

SPECIAL REPORT

The 9-Point Marketing Success Method *for Small Business Owners and Non Profits* by *Roberta Guise MBA*



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Does this sound familiar: As you stay busy servicing clients or selling them products — all the while keeping them happy — your attention drifts away from your business to the point that you let it run on autopilot?

For your marketing to really succeed, you need to know at all times where your business is headed; you also need to know everything about your business, from the inside-out.

This may all sound obvious, but stop and bear with me for a moment. Do you have a sound philosophy of doing business that's clearly stated in your communications and actions with your clients? Have you asked clients to tell you what they value most about working with you, and I do mean have you asked them in person?

The answers to these questions are the vital elements you should be using to build a story about your business, giving it — and you — an identity in the marketplace. Successful business owners focus like a laser beam on their business, and use the principles I present below to guide them.

So why don't you take one step back, and another step sideways, and look at your business, and yourself, as if through a different set of lenses.

You'll see things in a different light. And with this insight you'll have a new foundation for marketing yourself to a greater level of success.

1. Get the 360-Degree Attitude

Start with the big picture: What business are you in? No really, how do you change your clients' condition?

What's your vision for your organization? Where do you see it in 18 to 24 months from now?

Do you have a business philosophy? If yes, what is it? If not, ask yourself why someone should want to do business with you. The answer will help you uncover your business philosophy.

Have you considered all the ways your business can be generating revenues?

Do you know how people are better off from doing business with you (this is your core value/core talent)?

Have clients told you what they value because you asked or they volunteered their opinion (correct answer). Or are you guessing or assuming (see previous sentence)?

2. What's hot with your S.W.O.T.

Know your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats/challenges (S.W.O.T.). Write them down.

Hot tip: you can control your strengths and weaknesses (these are internal to your business), but not opportunities and threats (these last two points are outside your business). Pinpoint the strengths to take advantage of the many opportunities that await you. Where possible, use your strengths to work around a weakness or challenge.

3. Competition comes in many forms

How do you compare to others who do what you do? You're different, you say. How so?

What are others doing better than you? What are you doing better? Be sure to have a good grasp on this, as a

prospective customer may challenge you to compare yourself to the competition.

While you're doing this exercise, consider what you can learn from your competitors. Think you have no competition?

Hot tip: we all have competition, even just to be heard above the noise around us, or from our trying to be understood.

Aiming to get a piece of the market's mind can be like trying to hit a bull's-eye with quicksilver. So be honest and expand your concept of competition.

4. Know thy customer

What do customers value most? Are you delivering that value, day in and day out? How are you making them better off? How do you know you're making them better off?

Are you passing up any opportunities with current clients or customers? The way to find out is to ask. And the best way to ask is one-to-one, either in person or on the phone; or to survey them more formally by email, direct mail, or using a Web tool such as surveymonkey.com.

5. Target your market with laser-like precision

Who do you *really* want to be serving? Create an ideal customer profile.

For example: I serve small business owners, individual professionals and non-profits (a broad market segment). And I have a laser focus on developing women who want to become known as a thought leader in their field of expertise (extremely narrow niche).

Your target markets may shift depending on the economy and the results of your S.W.O.T. See #2 above.

First: choose to immerse your talents by following your passion. What's your biggest passion?

When creating your ideal customer profile, do it in two steps: first, identify common characteristics of your best customers to create the ideal profile; then identify the markets you already serve and those that have potential, while looking for common and shared characteristics.

Be prepared to shed customers or niche markets that either aren't profitable, or don't bring you joy.

6. Every word counts; first impressions linger

Do you know the precise words that communicate the value of doing business with you?

Have you created the images, such as your logo and Web site, to visually "agree" with the words? Not sure of your value? Review #1.

When asked "what do you do," many business owners tell people, literally, what they do. But that doesn't give people a sense of how you change lives through what you do.

Next time someone asks you that question, answer instead with a short phrase on how you make people's lives better. When they want to know more, you can tell them how you do it (the literal part of "what you do").

7. Map your marketing goals

Types of goals to consider: increase revenues; grow foot traffic; be acknowledged as an expert or the go-to authority in your field of expertise; have more profitable clients; sell new products/create products to sell, sell more existing products; grow membership; engage in philanthropy/good corporate citizen activities; capitalize on a growing market

opportunity or trend; grow your client base; raise awareness; diversify.

8. Match marketing methods to goals

Know when to send people to your Web site, when to give them a printed brochure, how to use e-mail marketing, how to promote an event, and how to be visible through traditional and online media.

Know when to use direct mail — the physical kind, and how to test. Assess which online marketing methods to use — does buying Google ad words make sense? Should you be marketing through others using an “affiliate” relationship?

Determine when writing a press release or sending a pitch letter is right for you. “Right” can be as basic as being able to follow through when the media and influential bloggers respond positively.

Is buying print advertising worth a test?

Could writing a blog, commenting others’ blogs, guest blogging, recording a podcast or video, creating and using your profile on LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook be good for your business? How can you use each platform as an effective marketing tool?

Hot tip: Don’t engage in social media purely for measurable financial gain. If you do, you’re likely to be disappointed. I consider social media to be akin to PR, except now we have much more control, because: we publish our content, we curate others’ content, we can reach the media directly, and (with concentrated effort), we can get infinite amounts of visibility.

9. Write an action plan, even on a napkin

Start writing. If you fill a page, stop writing and start doing. If you have a plan that consists of just a single activity that you'll carry out, write it down. Writing signals intention. And intention will play a huge part in your success.

Bonus point

There are eternal marketing verities, which means they haven't gone out of style and never will. One is knowing why your organization came to be — the core value or idea it was founded on.

Be sure that this core idea drives your messages; communicate it consistently. Use this fundamental as the basis for your overall strategy. Make it concrete in words and images so that your prospects and stakeholders say, "Aha! I get it!"

Give yourself high marks for every point or part of a point you answer in writing. Fact is, the deeper you delve into your business, the more effective your marketing — and your entire business — will become.

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