

Better Business Focus

Expert Inspiration for a Better Business

October 2009 Survival of the fittest

By Steve Smith

Page 1

- 01 **Survival of the fittest**
By Steve Smith
- 02 **Stop chasing your tail and get real results**
By Lorraine Pirihi
- 03 **No fear cold calling**
By Gavin Ingham
- 05 **Bestseller business books**
- 06 **Hairdresser gives free haircuts in pub what are you doing?**
By John Stanley
- 07 **Competitor annihilation - Nelson style**
By Philip Foster
- 09 **A marketer's dream**
By Barry Urquhart
- 11 **Emotional Intelligence**
By Martin Pollins
- 12 **Six steps to improve your sales results**
By Bryan McCrae
- 13 **All about a bit of give and take**
By Andy Bounds
- 14 **6 ways to cut costs**

Better Business Focus is the essential key for business owners and managers. It achieves that by focusing on the way in which successful businesses in the UK compete and manage their organisations.

It focuses on how people are recruited, coached and developed; on how marketing and selling is undertaken in professional markets as well as in markets with intense competition; on how technology and the Internet is reshaping the face of domestic and home business; and on how people are being equipped with new skills and techniques. In short, it offers expert inspiration for a better business.



Never has it been more important to set yourself apart from the crowd. Organisational change and downsizing has left many of us living under the cloud of redundancy or potential job losses or an unwanted change of role. A frightening prospect for many of us and with tough times ahead, your own personal development has never been more important. The job market is shrinking and in many sectors we are competing in the same arena, with the same set of skills as everybody else. So when it comes to the crunch, what makes you indispensable?

To ensure we continue to win it's crucial to understand what makes you different and capitalise on this unique selling point. Trying to be good at everything can be a recipe for disaster. Think about it from an employer's point of view, with the market flooded we are inundated with CV's all from candidates with roughly the same skill sets and qualifications, with limited time to go through them something needs to stand out, grab our attention, and set you apart. Find your niche and develop your unique strengths.

As an athlete, Olympic high jumper Steve Smith knew this more than most, competing with other high jumpers most of whom were four to five inches taller than him, left him at a disadvantage, he couldn't compete on their level, he had to do something different and this led to him developing the one thing that he believed gave him the edge and filled him with confidence. Whilst they all worked hard, they all had a great team, they all followed a

Survival of the fittest

By Steve Smith

competed for the same medals, the niche for Steve came from working on his diet. Working closely on nutrition enabled him to get more from each session. His body worked at optimal state when it was 80% alkaline and 20% acid, this took immense preparation and for Steve involved starting the nutritional process at 5am each morning! Steve didn't believe that any other high jumper went to that level of preparation for each individual session so this 5am start ultimately gave him the edge and increased his self belief that he could compete at the highest level.

So what is your 5am start? What sets you apart and ultimately fills you with self belief and belief in your own brand? It's true from an individual perspective, and in a market driven by customer choice, organisations have to think the same way too.

Think about some of the UK's current thriving organisations. Many compete, just like you, in traditional markets. What are they doing differently? One organisation that consistently out performs the market is IKEA.

So what is their value proposition?

Young first time or price sensitive buyers who want stylish, space efficient and scalable furniture and accessories at very low prices.

So what sets them apart from other furniture retailers - Take your pick!

- In house design of all products
- A wide range of styles displayed in huge out of town warehouses.
- Self selection

- Extensive do it yourself assembly, catalogues, videos – Don't expect world class customer service (But does the target audience want it?)
- Long opening hours
- Suburban locations with huge parking lots
- Child care provided in store
- Pick it up and take it with you
- On site, low cost restaurants

Now compare that to their competitors.

- Higher priced fully assembled products
- Customisation of finishes
- Most lines sourced externally
- Medium sized showrooms with limited models on display
- Long lead time for orders
- Extensive time consuming sales assistance
- Traditional retail hours
- Is it any wonder that they outperform the market?

Now that's organisations, but if we are to win we have to think differently, and think of ourselves as a business. To win in tough markets organisations aim to create a unique and sustainable competitive position and we have to too.

So like Ikea, what is your value proposition, what do you offer that your competitors don't?

Try the following task to get you thinking in the right direction.

First, ask yourself the question, what do I bring to my organisation that others don't?

It's about: Getting results
 It applies to: Business Owner/Managers
 Sales Directors

Main slant:
 Time management tips to help your
 business



First, ask yourself the question, what do I bring to my organisation that others don't? Take five or ten minutes to brainstorm a list of things that can set you apart.

Now go through the list and ask yourself:

- Do they make you unique?
- Do they add value?
- Do they give you an advantage over your competitors?

If yes, how can you major on them to make sure you stand out from the pack?

With shrinking budgets, personal development can be off the agenda for many organisations but it has never been more important to increase your own personal stock. This is what can give you the edge, people, not price are an organisations greatest asset, developing yourself could be the key to creating a sustainable career path and making you indispensable. So what are you doing to ensure that you are investing in your biggest asset...YOU!

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About the author:

For further guidance or advice on how to raise the bar on performance, visit www.raisethebar.co.uk, or contact us by telephone on +44 (0)151 426 0110 or e-mail at info@raisethbar.co.uk

“The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.”

Nelson Mandela



Stop chasing your tail and get real results

By Lorraine Pirihi

Do you ever feel overwhelmed and exhausted by all of the things you need to do to keep your business growing?

When you feel overwhelmed, do you sometimes freeze and not take any action at all? This is actually very common. Many people experience this. Can you relate?

If not, please skip this article. But if so, please read every word that follows. I'm going to share a few "time management tricks" with you, but the truth is that time management doesn't really work.

Something else does, and I'll share that with you too.

Here are the time management techniques that many of my clients have successfully used (maybe they'll work for you too)...

Group tasks together

Have appointments on the one day. Block times for e-mails and phone calls. When you're out pick up the mail, go to the post office and do all your errands at the same time.

You'll find yourself twice as productive from this one simple idea.

Schedule activities

Most people find that when they have an appointment, they don't miss it (they may run late, but they usually keep it). So, if you have a big project you're working on, set aside specific times to work on it in your diary.

You'll find that you procrastinate far less when you have a schedule and you'll make far more progress on your projects.

Make a list

Simple but it works! If you can get all of your ideas out of your head and

onto a piece of paper, you'll be able to immediately relax and you can get a great sense of accomplishment each time you cross something off the list.

Prioritise

Once you have a list, now you want to make sure you get the most important things done first. Of course, if there are a few quick and easy things you can do to make progress, get momentum, and get a few things crossed off your list, go for it.

If you can get clear on the top 3-5 most important things to work on, and you work on it, you'll make the greatest impact on the results you're wanting to produce.

Say 'no'

Don't let your time get chewed up by other people's priorities.

These tips will help you but to be honest, they are not enough to help you master your time, get on top of the day to day activities and make you more profitable.

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About the author:

Lorraine Pirihi, The Productivity Queen is the creator of "The Productivity and Profit System" the complete one-on-one training program for solopreneurs and small businesses. She's a productivity expert, leading business coach, author and speaker with straight-shooter, no-fluff strategies that really work. For your complimentary audio CD "10 Habits of Highly productive and Profitable People" go to www.productivityqueen.com.



No fear cold calling

By Gavin Ingham

At some point or other nearly every salesperson has to cold call. Whether it's ringing totally new clients, chasing leads, gaining referrals, networking or following up on a conference card handed in, it's not something that many salespeople are that comfortable with.

Being able to cold call confidently, professionally and effectively will not only open up more potential business for you, it will also allow you to feel more in control of your own destiny and much more empowered. Here are my top tips for cold calling success.

Plan and prepare your opening statement

The more salespeople that I work with, the more important I think this is. I have made tens of thousands of cold calls and listened to far more. Whether cold or indeed warm calling, the biggest problem by far is lack of client engagement. This can be down to several factors but one of the most significant is a failure to plan and prepare a decent opening statement.

An opening statement needs an introduction, benefits to explain to your prospect what's in it for them and a bridge (or link) to your questions or your close. Without these it's impotent. Make sure that the benefits you offer are a) really benefits and b) relevant to the person that you are speaking to and not just you. My top tip would be to imagine yourself in your client's shoes and ask yourself,

"What will this call potentially do for my business and why should I care?"

Get into the right state of mind and expect success.

Unmotivated people do not make good salespeople. Let's face it, who would buy off someone who didn't appear to believe their own message? When I work with sales teams I am constantly amazed by the number of salespeople who pick up the phone expecting rejection. It doesn't seem to matter whether they are making cold calls, customer care calls or follow up calls.

Only a small percentage of top performers absolutely expect success

Attitude and mindset are infectious. Clients know within seconds whether you are congruent with your message or not. I once did a verbal survey of my clients asking them why they bought from me in the first place. The overwhelming, and surprising at the time, answer was, "It felt like the right thing to do!"

Expecting success is a crucial part of your success and one that you need to work on if you want to be a cold calling superstar.

Know why this is important to you

On a day to day basis most of us forget why we are doing certain things. We find ourselves cold calling because we have to or because we are told to. If you want to make significant changes in your

cold calling habits then it is going to require commitment, focus and persistence.

The best way of leveraging these attributes from yourself is to get honest with yourself and ask, "Why is cold calling important to me? What does it do for me? How does it link to my goals and my dreams?"

When working with individual salespeople on teams I can usually tell who will take action and who will not and it's often down to whether the individual has a need or a want or not. Holding yourself to a higher standard of behaviour and performance is hard if you have no reason to do so.

Invest some time now and work out why cold calling is important to you and your success.

Practise your delivery focusing on pace, pitch and tone

In face to face sales, a large percentage of the message (some studies suggest 55%) is non-verbal. On the phone, this element is missing and this means that the message consists only of the words and how you say them. Whilst the words are vitally important, the way that you say them will be directly linked to your success or ultimate failure.

Having listened to thousands of calls, I can honestly say that the message behind the message for most calls is, "I'm bored, tired and putting in the numbers and you're probably going to say "No" anyway!"

Would you buy from someone who was saying this to you? Me neither!

Get someone you trust to listen to your calls and give you feedback on pace, pitch and tone to make sure that you are transmitting the right message to your clients.

Plan and prepare relevant questions

Questions and client interaction are paramount for selling. Most salespeople think that they are good at questioning. Most are wrong. Planning and preparing good questions is something that all salespeople should do regularly.

Questions are incredibly important because they focus the mind. This is as true when talking to others as it is when talking inside of your own head. Most of us put the focus in the wrong place both internally and externally by asking the wrong questions of ourselves and others.

Imagine ringing a new client, introducing yourself and giving a few benefits. They're listening but they're not on board yet. Now imagine asking a question such as, "Does that sound like something that would be of interest to you?" or, "Would you be interested in meeting up then?"

These questions are targeted wrongly and the resounding answer that you would likely get would be, "No!".

Questions need to focus the client's mind on something that you would like them to think about such as, "Have you ever had any difficulties with...?" or "How do you currently...?"

Have your support tools to hand

Part of being professional is being prepared. When you are on the phone you need your diary, notes, paper and pens to hand. I cannot count the number of times I have watched a sales "professional" start to close for a meeting and then realise that they didn't have a diary open on their desk or on their computer. After a long pause they invariably lose rapport and the potential meetings.

Expect success, work out what support tools you need to be successful and make sure that they are to hand.

Divert calls and minimise disruptions

A recent survey studying working habits suggested that the average worker actually works for less than 3 hours in an average working day...

Most people seem to find so many extraneous and irrelevant tasks to do on a day to day basis that it's a wonder that they ever get anything productive done at all. To be a sales superstar you need to work out what activities bring you success and then set aside time to do them.

Work out your ratios and then work out how many calls you need to make to achieve your personal goals. Once you've done that get on and do it. Most salespeople actually spend too much time "on the phone". The problem is that they're not focused enough when they are on the phone. Try turning off your mobile, diverting all calls and asking others not to disturb you. Get yourself energised and prepared and then make 45-90 minutes worth of top quality, proactive calls. You'll be amazed by how much you can achieve in such a short period of time when you are focused, on track and in the zone.

Set clear objectives for your sessions

Many salespeople make calls without any objectives or goals. This is a complete waste of time. You need to plan and prepare all proactive sales sessions and pre-decide on your objectives and how you are going to measure them.

Set realistic objectives and targets and stick to them. This way will you be able to improve, grow and get the results that you want.

Don't put the phone down

Whether cold or warm calling, it's important that you keep the energy flowing when you are making proactive sales calls. It's often far too easy to get distracted, start doing something else instead or take ever increasing breaks between each call.

One very effective way of achieving shorter break times and therefore more proactive energy when calling is to not put the telephone down between calls. Not only does this shorten break times between calls but you also save on the psychological energy of having to pick the phone up again before every call.

I also recommend that wearing a headset increases the work rate of nearly all salespeople when working on the phone. Many salespeople find this an uncomfortable suggestion, perhaps because of negative connotations they associate with wearing headsets.

This is a shame, because it can make a dramatic difference for some and a marked difference for most, so I urge you to try it out. After trying it out for a few days, most salespeople agree that it is a far more productive and empowering way of working.

Using a headset also improves the quality of your communications and therefore your calls by freeing up your arms, loosening up your neck and shoulders and allowing you to speak and move more naturally.

Master your physiology

Your physiology is the way that you use your body - your posture, movement, facial expressions and breathing. Changing your physiology changes your state. If you were to walk into a room full of salespeople on the phone you would instantly know if they were up for it or not by the way that they were sitting, moving, talking and so on.

Take a moment to think about your physiology when on the best telephone calls that you've ever made. How were you sitting or standing? How did you move? What were your facial expressions? What were your voice patterns?

How did you hold your head? What was your breathing like? Did you use a headset or handset?

Get your sales development log-book and make a note of your findings. Over the next week concentrate on starting all of your telephone sessions from this physiology and maintaining it throughout. If you find your physiology slipping into one that is less resourceful then get yourself straight back into your peak physiology.

Be aware that changing something even as simple as your physiology can potentially push you outside of your comfort zone. I always encourage sales teams that I work with to commit to proactive activities before 9am (the 9 before 9 principle). Salespeople like this principle and often decide to make 9 cold calls before 9am.

This is a great idea but frequently means making the calls in front of their peers in the office who are all sitting there eating their breakfast cereals or their croissants. This can make them feel potentially uncomfortable and may well be unnatural for them...

But then so are the extra commissions when they roll in but they usually manage to cope with those ok!

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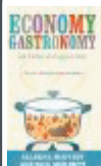
About the author:

For sales tips, tactics and strategies that will increase your sales and grow your business visit www.gaviningham.com now. You can read articles, listen to podcasts and join the Success newsletter.

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Bestsellers



- 1 Economy Gastronomy: Eat Better and Spend Less** (Hardback) By Allegra McEvedy and Paul Merrett
Michael Joseph
Price: £11.00



- 2 Memoirs of a Radical Lawyer** (Hardback) By Michael Mansfield
Bloomsbury Publishing PLC (7 Sep 2009)
Price: £15.00



- 3 The Secret** (Hardback) By Rhonda Byrne
Simon & Schuster Ltd
Price: £7.78



- 4 What Every Body Is Saying: An Ex-FBI Agent's Guide to Speed-reading People** (Paperback) By Joe Navarro
Harper Collins Publishers (1 April 2008)
Price: £8.39



- 5 The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World** (Hardback) By Niall Ferguson
Allen Lane (30 Oct 2008)
Price: £5.99



BOOK OF THE MONTH

Better, Stronger, Faster

By Brad Rosser, Infinite Ideas

Price £18.04 plus P&P

This month sees the publication of Better, Stronger, Faster. London-based Brad Rosser is a highly successful entrepreneur who worked at Virgin as Sir Richard Branson's right-hand man. When researching his book, he was shocked to learn that only 20% of new businesses survive to see their fifth birthday.

The reader will learn how to address all of the hard business issues and how to avoid the many pitfalls that so many start-ups face. Alan Bond, the legendary Australian businessman says: "Brad always gets the deal done...and knows the tricks of the trade."

To buy the book of the month online from the Better Business Focus bookshop for just £18.04 plus P&P, or for further information please call: (01730) 233 870 and quote BBF Bookshop. Source: <http://www.global-investor.com/bbf>



Hairdresser gives free haircuts in pub what are you doing?

By John Stanley

The key to managing your marketing strategy in these difficult times is to be more proactive in your marketing and if possible reduce the costs of the marketing at the same time. Is this possible? The answer is a resounding YES.

When times were good, marketing was relatively easy. You could, for example, put an advert in the local newspaper and wait for the customers to flock in. That strategy today may not work. In fact some marketing guru's are actually talking about the demise of the newspaper during this recession, they may not be around in the traditional format for much longer.

Marketing today needs to be low investment and high return and it needs to be so different that the customer will actually acknowledge what you are doing needs their support. You need to create a tipster marketing campaign that will get people talking.

What is the answer? Provide what you do for free. I realise that many readers of this article will probably not read past this sentence as they feel that providing their service for free will kill off their business.

Imagine if you were a hairdresser

A hairdresser in the United Kingdom, seeing his business decline, realised traditional marketing was not getting customers back in his door. He needed to do something dramatic to get his business back on track. He decided to talk to his local pub owner and ask if he could provide free haircuts for the bar patrons for one hour. The answer was a yes, the result was the hairdresser had a busy hour providing the free hair cut service. He made it clear that the offer was only available for a one hour period.

At the end of the session he handed out business cards with details of his business and invited the patrons to visit his premises for a haircut once the pub was closed. He then enjoyed a drink with the patrons, most of whom paid for his drink as a Thank You. The result of his marketing campaign was a huge success and he is now enjoying trade in the recession while his competitors who are relying on the old true and tested marketing methods are still seeing their businesses decline.

What are the lessons?

If you want to get the message across when the customer does not want to listen you need to dare to be different. You need to invest time rather than money in finding out where else your customers go and how you can create a theatrical experience using your services and products in that new environment. That environment could be the local pub, coffee shop, shopping mall, local service club or wherever.

Once you have selected your venue you need to offer the customer something for free. When the wallet and purse is being kept shut, you need to offer something radically different to encourage them to open it again.

Free is an emotional word that will attract attention in today's economic climate. Consumers want to know what they can get for free, so you need to create a curiosity that matches the economic time.

Then you need to follow through. Our hairdresser put a time limit on the offer and then had loads of business cards ready to hand out to the rest of the audience.

Plus, he realised it was not the haircut, that created the buzz, it was how he did it. He realised that he was in the theatre business and that it was his own persona that he was selling, not the haircut. His personality was a key to the success of the marketing campaign.

He built on a number of key marketing strategies. First, he was relying on Tipster Marketing; people talking about him after he had left the scene. Plus he was making the local customers aware that he was a local business person that needed help; he was into neighbour to neighbour marketing which always strengthens in tough economic times. In addition, people will support innovators over complainers in difficult trading periods.

The challenge is what can you do to get your business into a situation where it will be noticed and customers will start taking about you.

In case you are interested this is a true story, one of our colleagues Chris Drysdale, contacted me to provide the story.

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About the author:

John Stanley is a retail business coach, speaker and author. His specialist areas are customer focused layout, customer focused merchandising, customer focused marketing and branding, and customer focused selling and service. E-mail John on: john@johnstanley.cc or visit his website: www.johnstanley.cc



Competitor annihilation - Nelson style

By Philip Foster

During these dire economic times it's heartening to read about positive leadership. At present too many of our political and business leaders are "hunkered down in their bunkers" and looking miserable. They evidently hope that this ensures that we think that they're taking life seriously.

Now in 1805 we had a really big crisis here in the UK, nothing less than the threatened invasion and conquest by Napoleon. How we overcame this crisis is excellently described in "Men of Honour Trafalgar and the Making of the English Hero" by Adam Nicholson. So if you are bored by reading management books have a read of this.

It has always puzzled me as to how Nelson achieved such crushing victories during the 1700's many naval battles took the style of elaborate court waltzes. One fleet would lose a ship and retire with the Admiral explaining that he had kept "the fleet in being". The winning Admiral did not pursue in case he was lured into a risky encounter. Then along comes Nelson talking of "annihilation", one of his favourite words, and destroying enemy fleets at the Nile, Copenhagen and Trafalgar. Now at this stage, I must apologise to those readers whose ancestors may have been on the wrong end of his cannonballs. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time. During these battles the ships on both sides were similar in size and design, and carried the same number of guns and personnel. The crews were patriotic and all believed that they were fighting on the right side.

The causes of success concern leadership, training, behaviours, processes and accountability, all highly applicable to sales operations today.

Leadership from the front

Nelson believed that "Captains should show in themselves a good example of honour and virtue to their officers and men." Officers were expected to train others by showing them how, especially the more hazardous tasks. Before he lost his arm, Nelson often raced young midshipmen to the topmasts and back scrambling up the ropes. All younger Officers were expected to lead raiding parties. So it was all about leading from the front. Nelson would have been encouraged by senior managers meeting their largest accounts and not retreating to their offices to send e-mails.

Staying cool under pressure

In the early stages of the Battle of Trafalgar the French and Spanish ships opened fire first whilst the British held their fire. On the British ships, crews were ordered to lie down or go below decks out of harms way. Except for Officers, who walked the upper decks to show cool courage. At all times Officers had to be properly dressed, never to walk around with their hands in their pockets, and never to swear. Today big accounts expect to meet senior managers of suppliers to discuss critical incidents in high-pressure meetings.

Zeal

A word used frequently in Officer appraisals at the time. Zeal means "great energy or enthusiasm for a cause or objective" (Oxford English Dictionary), showing a surging hunger to excel. Unfortunately it has become associated with zealot, "a fanatical and uncompromising follower" Officers were expected to show zeal in moving close to an enemy ship and in hand to hand fighting. Failure to show zeal was reprimanded. Winning today certainly

needs a surging desire to excel, so zeal should be a key quality when recruiting and appraising account managers.

Staying close to the action

Nelson understood that in battle, signal flags could be shot away or obscured by smoke. So his instruction was very clear "... in case signals can neither be seen nor perfectly understood no Captain can do very wrong if he places his ship along side that of the Enemy". Now I'm not a big fan of double negatives so what this really means is "if in doubt stay close to an enemy ship and blast away".

Crews were ok with this order for this is how they earned their bonus. Successful Account Managers today stay close to their customers to build relationships and exploit the weaknesses of competitors, even if there is a lack of clarity back at their own head office.

Rewards

Were motivating and systematic, and capturing an enemy ship meant prize money. Most Officers were the second or third sons of landowners or merchants, which meant they inherited very little. So to create wealth they had to capture ships. The novels of Jane Austen describe how an increase in wealth added to a man's marriage appeal. The prize money was divided out to all of the crewmembers, and for some senior Petty Officers this could help them set up as an innkeeper or blacksmith. Failure to capture a ship meant no prize money, no promotion, and disgrace and criticism in the newspapers.

Meritocracy

There was scheming, manoeuvring and corporate politics in the Royal Navy, as with all organisations. But

there was also a promotion review designed to test the nerve of young Officers and rehearse them for future challenges. After six years of service as a Midshipman, a young Officer stood before three experienced Captains and was quizzed about warfare, ship handling, and “what if ...” situations. This was a pressure meeting and only the best passed. Once they passed this test, all of the Officers were on the edge and kept there by a combination of concerns about promotion, high rewards and improving social status, often measured by their success in capturing ships, leading raiding parties etc. There was no room for complacency.

Processes and accountability

Understanding who does what and how it is done is critical for success. For those who have visited HMS Victory or seen the movies, these ships were killing machines with little in the way of creature comforts. The ship was a model of order and the crew was expected to work calmly and in silence. The frequent giving of orders and shouting was regarded as a symptom of inadequate management, rather like too many e-mails and frequent “crisis meetings”. Everyone knew what to do and how to do it. If someone was unsure, there were Order Books, which could be read by any crewmember who was unsure of the tasks. Processes were clearly described and every one was expected to read them and know them.

Measurement

“If it is measured it is done” was vital then as it still is today. The focus was on measuring the processes needed to win. As well as cleanliness, order and a healthy crew, there was one crucial measure. How fast a 32 lb cannonball could be fired by each gun crew. The British could fire one every 1.5 minutes the enemy, one every 5 minutes. Therefore HMS Victory could deliver three smashing broadsides to the enemy’s one. After a while victory was assured. So crews were trained, rehearsed and motivated to perform this key process excellently.

Conclusion

So there we have it, winning Nelson style was about:

1. Creating a desire to annihilate the competition
2. Leading from the front
3. Staying cool under pressure
4. Staying close to the action
5. Motivating with rewards for all
6. Appraising fairly
7. Clear processes and accountability
8. Measuring key processes and behaviours

In a flat or declining economy the way to grow revenue is at the expense of your competitor. Therefore competitor annihilation is as relevant today as it was in 1805.

But this also begs the question – If this was so clearly understood 200 years ago why after thousands of books on economics and management are we now in this economic hole?

As that debate is obscured by “smoke” perhaps we should concentrate on staying close to the action.

So let’s start applying those ideas and return to winning.

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About the author:

Philip Foster created Account Strategy in 1997 in order to help companies grow the share of wallet with their accounts and prospects in a winning, systematic and timely manner.

Learning processes include workshops, coaching and conference sessions. Over 3000 people have participated in the workshops.

www.accountstrategyrealisation.com

Best Business Advice*

Fools and Mistakes

I am not a fan of the saying: “Fools learn by their own mistakes; wise men (and women!) learn by the mistakes of others.”

Many successful people have learnt from their own mistakes; the trick is to learn the first time.

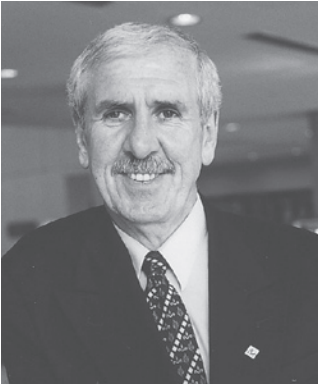
When I was a young marketing executive at my family’s drinks business, I negotiated a deal with British Rail Catering for miniatures of Martell Cognac to be sold on all their trains. I was very proud of myself until my boss told me that the extra penny off every miniature I had agreed with the BR buyer was 96p a case of nearly £10,000 for 10,000 cases pa! I learned then that every penny counts and attention to details is key.

After an eccentric career in law, drink and the arts, Robert Gordon Clark founded London Communications Agency in 1999. The company has grown by over 25% every year since then.

*Taken from Best Business Advice. A book which includes 75 examples of memorable business advice recounted by leading practitioners in the UK public relations industry.

“Failure will never overtake me if my determination to succeed is strong enough.”

Og Mandino



A marketer's dream

By Barry Urquhart

Pre-qualified prospects.

A business ideal has arrived.

The new reality in marketing and business today is that when business owners, managers and sales people first talk to new and prospective clients, many are pre-qualified. Indeed, self qualified.

These often first time prospective purchasers are well informed, confident, discerning, often articulate and assertive. Moreover, they are ready to buy and have the capacity to conclude a deal, typically, now.

Significantly, in the current communications and relationship era the power base has shifted to consumers, clients and customers. The key leverage is the readily inexpensive access to multiple channels and sources of information.

In many respects, business leaders, marketers, public relations consultants and advertising agents, in particular, have witnessed an ebbing of their previous seemingly impregnable power structures.

Images, status, market positions and bases for market competitiveness and appeal are now determined to some considerable degree by spheres of influence, over which businesses have little or no influence or control.

A weakening in market presence, market share and market positioning can be and often is a consequence of a lack of control over or consideration by many businesses of the media channels which are readily accessible to and by prospective clients.

Insufficient attention and resources are being allocated to the aspects of website profiles, interactivity, currency and relevance. Similarly the customer, purchaser or client ordering experiences begin from the initial contact with an e-mail address, website, telephone system and the ingress points of a parking area.

Unkempt and poorly maintained parking areas of premises are physically conspicuous to all. What is not truly appreciated by some is the poor house keeping which is evident on websites, message bank messages, on mobile and landline telephone systems and the remarkably unfriendly, obstructionist automated telephone systems.

Technophile consultants who strive to increase the efficiency of clients communication processes too often overlook the effectiveness of encouraging and facilitating easy and prompt access to individual branches, departments and people by prospective, existing and past clients. Remedial action is often required to ensure the channels of communication are open and welcoming.

Daunting realisation

It is a daunting realisation to some that prospective clients and customers have formed reasoned opinions, images and perceptions about an entity, its products and services, long before actually speaking to a team member.

Beware the words, "I've heard about you, your business and the products." That raises the question:-

"Who said what about whom and when?"

In some instances, the entity and its people are on the back foot before the relationship is established, the negotiating begins and the sale approaches closing.

There are five phases through which the consumers, customers and clients progress towards the successful completion of a sale, being:-

- Apathy and ignorance
- Interest
- Information
- Sale
- Service

Sales driven and oriented organisations typically skip or give tertiary consideration to the initial three phases. That is one major contributing reason for wide fluctuations in demand, varying response rates to advertising initiatives and a decided lack of customer loyalty.

Contemporary and astute marketers now recognise that a passive approach to overcoming consumers apathy and ignorance, stimulating interest and providing current relevant and easily accessible information is dangerous and exposes the entity to heightened risk and possibly uncompetitive standings.

Total control over all channels of communications about aspects of the entity, its policies, people, products and services is not possible. However, engagement is.

More than ever before in the annals of business and corporate history it is imperative that pre-emptive initiatives be taken to set the agenda and to formulate the purchase criteria which will or

should be applied by prospective clients and customers to conclude a favourable, mutually rewarding decision.

Let me share with you a recent experience that is a very apt case study.

A legal practitioner, a partner of an aggressive second tier firm of solicitors and lawyers, expressed disappointment and, to some degree, bewilderment, that his group was not enjoying more briefs, revenue, profits, market share and dominance.

A strong schedule of television advertising had developed an acceptable, if not desirable, presence in the marketplace.

Unaided awareness, recognition and prompted recall are simply not enough. This experienced and qualified lawyer did not appreciate that.

Many corporate and individual clients are sensitive to the professional fee charge rates of legal practitioners. The typical 6 minute metre countdown is scorned at by many.

In this particular practice, the professional fee rate is charge at intervals of 100 units per hour. That's right, the metre ticks over every 36 seconds.

Little wonder then, the pathway to the door of this practice is not well worn.

Upon receipt of information about the charge rating system, the interest of prospective clients quickly wanes and regression towards a state of apparent apathy and indifference (if not ignorance) is achieved.

DIY Home Buyers

An increasing number of new home builders are now sensitive to and are capturing the imaginations and custom of a new evolving market segment, the Do-It-Yourself Home Designer.

These people enjoy the challenge and satisfaction of completing their own initial and rudimentary house designs.

To match that demand a select few new home builders have updated their interactive websites to enable people to modify online standard house designs or to develop their own plan from certain modules of a home layout.

It's creative, responsive and above all, it is providing a competitive advantage.

By the time the homebuilding company sales representative speaks to the prospective buyer for the first time, he, she or they are pre-qualified, have determined a cost estimate and a budget and, in many instances, have received approval for finance. Welcome to Marketing 2009.

Online

Goodwill and good relations can and should be established with initial telephone contact made by a prospective client and customer.

Inefficient, outdated telephone systems are nominated by consumers to be the single most annoying, recurring and frustrating experience they encounter.

Obsolete messages and outdated tape and disk, on-hold telephone answering services reflect poorly on the relevance and imagination of the company.

International operator Online Onhold is able to customise messages and change them daily, if required, to provide weather patterns, stock market reports, local news and industry specified briefings. That alone can positively pre-qualify a prospective client or customer.

So, get to it. Start developing strategies and tactics which enable prospective customers to become pre-qualified.

Contact: Mark Horwood
Online Onhold
E-mail: mark
horwood@olmediacom.com
Web: www.olmediacom.com

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About the author:

Barry Urquhart is renowned internationally for his strikingly accurate forecast of the finish of the economic boom in 2008.

His well documented projection from early in 2006 of a specific date made media headlines around the world and enabled clients to plan for the event ... 10.35pm, Sunday 24 August, 2008. It was the closing moments of the Beijing Olympics.

Barry's subsequent warnings of the credit meltdown, increasing unemployment levels and branch, plant, model and services closures have enabled companies, large and small, to gain and sustain competitive advantages. His customised keynote addresses are in demand around the world.

Tel: 006108 9257 1777

E-mail: Urquhart@marketingfocus.net.au

Web: www.marketingfocus.net.au

Don't worry if you don't know what the word **IRR means, here's an explanation:**

IRR - a basis by which to measure investor returns, being effectively the compounded annual rate of return on their investment, including interest, dividends and realisation profits. It is used, for example, by venture capitalists to measure achievement and in such cases the IRR is greatly affected by the timing of exit.

Source: Bizezia's Glossary of Financial Investment and Business Terms and Ratios available through Bizezia's Online Business Library the UK's leading online business library with 700+ publications.



Emotional intelligence

By Martin Pollins

"After you pass your driving test - that's when you'll learn how to drive". These words must have been uttered a few million times. Most adults have long come to realise that what was taught in school (including driving school) isn't necessarily all that there is to know about life and the world. It isn't the smartest academically competent people who always become the most successful - in the end, a high IQ isn't the most important factor when the real world is encountered.

In 1991, Peter Salovey, a Yale psychologist, and John Mayer, of the University of New Hampshire, coined the phrase emotional intelligence (EQ) although it is more popularly credited to Daniel Goleman. EQ can explain why the smartest people aren't always the wealthiest, why some people are liked almost immediately upon introduction while others are distrusted. Emotional intelligence describes qualities like understanding one's own feelings, empathy for the feelings of others and the regulation of emotion in a way that enhances living.

Walter Mischel, a Columbia University psychologist, created a test where a researcher gave several children a marshmallow and promised them another if they'd not eat it but wait while he ran an errand. When he left, some grabbed for the snack immediately. Others were determined to wait and get the additional reward - which they received when the researcher returned. Later in life the children were observed again when it was discovered that those

children who waited for their marshmallows generally grew up to be better adjusted, more popular, adventurous, confident and dependable teenagers.

A University of Washington team found that when parents are emotionally adept, compared to those who handle feelings poorly, their children - understandably - get along better with, show more affection toward, and have less tension around their parents. But beyond that, these children are:

- better at handling their own emotions
- are more effective at soothing themselves when upset
- get upset less often
- are more relaxed biologically, with lower levels of stress hormones and other physiological indicators of emotional arousal
- are more popular with and are better liked by their peers
- are seen by teachers as more socially skilled, pay attention better and are more effective learners
- rated as having fewer behavioural problems such as rudeness or aggressiveness

Daniel Goleman (his book is "Emotional Intelligence - why it can matter more than IQ", 1995, published by Bantam Books) argues that the most important personal attribute is emotional intelligence - particularly as it is claimed to provide a more accurate way to predict success in life than

traditional cognitive measures like IQ. He proposed five parts to emotional intelligence:

- **Self awareness** - "knowing what's going on (inside and outside) and using the information to make decisions"
- **Managing emotions** - "keeping one's emotions under control"
- **Motivation** - "using positive emotion to achieve standards of excellence"
- **Empathy** - "sensing how others are feeling and then giving effective feedback and appreciating differences in others"
- **Social skills** - "handling the emotions of others"

Intelligence or what we call IQ is but a small part of the total human being but its importance is often stressed as being very important - intelligence is the ability of the brain to absorb information, analyse it accurately and rapidly and recall it when it's wanted. It's the ability to:

- learn and to cope
- to understand and deal with new or trying situations
- the skilled use of reason
- to apply knowledge to manipulate one's environment or to think abstractly as measured by objective criteria

IQ Tests might measure how fast we see and react to information, but what they don't do is determine how much we know - there are three levels of knowledge:

It's about: Simple sales tips
 It applies to: Sales Managers /Directors

Main slant:
 Make sure your sales team know what they are selling



- **intelligence** - when we know how things work we're "intelligent"
- **wisdom** - when we know why things work we are wise
- **prophecy** - when we know what actually works we are prophetic

On the other hand, our emotions have long been labelled as inferior to intelligence. Over the past 2,000 years, a cultivated person has been defined as one who is logical, rational and thoughtful. Goleman dispels this notion however and insists that to a large extent, emotional intelligence determines how successful we become as human beings. This fact has major implications, especially for the educational systems of the late 20th century - basic skills such as the three Rs are, of course, very important - the ability to deal with individuals and groups is just as important.

Current thinking is leaning towards the idea that emotions, not IQ, may be the true measure of human intelligence. Emotional Intelligence covers a range of factors (both rational and emotional) affecting how people cope with daily environmental demands and it directly affects their overall psychological well-being. It draws on research into the mysteries of the brain and presents the idea that emotions can be managed and that qualities like compassion and self-restraint can be encouraged within the family and schools.

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About the author:

Martin Pollins MBA, FCA ATII, F IDM, former ICAEW Council Member, the Founder of The CharterGroup Partnership and Bizezia Limited.

For further information about Better Business Focus, contact Iman Rouane at: Bizezia Limited Tel: +44 (0)870 389 1420, E-mail: iman@bizezia.com



Having worked with many businesses over the years, to help them improve their sales results, Bryan McCrae of Cognitive Sales has developed a comprehensive Sales and Marketing health check to identify what improvements can be made.

Whatever your business offering, there are often a similar set of core issues that many start up companies face;

1. What is your market and position in it?

Being clear about your market, where you are in it and where you want to be are essential foundations to creating a plan to get there. A few simple questions help to clarify this.

- What do you sell?
- Who do you sell to today?
- Who are your ideal customers?
- Who are your competition?

2. What is your Unique Sales Proposition (USP)?

Complete the following sentence;

"Customers will buy from me because my business is the only/ best..."

What is yours? If you don't know why people should buy from you rather than your competition, then how on earth do you expect to sell anything ?

3. What does your offering do for your customer?

The team at Cognitive Sales often find that web sites or brochures talk lots about the products, services or technology and little or nothing about the benefits of using them. This leaves the prospective customer to work out the benefits for himself, which is a risk you need not take. The answer here is to sell the benefits, not the features. From the customers

Six steps to improve your sales results

By Bryan McCrae

perspective, ask 'so what?' to each feature, the answers that you come up with are your potential benefits.

Don't forget the softer issues, often personal and emotional, which despite our best efforts often govern the buying decisions that we make (whether we realise it or not).

4. Are you getting your message out in the best ways?

There are potentially many tens, or even hundreds, of ways of getting your message out to your potential customers, but I often find that businesses get stuck in a rut of only using one or two and that there are often better approaches that can be taken (or even worse, try one, see no immediate success so stop all promotional activities). The secret here is to try several different promotional approaches on a small scale and the measure the return on investment from each, working out how much each sales lead costs. Do more of the ones that work best and modify or drop the ones that don't work as well. How many different ways do you promote your business? You should experiment with at least 6 and see what works best for you.

5. Do you have the right tools for the job?

Would you try and work as a car mechanic without some basic tools? If you did, at best, it would take you much longer to get the job done, at worst you simply could not complete the work. Apply this principle to marketing and selling and you'll soon discover that having the right tools makes the job a whole lot easier, more fun and more profitable.

Examples of some suitable tools are;

- Happy client testimonials
- Demonstrations
- Samples



- Case studies

Testimonials are probably the most powerful tools available as they are an independent indicator of your ability to do a good job. Assuming that you do deliver a good product or service, most clients are happy to give a testimonial if approached in the right way at the right time. Video testimonials work even better.

6. Don't go on wild goose chases

In sales and marketing there is always more work that could be done and it is not unusual to have more potential activity on the go than you can handle. So you have to choose between trying to give everything equal priority (the shotgun approach) or carefully select the best opportunities (the guided missile approach). Guess which would work best? You can blast away at anything that moves with your shotgun in the hope that you will hit something every now and then, or you can carefully pick out the best targets with your guided missiles one at a time.

If you are not choosing which opportunities to go for and which to pass over, in a repeatable, measurable way then you are wasting money on wild goose chases and missing business that could be yours.

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About the author:

Bryan McCrae is a Sales Psychologist and Managing Director of Cognitive Sales, which specialises in helping ambitious SMEs grow their sales fast. For further information on Cognitive sales please visit <http://www.cognitive-sales-consulting.co.uk/>

Strong, deeply rooted desire is the starting point of all achievement.

Napoleon Hill



The news is pretty depressing these days – credit crunch, global recession, housing slump. It's like a meteor is heading for Earth and apparently there's nothing any of us can do about it.

So, how can you 'meteor proof' your business? How can you ensure it thrives – not just survives – during these times? One skill to master is the ability to generate new customers. This is particularly critical if you're existing customers' budgets are being cut, resulting in them buying less.

The wonderful news that nobody knows

Did you know that your target customers – those you desperately want to speak to – crave recommendations into good suppliers, just like you?

I know this sounds too good to be true, but it isn't. Purchasers always crave referrals. You know this to be correct. After all, when you last wanted a decorator, what did you do? Trawl through local directories? Surf the net? Or ask someone you trust to recommend one?

No doubt you asked around. Decorators, plumbers, restaurants, hairdressers – word of mouth recommendations are the best chance of finding a good supplier for them all.

So you- as the purchaser – crave referrals. In fact, everyone does. We all want utter certainty that the suppliers we choose will do a fantastic job, at an appropriate price.

All about a bit of give and take

By Andy Bounds

Your target customers are like this too, especially in these troubled times, when finances are tight. So, here are two very positive, indisputable facts: You want referrals into them; and they want to be referred to good suppliers, like you.

If you make use of this knowledge, the potential is huge. We recently spent a morning with a major bank, during which we taught them what to say to generate referrals. The group then used these scripts with their contacts. Just 20 minutes later, they had triggered 30 referrals. How valuable would it be to your business if you did that?

Three simple steps to generating more referrals

1. Do more than nothing

Triggering referrals is an active process. It's not enough to simply do an outstanding job and wait for your customers to refer you. They won't. There are many reasons why not, but one is that they only see you as a supplier, and will rarely think "Great job – now, who can I refer them to?" You're the same. If you're finding this article useful, you won't be thinking "Who can I refer Andy to?" Your focus – quite rightly – is on yourself. So, to get referrals, you have to ask for them.

2. Specify who you want to speak to

If someone asks you to recommend any restaurant, it is hard for you to do. You don't know the type of food they like, where they live or their budget. The request is too vague. And, because you don't know where to start looking, you probably won't start.

So, when asking for a referral, don't ask to be referred to any business, but be more precise. Specify the sector, turnover, size, location, job title of the person you wish to speak to, to make it easier for the referrer.

3. Ensure all three parties benefit

There are three parties involved in a referral – you, the referrer and their contact/your target. If one of these three doesn't benefit, the referral has not been a successful, sustainable business transaction, so is unlikely to be repeated.

If you get a referral, you obviously benefit. Similarly, if you do a good job, the customer benefits too. But what about the referrer? If they haven't benefited, they probably won't refer you again.

Paying finders' fees isn't enough. You should work hard to ensure they benefit – put in a good word with their contact, refer them to one of your clients, invite them to a useful networking event – whatever you think will help them most.

There are real opportunities to grow your business in these challenging times, and maybe even dodge a meteor or two. And there's no better place to start than asking one of your good contacts to speak to one of their contacts to help you.

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About the author:

Andy Bounds is the ISMM's Sales Trainer of the Year and author of business best-seller *The Jelly Effect*. For more of further advice, visit www.andybounds.com/resources

6 ways to cut costs

1. Keep staff on board

Cost-cutting measures are often unpopular, but when staff understand that their jobs may depend on them, they'll play along.

2. Improve business forecasting

When you have a clearer picture of future trading conditions, you can make more reliable resourcing decisions, on everything from staff levels to materials and marketing spend.

3. Analyse spending

Map outlay on goods and services along a horizontal axis and criticality of purchases up a vertical axis. Divide box into four quadrants. Focus on purchases that fall into the top right-hand quadrant.

4. Review utility costs

Typically, these represent the second-or third-biggest single controllable cost. Shop around to cut utility charges.

5. Control business travel

Some journeys aren't really needed. Look at the purpose of long trips and whether you can get what you need another way, through a videoconference or webcam meeting, for example.

6. Cut the cost of debt

It's excessive (and sometimes expensive) debt that sinks many businesses. Look at reducing the cost of debt by an injection of equity.

Source: Director.co.uk

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bizezia

making your business easier

Tel: +44 (0) 870 389 1420

Fax: +44 (0) 870 389 1425

E-mail: info@bizezia.com

Web: www.bizezia.com

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