



SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESS

White Horse Plains

Community Futures Development Corporation



June 2005

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Tap Into Testimonials

The Marketing Strategy You May Tend to Forget

You've had it happen to you - you've just done an exceptional job of fixing something for your customer, and at a great price, and they can't stop raving about you. In fact, they're telling everyone in your showroom who will listen how great you are. You stand there and smile, enjoying your moment in the sun and hoping that everyone who's listening will be influenced toward making large purchases. After your customer leaves however, the enthusiasm dissipates quickly and an hour later it's business as usual, and you're just another guy who does what you do along with everyone else. So how do you make the most of your customers' great experiences with your business? Word of mouth is the most powerful way to gain new customers, and you can control how often those words are used through testimonials!

Marketing guru David Frey in his "Coaches and Consultants Marketing Bootcamp" says

"Testimonials are powerful. They create believability, credibility, and a sense of security for your customer. They help to break down the natural barriers and distrust that most buyers feel toward you and your business."

Have you ever noticed how infomercials are loaded with customer testimonials? Why? Because they work. It's easier for us to relate to an ordinary person telling the story about how great the product was, than it is for us to believe the words of the seller. Here are a few tips on how to maximize the good things your customers say about you, and use them to gain new business every day.

Strike while the iron is hot (and your customer is happy)

Don't wait to ask for a testimonial. Ask when your customer is most thrilled with your service - right at that moment. When they're raving about you, ask if they'd be willing to have you use their words on your marketing materials. When customers are in that state of satisfaction, they'll rarely turn you down, and those words will stay with you as long as you have your business.

Write it for them

Some people would love to give you a testimonial but struggle with the writing



part of it. If you have heard from them verbally and can translate that into a written testimonial, you're way ahead of the game. Simply send them a copy of what you wrote and give them the freedom to edit it if they wish (which they rarely do). This often saves a lot of time in waiting for them to get back to you.

Get testimonials for different aspects of your business from the same people

In my business, I offer three different services. I have several clients who use all three - and so I've asked them for three different testimonials specific to each of the areas of work I do for them. That way if I'm marketing the training aspect of my business, I can pull out the quotes that specifically refer to training, and when I'm marketing the coaching aspect, I use the quotes relevant to that side of my business. If you're asking for more than one quote, you may want to consider writing them for your customer as I mentioned earlier.

Keep them short and specific and offer guidelines

Ask for 2-3 sentences only. People can usually come up with a few sentences, but if you ask for something longer they may feel overwhelmed and not be as willing to do it for you. Also, provide guidelines to your customers as to what aspect of your business you want them to comment on. Recently, I asked for testimonials on a training session I did for a community college. Here's how I phrased my request: "Can you please comment specifically on what aspect of the course material you found most valuable, and also what made me as a trainer effective in delivering the material." I already knew this person thought I had done a good job because she emailed me after the session and told me so. She was more than happy to comply and sent me the quote within a day.

Use real names whenever possible and always use credentials

Always ask your customer if they feel comfortable with you using their real name, or if they'd allow you to use their first name and last initial. Saying the quote came from "Susan James, or Susan J., Associate Professor, Stanley College" gives more weight to the quote than just "Susan".

Always thank your customer for their testimonial

If your customer has agreed to give you a testimonial, make sure they know how much you appreciate it. Write them a thank-you note letting them know how valuable their words will be to you in growing your business. Send a small thank-you gift or offer a discount for the next time they use your service.

David Frey says:

"It's one thing to toot your own horn - people expect you to sing your own praises. Because of this there's an inherent disbelief in any marketing message that comes from you. But when other people who have nothing to gain from your success say good things about your products or services, your believability shoots skyward."

So get out there and start asking! You'll be amazed at how willing your customers are, especially after they've had a good experience, and watch your credibility to new prospects soar.

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The Stress Diary

A Powerful Stress Management Tool

Last week I delivered a stress management seminar at a prominent community college in our area. It was presented to the faculty and staff and the seminar was well-attended (in my experience 90% of people who attend stress management seminars are women - what does this say about men and stress?). I have taught this seminar often over the last several years, and I am continually amazed that in spite of the massive amount of information available on this topic, and the universality of the issues, people are still struggling with how to manage their stress on a day-to-day basis. We all struggle to some degree with not enough time, limited energy, too much work, high expectations, too many demands, raising kids, aging parents . . . the list goes on. Sometimes thinking about stress management in itself seems like just another thing "to do", so we keep on going, and our stress keeps on mounting, and we end up burned out and wondering how it ever got so bad.

Part of successful stress management is keeping track of your stresses as they happen, and being able to evaluate how things affect you, and how you react to them. The stress diary is a tool that might be helpful in identifying your stress sources, and getting on top of them. Here's how it works.

Keep a diary of the stressful things that happen in your life and your response to them. In your diary create 5 columns - the date, time of day, stressful event, degree of stress you felt (between 1-10), and the primary emotions you were feeling when the stressful event occurred. For example, at 7:45 on August 10, you find yourself stuck in heavy traffic on your way to an important meeting with a client and realize you left your cell phone at home. Your stress level is about an 8/10 as you realize there's no way to contact your client, and the emotions you're feeling are panic, frustration, and anger. You would log all of these things in the appropriate columns in your stress diary.

Keep going with the recording process for a period of two weeks, and then review it to see whether any patterns emerge. Ask yourself what emotions are surfacing as your primary reactions to stress. What types of events are causing high levels of stress? Are there any patterns to the stressful events? Are there times of the day when stress impacts you less or more than other times? Is your stress level higher for work or home-related stresses?

This may seem like a chore for the two weeks you're doing it, but you'll find it extremely helpful in figuring out some patterns in both the stressful events and your reactions to them. Once you get some clarity on those stresses, you can make choices about how to deal with them.

For example, if you find you have a pattern of not dealing well with stress in the late afternoon - can you reschedule your days so that potentially stressful events aren't scheduled when you're least able to cope? Is your primary emotion to stress anger? Perhaps there are deeper issues you need to look at to find out where the anger is coming from. You might realize that you're actually over-scheduling yourself, and the fact that you don't have enough real time to accomplish everything is causing the stress. You may determine that the things that are going on at home are more stressful than what's happening at work, but that those things are affecting your work negatively. In this case, what can you do to minimize the home stresses so you can be more productive at work?



This can be a real challenge if your work is at home, so let's talk about that specifically for a moment. Perhaps your stress diary revealed that your spouse's expectation for you to do certain "home" tasks before you go to your office to start your workday is a level 6 stress for you. On top of that, he or she doesn't understand that "work at home" really means "work" from home, and they keep interrupting you to ask you to do little things that only take a few minutes, but that cut into your workday. These interruptions to your productivity make you extremely frustrated and you rate them at an 8/10. This pattern might indicate that you and your spouse need to sit down and define

(or redefine) the boundaries you need for working successfully from home. Maybe you can schedule time away from home when you're doing tasks you know need uninterrupted time. Can you go over those sales figures at your favorite coffee shop? Can you proofread that report over lunch at a local deli? Even your local public library can be a great quiet place to work without distractions. These mini outings can act like "meetings with yourself" away from the pressures and expectations you may feel at home.

Whatever your diary reveals, it is the first step to dealing with your stresses in a positive manner. It's only when you can see your stresses clearly that you can actually make changes to minimize them. If you're struggling with your stress level, consider taking a few weeks to analyze what's going on, and work towards reducing the stress you feel. Everyone will benefit, and your business will reap the rewards.

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Developing a Life Blueprint

Have you ever felt dissatisfaction between what is actually going on in your business, and what you really want for your business? I mean those times where everything seems to be going well, there are no major problems, but something inside of you feels restless. You can't put your finger on anything specific but things aren't the way you want them to be. It's likely that you have a plan for your business, but not how your business fits into the rest of your life. All of us have deep values that we might not even be able to identify, but they are there, and they react to everything we do. When we are living in a way that is not congruent with our values, we feel uneasy, restless, or just "not quite right". It's common for small business owners to devote mountains of energy to their business at start-up, but the problem is the business never stops requiring that energy or devotion. At some point however, there needs to be a point to it all. Consider whether your business and your life work together according to your values and priorities - it may be that's what's causing your restlessness. Make sure the path you've taken applies not only to your business, but also to your whole life.

How do you do that? By developing a life blueprint. You wouldn't think about building a house before you have a blueprint - a set of plans - for every last detail of how you want your house to look, right down to doorknobs and faucets. You can't have a set of blueprints for just the living room, or for just the kitchen, you need to see how all the rooms work with each other in order to get an overall picture. In order to get exactly what you want. A life blueprint is the same. It's figuring out how your business fits in with the rest of your "house". If you haven't already thought along those lines, you may want to try it. It can be a dynamic, life changing experience, and doing it may even show you that you need to make some changes in your business to make it more effective. Here's how to go through the exercise of creating a life blueprint.

Create a mission statement

Just like you did for your business your life needs a mission statement (you did do a mission statement for your business didn't you?). A life mission statement is sentence or two that reminds you of why you're taking up space on the planet, what your purpose is, and it should be the core of everything you do. It should be brief, simple, and succinct, and it should contain the primary motivations for your life. It's not easy, and just as it probably took you weeks or even months to come up with a mission statement for your business, it can take a



while to determine one for your life, so be patient, and don't stop until it's absolutely right.

Identify your values

Determine what is important to you, your moral code, what is acceptable and not acceptable in your life and work. What do you value? Is it relationships, human dignity, creativity, excellence, passion, generosity, faith, growth, productivity, wealth? There is no wrong answer, but it has to come from inside of you. What you value should be your guiding light as you make decisions in your business and in life.



If you value creativity, are you being creative in your business? Are you involved in creative pursuits in your personal life? Do you allow those around you to be creative? Your values should drive your life.

Write down your goals and priorities

People who write down their goals are 80% more likely to achieve them. When was the last time you wrote goals for your entire life? Not just increasing your sales for the next quarter, but what you want your relationships to look like, how you will grow personally, or what physical challenges you'd like to take on. You should set goals in all areas of life - here are a few to consider - financial, spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical.

Create affirmations

Make personal promises to yourself about how you want to live. Promises that will help you stay the course when you're tempted to move in a way that's contrary to your values. Part of my affirmation reads: "I will endeavour to live out my mission with humility, creativity and passion, always striving to live in the present moment without regret for the past, or fear of the future." It's something I say to myself often. What are the promises you need to make to yourself that will assist you in living out your blueprint?

Live in peace

We generally do not live in a peaceful world, and sometimes, if we're not careful, a quiet war can ravage our lives when we make choices not to live in peace personally. Make a commitment to forgive regularly, to be at peace with people in your life wherever possible. Peace doesn't mean forced friendship, or relationships with people who are hurtful to your life, but peace does mean harbouring no resentment, anger, or bitterness toward others. Part of your blueprint should be to make peace in any area of your life where there is disharmony. This may be something that another person isn't even aware of, but continues to eat at you day after day. Write down the person's name and make a commitment to make peace within yourself, and/or with that person. You'd be amazed at how freeing it is to let go of resentments and anger toward others.

Once you have created your blueprint, post it somewhere so you can read it and refer to it often. Ask yourself whether there are areas in your life or your business that are out of line with your values and priorities. Living in a way that is incongruent with your values and priorities will cause stress. If one of your values is your relationships with your family, but you're spending 70 hours a week at work, something will not feel right until you make a choice that realigns those two things. Having a life blueprint will change the way you live, and it will change the way you do business - for the better.

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How to Successfully Confront

Negative Behaviour

George, your sales manager of three years, has developed a habit over the last few months of coming in 15-20 minutes late for work. He always seems to have a legitimate excuse (heavy traffic, kids got sick, had to do a personal errand, car broke down, etc.). You generally don't mind being flexible in your workplace, but his behaviour is becoming a pattern, and you know it's affecting your other staff. The telling looks between staff members when George walks through the door, the inadvertent glance at the wall clock by your receptionist, the hushed whispers by the coffee machine in the staff room. Everyone is wondering why you're putting up with it (and subconsciously perhaps, why they shouldn't try to get away with the same thing). For the health of your business you need to address this behaviour, but you really like George, and as a sales manager, he's the best you've ever had. How do you deal with George's unacceptable behaviour without damaging your relationship with him, and still maintain integrity with the rest of your staff?

Confrontation is never easy, but sometimes it's a necessary part of running a business, and when the business is yours, **you** have to do it! Here's a highly successful three-phase approach to confronting negative behaviour that can help you deal with a problem such as this quickly and effectively.

PHASE I - Problem Identification

This is the initial conversation you have with the person. It goes without saying that it should be done in private, and at a time when neither party is feeling rushed or stressed from other pressures. There are six steps to this phase.

1. Describe the behaviour you see (as specifically as possible).
2. Tell the person how the behaviour is affecting you and others, again, as specifically as possible.
3. Allow the other person to respond (it will often be excuses, but you may actually discover a valid underlying reason, which will give you the opportunity to create a win/win situation).
4. Specifically outline how you want the behaviour to change, or describe the behaviour you want to see.
5. Get their agreement that this is reasonable and that they will behave in this way in the future.
6. Set a deadline for follow-up.

In the example of George, your conversation might go something like this:

"George, I've observed a pattern over the last few months where you're coming in 15-20 minutes late in the mornings. The rest of the staff depends on you to be here on time because they need to meet with you in order to plan their daily schedule. Their productivity is affected when you arrive late." (Allow George to respond.) "I appreciate that from time to time you may have to come in late - we all do, but here's what I'd like to see from now on. I need you to be here by 8:30 so that your 8:45 meeting with other staff proceeds as scheduled every day. If there are occasions where it's necessary for you to be late, I'd like you to call ahead and let us know that it's going to happen. That way we can plan around it. Does that sound reasonable to you? Let's meet again in two weeks to see how it's going."

PHASE II - Follow-up

In this phase, the person will either have corrected the behaviour (in which case you can conclude the meeting very quickly, thanking them for their efforts), or the behaviour will still be causing a problem (in which case you go through the following steps).

1. Describe the behaviour you requested and the behaviour you're still seeing.
2. Remind them that they had agreed that this was reasonable.
3. Ask why no change has been made.
4. Describe the behaviour you'd like to see once again.



5. Ask whether they understand and are willing to act in this way.
6. State a consequence that will occur if the behaviour is not changed.
7. Set a deadline to review again.



Let's assume George is still coming in late.

"George, two weeks ago we discussed the problem of you coming in to work late, and you agreed to my request that you make an effort to be at work by 8:30 every morning. In the past two weeks, you've only been on time three out of ten workdays. Can you tell me why you haven't been able to do what we agreed to?" (Allow for response) "Your coming in late cannot continue, so I'm going to give you another week to show me that you can get to work on time each day. If this situation doesn't improve, we'll need to discuss whether your employment here can continue. Let's get together in a week to see how things are going."

PHASE III - Consequences

If George's behaviour has corrected itself, there's no need to go to phase III. Thank him and move on. If he hasn't, you need to make some decisions. How badly do you want to keep him? Is there a win/win solution that can be reached? Is it time to let George find another job? You may want to find a way to keep him but you also need to be seen as being firm and fair by your employees. The last phase could look like this.

1. Describe what you have decided to do, and why.
2. Allow the person to respond to your decision (only if you're continuing the employment under revised terms).
3. If you are suggesting a win/win option - ask them if they can live with the new terms of their employment.
4. If the behaviour is serious enough to warrant termination, make sure that you have provided the appropriate number of warnings (written or verbal) they are entitled to prior to their termination notice, in order to avoid complications down the road. Provide the details of their termination, and end the conversation.

Let's say you've decided to keep George on, but to change his employment terms. Your final conversation might go something like this:

"The problem of coming in late still hasn't resolved itself, and it seems that mornings are just very difficult for you for a variety of reasons. I've decided that because you are a valuable member of my sales team, I want to keep you on staff, but I am going to have to reduce your hours to allow you to take care of those things that need your attention. From now on, your hours will be 10:00 to 4:00. I expect you to be here ready to work at 10:00 every morning. If that doesn't happen, I'll have no choice but to let you go. Can you accept these new terms?"

Confrontation isn't easy, but it can be done effectively if you have a plan and stick to what you've said you'll do. In the end, this process is fair, efficient, and effective.

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Is it Time for a Marketing Overhaul?

These days it seems "make-over" type television shows are taking the consumer by storm. You can watch people overhaul each other's homes, cars, backyards, even their appearances - all in an effort to make it better than it was before. Although you wouldn't necessarily want someone else to overhaul your marketing materials, it may

be time for you to have a look at whether they need some renovation. Your marketing materials are often the first impression you make on your customers, and that impression is made long before a customer ever meets you face to face, or walks into your store or office. How much time and effort have you spent on making sure the right impression is being made? How long has it been since you looked at that tired old brochure or business card? Think about some of these things in regards to your marketing materials. Be open-minded and try to set aside any emotional attachments you may have to things (I'm partial to the colour red myself, but it's not always the best choice). If you're having trouble separating yourself from your preferences, get a group of people together and "test" them as real consumers. Ask yourself the following questions.

Printed Materials

Is there a professional, streamlined look between all of your printed materials? That means whether you pick up a brochure, a business card, a piece of stationery, are there features that tie everything together? A logo, a common colour, a design theme? The visual connection should be obvious to anyone who sees your materials. It may take a while to get everything coordinated, but decide on a look and feel and then take small steps toward having each piece, right down to your letterhead, reflect that look.

Have you invested in professionally printed materials? If your brochures, business cards or flyers look like they came from your cheap home printer, you won't be taken seriously by potential customers. Professionally printed (and don't forget designed) materials add a ton of credibility to your business. The impression you make and the credibility you achieve will definitely be worth the money you spend.

Are you certain the printed materials you have are the best way to market your product? Brochures are great, but they may not be the most useful vehicle for you. An ad or well laid-out flyer might work better. Or perhaps you'd be better off doing an inexpensive rack card, or even posters. Determine where the materials will be displayed, and then decide what route to take. Too many businesses do the opposite - create materials and then try to find a place to put them - whether they fit or not.



Web Site

Is it current, up-to-date and error-free? Your website is like an online brochure. It creates a first impression, and if it's dated, full of spelling or grammar errors, or difficult to navigate, you'll never receive the level of sales you deserve. Has it been professionally designed? Does it look and feel the way you want it to? Does it look like it comes from the same family as your printed materials? The goal is a unified marketing stream that moves seamlessly from one piece to another - and that includes your web site. Is it being properly hosted? Is someone maintaining it regularly, checking for broken links, making sure it's optimized, structurally sound and working for you on the search engines?

Office/Storefront

If you are a retail business, or you have clients coming to your office or place of business, the impression they get from the environment they see is also a powerful piece of marketing. Is the space your customers see neat, tidy and organized? Can they find things easily? Can you? Are shelves cluttered or organized? If you can't manage to keep your office or store organized, why should a customer trust you with their business?

You and Your Personnel

Yes, even the people who work for you are walking marketing materials. They too give an impression of your company. Regardless of your dress code, is your staff dressed neatly? Do they represent your business the way you want them to? Have they received customer service training

that helps them to deliver the best impression possible? Are they polite, courteous and helpful? One bad experience with your staff and all the brochures in the world won't bring that customer back.

So take a look at all these aspects of marketing, and determine if any overhaulin' needs to take place. If you don't, you might be "trading spaces" with your competitors as your customers walk out your door and through theirs!

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White Horse Plains Community Futures Development Corporation Z

(Please note our new address & phone numbers)

56 Royal Road North

Portage la Prairie Manitoba R1N 1V1

Tel: 204- 856-5000 Toll Free: 1-888-WHP-CFDC (947-2332)

Fax: 204-856- 5006

info@whpcfcd.ca

www.whpcfcd.ca

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