your customer's language more effective than anything a copywriter can come up with, but it's also free!

Testimonials also help substantiate what you offer. If you claim that your product or service offers a particular result, testimonials back up those promises so that potential customers can feel that they will actually get the results you promise. Accompanied with the name of who has given the testimonial helps to further establish credibility for your products or services.

Good testimonials serve to help potential customers put themselves in the shoes of the person giving the testimonial and, therefore, get them closer to imagining what it would be like to purchase your product or service. Most of us want to know that a product or service works before we buy, and in the absence of a referral from someone we trust, testimonials are the next best way of building trust. Here you would want to ensure that the testimonial giver and your target customers are similar in terms of their profile or needs. For example, if you sell to small businesses, you would want to ask for permission to mention that the person giving the testimonial is a small business owner.

Good testimonials speak about benefits and avoid generic statements like "Your product is really useful." Though you might receive statements like these, you certainly don't need to use them. Ask for what benefit or result your service provided and probe to emphasize outcomes. Examples



of strong statements you want to look for are “Working with you has helped increase my sales by 25 percent” or “Your products reduced the pain in my lower back—to the point where I can live my life the way I want” or something similar.

Once you have decided to include testimonials as part of your marketing arsenal, you would need to go about collecting and using them effectively. The following are a few things to consider:

- Make testimonials a regular part of how you do business. Once a customer has used your product or service, build it into your routine to ask for their time for feedback so that you can provide the same great results to others.
- If you have sold already to a group of customers, ask them for their feedback on buying from you. An example of what to ask is “How has using my product/service improved your business/life?”
- If you haven’t sold yet, offer a group of target customers a free trial in exchange for providing feedback on their experience of using your product or service.
- Testimonials can take many forms, and having a combination of text, audio, and video used throughout sidebars on your website is a great way to maximize their use. Offering a dedicated page on your website or in printed form with more detailed testimonials can also fully leverage their power.

Using results-filled testimonials is a powerful way to build credibility and trust without having to resort to hype. Taking the time out to collect and integrate them into the way you market your business will pay off significantly.

### *Case Studies*

What options do clients have when choosing whether a product or service is right for them? Let’s take a look at the different options available to clients and assess whether they are in fact feasible.

Imagine if finding a good dentist required trying out a whole bunch of dentists to determine which one is best. The problem from a client's perspective is that this would be costly and really time consuming.

Another thing you could do is directly observe each dentist (after you convince them to let you) by doing what they do to the point where you're comfortable and know how they work. But that is obviously not feasible either.

Another thing you could do to choose the right dentist is to look at their advertising. But the problem with that is you can't always trust advertisements. They tend to be very hyped and filled with a lot of attempts to persuade you.

Case studies solve this problem by creating a quick and easy way for your customers to collect lots of knowledge that is easy to remember. They provide proof that you can do what you say you do by sharing how you have helped others. And when they are told even reasonably well, they give prospects to imagine what it would be like to work with you, which actually gets them one step closer to work with you.

People are less likely to argue and challenge the integrity of a case study than they are with advertisements, especially if you back them up with a testimonial from that customer. As far as trust is concerned, that seals the deal for most other customers interested in knowing how you can help them.

Amazon has tapped into this well in promotion of their Amazon Web Services (AWS) Cloud service. The homepage shows the logos of some big client names like Pfizer, Netflix, and Dow Jones to name a few. Some of the case studies are in text, detailing what their challenge was, why they chose Amazon's AWS, and the benefits they experienced after having made that decision.

Some of the client case studies are shown in video, with the client talking about their before and after experiences, but in an engaging format. Any prospect looking at this would surely feel comfortable knowing others have worked successfully with Amazon AWS.

So, when it comes to assessing the options you have that build credibility and are easy for your prospects to understand, sharing case studies of how you have helped others is the right way to go.

## Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter that good marketing is less about hype and more about help. If we take the time to help customers by teaching them something that matters to them that we are expert in so that they can make informed decisions, then we position ourselves to be the *expert of choice*. This strategy works if you sell therapeutic shoes or corporate strategy consulting—customers will remember you and provided you do it often enough and without expectation, they will most likely remember you when the time comes for them to buy. It helps you to differentiate from the competition and gives you the ability to charge a premium—experts cost more and people are willing to pay for experts!

Anyone can implement the strategies in this chapter. Whether you are a small, one-person company, or a Fortune 500 company, these strategies have a track record of working. The trick is to choose what you are most comfortable with and have the skills and resources to employ. The great thing is that you have the choice of different activities to build visibility for your business.

It's important to note that these ideas will stay ideas unless they are implemented. And to get them implemented, you will need plan, not something complex and lengthy—just enough for you to be able to get over the difficult hurdle of starting. Once you've started and got your first wins under your belt, you'll be hooked! The next chapter will focus on planning the activities we've just reviewed so that they get done.

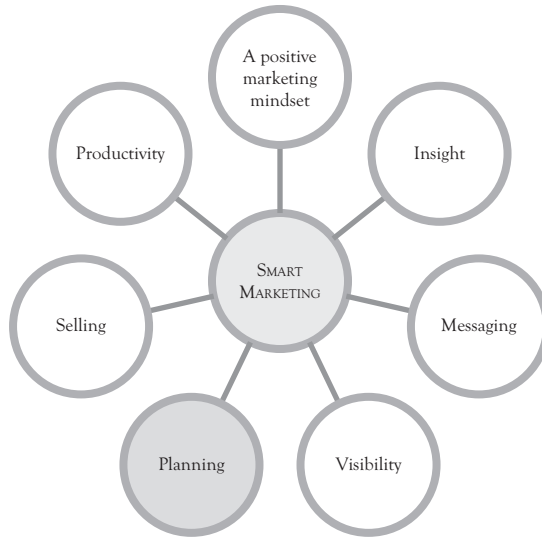
## End of Chapter Practice

Take a look at your own business and ask the following questions:

- Is my marketing helpful?
- What activities can I employ today that will help communicate the value of my product or service?

## CHAPTER 5

# Principle 5: Planning



### Introduction

Let's take stock of where we are so far in this book. We have seen what the benefits of having a positive mindset are and how that's the starting point of the process of smart marketing. Next we looked at ways of gathering customer insight so that we can shape our products and services around their needs.

We put together a marketing message, which is key to differentiating and getting prospects, attention in this busy, over communicated world. We then looked at the different tactics available to us that we can employ to get the word out about your products and services and how they solve your customers' problems.

We now have all the right elements to put these together in a plan. We'll start by reviewing the signs of when a marketing plan is going wrong and what to do about them. We'll then talk about the common marketing

plan mistakes and how they can be avoided so that your marketing efforts yield as much result and progress for your business as possible.

We will then go into what it takes to set goals and how every marketing activity should link with some type of goal. This leads us to put these concepts together in a simple planning guide called the One-Page Marketing Plan, which will help you channel your efforts and focus on all the activities you do.

## How Do You Know When Your Marketing Isn't Working?

A marketing strategy that isn't working or is not being implemented right can slow down a business and make growth difficult or impossible. So, how do you know if your marketing strategy is working or not? The following are eight symptoms to watch out for:

- *Sales are down or flat.* Revenue growth is sluggish and there are not enough ideas being generated on how to talk to change the situation.
- *You have a poor closing rate.* Most of your proposals never get approved. If you are focusing on providing value, then your closing rate (the number of proposals that get approved divided by how many you submit) should be above 25 percent as a minimum. Fifty percent is where you should aim to build up to.
- *You are losing deals based on price.* We all lose at some point or another based on price. But, as we've seen in the previous chapter, research shows that there are factors buyers look for in a supplier that carry far greater weight than price. And being cheapest by reducing price is not a long-term strategy—it erodes margins, and if you do it enough, it will make it difficult to deliver a good product or service.
- *Sales are talking to the wrong leads.* Your sales people end up spending a large portion of their time with people who won't buy what they sell. This is a classic problem with targeting—either you are not targeting the right people or, worse, you have no target and are trying to sell to everyone.

- *Customers don't understand your product or service.* Good marketing involves teaching customers about a certain aspect of their business that you specialize in. If your customers don't understand what you sell and its benefits, then they surely won't be able to justify paying for it.
- *Your business is losing clients.* Your business is losing clients and you are not sure why. Clients could be moving their business to other companies, or they could be deciding to do the work themselves, or not at all.
- *Your marketing has a poor return on investment.* You spend a lot of money and time on activities that don't deliver the kind of return you would want.
- *Your marketing goals are not clear.* Your team are not sure why they are carrying out certain activities and what they aim to achieve.

If your marketing is not working the way it should be, then you have the power to change it. Take the preceding symptoms, flip them around so they are positive, and you will have your first set of marketing goals to achieve.

## **Five Marketing Plan Mistakes and How to Overcome Them**

Marketing plans are the foundation on which a successful business views the future of its growth. Without it, there is no direction, and it will resemble a rudderless ship. If your marketing plans haven't generated the kind of results that you are looking for, it may be because of a few main issues.

The good news is that these issues can be overcome, and once they are, they can dramatically change a business for the better. The following are what I've identified as the most common marketing plan mistakes and what can be done about them.

### ***Mistake 1: A Lack of Awareness of Your Current Situation***

Prior to setting out what you are going to do, you need to know where you are. A situation assessment helps tell you where your business stands

in the market. As a minimum, it should tell you about your customers and their relationship to your business, as we saw in Chapter 2. Interviewing a few customers can tell you what they like about your product or service, and what they don't. You'll have a better idea of how your business is positioned in their minds, especially against the competition.

A good situation assessment should also assess what the competition is doing. What kind of marketing activities have they implemented in the last 12 months? What kind of deals have they won?

You'll also want to review what kind of marketing activities your business ran in the last 12 months. What worked and what didn't? Most of the time, it's 20 percent of the activities that yield 80 percent of the results. If you become aware of that in your situation assessment and are able to intensify your efforts on that 20 percent, then you'll be very successful.

There should be clarity on the main marketing issues your business is facing. These issues should not be more than three. Here you want to highlight the main problems you are seeing. Is it that your clients are not coming back to you with repeat business? Or is it that there are not enough new leads being generated by your marketing activities?

Without clarity on what your customers perceive, what the competition is doing, and what successes you have had in the last 12 months, your assumptions for the next 12 months will be weak. As a result, the plan will be weak. Spend the time to take stock of your business' situation and you'll be glad you did.

### ***Mistake 2: Planning Is Relegated as a Secondary Activity***

I come across this problem with my clients all the time. They seem to be too busy focusing on implementation that they don't take enough time to find out why they are doing things in the first place. They keep postponing planning. Therefore, firefighting is a regular occurrence.

Don't get me wrong—for you to have successful outcomes with your marketing, implementation is important. But taking the time to clarify your actions through simple planning will make your implementation more focused and effective. I always advise my clients to book time for planning in their calendars and not to accept anything in the day-to-day running of their businesses that will stop them from finishing their plans.

### ***Mistake 3: Not Involving the People Who Will Carry Out the Implementation***

It's never a good thing for people to make important decisions that affect you without asking for your input. Marketing plans should be no different. Management that doesn't involve their marketing staff (the people involved in the implementation) in the decision-making process are missing two big opportunities: insight from people who probably have strong insight as to what's going on and the opportunity to get their buy-in.

Your marketing staff are the people who implement the plan, so they know the ins and outs very well. They know what works and what doesn't and know how to avoid the pitfalls to implementation that perhaps were made earlier. They know the suppliers who will help you achieve your marketing goals, and they are closer to customers, so they have a better idea of what they want. So why not involve them in the decision-making process? They don't need to make the final decisions—they just need to have their voices heard. So, early on in the planning stage, ask to meet them and get their take on where the business should be focusing. Not only will your plans be stronger, but asking for their input also has the added advantage of getting their buy-in. Once the plans are finalized, they will have a better idea of why they were decided and be prepared to get them done!

### ***Mistake 4: One-Time Use***

One of the worst things you can do when it comes to planning is to finalize it and then have it sit in a shared folder or on a shelf. Like most things in life, if it's out of sight, then it's out of mind. Marketing plans need to be placed front and center so that their importance is not forgotten and to serve as a reminder of all the activities that need to be implemented. Along the way, other things may come up and distract us from what we need to achieve. By having the marketing plan visible and top of mind, this is less likely to occur.

### ***Mistake 5: Not Having Some Type of Measurement in Place***

What gets measured, gets improved. Without some type of measurement, it's very difficult to see if your plan is actually working. Reaching revenue



goals is one of the most important thing that CEOs care about, and understandably so. Reaching sales goals fixes a lot of the other problems a business may have. But it's not the only important measure to have. Other important marketing measures include conversion (how many leads it takes to get one client), the number of new customers, and the cost per customer.

Have you found your organization making any of these five deadly mistakes? If you want to dramatically improve your marketing results, the following are five things to remember when you next plan your marketing:

1. Carry out a situation assessment that helps you to understand where your business stands on a range of key aspects. This includes determining what your customers like and don't like about your product or service, what the competition has done, what has worked well in the last 12 months, and what your key marketing issues are. Use this as a platform to build your marketing plan.
2. Make planning an integral part of what you do. Book it in your calendar to make sure it gets done.
3. Get feedback from your marketing staff so that they can help enhance your plans and feel more loyal to them once they are finalized.
4. Make sure your plans don't get relegated to the bottom of a drawer! Have them printed out and on your desk. Review them regularly and speak about them with others.
5. Measurement helps create action. Know what measurements your marketing efforts are supposed to influence so that you can monitor progress.

## **Business Results—What You Should Know About How to Achieve Them**

“You must grow sales by 25 percent this year. The future of the company depends on it. I wish you all the success. Go get ‘em!” This is the all-too-common story of the sales rep who receives an instruction from his sales director. After hearing it, he thinks to himself: “How am I going to do that?”

As common as this scene is, it is also understandable. The sales director has been instructed by the CEO that he needs to double the

company's sales turnover within the next four years, so he is under considerable pressure to perform. Likewise, the CEO is under pressure from the board and shareholders who have high expectations of the company's performance.

So, the sales director fires off an e-mail to his sales reps with the results he wants. While this form of *managing by results* may seem like the right thing to do, it does not include a plan, and that's where many businesses with mighty revenue growth aspirations fail.

This is because results are attained by achieving objectives. Take for example the result handed to the sales reps: "sales revenue growth of 25 percent." To achieve this result, objectives must be set that support it. Objectives such as "grow new product sales by 40 percent" and "expand into two new geographic markets within six months" are examples.

These objectives support the results you wish to achieve, and it's clear that if the objectives are met, the results will likely follow. This is a plan that helps stimulate action, which is the last missing piece in the puzzle.

To achieve the objectives, some sort of action needs to take place. In other words, the objectives are not going to achieve themselves on their own. Someone needs to do something. But what? For the plan to be effective, the activities need to be spelled out. Take as an example the objective of growing new product sales by 40 percent. What kind of activities need to be done to achieve this? Perhaps, a combination of new product training for the sales reps and activities to build awareness of those new products would be actions that would support this objective.

So, results such as sales revenue growth of 25 percent are achieved by accomplishing a series of objectives, and those objectives are reached by carrying out a series of activities. The failure with many firms is in the communication of these objectives and activities. Management simply communicates the top line but doesn't provide much substance as to where to focus to achieve those results. Sales reps need to be clear on where they should focus so that they are all aligned and not chasing the wrong opportunities.

So, as a CEO or someone responsible for a sales team, the next time you are faced with a challenging result that your team needs to achieve, remember to provide clarity not only on the results, but also on the plan and how your achieving it will lead to the desired results.

## Marketing Your Business like a Fortune 500 Company

Most businesses think that just because they aren't as big as global, more established brands, they can't market themselves the same way. I'm convinced that this is more of a lack of awareness of how to use key marketing techniques than anything else. In fact, small and medium-sized businesses have one significant advantage over Fortune 500 companies: speed. They can make things happen much quicker and with a lot less red tape.

I remember attending an annual marketing plan presentation with some senior executives at one of the Fortune 500 companies I worked for. One of the main focuses they had was whether a side panel on the packaging of one of our products should use one font style or another. This topic took about 45 minutes to decide on! A smaller company would be out of business very fast if every decision took that long. Being fast in today's business world means you can make more money, so use the fact that you are smaller and less bureaucratic to your advantage.

The following are the main things that every small and medium-sized business should do to market their business just as effectively as a Fortune 500 company:

- *Kick small thinking out.* To market big, you have to think big. You have to remove any negative mindsets you have about your business. As we've seen in Chapter 1, the main problem when it comes to negative mindsets, whatever they may be, is that the mind tends to believe them. Telling yourself that you are too small, too understaffed, not qualified, or not as good will mean you end up being that way. So, overcome this by telling yourself that you may be small now but you can in fact have a really successful business. If you are reading this book, then you are at least interested in knowing how to succeed. That's half the battle!
- *Have a plan.* Plans for small and medium-sized businesses need to be simple. One or two pages maximum. The focus should be on what message you want to send out, what your priorities are to disseminate those messages, what action steps you should take, what obstacles may present themselves to

you that need to be addressed, and what tools and resources you need. We'll talk about this in more detail later in this chapter.

- *Use multiple marketing channels.* Small and medium-sized businesses have never had it so lucky in terms of the marketing tools available to them. I tend to advocate having a strong web presence, with a very strong website, integrated social media, and e-mail marketing campaign. Having an excellent web presence is hard work but is easier to pull off than most people think. Further that with other channels such as speaking, articles in the press, networking, and asking for introductions to key buyers, and you will be omnipresent and grow your business very fast.
- *Automate as much as possible.* The more tools you employ, the more work involved in maintaining them. You need to find ways to reduce the labor intensity of marketing your business, and there are plenty to choose from. Start by looking at what are the most important things you need to do yourself and outsource the rest. These days you can have an army of MBA graduates working for you in about five minutes (see [brickworkindia.com](http://brickworkindia.com) for more details). As an SME, avoid doing things that aren't core to your business and you'll soon find that you will own a niche that is hard to replicate.

You don't need to be big to market like a Fortune 500 company. You just need to be focused and use your strengths to your advantage. Follow the preceding four points and you'll soon see success like you've never seen before.

## Eight Steps to Effective Goal Setting

Writing about marketing plans wouldn't be complete without writing about setting and achieving goals. Some of the greatest leaders in their fields have achieved grand things by setting goals and taking action.

Arnold Schwarzenegger typifies what it means to set and achieve goals that are larger than life. Born in a depressed, postwar village in Austria,

he got into body building and won seven Mr. Olympia titles while moving to the United States. He then got into acting and became one of the highest paid actors in Hollywood, including becoming a business and real-estate mogul. And along the way, he became Governor of the State of California, the world's seventh biggest economy.

Many of Arnold's achievements can be attributed to the discipline and vision he had in setting and pursuing his goals. He would usually write his annual goals on New Year's Day. He would get motivated and fired up when people doubted him. "That was the way people in Austria had reacted when I said I wanted to be a body-building champ," explains Arnold in his autobiography *Total Recall*. "In Austria we become ski champs," his friends would reply. And that was the way Hollywood agents would react when Arnold explained he wanted to be an actor. "Why don't you open a gym?" they'd say.

According to Brian Tracy, a leading authority on goal setting, "Only about 3 percent of the population have written goals, and everyone else works for them." The following are some steps you can follow to set, keep track of, and achieve your goals:

1. *Decide what you want.* The clearer you are on this, the better. If you are exploring something, then that's a goal. But if you want to achieve it, that's another.
2. *Write down your goals.* Simply writing them with a pen and paper triggers a whole new thought process around whether it can actually be achieved, what resources would be required, what further information is needed, and so on. This helps crystalize the goal in the mind even further.
3. *Set a deadline.* This helps motivate and drive you forward, avoiding procrastination.
4. *Make a list of actions.* Write down everything that needs to be done in order to achieve the goal, no matter how big or small. Don't be overwhelmed—how do you eat an elephant? The answer is, of course, one bite at a time.
5. *Prioritize your actions.* Using Pareto's Principle (the 80/20 Principle): What 20 percent of your efforts would lead to you being 80 percent closer to achieving your goals?

6. *Commit to achieving them mentally.* Written goals mostly don't get achieved when the commitment to achieve them isn't there. Should this happen, relook at point 1, and determine if the goal is, in fact, what you want.
7. *Put yourself in front of people who have achieved similar goals.* Arnold was excellent at this—he learnt about body building from the then Mr. Austria and went on to compete against him, and then exceed him. He got acting roles with great actors like Lucille Ball and James Earl Jones who offered to coach him on how to be a better actor. In business, he worked closely with Joe Weider, a multimillionaire businessman who had several international companies. And in politics, besides marrying into the Kennedy family, Arnold befriended and later became chairman of President George H. W. Bush's Sports and Fitness Council, including helping him with 1988 presidential election campaign.
8. *Take action.* Making a habit of posting your goals on a wall so they're not forgotten, reading them everyday in the morning and at night, and speaking about your goals will also help here. Taking action is simply about constantly reminding yourself of what you need to do to achieve the goal and doing it!

## The One-Page Marketing Plan

Marketing plans don't have to be the complex, long-winded exercises that your college marketing professor used to brag about. It's true that planning is a necessity if you want to be successful, but when it comes to marketing, every ounce of implementation is worth two of planning. In other words, it's far more important to get your marketing activities done than to plan them to the nth degree.

The funny thing is that there are some organizations I have come across that spend millions of dollars every year on marketing but don't have a plan. You do not want to spend much time planning, but you still need a plan!

The one-page marketing plan cuts to the chase by being simple and action focused. It will help you channel your thoughts, provide you with direction, and generate new ideas for growing your business.

The following is what your marketing plan needs to have:

1. *Your marketing message.* This is the only constant on the whole plan and should rarely change. Write this to remind yourself of the value you provide to your customers and to the world. Read it whenever you are feeling low on energy or when your mindset needs a pep talk. Take a look at Chapter 3 for ideas on how to create your own marketing message.



Week/month:	<b>The one-page marketing plan</b>
Your marketing message (what will you communicate to customers?):	
Your top three revenue growth priorities:	
Action steps (call a customer, request a referral, ask for a testimonial, write and communicate an article, plan, record, and communicate a video, write a case study, follow up on a proposal, prepare and give a speech, take a past customer out for breakfast, send a newsletter, obtain press coverage): 1. _____ _____ 2. _____ _____ 3. _____ _____ 4. _____ _____ 5. _____ _____	Obstacles that may get in the way of achieving the action steps, and how you'll overcome them:
Tools, resources, help needed and anything else to keep in mind:	

2. *Priorities.* What are the most important things you need to get done this week or month? Limit these to no more than three.
3. *Action steps.* These are all the actions you should take to achieve your priorities. Which prospects will you call? Which past clients will you get in contact to rekindle relationships with? What articles will you write on your blog? Which videos will you create? Will you request and action testimonials or referrals?
4. *Obstacles.* There will always be obstacles, so anticipating them helps maintain your momentum. What problems can you anticipate and how can you overcome them?
5. *Tools, resources, and help.* What tools, budget, and internal or external help do you need to get these done?

Writing down the plan should take no more than 20 minutes. It's best to do this before you actually start it. So, write it at least the night before you are supposed to take action.

Having your marketing plan clearly laid out on one page will provide focus and remind you of what important things need to get done. The one-page marketing plan template can be downloaded from my website at <http://acksolutions.com/>

## **How to Craft a Marketing Plan with Maximum Employee Commitment**

Every business that wants to grow needs a plan. But plans are only as good as their implementation, and implementation happens by committed people. One failure of a good marketing plan is when the people charged with implementing the plan don't fully understand or, worse, agree with what the plan entails.

Contrary to popular belief, marketing is not reserved for the marketing department only. It is one of those disciplines that everyone in the company needs to be involved in. Take the example of President Kennedy during a visit to the NASA space center in 1962. Upon noticing a janitor carrying a broom, Kennedy interrupted his tour, came over to the man, and asked what he was doing. "Well, Mr. President," the janitor responded, "I'm helping put a man on the moon."



Besides demonstrating an understanding of how his job was designed to achieve a bigger goal, this wonderful story emphasizes the janitor's commitment to achieving that goal and a positive attitude toward teamwork. When you have employees who understand and are committed to achieving goals, there is a lot that can get done.

There are many different ways to get employees committed to achieving marketing goals. The following is a three-step process that will help:

1. *Get their input.* Right at the start, ask them what they think the organization's biggest marketing issues are and where the opportunities and focus should be. This can be done by simply meeting and interviewing them. Take it a step further by getting them together in a workshop where more brainstorming and group discussion can take place. Not only will the ideas be much stronger, but also asking people for their feedback works very well in getting their buy-in.
2. *Communicate the plan.* Once you have got the plan in place, be sure to communicate it. In most organizations, this simply means a summary of the issues along with what will be done, by whom, by when, and with what resources. Communicating the plan to everyone in the team is a great way to make people feel like their voices have been heard. It also gets them aligned to the main goals, much like the man on the moon example.
3. *Follow up.* Never assume that because someone has said yes to doing something that it will be done. Follow up with every task and ensure that those given accountability are followed up with. Try as quickly as possible to get some early wins to build momentum and ensure there are some types of project plans in place for longer-term initiatives.

The secret to getting your marketing plan achieved is to rally support from the people you'll need to implement them. Once you have that support, there is nothing stopping you from achieving your toughest goals.

## Conclusion

It's awful when you work hard to achieve the marketing and sales results you want but you don't achieve them. The important thing is to diagnose

the problem and figure out what is holding you back from achieving the results you want. In this chapter, we've seen some symptoms of a marketing strategy that isn't working. If you experience any of these symptoms, then you are at least aware that you have a problem and can now take action to resolve it.

We all make mistakes when creating and using marketing plans, and the five common marketing plan mistakes discussed previously share views on how they can impact the business. We have also reviewed what can be done to overcome them.

To achieve business results, you must stimulate action. But sometimes what we are supposed to do is not that clear. That's why an organization needs objectives—once they are clarified, what they are supposed to do to achieve them becomes clearer.

Stop thinking about all the inadequacies of your business. To achieve big, you must think big. Having a plan to get you there is a good start. Using the one-page marketing plan will help you structure your thinking and will help remind you of your priorities. Planning your action steps and the obstacles that might hold you back from achieving them will help. It's then about sharing it with those involved and ensuring that you communicate it effectively with everyone involved so that they are on board and support you.

Congratulations, you now have all the marketing bases covered and are ready to start selling! The focus of the next chapter will be to help you sell more effectively.

## End of Chapter Practice

Take a look at your own business and ask the following questions:

- What marketing activities have you implemented in the last 12 months that worked? Which ones didn't?
- Download the One-Page Marketing Plan and fill it in for your business. The template can be downloaded from <http://ackso-lutions.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/template.png>.



## CHAPTER 6

# Principle 6 (Part One): Selling—Like It or Not, You Are in Sales



### Introduction

Thus far in this book, we have discussed ways of getting your mindset ready, understanding your market and customers, and ways to communicate the value of your product or service so that prospects understand it and see the value in it. You have also put together a plan to attract prospects. But just before you go out and try to close deals with these prospects, you need to have a game plan of how you will maximize your efforts in order to sell much more than you ever thought possible.

Perhaps, you are a veteran and have been selling for years, in which case the principles here will serve to put some of your experiences into

perspective. If you are new to the game of selling, then following the steps outlined in the coming chapters will help significantly improve your chances of closing more deals and you'll get a head start above the rest of your peer group.

This chapter is going to set you up with some general principles on which successful selling is built. We'll start with what it takes to be in sales and how it has evolved very recently. We'll then look at where the real value is in identifying and solving problems, and why it's important to understand their distinction when selling your valuable products and services. You do this by asking the right questions, and there is none I know better than "Why?"

Robert Cialdini's Six Principles of Influence are also shared, which bring to light powerful methods of influencing someone, and how we can use them when selling. This will prime us well in order to go into the detailed sales and closing tactics in Chapter 7.

## What Does It Mean to Be in Sales?

Traditionally, those in charge of selling were adorned with titles such as sales manager or sales representative. But these titles seem outdated when you consider that the great majority of us have to influence and convince others of our ideas. Whether it's an internal discussion to get management on board with a new project or a coaching service you are informing a prospect about, selling (and the influencing that comes with it) plays a big part in most people's lives.

When many of us are involved in sales or one way or another, we tend not to like it very much. A survey referenced in Daniel H. Pink's book *To Sell Is Human* asked what came to mind when a sample of people thought of *selling* (Pink 2013). Among the most frequent answers were: *pushy*, *yuck*, *hard*, *ugh*, *difficult*, and *sleazy*. These are clearly strong negative perceptions, but they also have little to do with *selling*. Rather, it's about the conditions in which sales take place.

The old world of selling gave the seller the upper hand, as they tended to have more information than the buyer. This would generally be the situation when buying a used car. The previous owner would know whether the car was serviced and if it had any major accidents or repairs. The buyer, on the other hand, would have to rely more on an inspection and

road test of the car to make a decision on whether or not to buy it. With this information asymmetry, the seller would be able to offer information on an as-needed basis, and generally in his or her favor. But in today's world of the Internet and the instant ability to retrieve information on just about anything, this world is ending. Information symmetry is shifting sales situations from *buyer beware* to *seller beware*.

In today's seller beware world, buyers can arm themselves with enough information about what they want before even approaching the seller. A quick search on the Internet will reveal all the information buyers need to decide what kind of car they want that meets their budget and usage needs. They can also review the kinds of cars available at dealers in their own areas. They can then approach the dealer with most of the information they need about the car they picked out on the Internet. In many countries today, they can do a quick search on their smartphone using the vehicle's identification number to see if it's been in any accidents. They are, of course, not fully covered from any dodgy business. This is where social media gives further power to the customer to voice any trickery she may have encountered to a few hundred friends online.

The example given previously extends far beyond used cars and into all products, services, and ideas available today. The opportunity here for sellers (i.e., anyone looking to convince someone with their ideas) in the world of information symmetry is to make available as much as possible relevant and useful information about what you are selling. By providing information upfront and without expectation, you position yourself as someone who is helpful and not as someone who is pushy or manipulative.

This is a great way to build value in the eyes of a prospect, before you even talk about a sale. My regular e-mail newsletter is one way I do that with my business. Every so often subscriber gets valuable, proven ideas on how to improve their marketing and sales results. There have been many times that one or two of them write to me after receiving the newsletter to know more or even discuss how we can work together.

### **Solving the Problem Is the Easy Part: Finding the Problem Is Where Real the Real Value Is**

When you ask managers what they look for in a good candidate at their workplace, most times they mention someone with good problem-solving

abilities. While solving problems does of course have its merits, we now live in an age with near-limitless access to information at the swipe of a screen. This means that finding the answers that solve even seemingly complex problems will be easier.

Where the real challenge lies is in understanding what a problem is before you even start to solve it. To uncover issues and brainstorm possibilities. Doing this well will require that we bring clarity to the tons of information available by boiling it down so that the heart of the issue stands out: to focus less on talking and more on listening.

A client called me up the other day and asked me to conduct a survey of his top 100 customers. The issue was clear to him—how do we solve the problem of getting feedback from 100 executive-level customers? I slowed down the conversation to the point where we got talking about *why* a survey was even needed, and what the real issue was. It turned out what they really wanted was to change behavior among these customers in order to reduce costs. This moved the focus of the project from a mere deliverable—a survey—to one of a real problem to solve, with clear objectives.

You may have heard a version of the drill-hole scenario, where a customer walks into a store and says “I need a drill,” while the clerk replies by saying “No you don’t, you need a hole.” For those of us in sales, problem identification is a major step in understanding buying motives and gives us the ability to take charge of a sale. It’s the difference between perceived needs and the desired outcomes. Asking the right questions will help you uncover these problems—and once you understand them, solving them will be so much easier.

## Getting to the Bottom of the Issue by Asking Why

The other day my two-year-old daughter asked me her first why question. She wanted to figure out why her seven-week-old brother was crying. I’m sure many parents are familiar with children asking “Why?” all the time. In the sometimes confusing world we live in, they are trying to understand problems by asking.

In school, we learn how to answer, but not how to ask. But in today’s world where the right answers are easy to find online, asking the right

questions can be much more powerful. Questions help us identify the problem we wish to solve.

In order to get to the root cause of a problem, Toyota's production system developed a technique called "5 Whys." Whenever a problem was identified, the question "Why?" was simply asked five times in a row to get to its root cause. If a server was down, asking why would usually result with a technical answer, such as "Because the system crashed." Asking "Why?" again would uncover why the system crashed, and so on. This process helps reveal both technical and human causes of problems and how to fix them.

In your next sales call, get to the bottom of your prospects issues by asking "Why?" "Why is it that sales are down?" "Why are your customers buying elsewhere?" "Why won't your sales staff close more deals?" "Why is sales training not happening regularly?" "Why does the sales manager feel that way about training?" You get the picture by now.

In selling, prospects don't want answers as much as they want someone to help them identify their problem. The "5 Whys" technique can help identify a prospects problem and provide the *raw material* on which the rest of the sale can be built. Once you know what the problem is, solving it becomes a lot easier!

## Why Limiting Choices Can Increase Sales

People love having choices. So much so that our world is saturated with options and alternatives. Yet ample research shows that too many choices can lead to overwhelming customers.

I experienced this firsthand when I first went out to sell my services. I would offer prospects lots of options to solve their problem, which more often than not lead to nowhere. I didn't realize it at the time, but my *more than one way to skin a cat* approach to providing choice would make it hard for prospects to decide and ultimately lead to a *no-sale*.

A famous study by Sheena Iyengar of Columbia University involved setting up two booths selling jam at an upscale grocery store. The first booth offered 24 varieties of jam, while the second booth offered only 6 varieties. Not surprisingly, more people stopped by the booth with the greater variety than the one with less.



But when the sales figures were examined, a striking result was found. Of the customers who visited the 24 flavor booth, only 3 percent purchased, but of the customers who visited the booth with the limited selection, 30 percent did the same! In other words, reducing customers options to buy resulted in a tenfold increase in sales.

As you can see, there's a paradox: contrary to popular belief, too many choices can be bad for sales. Just like in my initial experience in selling consulting services, customers can be attracted to a large number of choices, but when it is time to make a purchase, too many options can make decision making difficult and lead to fewer sales.

Limiting choices is mostly about focus—both for the customer in the decision-making process and ourselves as sellers—when it comes to delivering what we promise. You can't walk into McDonald's and order a pizza. Henry Ford once said about his Model T: "You can have any colour as long as it's black."<sup>1</sup> These companies became successful by putting a lot of effort into a few good products.

Limiting choices is one of the first things Steve Jobs did when he returned to the then struggling Apple Computer, Inc., in 1996. He got rid of lots of products like the Newton and got Apple to focus on making a few good products. In 1997, Steve famously summarized what it would take to turn the company he started around:

Focusing is saying yes, right? No. Focusing is about saying no. You've got to say, no, no, no. The result of that focus is going to be some really great products where the total is much greater than the sum of the parts.<sup>2</sup>

In many cases, addition can subtract. Limiting customer options makes it easier for them to buy and avoids overwhelming them with choice.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Henry\\_Ford](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Henry_Ford)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fastcompany.com/1776369/video-how-steve-jobs-early-vision-apple-inspired-decade-innovation>

## Six Influence Techniques that Help You Sell

There are very few people in the world who don't have to sell something to others. It doesn't matter if you are selling to your customers, family, or friends. We all have products, services, or ideas to sell, but selling is challenging. This is where Robert Cialdini's Six Principles of Influence come in really handy.

The following is a list of his principles and how to use them to grow your business.

1. *Reciprocity.* It's human nature to appreciate gifts and favors and pay them back in some form or another. Receiving a gift psychologically wires us to want to return the favor in a similar or another form. Marketers use this all the time when they give out free samples of their products. If done in the right way, the recipient feels a larger urge to pay it back. Some customers do, some don't. But to most companies, the cost of providing something free is far offset by the acquisition of a group of new customers.
2. *Commitment.* We all know that when you set your mind to achieve something, there is nothing that can stop you. Similarly, asking someone if they like your idea, product, or service and getting their verbal or written commitment to use it generally means you have successfully influenced the person. A good way to do this is to ask their permission: "Would you use this product to solve your problems" or "Are we in agreement that this service is right for you?"
3. *Social proof.* This principle relies on people's need to ensure that their decisions are the right ones. Many people decide based on the choices similar people have made. They feel a sense of relief knowing that if other people are doing something, then it must be OK. Dishonest TV commercials show actors pretending to have some sort of problem and endorsing a product that provides the miracle solution. The best way to do this is to do it honestly: get some of your current customers to say a few words about how they are now better off. Then share that powerful language with other potential customers.
4. *Liking.* We are more likely to be influenced by people we like. It's, therefore, important, when selling anything, to be liked! A few sim-

ple tactics you can adopt taken from Cialdini's work include providing compliments and finding a similarity of opinions, personality, background, or lifestyle. It is worth mentioning that it's important to *look* likable too. Dressing well, smiling, and laughing really help in being more likeable to customers.

5. *Authority*. For the most part, we tend to feel a sense of duty or obligation to positions of authority. They, therefore, have a real influence on us, both good and bad. One experiment measured the number of serious errors nurses made when a phoney but authoritative-sounding doctor told them what to do. Even though the nurses knew the prescribed treatments were wrong, they nearly carried them out anyway, until they were stopped by experimenters. In business, becoming a recognized authority requires a lot of effort and can significantly increase your chances to influence others.
6. *Scarcity*. The law of supply and demand holds very true in how we think. When something is scarce, it is perceived as valuable. Make it more scarce (as in, begin to take it away) and it becomes even more valuable. Promoting limited time and quantity discounts is one way marketers encourage customers to take action.

It is worth mentioning that using techniques to influence people is not about being dishonest. It's true that dishonest people use compliance techniques to do dishonest things and trick people. But if you genuinely want to help people with your products, services, or ideas, you will have to adopt one or more of these elements of persuasion to get them to buy in.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined how sales have changed in the last few years. Buyers are now more empowered than ever, and we can look at this in one of two ways: either as a threat or as an opportunity. If you are reading this book, then you are probably more inclined to view this shift as the latter. What matters is what we do with it.

We've seen that solving the problem does not hold as much weight as finding the problem, and, therefore, what we sell should be shaped

accordingly. A great technique to use to find the problem is to ask “Why?” until the core issue stands out like a sore thumb. You can then position your product or service accordingly.

Making it difficult for customers to buy is never a good thing, and we have seen that customers faced with too many choices may feel put off by the confusion associated with choice. We also shared Robert Cialdini’s Six Principles of Influence, which will be useful in many aspects of life, including having in your toolkit of techniques when selling. In the next chapter, we’ll focus on Part Two of smart marketing principle 6 (selling), which includes the key elements of how to close a sale.

## End of Chapter Practice

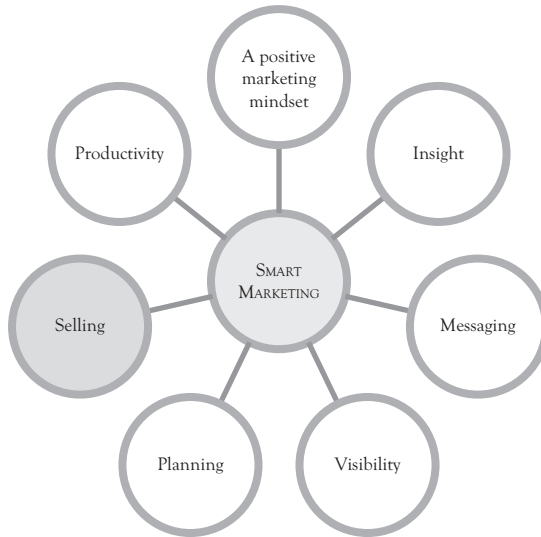
Take a look at your own business and ask the following questions:

- How can you help your own clients to identify their main problems?
- Which of Robert Cialdini’s Six Principles of Influence are you currently using when you sell? In what way?



## CHAPTER 7

# Principle 6 (Part Two): Closing the Sale



### Introduction

In this chapter, we'll go through a step-by-step process for getting the best results out of your sales efforts. I have to warn you that there are a lot of lists in this chapter. It's the best way to communicate the concepts as many of them are a series of steps. This will help you create a game plan for successful sales meetings.

We'll then cover some other topics that are also important in selling, like writing a strong proposal. Ideally, you will walk out of your sales meetings *with* the elements of the proposal discussed and agreed. We'll also look at establishing criteria that help you determine when a prospect is wasting your time.

Like in Chapter 6, some of this might be a refresher for a few, while new for others. Later in this chapter, there is a role-play segment that you

can practice with a colleague or friend to refine your sales skills and put some of the steps in this chapter into practice.

## The Four Absolute Worst Ways to Sell Anything

Every year companies leave billions on the table in lost revenue due to ineffective ways of selling. I have come across some poor sales tactics in my time; here are some of the worst and how to avoid them:

1. *Selling what you sell and not what you actually sell.* Confused yet? Here's the difference: an architect doesn't sell drawings, he designs people's dreams. A bottle of water isn't just water, it's a tasty, refreshing beverage that quenches your thirst. The difference is those that get it wrong in selling lead with the *technical* aspects of what they sell, while those that get it right lead with ultimate outcome or benefit of what they sell. Much of the time, this involves emphasizing the product or service's emotional benefits. It also helps to simplify the language till anyone can understand it. As we saw in Chapter 3, if it can be easily understood, it makes it so much easier for the buyer to make a decision in your favor.
2. *Talking more than listening.* There's an old myth that extroverts make better sales people because they talk more. However, being an extrovert does not make you any more successful in sales than being an introvert does. The truth is, to be effective in sales, you need to have a little of both: the ability to be able to listen and pick up on a customer's needs, and then answer questions and provide further detail when the time is right. If you are trying to sell something, you need to let the buyer speak about what her issues are and what outcomes she wants.
3. *Focusing on the sale too early in the relationship.* Not marketing and just going in for a sale means that you are commodity in your buyer's eyes—no different from anyone or anything else in the market. When you market your product or service effectively, buyers start to understand the true value of your product. Then, when the time is right, they'll want your product so bad that they'll be falling over themselves to buy it.

4. *Not getting agreement on next steps.* Far too many salespeople end their sales calls thinking that the buyer is clear on what happens next or that they will receive a call from the buyer (there is a significant chance he or she won't call you back). The end of a sales meeting should never be open-ended and you should always own the task of following up. During the meeting, provide clarity and get commitment from the buyer on exactly what happens next. If the next step for you is to send through a proposal, make sure the buyer knows when she'll receive it. Then ask for permission to follow up with her, specifying when and how.

Avoiding some of these sales blunders could mean the difference between exceeding your targets or not. If revenue growth is one of your priorities, make sure you steer clear of such blunders.

## Six Steps for Successful B2B Sales Meetings

Sales meetings are a vital part of B2B selling. The more successful you are with them, the more money you can make. So, taking the time to have a structure in place for your sales meetings will save you time, increase your closing rate, and allow you to better predict the outcome of your sales efforts. I've broken these down into the following six steps:

1. Setting meeting objectives
2. Communicating the agenda
3. Asking questions
4. Proposing your solution
5. Confirming commitment
6. Closing the sale

### *Setting Meeting Objectives*

Make sure you know what you want to achieve from the meeting prior to even setting it up. Do you want the prospect to sign on the contract and hand you a cheque right then and there? Or do you want him or her to introduce you to the CEO so that you can meet the person in charge of making the decision?



Setting goals in your sales calls work in much the same way as setting goals for other aspects of your business. Once you have identified what they are, you are more likely to achieve them. Neil Rackham's book *SPIN Selling* outlines four possible outcomes to a sales call and how to handle them (1988). By knowing what they are and planning in advance of a sales call, you have a much higher chance of achieving what you want.

Here are four possible scenarios:

1. *You get the order.* This is a flat out yes. You have agreement on objectives, measures, the value of the order to the buyer, when he or she will get the proposal, and when you will start the project. If this is the case, then well done! Remember, in B2B selling, this rarely happens in the first meeting.
2. *No sale.* On the other hand, you may find that you can't help the buyer. This is forgivable—sometimes you need to meet a prospect and discuss his issues to see if you can help him. If you are meeting too many prospects who end with this outcome, make sure that you are targeting the right kinds of prospects by clearly defining them. Next, look at your marketing. Is it geared toward attracting those ideal prospects?
3. *Continuation.* This is when a buyer offers to meet or speak to you at a future point in time. They may not be ready to buy just yet, but have offered to keep in touch. Obviously, this is not an ideal scenario as it doesn't progress the interaction much closer to a sale. It is at this point that you should consider if this is an ideal client and whether you can help them before investing more time and energy in meeting them again. If so, have a system in place to keep in touch such as an automated newsletter or inviting them to one of your events. I also put a reminder in my calendar to call them at an agreed point in time.
4. *Advance.* After immediately getting the order, this is the second best option. An advance is when you move closer to signing a deal. The prospect may need more information or may need to make a decision with someone else in the organization. To determine this, ask questions like "Who else do we need to speak to in your organization to make a decision on whether this is right for you?" and "I'm happy

to provide a demonstration to you and the CEO so you can experience the benefits of our product or service.”

### *Communicating the Agenda*

When requesting or confirming a meeting, ensure the prospect knows what the purpose of the meeting is and why it is in her interest to accept one. You will have a much better chance of securing a meeting if you make the prospect feel that she will be better off that she met with you. An example of how to do this is to position the meeting as a free *strategy session* or *consultation*, where you help the prospect be clearer about her priorities and requirements, whether she buys from you or not.

### *Asking Questions*

The most powerful element of selling is asking. The more thought provoking your questions, the more likely buyers are to think about what it is they actually want. They will introduce you to key factors that influence the sale or key buying motives. And once you know what motivates a buyer, you have a much better chance of closing a sale, provided you structure the conversation well.

In my search for the best sales techniques for complex, higher-value products and services (such as consulting, advertising, or others that are B2B oriented), I came across the *SPIN Selling* model, researched and developed by Neil Rackham. These questions cover four main areas: situation, problem, implication, and need-payoff.

Situation questions deal with the facts about the buyers existing situation. They help you understand more about the buyers business. “Tell me about your business” and “Who are your ideal customers” are examples of such questions.

Situation questions are an essential part of selling, but they must be used sparingly. They are easy to ask and the buyer doesn’t benefit from answering them as much as you do. Each question you ask needs to have a focus and purpose—avoid asking questions that you can easily find the answers to on the Internet or through other means. If you have done your planning for the meeting, you should only need to ask a few of them!

Problem questions ask about the buyer's pain, difficulty, or issue and focus the buyer on this pain while clarifying the problem. They provide the *raw material* on which the rest of the sale will be built. After all, if you can't solve the buyer's problem, you are not much good to them!

A good way to develop the right problem questions to ask is to look at the issues your product or service solves and work backward from there. Examples would be "What are the disadvantages in the way you are selling now?" and "How satisfied with your present process?"

These uncover what Rackham describes as the buyer's implied needs, which depending on the conversation can include responses like "We are not hitting our sales target" or "Our process is too slow."

Implication questions discuss the effects and consequences of the problem not being solved. They are built up enough to increase the buyer's motivation to do something about it by increasing the size of the problem in the customer's mind.

One thing to watch with implication questions is when they are so built up in the buyers mind that they become overwhelmed by the problem. This is where the next type of question comes in—need-payoff questions. A good example of an implication question would be "How does that affect you?" People buy when the *pain* of the problem is greater than the cost of the solution. Asking implication questions reminds the buyer of this.

Need-payoff questions get the buyer to tell you about his or her explicit (or true) needs and the benefits your solution offers, rather than forcing you to explain the benefits to the buyer. Basically, they ask about the value or usefulness of solving a problem. Getting the buyer to state the benefits has greater impact while sounding a lot less pushy. What these questions do is probe for explicit needs.

"Why is it important to you to solve this problem?" and "Why would you find this solution so useful?" are generic examples that work well as need-payoff questions.

The psychology of need-payoff questions is that they focus the buyer on the solution, rather than the problem. This helps create a positive, problem-solving atmosphere (which would be a breath of fresh air from the implication question phase). They also get the customer to tell you the benefits of what you are selling and help to avoid objections.

The SPIN Selling framework can be a very useful model to use for structuring your sales conversations and increasing the chances of closing a sale. When asked upfront, hearing from buyers about their business' situation, what problems they face, the impact of those problems, and what their explicit needs are can put you in a great position to close a sale.

### ***Proposing Your Solution***

By now you should know if you can help the prospect, and have a good idea of what he or she needs most that you can help with. Use this opportunity to empathize with the prospect: "I want you to know that the problems you are facing are common ..." and then share your approach: "I would first start off by doing so and so, and then so and so." Make sure to explain the benefits of each stage of your proposed approach, and how they will solve the prospect's problems. Then share your war stories of how you have helped others overcome the same types of problems: "We had a client that was faced with a similar problem. We helped them to save time/reduce costs/make more money/etc."

### ***Handling Objections and Confirming Commitment***

You think you've done everything right with the prospect. You have planned the meeting, established rapport, asked the right questions, and presented your services well. You think your prospect is going to sign on the dotted line when you ask him for feedback but he turns to you and says: "we just don't have the budget" or "the price is too high" or a similar statement that prevents you from closing the deal. What do you do? Before answering this, let's review what objections really are.

Most objections aren't really what they appear to be. Most of the time they are a way of stalling, a way of expressing fear over the risk of making a decision, or sometimes even a lie. When a prospect objects for whatever reason, they are actually telling you that they want to buy (they may not want to buy from you, but they want to buy). And if they're going to buy from you, they need some answers from you that will provide reassurance, communicate further value, or lower the perceived risk of doing business with you.

In sales, there will always be objections. How you handle them will determine how successful you'll be. The following is how to prepare for and handle them:

1. *Make a list.* List out the top objections you receive from customers.
2. *Generate creative responses to those objections.* For ideas, ask your top customers why they buy from you.
3. *Prevent objections.* Build those objections into your conversations and presentation. If you address the prospects fears, desires, and hidden objections before they even have the time to voice them, you move them closer to closing the deal.

The following are some examples of typical objections most of us in sales will receive at some point or another and how to answer them:

Prospect: "The price is too high."

You: "Let's review the project's objectives and discuss the value of achieving them. How much additional revenue/additional profit/cost savings/improved productivity/improved customer satisfaction would be made by going through with this project?"

Prospect: "We don't have the money."

You: "Of course there is no money, I'm sure if you budgeted for this you would have done it already. But tell me what would your business and yourself gain from achieving what we just discussed?"

Prospect: "Our CEO says we will do this in-house."

You: "May I ask why you want to do it in-house?" Note: if it is to save money, then use answer 2. If it is because of other falsely perceived risks, then answer: "I understand that this is a big investment so I want to make sure that you feel comfortable with the decision you're making. Here is how we helped a client with similar issues that you have and here's what they had to say about the results we provided them."

Prospect: "I don't have enough time."

You: "Of course you don't, the process/machinery/staff you have is taking up all of it as you mentioned earlier. So let's say that if you dedicated a small amount of time, say two hours a week for four weeks, to work with me to help you save 15 hours a week thereafter—what would that mean to you?"

Don't let objections (especially on price) be the reason why you don't make the sale. Most of the time, preparing for them and handling them well will spell the difference between success and failure in sales.

Check whether what you have proposed addresses their key concerns. Are they satisfied with what you have proposed? Do they have any further concerns that you can clarify for them? Then summarize the benefits you have presented so that it is clear what they will get out of working with you.

### *Closing the Sale*

Here you want to remember your meeting objectives and ensure they are achieved. Do you need to meet anyone else in the organization? Does their senior management need a demonstration? Perhaps, they would want more evidence of how you have helped others, in which case you could send them some client testimonials. If you feel the prospect sees the value of working with you, is fully comfortable with your approach, and is the economic buyer (the guy that signs on the cheque), then offer to provide a proposal, detailing when they'll receive it and when you'll next be in touch to discuss it.

Typically, in a sales meeting, you need to go through a process of closing to make the sale. How you close a sale depends on a variety of factors, including what you're selling, the kind of social style of the prospect, and, most importantly, what feels appropriate to you during the sales interaction.

There are four main steps to closing a sale. They are as follows:

1. *Summarize the discussion so far.* This should include reviewing the prospect's issues and desired outcomes. There is no way you can really understand them unless you have asked questions that uncover their problems and needs. You then need to describe how you will help them, giving them examples of how you have helped others. Here's one way to do it: "I would now like to review your issues and desired outcomes, along with suggesting ways I can help you. I'll also share examples of other clients we have helped that had similar problems."
2. *Handle objections.* The fact of the matter is that objections are good. The absence of any objection from a prospect may be a sign of

indifference. Objections indicate interest. Handle them well and you'll be closer to making the sale. Hear the prospect's objection out completely and acknowledge your understanding of the objection. Then answer each objection, getting agreement on whether the prospect is comfortable with the answer and continue with the close from there.

3. *Confirming commitment.* This is about asking the prospect directly whether the product or service you are selling is right for him or her. You can ask "Do you have any questions or concerns that we haven't covered so far?" or "Based on what you have heard so far, does this program sound like something that you can see yourself doing and succeeding with?" That way you have a good chance of getting a direct indication of what the prospect is thinking. Take it one step further by asking "Why is that?"
4. *The final close.* Here you want to get a buying decision from the prospect. My favorite type of close that works well with the first three steps is the assumptive close, where you act as if the prospect has made the decision already. I usually say something like, "If we are in agreement on the issues and objectives of the project, then I'll get a proposal sent to you by tomorrow and we'll start on the project on Monday" or something similar. The key here is to act confidently and to make it difficult for the prospect to say no.

Keep the preceding four steps in mind the next time you are in a sales situation and they'll help guide your thinking. If you spend a lot of time in sales meetings, it makes sense to have a structure to follow and a game plan for each of your meetings so that you can increase sales and save time.

## How to Write a Winning Proposal

There is a significant difference between providing a prospect with a quotation and a proposal. The earlier tends to simply state deliverables and commodities, along with a price. The latter, if done well, specifies value that can make all the difference when selling a high-end product or service. Companies facing stiff price competition will especially need to

take this route, as it helps differentiate from mere deliverables to a set of value-rich elements that buyers will fall over themselves for.

No one has mastered this better than Alan Weiss, who wrote the book *How to Write a Proposal That's Accepted Every Time*. Alan espouses first establishing conceptual agreement with the buyer during a sales call so that nothing that is written in the proposal is confusing or not agreed to. In other words, you walk out of the sales meeting *with* the proposal.

The following is what Alan calls the basic framework for a proposal that can be adapted, depending on the nature of the business you are in.

### ***Situation Appraisal***

Here you want to summarize the prospect's biggest issues. Avoid stating the obvious with sentences like "Company X was established in 2002 and sells widgets." Go straight into why they agreed to meet with you in the first place and what it is that needs to be improved. A much better example is: "Company X is facing increased price competition that has eroded its market share in the last 18 months ..."

### ***Objectives***

What outcomes will the company experience upon buying from you? State tangible and intangible, quantifiable and nonquantifiable objectives. "To grow your sales of product X by 20% within the next 3 months" and "To have the sales teams accountabilities and targets set and communicated" are sound objectives.

### ***Value***

If the objectives are met, what value will that bring to the company? So, if sales of product X increase by 20 percent, what would that mean to the company? To the prospect?

### ***Methodology and Details of What They Will Get***

How will the objectives be achieved? What details that the prospect is interested in should be included?



### ***Metrics***

They say what gets measured gets improved. Use time, revenue, productivity, communication, or other indicators of success as measures of whether the objectives are met. “How would clients know if they fell over it?” says Alan Weiss.

### ***Timing***

State when the project starts and ends and when any key milestones in-between need to be achieved.

### ***Accountabilities***

What elements that are important to the success of the project need to be provided by the client? By you? What is important to mention about how you will work together?

### ***Fees, terms, and conditions***

Mention your fees, and if there are one or more options of differing value to choose from, I highly recommend providing options: There have been countless times I’ve been able to upsell by offering an option of greater value just by listing it in the proposal.

Also, state what your payment terms are and anything else that needs to be mentioned that clarifies how you will work together.

### ***Acceptance***

This is a place on the proposal for you and the economic buyer to sign off, with clear instructions on what to do immediately after that.

None of these elements need to be followed rigidly except for one thing: ensuring that the buyer and you are clear about what value will be provided if your proposal is accepted. Once that is established, the process of closing the deal becomes much easier.

## A Few Words on Price: Why Lowering Price is Not a Long-Term Strategy

The decision to lower your price is a hard one that is often used to address price competition (your competitor has offered a lower price, so you feel compelled to match it to win a deal or new business). In the short run, this may work, as you find ways to lower your costs and work more efficiently.

But lowering your prices is no long-term strategy. In fact, it is a race to the bottom. Being *the cheapest* can be brutal. It forces you to sacrifice on quality, your values, and your relationships. Someone will always be willing to charge a fraction less than you, and to compete, you focus on matching or beating that fraction. In turn, you divert your attention from what your customer is really looking for to have his or her problems solved and be delighted along the way. When you compete solely on price, you turn what you are selling into a commodity as the customer won't see the difference between your and your competitor's product.

When you are in a market where price competition is fierce, you can do one of two things: the first is to find ways to reduce costs and the second is to find ways to differentiate. Let's assume there are three companies in the widget industry. Company A produces basic widgets at a reasonable cost. Company B also produces basic widgets but at a cost lower than Company A. Meanwhile, Company C produces premium widgets that perform better than the basic widgets Companies A and B produce. Company C has chosen to differentiate by offering a premium widget at a premium price. Companies A and B are producing the exact same product, but it costs Company B less to do it.

Which strategy is best? Depending on the needs of the customers and how important price is compared to improved widget performance, either Company B or Company C may prevail (or both).

The advantage Company C has in not focusing on lowering price is that it can focus on the other elements of the mix that may matter more to some customers. As we've seen in Chapter 4, this can include enhancing the sales experience by teaching customers something they didn't know about their industry. The larger margin that Company C earns on its widgets gives it the ability to also offer enhanced functionality, package

it in a way that makes it easier to understand and use, improve product availability, promote the benefits of using the product, and hire better staff that can deliver better service. All these may matter a lot more to some (or most) customers than simply offering the lowest price.

The next time a customer says you are too expensive, ask them what matters most to them. The majority of the time it is not price—it is some other element of value that they are looking for that hasn't been identified or articulated.

## Four Telling Signs That a Prospect Is Wasting Your Time

There is nothing worse than trying to sell to someone who is not going to buy. The challenge we face as sellers is that there are plenty of time-wasters out there who are not serious, don't have the authority to buy, and aren't going to end up being profitable clients.

The good news is there are ways to catch this early, so you don't end up spending time with prospects who you won't convert into clients. Those of you who invest in the stock market will be familiar with what a stop-loss order is. That's the automatic trigger that is set with your broker to limit the loss on a stock's position. For example, setting a stop-loss order for 10 percent below the price you paid for a stock will limit your loss to 10 percent if the stock plummets. When selling in the professional service field, you need to have the same *stop-loss* decision-making process that helps you recognize when a prospect is wasting your time and gives you the ability to cut your losses.

The following are some telling signs that will help you spot time-wasters and cut your losses as early as possible:

1. *The prospect hasn't read the information (your article, proposal, testimonial, and so on) that you agreed to send him.* It's worse when he doesn't read it and still wants to meet you to discuss it. If he hasn't bothered to read your proposal, what does that tell you about what it would be like to work with him? If he doesn't show that interest, he probably doesn't care too much about what you have to offer. I would limit the next interaction to a phone call and try to convince him to read the proposal before agreeing to meet in person again.

2. *You have no access to the economic buyer.* The economic buyer is the person who signs your cheque at the end of the day. When selling complex products and services, you want to be dealing with the economic buyer as it is he or she that makes the decision to buy. Why deal with anyone else in the organization?
3. *The prospect seems to only be interested in price.* “How much do you charge?” is a question that a prospect who isn’t serious tends to ask very early on, sometimes before you have even discussed how you’ll help him or her. Address this head-on by promising to discuss price only after discussing how you’ll help them. Never do it the other way around.
4. *They want to meet more than three times.* Life is too short, and unless this is a sizable project and there are some serious buying signals coming from the prospect, I would not agree to another meeting beyond the third. By now if you haven’t discussed their issues, proposed and agreed on outcomes and an approach, and addressed their concerns, will you ever?

The best ways to avoid these is to do two things: the first is to aggressively market your services. This will help communicate the value you provide, educate prospects about how you can help them, and will give you the ability to charge more. The second is to qualify your prospects before you invest any time with them at all. One way to do this is to have a set of questions prepared in advance that you can ask to see if who you are talking to is in fact a prospect and that you can help him or her.

## Why Competition Is a Good Thing

When I moved from Bahrain to Dubai, I had many people ask me what it’s like to be in a more competitive market than where I was prior to that. “There must be much more competition” is a comment I heard several times. While there are many more consulting firms in Dubai, it’s my strong opinion that having more *competitors* in the market is a good thing, and for one main reason: It opens up the market. Here’s why:

What most people forget about having more competitors in the market is that selling professional services is not a zero-sum game (as in, if I don’t win the client, my competitor will).

Let's take a look at the options a typical prospect has. In buying professional services, there are four scenarios that can occur from their perspective. The first (and most desirable to you) is that the client chooses to do business with you. The second scenario is that they choose your competitor. But there are two other possible scenarios that we tend not to talk about as much, but are very much a reality.

The third is that the client could always decide not to choose to use any outside help and do it themselves. While I don't believe this is always in the best interest of the client (otherwise I wouldn't be trying to sell my services to him or her in the first place), I can understand why this can happen. Provided the client understands what the problem is, solving it is so much easier these days. A simple Google search will yield a variety of possibilities for the client to read up on and decide from, with instructions on how to administer the remedy themselves. Problem solved? Maybe or maybe not.

The fourth, and very likely possibility, is that the client chooses to have nothing done. The buyer may weigh up all proposals and scenarios and decide "You know what, maybe we can live with the problem. Its not so bad after all."

Its situations like these that make selling professional services so tough, and that is why competition is a good thing. It means you are among others in the market that are building awareness among your prospects of problems they never knew they had and how services like yours can solve them. If prospects become aware of how you can help them, selling to them becomes so much easier.

As I've stated earlier in this chapter, to convince a buyer that they should choose your firm, you must convince them of the value your service will provide them. The value you provide should be inarguable and far outweigh the fees that you charge. A nice return I aim to deliver for my clients with my services is 10 to 1. For example, if my services cost \$50,000 on a single project, then my client can expect to make or save \$500,000 or more. Once you talk to prospects using that kind of language, then they are hooked. What else matters besides a return like that? Its conversations like that move prospects from doing nothing or doing things themselves to hiring a professional to do it for them.

## Sell Me This Pen—How to Nail the Classic Role-Play Challenge

A scene in the movie *The Wolf of Wall Street* depicts Leonardo DiCaprio's character, a convicted stockbroker, trying to turn a group of inexperienced misfits into junk bond salesmen. In order to show them how sales works, he pulls out a pen, hands it to one of them, and instructs them to "sell me this pen."

This challenge is used when hiring for sales positions to see if candidates have the required sales skills and can think on their feet. You can practice this with a colleague or friend to develop your sales skills in a low-risk environment. Usually, those who get it wrong start by talking about the product ("this pen is so wonderful, it writes so well, you can have it in blue or black...").

Those who get it right use one or more of the following:

1. *Identify the need:* The prospect doesn't always know what she wants, so you have to ask about her current situation and problems.

Situational question examples:

- How often do you use a pen? Occasionally or every day? Any special occasions?
- When was the last time you used a pen?
- Where do you store your pens usually?
- What ink do you prefer to use and why?

Problem question examples:

- What are the biggest issues you have with writing in general? Why is that?
- In what circumstances have you been disappointed with your current pens performance?

2. *Build a sense of urgency:* Implication questions discuss the effects and consequences of the problem not being solved. They are built up enough to increase the buyer's motivation to do something about it by increasing the size of the problem in the customers mind, and hence a sense of urgency. In the movie, the character tasked with selling the pen responds "Why don't you do me a favor and write your name down on that napkin for me." DiCaprio's character replies

“I don’t have a pen.” The challenger wins by replying, “Exactly, supply and demand my friend.”

Implication question examples:

- How do those issues affect your writing, your personal life, or your business?
  - How has not having a pen (or the right pen) cost you reputation, time, or money?
3. *Maximize the opportunity.* Nowhere does the “sell me this pen” challenge say that you can’t sell more than one pen. Why sell one when you can sell thousands? In fact, it may cost you the same amount of time and effort to sell one as it does thousands.
    - “Would you like to make a minimum order of 1,000 pens or would you like to benefit from our volume discount of 5,000?”
  4. *Look for upsell opportunities:* Similarly, the challenge never stipulated that you can’t upsell. In your conversation with the prospect, look out for ways to increase the size of the opportunity.
    - “Some of our clients use pens as giveaways with great success. Branding our clients’ quality pens with their logos and contact numbers have given them the ability to build relationships and increase their own sales. Is increasing sales important to you?”
  5. *Look for cross-sell opportunities:* Take this one step further and go completely out of the box by looking for other things the prospect may want to buy, besides just pens. People who buy pens might have a need for other stationary, office equipment, or other supplies. Look for substitutes (pencils, markers, or tablet PCs) and complimentary products (paper, notebooks, marker boards, or posters). The list can go on and on, but success comes in the conversation you have with the buyer and identifying his or her needs.
    - What other office supplies do you use?
    - How much of each do you typically buy in a year?
    - How happy are you with your current supplier?

## How to Get Marketing and Sales Departments to Work Together Effectively

Its no secret that marketing and sales departments don’t always get along. When sales are slow, they tend to play a blame game. Marketing teams

blame sales teams for not closing leads and sales teams blame marketing teams for not generating enough leads.

In my experience, the best performing companies have strong alignment between sales and marketing departments. This helps them to achieve more consistent revenue growth.

So, how do you achieve such alignment? The following are three simple rules that will help you remove any divide between sales and marketing:

1. *Speak a common language.* Many companies don't have companywide definitions of prospects and sales-ready leads. Not having a common sales and marketing language can lead to confusion and frustration. All it takes is a meeting or two and some effective communication to clear this up. Who are your ideal clients? What makes a prospect a prospect? Once he or she is qualified, who takes over? Having a discussion and agreeing on the language will really help.
2. *Hold each other accountable.* Every effective sales team has targets, and it takes communicating to a certain number of prospects to achieve those targets. How many prospects do you need to talk to achieve your sales targets? Having both teams agree on this will give marketing an idea of what they need to do to attract the required number of prospects. Similarly, once those qualified prospects are delivered to the sales team's doorstep, what percentage of those should sales ideally convert into clients?
3. *Talk to each other.* Here you want to ensure that marketing and sales teams know what each other are doing, and the best way is to get them talking to each other. Regular formal and informal meetings will not only help improve camaraderie but get them to understand each other's challenges and improve the way they work together.

If you follow the above rules, your teams are sure to better understand each other and that is when the *magic* happens. The sooner you get your sales and marketing teams working together toward a common goal, the sooner you will achieve it.

## Conclusion

If you have come this far in this book, then well done! You should now be better equipped to not only communicate the value of your product or



service through your marketing but also sell effectively. You may be good at some of the techniques shared in this chapter and you may need some practice in others. The important thing is to be aware of what's needed to successfully close sales and incrementally improve your game plan each time you are in a sales scenario. Following these techniques will help you to increase your closing rate, raise your price and be able to justify it, and decrease the effort involved in selling.

In the next chapter, we'll focus on the seventh and final principle of smart marketing: productivity.

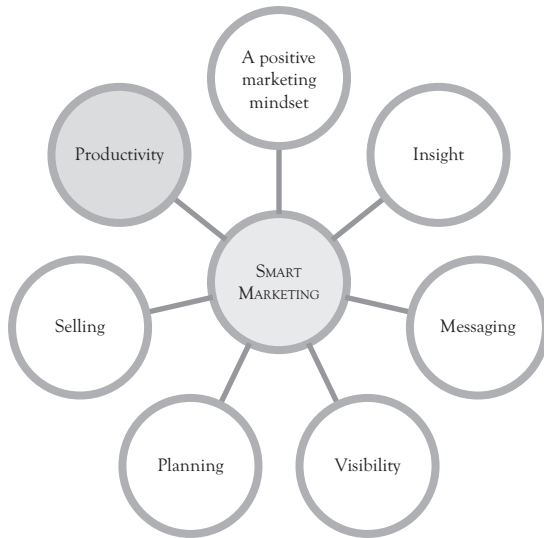
## End of Chapter Practice

Take a look at the way you sell currently and answer the following questions:

- How effective is the way I sell currently?
- What can you do now to improve your closing rate?
- Imagine your next meeting with a prospect is for potentially a very lucrative deal. What preparation will you make for the meeting?

## CHAPTER 8

# Principle 7: Productivity— Maximizing Your Marketing Productivity



### Introduction

We have gone through a lot of marketing and sales concepts in this book thus far. This chapter is about reaching your potential in marketing by developing yourself and overcoming any of the other elements that could be holding you back.

We'll first review the ways you must develop as a marketer in order for you to achieve best marketing and sales results. Some of them might be obvious, but many of us overlook them in our development and get stuck without knowing what to do. To achieve great things, you must be armed with the right knowledge and skills.

There are also habits that we have picked up over time, which pull us away from achieving our goals. We'll review what those things are and how to overcome them. Sometimes they simply require a concerted effort to implement, resulting in you achieving things that you never thought you would.

Once we have won a client, we need to keep them. The financial benefits of doing so can be desirable.

## The Five Laws of Growth for Marketers

In order for your business to reach its potential, you must grow as a marketer. Your and your business' growth work in parallel: the more you grow as a person, the more potential your business has to flourish. In the book *The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth*, John Maxwell spells out his answer to being as intentional about your growth as possible. I've chosen five of those laws to focus on that I strongly believe apply to marketers.

### *The Law of Intentionality*

Growth doesn't just happen. Many people assume they will automatically grow, and because they get older, they inevitably become better marketers. That simply isn't the case. Without being intentional about your own growth, you stand the chance of others in your peer group passing you by.

Others don't know how to grow. They want to achieve bigger and better things, grow their skills, and become better marketers, but are not sure where to start. They never can find the right time or there may be too many options to choose from, which seem overwhelming. They worry that if they start, they will make a mistake, which they are afraid of making.

To become intentional about your own growth, you need to have a plan for it. This means understanding where you want to be in terms of your development, what your gaps are, and what you need to do to raise your performance to the next level. It's then about spelling out the specific actions you need to take to grow and going to the extent of booking these in your calendar to make sure they get done.

I tend to read a lot as part of my growth. It's a great way to gain ideas from lots of experienced, intelligent people, and it's also very cost

effective. All it takes is to plan the time into my daily routine. I look forward to the next books I'm going to read, and even visualize how I can be more valuable to my clients once I've absorbed some of the concepts from each book. It also makes me feel so much more confident in the important decisions I make.

John Maxwell writes on the Law of Intentionality:

Start now. No matter what time of day you're reading these words, make a commitment to start growing today. Give that first hour before you go to sleep tonight. Put in the time today and for the next five days. You probably won't feel like doing it. Do it anyway. (2012)

### *The Law of Awareness*

This law is about understanding yourself, your limitations, and your growth needs. Maxwell writes:

To grow, you must know yourself: your strengths and weaknesses, your interests and opportunities. You must be able to gauge not only where you've been, but also where you are now. Otherwise you cannot set a course for where you want to go. (2012)

I see two key elements here: knowing what you are good at and what you like to do. Once you really understand that, ask yourself if you can make a living doing just that. If you can, how amazing is that? For me, that started why I focused my growth in areas that would help me market my business. I knew public speaking was important to attracting clients, but I wasn't necessarily very good at it. Being aware of this made me focus on speaking as an area of growth: I joined Toastmasters, read books, hired a well-known speaker as a coach, and recorded my speeches so that I could review them later. I also spoke wherever anyone would accept to take me. (I basically contacted every business networking society I could get hold of until I had a speaking appointment booked at least once a month.)

The following are some questions to ask yourself to get on your desired growth course, particularly when it comes to marketing:

1. What marketing activities do you like to do?
2. What talents, skills, and opportunities do you possess that support your desire to do it?
3. Where do you most need to grow?
4. What resources do you need to grow (time, money, coaching, and so on)?

### *The Law of Reflection*

John Maxwell writes:

There are many different ways of growing and an infinite number of lessons to be learned in life. But there are some kinds of growth that come to us *only* if we are willing to stop, pause, and allow the lesson to catch up with us. (2012)

Being disciplined about reflection allows you to take stock of what works and what doesn't. Some things we do just for the sake of doing them. They add no value to the growth of our business and our personal lives. But because we have developed the habit, we continue to do them and they continue to yield the same negligible results.

Reflection helps by letting the growth catch up with you. This enlightens you with understanding of what are the most important activities that yield the greatest results. Imagine having complete clarity on what those activities are and which ones don't help at all. Dropping those unnecessary activities and focusing on the low-hanging fruit will mean you can work less and still get the same results! To double your results, all you need to do is double up on those low hanging fruit!

I strongly suggest to incorporate reflection as part of the way you manage your growth. Start by listing out all the activities you have done in the last 12 months. Which ones were the most impactful? Which ones did not make any impact? Now look at your list of clients you have acquired in the last 12 months. How did you attract them?

### *The Law of Consistency*

E.M. Gray said, “The successful person has the habit of doing the things that failures don’t like to do. The successful person doesn’t like doing them either, but his dislike is subordinated to the strength of his purpose” (quoted in Maxwell 2012). Growth as a marketer needs to be consistent. Doing something small everyday will add up to big gains in the future. To become consistent, try not to bite off too much too soon.

For example, if you decide that writing is one of the new ways that you’ll start to crystallize your thoughts and grow, don’t start by taking on a book. Start by writing a few articles first, and then build yourself up to writing a book. This way you’ll master the basics of writing and not be discouraged or overwhelmed by taking on too big a challenge. If you are consistent enough with your article writing, you’ll build a habit that is a great foundation for writing a book.

The importance of consistency with your growth, as in with your marketing, is crucial. But being consistent isn’t easy and requires sacrifice. John Maxwell shares the wonderful example of John Williams, a successful Hollywood music composer. Williams writes on remaining consistent even when it’s hard to:

I never experienced anything like a block. For me if I’m ever blocked or feel like I don’t quite know where to go at the next turn, the best thing for me is to keep writing, to write something. It could be absolute nonsense, but it will project me into the next phase of thinking. And I think if we ourselves as writers get out of the way and let the flow happen and not get uptight about it, so to speak, the muses will carry us along. (Maxwell 2012)

Being consistent is not about doing things when they suit you. Its about doing things when they *don’t* suit you. Even if it’s hard to, remaining consistent will help you grow as a person.

### *The Law of Modeling*

When I first started out my consulting business, I had never had any formal background in consulting. Surely, I had some of the necessary

skills and had worked on some consulting projects before. But I had never worked as a full-time consultant, who had to go out and sell my skills to others. I had no idea how to do that, and very early on in doing so, I realized that I needed help.

That's when I first came across Alan Weiss' book *Million Dollar Consulting*. It opened up my eyes to a lot of new ideas that I would have never thought of on my own. Alan had achieved a lot of success in his consulting practice, and I wanted to emulate that. So I did everything I could to learn from him. I started buying other books and information products of his, attended his conferences and workshops, and even hired him as a business coach to refine my marketing and sales approach. The result of these growth efforts was that I was better equipped to grow my consulting business.

To grow as a marketer, you do not necessarily need to chart a path that no one has gone down before. You simply need to look at what successful people have done, and replicate that in your own way. A great way to start is to read their books or follow whatever thought leadership they publish. You'd be surprised by how accessible these people are. Most of the time, you can reach out to them on e-mail or social media and even ask them questions about what they would do in certain situations. If they are worthy enough, you can even hire them as a coach or mentor.

## How to Take Your Marketing Productivity to the Next Level

How do we make ideas happen? Have you ever heard someone say they always wanted to do something such as start a business or write a book (or anything that would positively improve their marketing results) only to see them never get around to doing it? Part of the reason could be that they are too distracted by other things that encroach upon their daily lives.

One of the worst excuses you can make when it comes to marketing your business is that you don't have enough time. I hear lots of entrepreneurs say things like "That would be very beneficial for the business, but I just can't find the time." If you have read up to this point in this book, then you surely must be convinced that marketing your business is key to its growth. Anytime you think otherwise, then you must have a negative

marketing mindset. Revert to the exercises in Chapter 1—particularly Byron Katie’s *The Work*—to overcome any negative thoughts you have that may be holding you back from achieving your marketing goals.

The human mind is incredibly susceptible to distraction, especially when you are trying to be creative. It is just so much easier to pick up a phone call from someone or answer an e-mail than it is to sit quietly, undistracted, and focus on something proactive until it gets done.

There are many distractions at our fingertips today—social media, instant messaging, the Internet. All it takes is a ping or a whistle from one of these apps and our attention gets diverted from what we were meant to do. We tell ourselves that we will take a short *break* of one or two minutes, but these can take several minutes to get our minds focused back on what we were doing before being distracted.

And being distracted is not only the problem—the process of resisting the urge to be distracted can also be a problem, according to a research conducted by the University of Copenhagen. Some participants who were asked to perform a task on a computer were then exposed to a funny video, while others were faced with a play button for the video, but had to resist playing it. The group was then asked to perform an additional task afterward. Those who resisted watching the video performed worse in this task than those who were allowed to watch it.

### *Overcoming Distractions*

How many times a day do you check your e-mail? Many of us click our send and receive buttons on Outlook like rats with a cocaine pellet dispenser, hoping that some e-mail comes that desperately needs our immediate attention. E-mail was designed to make us more productive, but its accessibility through phones, tablets, and PCs have in many ways taken us a step back from being truly effective. A key part of getting the most important things done is our ability to focus, which requires the will power to overcome interruptions, including those from e-mail, instant messages, and anything else that can distract us. The best way to get anything marketing-related done in business is to first get rid of these distractions.

So, it’s not simply a matter of overcoming distractions as it is to prevent them in the first place. If you have to, change your usual place of



work to somewhere where there are less distractions. I tend to switch off my devices until I'm done with my critical assignments and then reward myself by connecting to social media and other channels.

### ***Switch Off Your Phone at Selected Times in the Day***

If you are managing your business right, there will be very few calls you get in a single year that will be deemed extremely urgent. Switching off your phone so that you can concentrate on your marketing allows you to focus. There is nothing worse than having your concentration broken by someone who calls you just to sell you something or to inform you that your dry cleaning is now ready to be picked up! Switch off your phone for at least two hours a day to stay focused.

### ***Check E-mail at Selected Times in the Day***

This works much the same as answering phone calls as selected times. It helps minimize unnecessary distractions. I tend to check and answer e-mail twice a day (at 11 a.m. and at around 3 p.m.). To take this to the next level, Tim Ferriss, author of *The 4-Hour Work Week*, suggests to set up an auto-responder that informs e-mail senders that you are currently busy and will attend to their e-mail at a later time (Ferriss 2007).

### ***Delegate Unimportant Tasks***

Doing less is not about being lazy, it's about being smart. Never do tasks that can easily be delegated or outsourced to someone else. I've met people who insist on doing things themselves, out of principle—"having a website is important, so I must create it myself." Yes, having a website is important, and if you build websites for a living, then great, but if you don't, it's not wise to believe that doing it yourself is good use of time. Outsource it. Give it to the professionals. Let them solve the problems that would take you twice the time to figure out. That will leave you with time to work on other core activities that are important and you can make money on.

### ***Be Selective with Meetings***

Accepting to attend a meeting in person without a set agenda can be the big waste of time (if there is no agenda, most of the time they are a waste of time). To minimize this waste, refuse to have any meeting without setting an agenda and a cutoff time. And before accepting to attend, ask if it can be done on the phone. You'd be surprised how many people shuffle up and down the city from one office to another. Yes, you are *working*, but is this really effective? Get as much as you can done over the phone or Skype, and avoid face to face for only really important meetings.

### ***The Multitasking Myth***

The human brain can only concentrate on one thing at a time. There is a large amount of evidence that shows that multitasking is ineffective. Take writing an e-mail while taking a phone call. According to John Medina, author of *Brain Rules*, it can take up to 50 percent longer to accomplish those tasks than if they were done separately, and studies show that the brain makes about four times more errors switching between tasks than not.

It certainly does feel productive to carry out multiple tasks simultaneously, but to what end if you are not achieving the right results?

### ***When Is Your Energy Highest?***

Most people have peak energy levels early in the morning and a couple of hours after lunch. I find that I am most effective when I dedicate these peak energy times of the day to getting my most creativity-demanding work done. This includes writing, creating speaking opportunities, and other creative work. I also tend to put off doing other basic tasks that I can do with less energy, such as paying bills or doing admin work, for my lower-energy periods of the day.

### ***The Hangover Effect***

Letting go of unfinished challenges is not that easy to do. Your mind continues to try to solve them even after you have stopped working on them.

Dr. Christian Jarrett, coauthor of *Manage Your Day-To-Day*, describes this as the hangover effect: “They continue to draw on our mental resources even after we think we’ve switched focus. What’s more, attempting to ignore this mental tug drains us even further” (Glei 2013).

Jarrett encourages readers to find a place to stop at while working on the project—one that can easily convince your brain that you are done with the project for now, until you next have it scheduled to pick it up again.

### ***Booking Your Calendar***

Never start your day or week without knowing what you want to achieve by the end of it. Instead, write down what major things need to be achieved and put them in your calendar. Doing this the day before in preparation for a busy next day will mean you start your day with focus and purpose. You will not have to think about what you need to do and you will be more inclined to just do it. You will be in action mode and will want to get things done. Following a schedule will almost feel like a game because your mind will be telling you that you want to achieve what you have committed to the day before. Sharing your calendar with colleagues will notify them of when you are busy and when they have access to you.

I tend to tackle the most important, nonurgent marketing tasks at the beginning of the day. This includes recording videos for my YouTube channel, writing articles for my blog, following up with prospects, and asking clients for referrals and testimonials. These are the important marketing actions that will build my business in the future. By about 11 a.m., I start answering e-mails and tend to other tasks that are due on the day.

### ***Daily Focus Blocks***

To achieve anything worthwhile, you have to have the ability to have your mind focus. There is no better method I know than to have daily focus blocks. This technique builds off of the prescheduled appointment. You simply block the daily chunks of time you need to carry out your project in your calendar and make sure it is followed. Anyone who requests your attention or presence during those times is asked to schedule at another date.

During this time, you must resist distraction: e-mail, phone, social media, and Internet should be off and hidden away. Cal Newport, coauthor of *Manage Your Day-To-Day*, has the following tips to ensure you overcome distractions:

- *Start small and work your way up.* Start with a small amount of time, such as an hour, and build from there. Add 15 minutes every week or two, till you have enough time in your daily focus block to do something significant. If you get distracted during that time, cancel the whole block and try again later. Your mind can never come to believe that even a little bit of distraction is okay during these blocks.
- *Tackle something concrete.* Use the focus block to tackle something concrete (such as calling a prospect, working on a speech, or writing an article). Make sure you know what you want to achieve by the time the focus block's time is up.
- *Use different locations.* Move to another room or do something as simple as closing the door to your office during the focus block time. If your online access is off during this time (such as phone calls and e-mails), then your offline access should be the same (2013).

## Keeping Your Clients

Winning a client is a battle on its own. Once you have acquired a client, you also need to ensure you keep them. The financial rewards associated with keeping your clients can be astonishing: According to research conducted by Harvard Business School, increasing customer retention rates by 5 percent can increase profits from 25 percent to 95 percent. Other research shows that it costs as much as six times to acquire a new customer than it does to retain an existing one. So, in other words, once you have won a client, do what you can to keep them!

In order to help you improve client retention with your business, following is a list of several things you should be doing at any point in time with your clients to nurture and improve your relationship with them.

### ***Avoid Overpromising and Underdelivering***

Alright, so you have won the contract with the new client. Now you have to deliver what you have promised. This is where a lot of client relationships can go pear shaped. In selling your service, if you overpromised, you now have a client with expectations that are sky high. Even if you do a good job, if it's anything under what you have promised, they are disappointed.

This situation comes with promising miracles, which is a consequence of overselling and hype. It's far more effective to be genuine with what you promise. If you believe that the client needs to hear that you will provide the moon and the stars with your service, then the client probably isn't worth acquiring anyway.

When you win a new client, your *job* starts there as far as the client is concerned. In their eyes, you have simply earned the right to prove yourself. The client has assumed the risk of choosing you and is now waiting for you to deliver. So make sure you do.

Similarly, the risk you take on by acquiring a new client is that if they are not happy, they are likely to tell others about their bad experience with you, which is basically bad for business. Deliver what you promise, and you will be fine.

### ***Say "Thank You" Often***

Never take your clients for granted. Saying thank you doesn't mean that you need to buy them expensive gifts or treat them to the most expensive restaurants. It does mean that you need to show them that you appreciate their custom. Take them out for breakfast and pick up the check. Send them a handwritten letter saying thank you and what your relationship with them means to you. Simple things like these go a long way with clients, and making sure that they feel appreciated will mean they will go out of their way to reciprocate when deciding whether to stick with your company or choose another.

### ***Ask How They Are Doing***

Make sure to ask clients about their own business. What's happening in their department, their recent challenges, and other news. This will keep

you abreast of changes that may affect the work that you are already doing for them and help you identify other sales opportunities. It's a great situation to mention that you offer a new type of service or one that the client hasn't purchased before. Using language as simple as "Did you know that we also do this ..." is the way to go.

### *Let Them Know How You Are Doing*

Keeping clients updated with what's going on with your business is just as important. Why? Relationship maintenance has a lot to do with keeping your business top of mind. And if you are out of sight, you are definitely out of mind. Keep them informed of the new projects that you are working on, the new clients that you have acquired, recent recognition you have received, case studies you have developed, and results you have generated for other clients.

### *Keep in Touch with Clients Who Move to New Organizations*

This is a wonderful by-product of offering a great service—people will want to continue using you, even after they move to other organizations. They will want to make sure they use tried and tested service providers—such as yours—to get the job done. Make sure you keep in touch with individuals who move to new organizations (simply by congratulating them and asking them to meet for coffee and a catch up).

### *Have Service Standards in Place*

Having service standards in place ensures your clients get a consistent experience from you each time they work with you. Typical service standards include returning phone calls within a certain time (say within two hours) or answering e-mails within the same business day.

Keeping your clients is an essential part of running your business. Make sure to think about what you're doing to maintain the relationships you've built and how you will continue to benefit from them in the future.

## Conclusion

Our own development has a significant impact on how successful we'll be. We've seen that taking the time to make your own growth happen is an investment that will yield big returns later on in life.

We also looked at ways of improving the way we manage our time and how to get things done more effectively. There are far too many distractions we are exposed to that can prevent us from achieving the kinds of great things we dream of. From ringing phones to e-mail pings, setting those aside for the appropriate time will be a wise decision.

Time is an asset. Why do anything else but make sure that it's managed wisely? We've seen some techniques that can help you do that and get more out of your time, so you can achieve more or decide to go home early because all your work is done!

In Chapter 9, we'll see what it takes to keep the clients you have worked so hard to acquire, along with some further questions you need to keep in mind when thinking about implementing smart marketing for your business.

## End of Chapter Practice

Take a look at the way you manage your productivity and ask the following questions:

- Am I intentional about my growth?
- What marketing activities am I good at, and like to do?
- Do I get distracted regularly from doing any of my marketing activities? How big of a problem is it?

## CHAPTER 9

# Conclusion

### Introduction

In the introduction of this book, we listed the seven principles of smart marketing. This powerful model will help any business with revenue growth as one of its primary goals. You do not have to invest large amounts of money to achieve great things—you just need to put in the hard work and you'll reap the rewards.

In this chapter, we'll review the challenges that we as sellers face in marketing and sales. We'll then review the seven smart marketing principles to see how we should deal with the challenges and the key questions to ask when implementing them.

### The Marketing and Sales Revolution

In the introductory chapter of this book, we talked about the marketing and sales revolution we are all witnessing. This is characterized by rapidly changing media channels, with the demise of the importance of advertising on TV and the rise in influence of other channels such as video through social media platforms like Facebook. We also have shorter attention spans, with e-mail pings and notifications hitting us all the time.

We are also dealing with more empowered buyers, and they are armed with just as much knowledge as sellers are, and sometimes more. So, if we don't regularly provide information about what our customers want to know what we are expert in, someone else will, most probably a competitor. In that respect, we have to educate buyers so that they not only learn about what they really need, but also keep us in mind when they are ready to buy.



## Key Smart Marketing Questions

To help you get started on growing your revenue by using smart marketing, ask yourself the following eight key marketing and sales questions that serve as an overall summary of the main learnings from this book. Answering these questions will also go a long way in helping your organization to navigate upcoming shifts in the marketing and sales landscape.

### **Chapter 1—Principle 1: A Positive Marketing Mindset— Managing What’s In-between Your Ears**

In this chapter, we discussed how success is limited by what your mind thinks it can achieve. There are no *sure things* in marketing, but what you can be sure of is that if you apply a positive mindset to what you want to achieve, you will be in a much better position to achieve it.

Is your approach to marketing positive? Do you approach marketing with an open, honest manner and *can-do* attitude?

We don’t need to be positive all the time, but we do need to be positive when planning and implementing marketing activities. Otherwise, a lot of what gets done will be useless. Dispute any negative thoughts with regard to your marketing by using Byron Katie’s *The Work*, and use the turnaround to help you paint more optimistic point of view.

### **Chapter 2—Principle 2: Insight—Understanding Your Customers**

We’ve seen that the most powerful way to offer products and services that customers want is to collect and act on customer feedback. We reviewed the process of collecting feedback and developing a product that customers value even before it’s launched.

What do you know about your customers?

Look at the last three months of deals that you have closed and the clients you served. What do you know about them? Was there a particular marketing activity that you used to start talking to them? What industry are they in and where are they geographically. Taking the time to do this will help you identify patterns that you can then act on.

### ***Chapter 3—Principle 3: Messaging—Developing Messages That Stick***

There are plenty of opportunities for us to communicate about our business, but most businesses fail to communicate effectively. Stop talking about how great your business is because your customer doesn't care! If a prospect has given you his attention, albeit for a brief moment, then use that window of opportunity to speak about his problems, not about your product or service.

Is the message you are using to communicate about your business effective?

Do you get prospects to say "Tell me more" or do they switch off and change the subject the minute you tell them what you do? Do your calls to action actually generate leads into your pipeline? Take the time to structure your messaging so that it communicates the value of your product or service effectively.

### ***Chapter 4—Principle 4: Visibility—Being Useful to Customers***

Marketing does not need to be about hype—it needs to be about help. You need to help your customers with your marketing. Teaching your customers something about their problems or an aspect of their business that you are expert in is a great way to build trust. You also get found much quicker on the Internet.

How can you help your customers with your marketing?

Think of all the ways a company you know has helped you without asking you to buy from them. Do they offer some kind of content that has been useful to you at a point in time? Perhaps, they brought to your attention a problem that you didn't even know you had. How has that helped position the company in your mind? How could you do the same for your own customers?

### ***Chapter 5—Principle 5: Planning***

If your marketing efforts are not giving you the type of results you are looking for, then you have the power to change this. Don't aim for perfection, because it's unachievable. Aim to communicate often. The One-Page

Marketing plan is a great way to structure your thinking around all the activities that you want to complete in the next week or month.

What is stopping you from achieving the results you want right now?

Sometimes, this can be a perceived lack of time, in which case I would recommend you to review Chapter 8, where we discussed how to get more marketing out of your typical day. Other times, it could be your mindset telling you that you're not good enough, not ready, too small or big, don't have the budget, or some other reason. These are all excuses. Go back to Chapter 1 where we discussed how to get over a negative mindset.

You could also have all the time and will in the world and be implementing a lot but without the desired results. In Chapter 5, we talked about how results are achieved by delivering on objectives and how those are completed by actions. Are your actions the right activities?

### ***Chapter 6—Principle 6 (Part One): Selling—Like It or Not, You Are in Sales***

Selling has dramatically changed over the years. We are now dealing with empowered buyers: buyers who more often than not know just as much about the products and services we're selling as ever before. Rather than spending time helping them to solve problems, they would most probably prefer that a supplier helps identify their problems to start with. Asking the simple question "Why?" is key to this. Robert Cialdini's six influence principles offer techniques that are just what you need to get prospects to say *yes*.

How has selling changed in the industry you are in over the last 5 or 10 years?

Every industry and business goes through a phase where at some point someone realizes and creates more value than a previous technology did. Sometimes there is significant change: The automobile debunked the horse-drawn cart just like crowdfunding is disrupting the way we invest in companies and projects. What do you need to do now to keep your business ahead of changes in your industry?

### ***Chapter 7—Principle 6 (Part Two): Closing the Sale***

There are steps in selling that you need to follow. Without them, your selling efforts can be largely unproductive. You may even be doing the

right things, but in the wrong order. Multiply that by the size of your sales team and you have a lot of wasted energy and potential.

What is the ideal route a prospect takes to becoming a paying client in your business?

The clearer you are about this, the better chance there is of it happening the way you want. This exercise simply involves writing down the steps and following them. It will give you the chance to see what works and what doesn't, and course-correct as necessary. You will be able to walk out of prospect meetings with the proposal already agreed—a huge time saver and one that will take a lot of the guesswork out of writing your proposals.

### ***Chapter 8—Principle 7: Productivity—Maximizing Your Marketing Productivity***

To grow your marketing and sales results, you must grow. And that growth does not just happen. It needs to be intentional and a process, rather than a single event. Growth makes you more effective and helps you realize the 20 percent of activities that yield 80 percent of the results. Stop wasting time by prioritizing e-mails and phone calls. Incorporate enough discipline in your routine to build creativity in your day. You will need this to get all those marketing activities done!

Think back at the last two hours you were at your desk. How many times were you distracted and how can you prevent that?

Distractions stop us from achieving those all-important growth activities. The trick is to not allow them to happen. To do that, we must build in our routine a way to that says “Not now” or “I’ll attend to that later.” The best way to let your mind focus is to switch off the things that get you to say that completely, with the full awareness that they’ll be there waiting for you when you *plug-in* again later.

## **Final Words**

Never has there been so much importance put on the need to make the sale. Everything else in a business starts to work after a sale is made. Having great products is only the start of it—it’s a prerequisite for success but not a determinant. *How* you sell is where the new battlefield is. This shift

means that now more than ever, we need to have a game plan on how we justify our product or service's value to the customer. Using the seven principles of smart marketing will help you to achieve that. There is no doubt that there is a lot of hard work involved with implementing it, but along the way you will experience the kind of growth that makes hard work worthwhile.

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**Ahmed Al Akber**

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This book is designed to help organizations looking for significant growth. Offering a great product or service does not guarantee success—to win these days, a business must also excel at marketing and selling. In most instances, a big marketing team and budget also isn't necessary. To achieve big goals, focus must be put on the most important marketing and sales activities that generate the biggest impact for the business. This book outlines what those activities are and how to implement them.

**Ahmed Al Akber's** entire career has been dedicated to helping organizations to grow their revenue. His company, ACK Solutions, is a revenue-growth consultancy whose average client grows their top line by 15 to 20 percent in their first year of working with him. Ahmed has worked internationally in marketing, sales, and strategic planning at companies like The Coca-Cola Company, Philip Morris International, and Dell. Ahmed was awarded the Chevening Scholarship to attend his MBA at Lancaster University. He also has a BSc from Staffordshire University.

Ahmed has a widely read marketing and sales blog and his work is regularly featured in regional and national publications. He is a regular speaker at international business conferences and forums. More details can be found at: <http://acksolutions.com/>

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ISBN: 978-1-63157-234-0



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