
HOW TO AVOID THE TOP 10 MARKETING MISTAKES BUSINESSES MAKE WHEN TIMES GET TOUGH

What you can do to make sure
your small business not only survives,
but thrives in a slow economy.

BY CAROLYN STAFFORD

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How to Avoid the Top 10 Marketing Mistakes Businesses Make When Times Get Tough

Introduction

I was concerned to read in a recent article that approximately 8,000 businesses are predicted to fail in the next 12 months*. A sobering thought which really got me thinking - about the 10 most common marketing mistakes that businesses make when the going gets tough - and how powerful it would be to share that information and help other businesses learn from these mistakes. Even more importantly, if you are making any of them yourself - you can apply our suggested remedy to change course right now so that your business not only survives the times, but that it thrives in them, now and in the future.

You see, over the years, I've worked with thousands of business owners who have shared their experiences and their stories of what works and what doesn't and I've observed a distinct pattern in what most businesses typically do when times get tough. In the panic and wake of rising interest rates and fuel prices, slowing sales and overall lack of confidence in the slowing economy, they make a fatal mistake.

THEY STOP MARKETING!

Despite this gloomy news, the slowing economy and tough times ahead, you can avoid becoming a statistic. How? By focusing on this vital area that so many businesses ignore when sales slow down. Yes - MARKETING.

*Source: www.smartcompany.com.au 7 August 2008

What I have found is that when the going gets tough.... the smart get marketing!

You see, the smart business owners see current challenges as an opportunity to do things differently - to use their existing resources such as people, ideas, customers, databases - and make the most of what they already have. Often without spending anything more at all.

Of course, it makes perfect sense to review your cost base, reduce expenditure and excess resources. However before you go retrenching staff or slashing your marketing budget in a desperate attempt to save dollars, have a good think about what is the purpose of marketing. The purpose of marketing is to generate quality leads and get new business. Reducing expenses is one thing – but you can only trim the fat so far. Once you've done that, it's vital you focus on what will actually expand your business and keep more business flowing in the door. Not just for today, but for the months and years ahead. The last thing you can afford to do at times like these is drop all your marketing activity and start fading from people's minds... after all, you've put in time and energy to have them notice you already, now you need to stay there!

Like so many small business owners, I have had to take a step back and re-visit my business model, my marketing tactics and take a reality check on what's working and what's not. So this report brings with it not only 20 plus years of marketing experience I've had in big business and small, but my own personal experience as a small business owner myself. In other words, it's written for you – by someone like you who has tried just about everything and knows what works and what doesn't!

You'll get the most value from this eReport not just by reading it but by taking action, so grab a pen and notebook and get started!

Here are the top ten marketing mistakes business owners make when times get tough. And the suggested remedy. So, get smart...and get marketing!

Mistake #1

They lose sight of the big vision – for their life and their business.

Grab a pen or your keyboard and quickly write down a few points (three to five) in answer to this question. Don't spend any time thinking about it. Just go with your gut instinct response and ask yourself now "Why did I start my own business?"

If 'lifestyle' was among your top three answers, you're in good company. Of the thousands of people who have attended my *Small Business Big Brand* marketing workshops in the past few years, over 80% of people listed 'lifestyle' as one of the top three reasons they started their business. Now ask yourself "Am I living the life I want to live?"

For example, are you following your interests and passions outside of work – that may include spending more time with family, travelling, singing, dancing, skiing or anything else takes your fancy? And are you honestly working the number of hours you wanted to, when you first started your business?

By now, you may be asking, but what the hell has this got to do with marketing? Everything. If you answered NO to any of above questions, then you have lost the vision for your life AND if that's the case, then the vision you have for your business (if it still exists) will be hard to maintain. And a business that has no vision is hard to market. When a business owner and their team are inspired by a great vision, their passion and their dedication shines through. It keeps them motivated to get up in the mornings. They love what they do, they give great service and they are more likely to succeed, in good times and in bad. Got the connection?

Remedy

Stop spinning your wheels. If you have lost sight of the vision for your life and your business, I recommend you get up close and personal with yourself.

Challenging as it might be for you in this busy, workaholic society we exist in today, it's vital that if you and your business are to survive in a sustainable manner (better still – if you are to thrive) - that you take the time to slow down and then STOP. Breathe. Nice. Now go somewhere quiet and invest some time in really reviewing your life vision. Perhaps get away for a weekend, away from the business, family, friends, everyone and conduct a self-imposed, tax-deductible conference with yourself.

Remind yourself of the life you once wanted to create - or re-create a new vision now - and ask this important question. How can I adapt my business to create the income I need to sustain the lifestyle I truly want?

Just sit and relax and paint a picture of what you really want. You could read some life changing books for inspiration, such as *The Richest Man in Babylon*, *Think & Grow Rich*, *The 4 Hour Work Week* and any other book that may get you back in touch with what you really want. If you're not much of a reader, there are plenty of great audio books out there. You might like to create a vision board for yourself, cutting out words and pictures of the life and business you want to create moving forward. At the very least, write yourself a vision statement and create your own life map with YOU in the centre.

Haven't tried this before? Here's an example of my ideal life. Each year, I spend 3 months working and living in a country I have never been to before. During my son's school semester in Australia, I work only in Sydney and Melbourne so I can spend less time travelling and more time with him. My ideal day starts with walking my dog, doing yoga, taking my son to school, working a maximum of 8 hours per day four days per week. I take singing lessons, enjoy cooking vegan food, reading and writing and spending my weekends relaxing with family and friends.

Since I revised my life vision, my business vision has been reshaped – and as a result I am more passionate and energetic than ever about working on my business to create more income in the areas that I love the most. It's about working smarter, not harder, in the time we have. The common mistake most small business owners make is to let their business rule their life – it may even become their life. Don't let this happen to you.

PS. If you would like a copy of my personal vision document for inspiration, please email info@connectmarketing.com.au and I would be happy to share it with you.

Mistake #2

They don't follow a plan and take a 'scattergun' approach to marketing.

When times get tough, many business owners start to panic and take a scattergun approach to their marketing, desperately firing off randomly in all directions, hoping something will hit the mark. Because new business leads have dried up, they pull out the old direct mail letter they used two years ago and send an untargeted, impersonal letter to their entire database and cross their fingers, hoping some of it will stick. Or they decide to spend \$15,000 re-running their Yellow Pages ad because the rep happened to contact them last week and things felt hopeless. Maybe they try a letterbox drop to 5,000 homes in the local area, despite the fact that 80% of these people aren't even interested in what they have to offer (the 80/20 rule always applies). Next they put a small, black and white ad in the local paper only to find that it appears right next to a full-page colour ad of their biggest competitor. You get the picture.

This is what I call 'reactive marketing'. Because they need more business FAST, they market in whatever way they know and at the lowest possible cost. They take a scattergun approach.

Wouldn't it be better to be a proactive marketer? Wouldn't you prefer to be so confident in your marketing plan and approach that you could tell the next random sales rep that knocks on your door "Sorry, our marketing plan and budget has already been allocated for the year".

I was recently contacted by a law firm that found out about our business through a Google search - they typed in 'marketing small business' and up popped Connect Marketing Professionals on the 'free (organic) search' list.

When I asked why they had decided to seek the help of a marketing specialist, the client advised "We got approached by our Yellow Pages rep to spend another \$12,000 again this year on our advertising.

We thought there must be a better way to spend our marketing budget that would get us better results, so we decided to investigate who was out there who might be able to help. We took a look at your website and we liked what we saw, so we decided to email you.”

When I asked why they decided to use our services, he replied “Well, I really liked your no BS approach when we talked on the phone. Then your PA sent me an email and I watched your YouTube clip which was attached to the bottom of her email signature. That really struck a chord.”

What’s my point? I didn’t go out and find this client. This client came to me through my strategic approach to e-marketing AND at NO COST per lead. Sure, I have invested time and money in creating our website over the years, but you can be a whole lot more strategic and creative and spend that \$12,000 Yellow Pages budget on building what could become one of the biggest assets you can create for your business instead – a powerful website. Remember, that’s how the law firm found us in the first place – on the internet. They didn’t look up the Yellow Pages to find a marketing consultant!

Remedy

Follow this simple 3 Step Process to get yourself a simple marketing plan as a starting point:

1. Get some marketing know-how. If you really don’t know the first thing about marketing, you need to educate yourself. You simply can’t afford to waste more time and money by continuing to scatter your marketing efforts. Marketing is really about generating more quality leads, so that you can convert these leads into sales. In tough times like these, it’s even more critical to generate more leads than you would normally, because less people are buying. I recommend you get up to speed with technology, the internet and the many possibilities that exist that you may not even be aware of. You don’t have to become an e-guru but you do need to be aware enough to be able to make wise, informed decisions on the kinds of skills required of your internet and website suppliers. I’ve learned that when it comes to both technology and marketing – ‘you don’t know what you don’t know’.

Just like ‘I don’t know what I don’t know’ about how to use my voice in a way that won’t shatter the windows. That’s why I have a singing teacher. Find yourself a great marketing program – whether that’s a book, workshop, CD program or a consultant - and get educated. It doesn’t need to be complicated or expensive. It does need to be practical, affordable and easy to action though – otherwise you’ll never get around to actually doing it! (Is this where I unashamedly plug my own *Small Business Big Brand* products and services? Check out www.connectmarketing.com.au for information not only on my book, workshops and packages, but to discover other great links, tools, tips and resources too.)

2. Do a marketing audit. This may sound painful, but it will save you from making the same mistakes again in the future (and this eReport is all about how to avoid the mistakes remember?) Take a trip down memory lane and revisit all the marketing activities you have used over the past three years. Look at what worked and what didn’t and in particular what results you achieved compared with how much you spent on it. That’s time and resources as well as actual out of pocket expenses (such as design, printing, postage etc). Ditch the ones that didn’t work at all (ie. they cost you more money than the value of business they generated). For the ones that ‘sort-of’ worked (they broke even or made you marginally more business) and may have future potential, keep them on the work-bench. There is no point in ‘throwing the baby out with the bath water’ if what you have done in the past is working or could work even better with a bit of a tweak. Naturally, put any campaign or activity that worked with stellar results at the top of the list so you can see how you can make it even better!

3. Get a marketing plan. Now you are starting to get the hang of this marketing stuff, it’s time to ask yourself if you have the skills, capability, time and interest in writing your own marketing plan? A good marketing plan will include a 90 Day Action Plan and a marketing calendar for the year ahead. If you answered no, then it really is worth investing in someone who can create a plan WITH you (NOT for you). The sooner you have a plan and some tactics and targets in place for your marketing, the sooner you’ll start getting new business in the door (the kind of business you actually want!). You wouldn’t consider driving your car in unfamiliar territory without a street directory, roadmap or a GPS. So why would you take that risk with your livelihood – your business!? I’m a big believer that it is best to find someone who will work with you to create your marketing plan together, rather than doing it for you. If you get someone else to write your marketing plan it will feel like it’s their plan, not yours, and it’s quite likely you won’t ever execute it. Look for someone who shows interest in your business and knows how to ask quality questions that will extract the best answers from you. Find someone with experience who can give you good advice, mentor you and who can create a simple, tactical marketing

plan that's a combination of their marketing skills and experience and your business experience. (How ironic – we happen to offer this service too! Find out more about our Kick Start Marketing Plans at www.connectmarketing.com.au. There are plenty of other great websites, with free tools, articles and resources that can help you with your marketing. When you visit our website, be sure to click on "resources".)

Mistake #3

They slash (or even wipe out) the marketing budget.

It never ceases to amaze me that, when times get tough, in most companies – large or small - the first thing that gets slashed is the marketing budget. Yet, this is the very budget that has the potential to help you generate more quality leads. Which is what gets you more sales, right? While I don't believe in wasting money, I do believe that marketing is the LAST thing companies should be cutting back on. If anything, the marketing budget should be increasing at times when your competitors are slashing their marketing budget, which puts you in an even better position to stand out even more. Sometimes you don't even need to spend more on marketing, but simply redistribute your budget on the tactics that are the most targeted and effective for you, as you will discover by reading on.

Based on my experience, I have found the successful business owners that thrive year after year, allocate at least 10% of their gross desired revenue as their marketing budget. That's become my rule of thumb for small businesses. So that means if you want to turn over \$500,000 next year, set aside \$50,000 for marketing. This could include costs for copywriters, your website, designers, networking, direct mail, sponsorships, client events, advertising, PR and more. These same smart business owners treat their marketing spend as an investment, not an expense.

It's also not about how much you invest, but how you invest it. A property investment adviser I worked with recently was about to spend \$40,000 of his \$50,000 marketing budget (that's 80%) on a one month print advertising campaign. After spending a day with me creating his marketing plan (this cost \$3,000 of his \$50,000 budget) he slashed his advertising spend to zero and was able to cleverly redirect his funds into a 6-pronged marketing program that included tactics such as: raising his profile and expertise in the local area market through a speaking and media campaign; hosting 'lunch and learn' series with clients and friends; an active and targeted networking and alliance building program; sponsorship of his local golf club (his biggest passion); and a whole new focus on the internet and e-marketing. His total marketing spend: \$45,000. Projected revenue: \$450,000.

Now you may think this 6-pronged marketing approach sounds like a lot of work and that sticking a few ads in the paper would be far easier. That may be true, it would be easier. But would it generate the same effect ie. sales!? Remember, advertising is here today and gone tomorrow. If anyone even saw your ad on the day it appeared, they definitely won't remember it in three months time when they actually want to buy what you were selling. You'll be scrambling for the next big marketing idea very quickly. By comparison, the marketing strategy above that my property advisor client undertook was targeted, consistent, kept his name out there and continues to help build his profile for the long term, so that over the years everyone will know who he is. Better still, his marketing budget won't really need to increase in line with the projected revenue increase.

Some of you may be thinking 'but I don't have a \$50,000 budget!' Don't despair – there are plenty of ways to find the funds for a marketing budget, so get creative! For example, some companies offer special funding packages for your marketing activities such as website development. What about asking your marketing suppliers if they would consider a payment program rather than a lump-sum payment? What about getting some bright, savvy young marketing students from the local university to work for you? Or perhaps you can set up a separate 'marketing fund' bank account, where you deposit 10% of every sale you make to fund future marketing activities?

Remedy

So what can you do to turn your business around now? Whether you already have a marketing budget (don't slash it!) or you don't have one at all, go back to Mistake #2 as a starting point. Put a plan in place and then allocate a budget. Then develop an excel spreadsheet that will highlight the estimated budget, expected leads, expected conversions and sales for each marketing activity. Do this for the 12 month period initially and then break it down into months.

Don't put it off any longer. The sooner you start, the sooner you will start to see the results. Get creative and find a way that you can invest in marketing, or do things differently than you have in the past. How you market yourself will be a major determinant of the future success of your business.

Mistake #4

They take an 'any client will do' approach.

Some years ago I was running a marketing training program for a group of planners of a big financial planning organisation. The hot topic of discussion was 'how to identify your target markets'. I asked one of the planners. "Who is your ideal client?" His response was both quick and deadly serious – "anybody who is breathing". Now unless you're a funeral director, "anybody who is breathing" is a very bad answer.

When things get tough, many businesses lose sight of the market they want to attract and they take on any client they can get. While this might bring in short term customers and revenue, it doesn't really position your business for the long term and can even disadvantage your company in years to come.

The other risk of losing sight of your target market is that you won't know where to spend your marketing dollars and effort. You will revert to the 'spray and pray' approach – you'll 'spray' your message to as many people that will listen in as many ways possible and 'pray' that someone will pick up the phone and call you.

I was working with a husband and wife team some time ago who were establishing a new financial services company. When they completed the ten step customer value proposition which asks 'who is your target market?' their response was property investors and wealth accumulators aged 25-50 years old. A good start, but let's get more specific. A target market is not a market unless you know who they are, where they are and how to get them. So how did they redefine their target market? People living in their local area within a 5km radius who are passionate about building serious wealth, have a good asset base and equity in their home of at least \$500,000. They are local business owners and professionals such as doctors, dentists, lawyers and accountants. They are aged 35-50 and they have two children who go to the two private schools in their suburb. They belong to the Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Clubs...and the list goes on. Now that's a target market!

I encourage you to get specific and really nut out what your ideal client looks like – and go for them. It's a big mistake to try and be everything to everybody. Because guaranteed you'll end up being nobody to anybody. 'Everybody' is NOT a target market!

Remedy

Go through your client database and look at the kinds of clients that you would like more of. Try and identify if there is a pattern that repeats itself. Paint an ideal picture of your clients and get really specific, using the example above. You may have two or three markets and each of these markets may require a very different approach. That's OK, at least you know their common traits. I suggest that you actually list the names of the clients/companies you want to work with and develop for yourself a top 100 client list. Can you think of a better way to get your marketing effort this targeted and focused?

Mistake #5

They reduce staff numbers to cut costs.

Slashing staff numbers is often the first thing many big businesses do when expenditure needs to be cut. Hundreds or even thousands of people get retrenched or take 'voluntary redundancy' packages to prop up the company financials and keep the shareholders happy. The sad thing for big business is that often the people that are made redundant are the very ones they should have kept. Many small business owners I know create a business from perceived adversity (ie. a redundancy). These are the ones who have had enough of 'toeing the party line' and want to be the master of their own destiny. They are often intelligent, creative, risk-taking, visionary people who treat a pay-out as an opportunity and not a threat to their very existence.

What's my point? Don't make the mistake big business makes when the going gets tough and slash staff purely for financial reasons. Be honest with your people - tell them times are tough. Be human and share your concerns. At the same time demonstrate your strength and commitment to the long-term life of the business. Reassure them they have a job if they can help you to grow the business. Being vulnerable is not a weakness – it's actually a strength that can inspire you and your staff to achieve greatness – not just for you and your own business but for their own sense of achievement too.

So, instead of sacking your people when things get tough, ask them how they can help you turn the business around. Get them involved in marketing the business. Make everyone the "Head of Marketing". Teach them how to generate and spot lead opportunities. Ask them to think about people they have met who could need your product or service. Give them some marketing know-how and education. Give them the licence to be creative and think about new ways to help you market your business. Incentivise them to seek out new business leads.

I once sat next to a woman at a lunch event who had a senior role in a large financial company. We talked about many things – mostly superficial chit-chat. It struck me, that NOT once did she strike up a conversation with me about money. She never asked who my banker was, if I was happy with them or what my biggest complaint about my bank might be. Nothing. And she missed one of the biggest marketing opportunities available - handed to her on a platter. I thought about her poor staff - the sales team who were out there desperately trying to drum up new business, when she had a hot new lead sitting right under her nose, ready to engage in conversation. This woman had no idea what marketing was and no idea that her role in leading her people, was to demonstrate by example and to be out there marketing on their behalf and to arrive back in the office to pass on potential new leads to her sales team.

As the leader of your business you need to lead by example and generate new leads - and spark this desire in your people too. Instead of sacking your staff, make everyone the "Head of Marketing" and see what new business opportunities open up for you.

Remedy

If you are a solo operator, I suggest you seriously consider employing someone so you can focus on working 'on the business' instead of 'in the business'. The day I employed my first staff member was the turning point for my business. Suddenly I had to generate the new leads and business to fund their salary and it inspired the growth of the business.

If you already have partners and staff in the business, develop an organisational chart for the business. Put yourself in as the CEO. Include all the usual divisions of a big company ie. Finance, IT, HR, Marketing, Sales, Customer Service and so on. Slot your people into management roles of each of those divisions and make someone responsible for marketing (even if it is you). Then give everyone a specific marketing task and ask them to report to the person responsible for marketing. Include the marketing task and expected results in their job description (with their input of course) and agree on an incentive that will motivate them to keep bringing in new leads.

Mistake #6

They communicate poorly with the people that matter most to their business.

When times get tough it's easy for business owners to go 'under cover', to hide behind the desk and forget to keep the communication channels open and flowing – work 'in' the business and keep it afloat. 87% of customers who leave your business will leave because of poor communication and service. A pretty compelling statistic to highlight the fact that when times are tough, we need to communicate even more with the people that matter most – your clients, suppliers, business alliances, family, friends and networks.

So instead of burying your head in the sand, think about ways that you can communicate even more regularly with the people that matter most to you and your business (and yes, that includes your spouse/partner and kids if you have them).

A wholesaler client of mine had been in business for about five years and was going through a difficult time. She had a catalogue of over 100 products that she was trying to sell to thousands of retail outlets across Australia.

It was a huge market and she just didn't know where to focus her marketing effort next. She had 'marketing paralysis' (which incidentally happens to every client that isn't clear on their target market). In a 30 minute mentoring session, I asked her three questions that snapped her out of her coma. Those questions (and answers) were: How many customers (retail outlets) do you currently have buying from you? 300. On average how many of your products does each of these clients stock? Just 3 out of a possible 100. How regularly do you 'love and communicate' with these clients – apart from sending them an invoice for recurring orders? Hmmmm...Never! Need I say more? Her gold was sitting right under her nose and she was oblivious to it.

I recommend that you develop a regular touch-point program for all business connections such as clients, regular suppliers and all other business associates. Again the 80/20 rule applies here. The touch-point program is aimed at the 20% that matter most. At timely and regular intervals, communicate with these people about what's happening in the economy, the news, your business or whatever is relevant to them. Send them a timely and pertinent news article (no boring newsletters please), refer a potential client to them (very powerful), ask them to share their business woes with you, invite them to your next 'Business Builders Lunch' or to Friday night drinks with you and your team or simply send them a birthday card or a thank you card. Just be sure you stay in touch and keep the communication channels open.

Your biggest repeat buyers, advocates and referrers are the people that know you and your business. Never ever stop communicating with them, thanking them and loving them. They are the life-blood of your business and biggest source of potential new business.

Remedy

Spend a few days going through your database of contacts. Apply the 80/20 rule and identify the 20% of people (include clients, suppliers, business associates) who are likely to give you more business or are advocates for you in some way. Then don't wait. Call them up. Invite them out for a coffee. Don't make it a sales pitch. Ask them for feedback on how you can improve your service to them. This is by far the best way to get honest feedback. I am not a big fan of mass customer surveys or questionnaires and believe the personal approach works best. Ask how you can help. Ask them what they need right now in their business (or personally if that's appropriate). Then create a touch-point program that will keep you in front of them at regular intervals. Make sure you touch base every six to eight weeks.

Mistake #7

They don't seek professional support or help until it's too late.

Many years ago a friend once said to me 'we are the sum of the five people closest to us'. I wasn't quite sure if this statement scared the hell out of me, or delighted me. A bit of both I suppose. But as the years go by I have come to learn that the people you surround yourself with are what you will become. If you want to be poor, hang around with poor people. If you want to be rich, surround yourself with rich people. If you want to be fit and healthy, hang out with fit and healthy people. If you want to be an author, hang out with authors.

When it comes to your business, the same applies. If you need to change an aspect of your business such as your financial management, find a specialist accountant or adviser who can help you turn things around. If you need a business coach to keep you on track, find one. If you want to become great at selling your services on the internet, find an e-specialist to help you out.

Other options for support are to create your own Mastermind Group with other business owners. The group could focus on general business issues and referrals or it could be set up to focus on a specific aspect of your business. I have set up an e-support group with seven other fabulous women with our sole focus being on the internet and technology as a means for growing our business. Other options for support are to find a mentor or set up your own advisory board.

When it comes to marketing, you need professional support and help too. One of the biggest mistakes you can make is to not allocate a percentage of your marketing budget to using professionals. Many business owners will write their own ads, copy, media releases, direct mail letters, website content to cut costs and then wonder why it doesn't achieve the results they would expect. Don't wait until it's too late and don't waste another day or dollar on doing everything yourself. Find someone who can help.

Around 30-50% of your marketing budget should be spent on paying professionals to help you out. That could mean outsourcing to freelancers, another company or perhaps you can bring in a marketing assistant or specialist to work part-time for you. The rest of your budget should then be spent on executing the tactics in your marketing plan. Take it from me. I am a marketer and I don't even do my own marketing. I use an adviser to develop my internet strategy and presence. I use a copywriter to write and edit my sales and marketing copy. This report was edited by a pro before it hit the public. Another pro designed my logo, my product branding, my book, workbooks, packaging, banners and more.

No man (or woman) is an island. Whatever you do, don't sit there on your own wondering what to do next, find the people you need to give you help. Be prepared to pay for it if you need. When you find the right person or people, it will be worth every dollar. Ultimately, if you have a vision for your business and know what you want to achieve, you will attract the support that you need to help you on your way. Don't wait until it's too late before you seek help!

Remedy

Review your business vision and make a list of all the kinds of professionals you could use to help you in your business. List the top three you need to achieve your goals for the next 90 days. Think about who you might know who does good work in these areas. Ask your friends in business who they use for their marketing (provided of course you like the way they market themselves and they are getting good results). Do some research on the internet too.

Mistake #8

They stop networking and building business relationships.

Going even further underground when things get tough is a common phenomenon for many business owners. They work more than ever 'in' the business (not on it) and stop networking and building relationships because they have clients to look after, bills to pay and kids to feed. And who the hell has the time to network anyway?

Having a strong network of other business owners is critical to sustain your business. After all, as the old cliché goes – it's not WHAT you know, but WHO you know. The more people who know you, the better.

9 out of 10 people I come across have an irregular and untargeted approach to their networking. In tough times, those 9 people aren't even doing occasional networking. They do NO networking! So what about the other 1 in 10? This business owner has a serious networking strategy as part of his/her networking plan. They attend at least one networking event per week. They have one coffee meeting each week with people they met at these networking events. They follow the rules of networking etiquette. They network in the spirit of giving. They follow up and refer people to one another. They understand that their 'networks are equal to their net worth'.

Just yesterday I had two coffee meetings with people I met while networking. In the first meeting I gained something - a radio interview. In the next meeting I gave something – an offer to have the lovely woman speak to 12 of my closest women friends in business. That's how the world works. What goes around, comes around. When times are tough, getting out of the office and meeting inspiring business people and sharing stories is one of the best things you can do for yourself. You'll learn that other people are doing it tough too. You'll discover how they are dealing with it and what they are doing to turn things around. You'll meet potential business alliances who may be willing to cross-refer clients. You will learn something new every time. You will connect with a community of like-minded people and it will make you feel really good!

Remedy

Even if you hate the idea of networking, give it a go. I love the idea of 'doing one thing that scares you every day'. Make networking this one scary thing. You can make it easier on yourself by reading up on how to network effectively. There are plenty of books about networking. Find yourself a networking mentor. Do a Google search and find networking groups in your local area - and be sure they meet your highly defined target market (see Mistake #4). Or find other local business groups to get involved in such as the Chamber of Commerce or Rotary Clubs. Book and pre-pay for four events over the course of the next month so you are committed and just get out there!

Mistake #9

They stop being creative and innovative and are slow to adapt to the environment.

Tough times are an opportunity for you to get creative and innovative. Smart business owners keep abreast of what is happening in the current economic climate. They find out what their competition is up to. They observe how consumers are behaving and what they are spending their money on and how they are buying. They find out how other business owners are adapting by reading business magazines and networking.

When it comes to marketing, you need to be creative and innovative too and adapt to what is happening outside the walls of your business. Maybe you should be repositioning and re-branding your business for a new market? Perhaps you could be sprucing up that old product sitting on the shelf that you never quite knew how to market properly? Maybe you could find a new niche service for your existing client base? How about repackaging a tired old product and refreshing it by offering a bonus or money back guarantee? It's time you got out of the rut of your old ways of marketing and adopted a brand new, fresh and clever approach.

How's this for an example of creative thinking? I had a phone call from my sister who is getting ready to move out of their apartment and rent it out while they relocate overseas for her partner's career. She told me "I just booked a carpet cleaner and I had to tell you about how they marketed themselves. I found an envelope addressed to our apartment in my mailbox this morning. It contained a flyer that simply said "Need your carpet and upholstery cleaned?" When she called them, she asked the guy how he could possibly have known that she needed her carpet cleaned? "Simple" he said. "We check out the real estate websites and find the addresses of people who are either selling or renting out their homes and we target them specifically – we figure they're going to need their carpet cleaned at some stage." Now that's creative - and a fantastic alternative to dumping 10,000 flyers in people's letterboxes!

When times are tough, the smart get creative. They don't sit still and just plod along with their old products and services and old ways to market them. They adapt to the changing environment. Is your business stagnating or innovating?

Remedy

Educate yourself on what's happening in the environment that your business operates in. How are consumer spending patterns changing? Do they still want what you have to offer? Call some customers and find out what they think about your products and services and how you could improve them. Get your staff together and create your own 'innovations' forum. If you have no staff, find some other business owners to create a forum of your own. Identify the top three areas in your business where you need to innovate and set yourself a 90 day action plan to make them happen.

Mistake #10

They reduce investment in technology and the internet.

Only 48% of small business owners in Australia even have a website and less than 10% of these business owners use their website to sell online. This represents a huge opportunity for you, considering that in 2007, Australian's spent \$11.35 billion online or an average of \$1,900 each per year*.

Over 90% of the thousands of business owners I meet admit that the internet and online marketing is an area that they are really struggling with – perhaps more than any other area. They know they need to invest in a web presence but they don't really know how to go about it. They don't know how much it should cost and what they should expect for that money.

So they build a basic brochure-ware site and stick it up on the internet in the hope that someone will find them. When things get tough, they spend even less time on taming and mastering the wild WWW beast because they think it will be too expensive.

* '50 Great e-businesses and the minds behind them' by Emily Ross and Angus Holland.

When it comes to the internet mistakes business owners make, I could give you a list as long as my arm. For example, there was one case where a staff member in the business had died but she was still featured on the front page of their website 12 months later!

Many business owners make the mistake of not maintaining a regularly updated database where all customer information can be kept in one single place for everyone to access. This is one of the fundamentals of good marketing. Having a good database will allow you to develop highly targeted marketing campaigns.

Many websites are boring, lifeless and dull from both a design and copy perspective. Or they are too busy and clever for their own good and this can also send potential customers the other way, as they wait impatiently for a fancy flash animation to load. Most sites are not built with the customer in mind – how they will navigate it and purchase online. Too often they are set up with the single focus on attracting new clients and forgetting that your website can also be one of the best ways to keep your existing clients coming back. People want good content today, not just a sales pitch. They want quality information and if you give it to them they will consider buying from you before the others who have poor quality (or no) content. Good websites are regularly updated and refreshed (this helps give you a good search engine ranking) and their content is fresh and current. They keep people engaged and coming back.

Most businesses do not have an e-marketing strategy in place to get the website found. You need to invest as much time and effort in getting your website found as you do in building it. Search engine optimisation, Google AdWords and online directories are just a few ways for people to find your website. Over 85% of all Australian web searches happen via Google. 70% of web searchers never go past the first page and 99% don't go past the second*. So when it comes to Google, if you are not found on it high up on page one, then you simply don't exist!

It's also easy for business owners to shy away from all the other ways to get their business found on the internet, what is now commonly known as Web 2.0. What about blogging (there are an estimated 110 million websites in the world and over 70 million blogs)? What about online social networks such as YouTube, Facebook, Squidoo, Twitter, forums....? Have you thought about podcasting, vodcasting, video streaming or webinars? Is your head spinning yet? Don't worry, I am not suggesting that you need to be doing all (or any) of these now. What I am suggesting, is that you should be thinking about it and progressing towards using at least two or three of these tools in the next 90 days in order to enhance your online marketing efforts.

There are also many ways we can improve the way we communicate through the use of technology. Do you use Skype or VOIP instead of the telephone? Do you have an intranet system to store all your files, systems and procedures that can be web accessed by all your staff regardless of where they are located? What about using webcam for video conferencing with clients, suppliers or staff?

For me, technology and the internet provide the ticket to freedom and flexibility. They continue to increase my revenue, making me more money while I sleep and enable me to work from anywhere in the world that I choose to be.

You can't hide out anymore when it comes to the internet, it's time to get your head out of the sand and use it to your advantage!

Remedy

Make sure that a web strategy is part of your overall marketing strategy and budget. Look for an e-marketing strategist to work with on your website – do NOT simply get a designer or an IT person to work on it in the early stages. Find someone who knows the web in all its glory and has some runs on the board and is willing to share their experiences with you. You don't have time to go and make all the mistakes yourself! When you find a web savvy person, ask them to do an audit on your website (if you have one already). You can try finding this person through recommendations and Google searches – if they are well found on Google they will know what they are talking about. The web is ever changing and you'll never be able to stay on top of every single trend, but the more you start to get a grasp of it and understand what works for you when you do your own web surfing and shopping, you'll get a good idea of what others will be looking for also.

*Source: www.aussiewebconversion.com

A Final Word

The purpose of this eReport is NOT to make you feel guilty if you put your hand up to committing to any of the mistakes we have covered here. Don't worry I've been there too! This eReport was created to help you start to think differently about marketing and take action by starting with some of the remedies we've suggested. Don't panic or go into overwhelm. It's never too late to start marketing your business better. Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day...nor was it built by one man!

This has been a long and fairly comprehensive eReport. If you've read this far, congratulations! Truly, the first step to success is having the awareness of where you are right now and identifying the warning signs that may indicate you have been going in the wrong direction and wasting valuable dollars, time and energy. You can stop doing that right now and start turning your business around.

And while this eReport does not have all the answers by any means, it's a great starting point – and hey, it didn't cost you a cent! By simply starting at point 1 and gradually working your way through the 10 points, you'll notice a significant improvement in the way you feel about your marketing possibilities – and you should definitely start seeing results, even by making one small change now!

Good marketing is a vital, long-term ingredient for any successful business. It's not a journey you can – or would want to – travel alone. So here's our shameless marketing tip: If you'd like a sounding board, some advice, one on one or group mentoring or practical, cost-effective education to help you take your business to the next level, please feel free to contact us at Connect Marketing Professionals to ask about our *Small Business Big Brand* products - book, 5CD Program, DVD and marketing workshops or our great Marketing Packages – Head Start, Jump Start and Kick Start. We're passionate about helping the 1.9 million small businesses of Australia become bloody brilliant at marketing, and if you'd like a helping hand, we'd love to help!



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