SALES AND SERVICE

Excellence

THE MAGAZINE OF TEAM LEADERSHIP

SEPTEMBER 2012

Priced to Sell

Why Teams Fail

Remarkable Companies

Hear the Voice of the Customer

Sara LaForest
and Tony Kubica
Consultants

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Sales and Service Excellence

Volume 12 Number 9 | The Magazine of Team Leadership | September 2012

MARKETING/SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media Marketing

or marketing on social networks?

by Deb McAlister-Holand

DOES YOUR COMPANY PRACtice *social media marketing* (SMM) or do you use social networks for marketing? There is a difference. SMM requires a strategy specific to social channels, and content tailored to those platforms. Marketing on social networks (MSN) is simply distributing traditional marketing messages through social media.

SMM works. MSN doesn't. SMM is a true two-way conversation between a company and its customers, prospective customers, and the world. MSN is a way to push out company offerings to anyone who can hear them. This includes tactics like feeding miscellaneous news to a Twitter stream, posting special deals on Qwiqq and Groupon, and sending messages and emails asking people to follow the brand. Some tactics—particularly *hyper-local promotions* like those on Qwiqq or Groupon—might work at times in niche markets, but simply pushing a traditional marketing or sales message out through a new channel is still *one-way communication*.

Here are ***five SMM rules of thumb***.

1. Limit scheduled content. I use a scheduling app for my social media. It's tempting to write everything at once, and schedule it all, especially if you use *Socializer* and behavioral profiling of your followers and fans to predict the best time for messages, and schedule them accordingly. I learned that without a conversational component, I was better off not doing anything. Using social media solely as a one-way communications tool made people think that I didn't know how to use social

media properly. Now, when I publish new content or have a message to promote via social media, I still write everything at once—the content, the press release, the banners or PPC ads, the social media messages (tweets and posts and social news and booking mark site abstracts). Then *I schedule the posts*, letting my scheduling app recommend the best times and days for each message. I also schedule some time every day during *peak audience hours* for my followers and fans, as analyzed by Socializer, to engage in social media conversations. I reply to tweets from followers, I comment on other people's blogs and Facebook pages, and I post open-ended questions asking for help or suggestions or advice—and I say *thank you* to those who offer it. It only takes about 15 minutes, twice a day, to do this, and that includes all of the social media channels we use.

2. Look on the bright side. *Positive, upbeat posts on social media get a far better response than negative downers*. So check—do your posts make people smile? Actor and human rights activist George Takei's social media success is amazing. He even blows people with many more followers out of the water on Twitter in terms of retweets, and on Facebook nobody gets more "shares" or "likes." Nearly half of all the items Takei posts—and he posts multiple times each day—get upwards of 50,000 likes and 30,000 shares. His success on Facebook—starting in late 2011—has helped his once sagging career (he has a *million followers*). Why? He has three secrets: 1) He makes me smile. Even when I disagree with his politics, or he's flogging tickets to an event or sell-

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ing a product, he does it with humor and hilarious pictures. I can't help but laugh or smile at what he posts. 2) He knows his audience well. His fans don't like words—they like pictures—so his posts are typically less than 20 words in length—with a hilarious photograph or image to go along with them. 3) He often posts material from other people. And he is always polite and humorous in his responses to people who comment on his posts. Negative posts aren't deleted if they're about him or what he says, but he's quick to remove anything in which a fan attacks someone else. So, while he can be edgy, he's rarely offensive.

3. Show your true colors. It's hard to get people to give you their valuable time if they don't know who you are or what you represent. And that means *personalizing your profile*, even if the social media account represents a brand. The least successful Twitter accounts are those with the default "egg" photos instead of a person or logo. This is a proven marketing principle. Remember Col. Sanders, Betty Crocker, the Brawny paper towel lumberjack, Mr. Clean, MufflerMike, and Tony the Tiger? If you blog, tweet, or post to social media on behalf of a brand, you might create a character to represent your brand. One benefit of the new Facebook Timeline for Business page layout is the cover photo: a big photo block at the top of the page. Nearly 60 percent of brands have opted for a Twitter or Facebook profile that includes their logo, since the profile photo is what shows up next to posts and responses. The cover photo on Timeline is a great place to *humanize* or *personalize* the brand with a photo. Cover photos are simple to change (just mouse over it, and an option to *change image* pops up). They can encourage people to think positively of your brand. One brand in Dallas rotates photos of its employee volunteer program across its Facebook Timeline cover photo. An oil company shows its people on drilling rigs, in offices, in town hall meetings with community groups.

4. Make your fans feel like winners. People like to win. A competition or contest can bring a company into the spotlight and attract a lot of new leads and customers. You can host it through the social media site or through an app that manages online competitions for you. Support your contest with email marketing (messages to your opt-in list about the competition or in the signature files that employees use on routine emails) and other communications ("hold" messages, PPC, banner ads, press releases, SEO, blog posts). Use all of your social media channels—LinkedIn, Pinterest, Facebook, Twitter, Google+, StumbleUpon, Reddit—to tell people about your contest/competition.

The best contests are repeatable, simple, and fun. For example, a summer camp runs a "camper photo of the month" contest year-round where parents and campers alike can send in photos of camp alumni or participants in multiple categories. Finalists are picked by the camp, but a vote from the page's fans determines the winner. An insurance company runs a quarterly contest based on their company mission statement: *insuring dreams*. Social media followers are asked to describe their dreams—and the prize is "helping make that dream come true."

Quizzes are also popular. If your quiz is interesting and entertaining enough, you don't even need to offer a prize. They can be a bit challenging, since Facebook requires an app to host them, but a simple landing page powered by a form and survey tool like the one in the Distribution Distributed Marketing Platform can handle them for Twitter, Pinterest, and other social media sites.

5. Remember: It's customer choice. Social media is the ultimate *pay it forward* media. The Internet changed the *balance of power* between marketers and customers forever—customers have the power, and *they won't give it back*. Never forget that your customers have choices. Do they want your content—or someone else's? Do they want long-form content (white papers, eBooks), intermediate content (like this blog post), or short-form content (a 90-second video)? Do they trust that the information we're providing is accurate, useful, and interesting?

Social media marketing is a marathon, not a sprint. Anyone who thinks that it's a *set it and forget it* process isn't cut out for social media marketing. It takes time to build credibility—and commitment to a two-way dialogue with those who visit your pages.

Social media is not free—it consumes the rarest non-renewable resource, time. Employees, agencies, or independent contractors must be paid for the time it takes to plan and execute the strategy, the creative inspiration to make it memorable, and tools to manage, monitor, report, archive, and analyze results.

Are you still *marketing on social networks* instead of *conducting social media marketing campaigns?* Are you trying to avoid the costs of doing it right? That can be a fatal mistake in a medium where the audience is quick to spot those who don't become part of the community, but instead become *drive by posters* who drop in to sell them things. SSE

Deb McAlister-Holland: 214-206-3468, debh@distribion.com (http://www.myprgenie.com), www.distributedmarketing.org.

ACTION: Conduct social media marketing campaigns.

Volume 12 Issue 9

Sales & Service Excellence *is published monthly by Executive Excellence Publishing, LLC (dba Leadership Excellence), 1806 North 1120 West, Provo, UT 84604.*

Editorial Purpose:
Our mission is to promote personal and professional development based on constructive values, sound ethics, and timeless principles.

Basic Annual Rate:
$59 (12 issues)
$119 two years (24 issues).

Article Reprints:
For reprints of 100 or more, please contact the editorial department at 1-801-375-4060 or email CustomerService@LeaderExcel.com. Permission PDF: US $100

Submissions and Correspondence:
Please send any correspondence, articles, letters to the editor, and requests to reprint, republish, or excerpt articles to Editorial Department, Sales & Service Excellence, 1806 North 1120 West, Provo, UT 84604 or email Editorial@LeaderExcel.com.

Customer Service/Circulation:
For customer service, or information on products and services call 1-877-250-1983 or email: CustomerService@LeaderExcel.com.

Internet Address: *www.LeaderExcel.com*

Marketing Offices:
Leadership Excellence
1806 N. 1120 W.
Provo, UT 84604
1-877-250-1983
1-801-375-4060

Sales & Service Excellence:
Ken Shelton, CEO, Editor-in-Chief
Sean Beck, Circulation Manager

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Executive Excellence Publishing

Raving Fan Customers

Creating customer-focused teams.

by Bruce Hodes

WHAT'S A CUSTOMER-FOCUSED team? The word *team* is overused in business; it gets applied to any group. In *The Wisdom of Teams*, Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith define a *team as a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable*. The key words are *common purpose* and *mutually accountable*. Without these, you don't have a team.

Also, for a team to exist there has to be adversity, challenge and tension between the team and attaining a common purpose. No adversity and challenge means *no team*. You don't need teams for easy tasks. Tough challenges and high performance standards—like those associated with customer service, quality and profitability—are essential for teams to come together and coalesce. Having customers consistently be raving fans of the company's service is certainly a challenging and lofty goal.

What is a Raving Fan Customer?

A *raving fan customer* is one who is excited about the company's service delivery and product way beyond normal. RFCs remain loyal given price pressure from competition. They would go through a lot to get the company's service. Even a price increase would keep raving fans loyal buyers. RFCs would wait in long lines; pay extra shipping fees; all for the service or product that their favorite company offers.

When you earn RFCs, you gain a *strategic advantage* over competition. Ask Zappos, Southwest Airlines, Apple, or Jimmie Buffett. Your customers will buy from you *no matter what*. Your company becomes a monopoly, the ultimate positioning! We see this with Apple's iPhones. Apple customers are disdainful of other smartphone products.

To create customer-focused teams, employees must understand that they win when the customers win. The *customer win* has to be defined so that the *company also wins*. If you ask customers what they want, they'll tell you I want the service and product *for nothing*. So the *raving fan service strategy* needs to be designed so that the company can stay in business and its employees can deliver. Apple products are easy to use, and their informed employees can teach consumers how to use them. All this conspires to make *raving fans* of Apple customers. Every service strategy needs to be designed so that this concept is constantly reinforced.

Employees who directly impact customers need feedback to know what they are doing right (and wrong) in creating RFCs, coordinate and fix problems with other departments that impact delivery, and ensure that customers perceive great value from products and services they receive.

Two challenges exist in creating high performance, customer-focused teams: 1) getting the voice of the customer clearly delivered to the front line regarding the service or product—create forums for the front line to listen to the customer; and 2) making sure everyone understands the standards by which customer service is measured.

Five Stages of Team Development

I see five stages of development for customer-focused teams:

Stage 1. Getting to know you: feeling that *customer service* could be fun combined with anxiety about how to do it; excitement about the concept of team; figuring out who is in charge; clarifying rules and developing standards; dependence on the *coach/leader*; and *coach/leader* uses a directive approach.

Stage 2. Wish we weren't here: Feeling that this is *not* fun: leadership and members are screwed up; feeling that *something is definitely wrong here*; feeling uncertain and incapable; performance standards not being met and finger pointing; little agreement among team members regarding standards; *customer focus* is rhetoric only; internal strife and no sense of mutual accountability; task-driven but many individual agendas; performance standards not agreed on.

Stage 3. Getting behind the game: performance standards hammered out; increasing ownership of standards; decreasing hostility as the team begins working out differences; focus on customers; starting to feel comfortable with mutual accountability; positive feedback from customers; more *honesty* among team members; failing forward—learning and improving from trial and error, with rapid recovery from mistakes; enthusiasm and energy increase; support for each other is evident; and small wins bring large smiles.

Stage 4. High performance and raving fan service: customers are consistently impressed by the service and product; team standards are met and moved outwardly by the team; members feeling good about consistency; shared leadership; open and honest communication; meetings feature straight talk; results are recognized by customers as *high performance*; members feel deep concern for each other's personal growth and success; the team outperforms reasonable expectations; and team members have fun.

Stage 5. The times are a-changing. A major change occurs, such as members joining or leaving, a new coach, new standards; confusion; uncertainty regarding the implications of change.

Here are four points to remember:

1. Customer-focused teams and victims (people who refuse responsibility and accountability for their behavior) don't go together. Members must want to make the team successful. You can't create a team with victims.

2. Enemies and customer-focused teams do not go together. Team members must have a basic regard for each other. They do not have to love each other, but at minimum they should have mutual professional respect.

3. Expect conflict. Since performance standards are high, team members will have differing views on how to achieve them. Open dialogue is useful. It doesn't matter *who is right*, only that *the customer is served in an extraordinary fashion*.

4. Experiment. Customer service strategies need to be planned, but it helps to be flexible and try new ideas that will make your organization indispensable to the people it serves. SSE

Bruce Hodes is CEO of CMI, and author of Front Line Heroes. *Email bhodes@cmiteamwork.com, call 800-883-7995, or visit www.cmiteamwork.com.*

ACTION: Create a customer-focused team.

SALES/REVENUE

Boost Sales Revenue

Learn from the Olympic athletes.

by Leslie Groene

ARE YOU USING ALL OF THE options available to you in your career or company? Do you appreciate the freedom you have to choose your discipline? Are you taking advantage of all the education opportunities to improve your *game* or skill set? Do you embrace each day with new resolve and passion to make the day the best it can be?

During the 2012 Summer Olympics, we saw *the world's best athletes* compete in 26 sports that included 10,500 competitors from over 200 counties as they strove to be their best at some event. Michael Phelps (who holds the record for the most gold medals) trains for 6 to 8 hours per day; the average world-class athlete trains 23 hours per week.

Are you putting in enough work and training to be a *world class sales professional, manager or service provider*?

Keep a positive mental attitude. Remember: your future is based on your performance! Stay in a *positive mental attitude*. Negativity costs you money.

Sports analogies and examples are often used in sales because the fit is so precise. It's easy to compare sports to sales. Sports team owners and the owners of companies are in a similar position. When a pro sports team wins consistently, all is good with the world! Players and coaches get bonuses, contract extensions, and recognition within the team, organization and league. However, if the franchise starts losing, heads roll—players get released, and the team's coaches get walking papers.

Both sales and sports focus on results. You can expect rewards when you win and unpleasant consequences when you lose. A great sports team develops a *positive collective psychology and dynamic*. Members of the team expect to win, and every victory reinforces the team's collective expectation so that players find ways to deliver when the game is on the line.

Being positive can be challenging. Often, you might vent at someone who has pushed your buttons or done something offensive. However, if you have incorporated a positive approach to every aspect of your life, you won't let others' thoughtless acts interfere with or control your reactions. This involves shedding the *reactive point of view* that you see daily while driving or in public arenas where *rudeness* is on display.

Do You Win a Gold Medal?

Unlike Olympic athletes, who must be in perfect form at a specific time and day, you have many chances to show your clients your acumen and understanding of their business dynamics.

How do you rate as a *competitor*? How do you handle wins and losses? Do you ever whine to a client or prospect when you lose a sale, proposal, contract or project? It's tempting to complain when you have given it your all and provided the client with a good solution and competitive pricing. However, you need to ask the decision maker what you could have done better, what other options you need to consider next time, how you and your company can perform better!

Analyze your wins so you can replicate those strategies and performances. You'll learn *valuable lessons* from your losses and wins. So, continue to sharpen your skills and become more effective with each and every opportunity.

Maintain a consistent approach to your work. Others will view you in a positive light when they see that you follow through on commitments and promises to them. Here are *four easy ways to stay consistent:* 1) Make lists, 2) establish regular routines (for cold calling, for example); 3) build in rewards when you complete difficult tasks; 4) practice a priority systems and allocate high grades (*A* and *B*) to *necessary tasks* that *must get done in a timely fashion*. SSE

Leslie Groene is author of Picture Yourself & the Life You Want. *Visit www.groeneconsulting.com.*

ACTION: Boost your sales revenue.

SALES/PRESENTATION

Positive Persuasion

Make sales arguments based on facts.

by Jean Van Rensselar

IN SALES, MORE EFFECTIVE than *manipulation* is making an argument based on research and logic. The art of *persuasion* is the art of *effective articulation*—making an *organized argument based on facts*. You are translating—from concepts to words—what you are convinced is true in a way that's structured, professional, accurate, and compelling. When it comes to persuasion, effective *articulation* is more compelling than *manipulation*.

To articulate without manipulating, try six tips:

1. Establish credibility. Credibility is built on *expertise* and *relationship*. The expertise your clients perceive is based on your exceptional knowledge of the product or service you offer and *how it fits* into the client's business, willingness to learn, and sound judgment. In relationships, you show credibility by being trustworthy. Have genuine interest in your client's success and *emotional reliability*—so they know you'll react rationally to the same set of circumstances in the same way.

2. Synchronize. Identify shared benefits. In addition to discussing how the transaction will benefit the client, discuss how the transaction will benefit you and your company. Know your client's goals, circumstances, restrictions, consequences. Look for *genuine* and *significant* points of commonality.

3. Demonstrate accountability. Discuss how your success depends on the client's success. The client needs to know that—if things go south—it's going to affect you as much or more than the client. Let the client know that you will be with them every step of the way—especially post-purchase.

4. Use relevant analogies to articulate the abstract, especially in selling high-tech products and services. A good analogy involves forethought (to make it *relevant to the client)*.

5. Keep things simple. Any evidence you provide should be *easy to understand*, *logical*, *memorable*, and *portable*—after you leave, the client can then share it with colleagues. If you take notes in a meeting, make a copy for your customer. This shows you were listening, and documented your client's circumstances and concerns. Or, send a bulleted summary in an email later that day.

6. Be positive. *Persuading with facts is always positive*. If the facts aren't positive, *reframe* them in a way that is. Don't *scare* customers into buying. They do business with you because they want to, not because they have to. You want them to be happy when you visit and call—not equate you to a dark cloud. Everything you say about someone else (including competitors), people tend to associate with you. SSE

Jean Van Rensselar is owner of Smart PR Communications. Email Jean@SmartPRCommunications.com.

ACTION: Engage in positive persuasion.

Reality of 2012

Create more buyer demand.

by Bruce Wedderburn

Most companies in 2011 were emerging from years of cutting costs and finally enjoying some degree of *revenue growth*. They began revising and reviving business plans to show growth targets and territory expansion. As businesses saw the economic climate slowly improving, their 2012 budgets indicated they might invest in technology or human capital to achieve more optimistic growth goals. For selling organizations, growing demand brought a smile to the face of every VP Sales, who predicted continued growth.

How much of that enthusiasm for growth remains? Has the upbeat sentiment transformed into a lead weight, deflating expectations? Couple that with news that more organizations globally are reporting that they are not where they expected to be at this time of the year. The comment often made is, "We have a revenue problem."

Revenue performance for the first half of 2012 caused many companies to re-examine their predictions. Feelings of risk, uncertainty, and indecision are creeping back in. Decision-makers are reintroducing *five questions* that we haven't heard since the 2008 recession.

Ask and answer five big questions: *Are there still other places to cut costs? Can we hold off on spending what we've budgeted for another quarter? Can we get by, for now, with what we already have? Where do we need to focus our energies to increase revenues quickly? Can we balance our investments against our revenue?*

The Decision-Makers at your client companies are asking these questions. Has your selling approach changed to reflect the new reality? If not, every dollar in your pipeline is at risk.

How can you sell when your clients and prospects are asking these five questions? In this buying environment, it is a far less successful strategy to focus on showing customers why your offerings are better than the competition because, for now, they are unlikely to buy from anyone. You may have tremendous customer relationships, but budgets have shrunk or been frozen. When your customers are asking these five questions, you must help your customers see the urgency of their problems and the downsides of inaction. You need to provoke deeper thinking from their customers about the investments that they need to make. In short, successful sellers in this economy are *creating* demand, not *responding* to it.

Creating Demand

Creating demand is a very different selling approach than responding to existing demand. Use skillful questioning to uncover unrecognized problems around their most pressing business issues, challenge the buyer's current perceptions of their needs, and help them see the commercial downsides of not investing now. Your goal is to increase the size, urgency and severity of the buyer's problems, thereby increasing the value of your offering to solve those problems. Your selling approach is not about presenting your solutions; it's about delivering insights about unfreezing budgets, and helping your prospects and clients see that your offerings are not discretionary. To spread risk, executive level buyers will involve more people in the decision-making than ever before. Each will play a role, so develop your strategy to understand who will be involved, the role they will play, and how to gain access to each person.

Your marketing department plays a key role here. If they are producing collateral that describes *who your company is, the services you sell and why you're different/better*, they are missing the boat. Are they adjusting their approach to your customers who are asking themselves the 2012 questions?

Where to Begin

We've identified four strategies that companies can employ now to begin creating demand from buyers:

1. Define your demand creation sales approach: Begin by establishing your company's *demand creation strategy*. If your message revolves around all the advantages that your clients will receive by buying from you, you may be fighting a losing battle when your customers hang on to their money.

2. Do an inventory of your sales force: What are the tendencies of your salespeople when they are face-to-face with prospects and customers? Do they ask the questions that lead to deeper thinking about your customer's problems and opportunities? (*High value*) Or, are they describing to customers why your solutions are tremendous? (*Low value*) Then, identify what skills your people need to start/stop using to execute that strategy effectively.

3. Develop provocative prospecting and selling messages: In times of heightened risk, effective selling provokes buyers out of their fear. Prospecting messages that describe "who are we and what we do" don't work when demand is low. Coach your salespeople to build provocative (not informative) sales messages.

4. Leverage your marketing department to create these messages: Too many organizations leave it up to the salespeople to generate effective messaging that resonates with buyers in this economy. Marketing is well-positioned to create the messages, questions and playbooks for the sales force to use in the field.

Companies that choose to *ride out* their current troubles may survive the storm—but lose ground to competitors who take advantage of the current situation and emerge stronger and better equipped for growth. To move ahead, your sales force must have the skills and business acumen to demonstrate to prospective customers the imperative for taking action and the value that will be derived from it. Sellers must uncover the issues or opportunities that have enough urgency or value for customers to take action. Finally, follow through with speed and efficiency to ensure *indecision* doesn't reinsert itself.

Begin with the four strategies. Then, be smart about preparing your people to execute. Make sure your sales teams get the proper skills to leverage your value proposition in ways that will help your clients realize how essential your offerings are.

What ways does your company create demand for your customers? SSE

Bruce Wedderburn is EVP of Global Channel and Enablement at Huthwaite (www.Huthwaite.com), the world's leading sales performance improvement organization. Email bwedderburn@huthwaite.com.

ACTION: Create more buyer demand.

MARKETING/STORY

Win More Leads

Get people to sneeze about you.

by Eric Keiles

WHO ARE THE ***BIG Sneezers*** in your industry? I'm not talking about *sneezing* as the reaction to a cold or allergy, but about people *sneezing about your business* all over other people—passing it on, *person to person* (*influence marketing*).

Every business has access to *sneezers*. Learn how to find them, what to ask and tell them, and how to get them to *sneeze* about your business to prospects.

Whose sneeze reigns supreme? Identify *your prospects* and *their influencers*. Don't just go after key opinion leaders at the top—assuming that if you reach them, your message will trickle down to your targets. While your prospect may admire these big names, he isn't looking to them for advice on purchasing decisions. He's going to his friends, family and co-workers.

Who are your market influencers? Where do these people hang out online and what content gets their attention? Do you have *marketing personas* for your target prospects ***and*** their influencers? Identify *big sneezers* who hold the most clout with your targets.

Tell Them Stories

We share information through stories. The human brain is hard-wired to understand, remember and *share* stories. Follow ***four tips*** in telling stories:

1. Create a story worth telling. By performing *community outreach*, you instantly improve public perception of your company, building *prospect awareness* and *customer loyalty*. Why? *People do business with people, not businesses*. People make purchase decisions *emotionally*. What can your company do to benefit its community? Think about donating a percentage of product sales to a charity, sponsoring a community event, volunteering at a charity, hosting an altruistic contest or sponsoring a local team. You help others in need while increasing your marketing success—the ultimate win-win.

2. Create memorable, shareable stories with four core elements, and make the website a *master story teller* to deliver the leads your business needs to grow.

• ***Theme.*** All good stories have a *theme* or *message* to convey. To relate this to your business and website, there has to be a *win* for your prospect or customer. The theme of our website is *get the leads you need to grow your company*.

• ***Plot.*** The *best stories* have a *compelling plot line* that takes its audience on a dynamic journey, overcoming unique challenges or roadblocks, and keeps them engaged, wanting to hear more. Add an *emotional component* that people relate to readily. Make the story *about them*. Address their pains and challenges on the homepage of your website, enabling them to *connect with* your story. Then you can offer them *the solutions* they're searching for.

• ***Characters.*** The *cast of characters* in your story is usually straightforward—you, your business and team, your potential customer and their team. Your goal and website goal is to help those people see themselves in your story and in the solutions you provide.

• ***Setting.*** The setting is usually your prospect's business, industry or target marketplace. Be sure to populate this setting with the *characters* and ensure that the *plot* and *theme* you've identified fits into that setting seamlessly.

3. The story must be about your prospects. Don't write the story *about you*. When designing your website, *tell a story about your prospects*: What their challenges were, how those challenges were solved, what benefits they saw, how long it took to achieve the solution and what it meant to the business. That makes for a *compelling story* that will get others to work with you.

Start telling your story today, ensuring it has the *four components*. SSE

Eric Keiles is Chief Marketing Officer of Square 2 Marketing, 215-491-0100. Visit square2marketing.com.

ACTION: Get people sneezing about you.

MARKETING/SOCIAL MEDIA

10 Social Media Tips

Improve internal communication.

by Steve Nicholls

WHEN YOU THINK OF SOCIAL media, you likely think of how it can help you communicate with clients/prospects, but you can also use social media internally to facilitate communication, overcome distance, and boost productivity.

Here are ***10 social media tips*** for improving internal communication:

1. Create a common language. Train the staff and *create a common language*. Explain how this will help the company achieve its goals.

2. Understand your culture. Culture will define *how well your social media projects will do*. If you have a closed culture, a transformation towards transparency needs to be made, soon.

3. Create internal social networks. These bring the company *closer together* by facilitating connection between different departments and management. Use *social networking apps* like *LinkedIn* as a personnel directory to know the skills and experience of your people.

4. Share information. Creating a DIY Wiki platform, composed of all company-related information—articles, videos and webinars among many others—is an excellent way to allow company members to access valuable information anytime and anywhere.

5. Encourage employee participation. Speaking up in the boardroom is intimidating. So, encourage staff to offer ideas in a less threatening environment via social media. This gives everyone a voice and produces some great ideas.

6. Collect intelligence. *User-generated content* via social media becomes *valuable business intelligence* that can be used to perform better, generate new ideas and be more successful.

7. Mobile technology and online project management tools. Take advantage of technologies like iPads, smartphones, conferencing tools like Skype and Webex or project management tools like Wrike and Zoho to function efficiently from different locations.

8. Don't forget the risks. Take risks into consideration and mitigate by including them in your model. Those who don't integrate social media into their business because of risk will be left behind.

9. Have a solid social media policy. Having *clear rules and regulations in writing* sets the framework of what is acceptable and not when using social media at work. This protects both the company and the individual and makes the experience safe and easy.

10. Do not go enthusiastically in the wrong direction. Have a step-by-step model that brings *the right combinations of social media* in the perspective of specific business goals, within the context of *your business environment*. SSE

Steve Nicholls is author of the best-selling book Social Media in Business. *Visit SocialMediaInBusiness.com.*

ACTION: Try these social media tips.

Priced to Sell

Finding the right price.

by Chip Averwater

TODAY CONSUMERS CAN FIND what they want for the price they want without ever leaving home. And many of them enter stores wielding smartphones. Now they can compare a product's price while they're in a store to what it's going for at other stores. Amazon capitalized on this trend by creating its *Price Check* app to allow shoppers to compare prices of in-store products with Amazon's.

Your survival depends on finding the elusive *right price*. That magic number that will get people to buy from you in an online-discounts-dominated market while allowing you to make a profit.

The right price to ask for your goods is never clearly defined. After all, the price at which profits disappear isn't just the wholesale cost—you must also take into account your expenses. Online stores don't have the overhead of staffing and often aren't subject to the same sales taxes, they can sell a product at a lower price and still make a profit.

Many businesses make costly pricing errors, because they don't know that they're making a mistake, they miscalculate it, or they simply don't do the math. Even for those who do, when price comparisons are so easy for shoppers, doing the math the right way can feel like advanced calculus. Retailers who survive *correctly estimate the balance point* and *have the discipline to maintain it* despite competitors' miscalculations.

To be a business that makes it, take this pricing advice:

• ***Know the science, but realize that pricing is an art.*** Yes, *as prices go down, sales go up; as prices go up, sales go down*. Theoretically, it's possible to determine the point at which price and sales create maximum profit, *but you never see ideal conditions and have time to experiment*. In the real world, you must often take your best guess. For instance: *I think customers will be willing to pay this much for this product*. If you make a *net profit*, you can assume that your guesses were close—but you never know *how* close. Only experience and feel for the market will keep you within a profitable range.

• ***The right price isn't a multiple of wholesale.*** It's tempting to price by using a fixed-percentage markup from wholesale. But that strategy assumes *all* expenses of a sale are determined by the product's wholesale cost. Things like *cost of capital* and *insurance* are functions of wholesale cost—but many others, like labor, occupancy, and support, aren't. To price correctly, you must do it individually and by feel, with consideration to the *total expenses* of the sale, customers' price sensitivity, competitive options, and the sale's *potential contribution* to other business. Only occasionally and by coincidence should markup percentages match!

• ***Understand your limits.*** Don't overlook the price of your mistakes. When you're too aggressive in your pricing, give unnecessary discounts, or make mistakes in buying and selling, a sale can easily turn into a loss. The net profit in retail is 1 to 3 percent of total sales. Often, losses due to pricing mistakes aren't limited to that 1 to 3 percent, and retailers are left digging deeply (and painfully) into their back pockets.

• ***Know the real definition of wholesale.*** *Wholesale* is *the cost of the merchandise*, not *the cost of the sale*. The price paid to the manufacturer is only the first of many expenses. Sales can't be made without including expenses for rent, salaries, advertising, utilities, telephones, freight, maintenance, taxes—and the list might go on. Just because a sale has a gross margin doesn't mean it's profitable. Unless the price covers all sales expenses, you'll lose money.

• ***Know which sales should bear the operating expenses (Hint: all of them).*** Some salesmen and managers think: *Our expenses are fixed, so we should accept every sale that has a positive gross margin*. When are expenses ever fixed? Sales don't happen in a vacuum. So increases in sales require increases in personnel, space, inventory, handling, and every other expense of doing business. Since *every sale incurs operating expenses*, its price should be sufficient to cover them plus a fair contribution to profit.

• ***Practice your math every day.*** You need to know the costs of every sale, service, and activity of your business. That information helps you to decide what to stock, what to promote, where to channel efforts and investments, and how to set prices! Since pricing is more art than science, you'll never have a totally accurate *feel* for costs. You tend to underestimate expenses. So, regularly sit down with a spreadsheet and divide the whole list of expenses across your product sales and services. Only then will your costs become truly clear.

• ***Don't try to offer the lowest price—you'll likely fail.*** Weaker competitors offer lower prices to be the customers' first choice. But those companies may see *little or no profit*. It's futile to try to price below desperate competitors, because they'll *always* drop their prices below yours. You might be tempted to play the *lowest price* game, but even if you win, another business will soon fill the void. *Differentiation is a better strategy:* Offer superior products/services that customers are willing to pay more for.

• ***Reputations are made on price-sensitive items, margins on the rest.*** Price-sensitive items are *those bought and advertised often*. Pricing these items low creates a *value image*. Higher margins on other merchandise allow the store to cover its expenses, stay in business, and occasionally make a profit. If you have trouble reconciling this idea with the idea that each sale should cover its own expenses, think of price-sensitive items as an advertising/promotion expense!

• ***It won't sell if it's not on sale.*** We love bargains. Customers have become so accustomed to discounts that many won't make a major purchase *unless the product is on sale*. Some stores schedule only brief intervals between sales or end one sale as the next begins. It begs the question: If merchandise is always *on sale*, is a *sale* really a *sale*? Since shoppers rarely care, use that to your advantage!

• ***Don't delude yourself when you make a buying mistake.*** Many retailers hold on to these *mistakes*, hoping customers will buy this outdated, overpriced merchandise and bail them out. A product's value is determined *by the market*, not by *how much you paid for it* or *how much profit you want to make when you sell it*. It's more profitable to move out your mistakes and put floor space to more productive use. The mistake was in buying; trying to make up for it in selling only makes the error more costly.

There is no foolproof formula for finding the delicate balance between *making sales* and *making a profit*. However, these strategies can help you. SSE

Chip Averwater is chairman of Amro Music Stores, a featured speaker on retailing, and author of Retail Truths *(ABB Press). Visit www.retailtruths.com.*

ACTION: Find the right price for your products.

Motivate Your People

Recognize small achievements daily.

by Jeb Blount

EACH WEEK MANAGERS AND leaders ask me: "How can I *motivate* my employees?" What they usually mean is, "How can I *manipulate* my employees to do what I want them to do?"

Managers waste billions of dollars on *manipulation* disguised as *motivation* in an attempt to change employee behavior and boost sales results. Sometimes they get short-term results, but *manipulation never works over time*. There's nothing wrong with providing incentives to employees who do a good job, but incentive programs don't teach you to tap into *what really motivates people*.

For example, Steve, a regional account executive, told me that his company hired a new VP of sales who created a *national incentive program* by taking the budgets away from local sales managers and insisting that any recognition be in compliance with the new program. He hired a person to administer the program, and announced the *new and improved program* to his field sales team of over 1,000 people.

Since Steve was a consistent top performer, he sold more than anyone else on his team the next quarter. "About a month later," reported Steve, "I received a plaque, a catalogue of prizes, and a form letter congratulating me." Steve shook his head in disgust. "It meant nothing to me. No one, not even my sales manager, called me about the award. At least before the program, we would all go out to dinner at the end of the quarter, and my sales manager would toast all the top performers."

Steve concluded: "This *recognition program* didn't motivate me at all. I was ticked off when I learned that they were deducting taxes from my paycheck for the value of the prizes in the catalogue. All I really wanted was a pat on the back in front of my team." Steve eventually left the company.

What Really Motivates People

The most powerful motivators of people are *achievement* and *recognition of that achievement*. These two elements can't be separated. Achievement without recognition is rarely rewarding, and recognition without achievement is empty. When people have the chance to achieve (win) and their *achievements are recognized by leaders*, they report higher job satisfaction and perform at higher levels. Leaders who find ways to recognize the achievement of their people through *positive emotional experiences* deliver superior results.

To be effective, *recognition must be directed at achievement*, big and small. Most leaders find it easy to recognize the big achievements; however, the top leaders excel in consistently recognizing the many small achievements required for big things to happen.

One easy way to motivate people for small achievements is to *catch them doing something right* and recognize them for it. Yet this is difficult for leaders who are under pressure to produce results, deliver on plans, or fix a problem. So, one leader devised a trick. Each morning she put a few chocolates in her pocket. Each time she recognized an employee for doing something right, she ate a chocolate. "I rewarded myself for doing the right thing for my people."

Another manager explained that with all the meetings, he couldn't recognize achievements in real time. "One night I wrote *personalized thank-you notes* and stuck them on their computer screens. The reaction was amazing. People came into my office to thank me! After that I recognized outstanding performance daily with thank-you notes."

When it comes to motivation, thoughtful recognition of achievement in real time always works. In most cases, small gestures carry far more meaning than big ones. SSE

Jeb Blount is author of People Follow You, People Buy You, *and* Sales Guy's 7 Rules for Outselling the Recession. *Visit www.salesgravy.com.*

ACTION: Use recognition to motivate people.

Stop Micromanaging

It isn't the same as attention to detail.

by Eric J. Romero

MANY PEOPLE CONFUSE *micromanagement* with *attention to detail*. *Micro-managing* is when a manager or leader assigns work, tells capable employees exactly how to do it, monitors them excessively, and often takes over when work is not done exactly as the manager wanted. The result is that employees never learn how to do the job or utilize their skills and creativity. Employees become discouraged and loose interest in the job since they have no sense of ownership in the process or outcomes of their work; the manager does.

Micromanagement leads to relationships characterized by mistrust and stress. It also removes incentive for workers to improve a process or innovate. Yet many leaders micromanage people. Why? A *controlling personality* often plays a role. Additionally, companies fail to attract *top performers* by hiring people at the lowest possible wage. If the employee isn't matched to the job, the *manager feels compelled to step in to ensure the job gets done*.

Paying *attention to detail* is not the same as *micromanaging*. Paying *attention to detail* is what good managers do to ensure that work is done properly and the vision is advanced. It involves assigning work, allowing staff to do it their way, and ensuring it gets done according to agreed standards.

Skilled, creative and well-matched employees should have more freedom. The manager checks in during the process to see if assistance or resources are needed and to ensure that work is completed on schedule. This isn't *micromanaging*—it's *paying attention to detail* and not settling for less than *excellence*.

To pay attention to detail and get the full value of your people, do this:

- ***Hire the best people you can afford***. Less managerial effort is needed for them to perform well.
- ***Hold people accountable for quality work and deadlines***, but *give them freedom to determine how to do their work*.
- ***Encourage people to be creative*** in their jobs and to try new ideas.
- ***Create reasonable deadlines and standards*** *that allow for creativity and delays* when new ideas don't work.
- ***Have meetings to share what they learned*** when trying new ideas.
- ***Check on progress regularly*** and use it as a chance to offer help and to learn.
- ***Believe perfection is possible***—it's just a matter of *hard work* and *persistence*.

Micromanaging results in overworked managers, de-motivated workers and poor performance. Paying attention to detail always results in better staff and organizational performance. SSE

Eric J. Romero, Ph.D., helps managers create competitive advantage based on creativity, flexibility and risk-taking. He is author of Compete Outside the Box. *Visit www.CompeteOutsideTheBox.com.*

ACTION: Practice paying attention to detail.

Why Teams Fail

The 10 most common reasons.

by Dean M. Brenner

THERE ARE GOOD AND BAD teams. Good team experiences are preferable, but when a team fails, do you try to figure out what happened—or do you quickly put the experience behind you?

Knowing why teams fail is the key to progress. Once you know what can go wrong in teams, you can then build your teams on a stronger foundation.

A *team* is *a collection of unique individuals*, and each collection is also unique. Change just one person on a team, and you have a new and unique team.

If you reassemble a team that succeeded in the past, isn't the new team really the same old team? No. People evolve and dynamics change. Since their last project together, team members have grown, and the challenges of the latest project will elicit different behaviors. A team is like a living organism whose cells are *constantly mutating*.

We value *repeatable outcomes*. We constantly seek *efficiency, process and rules* to create these outcomes. We want to learn what works, and then relentlessly perform it over and over again. But that concept is hard to apply to team building and leading. Every situation is different, and it's tough to take the same techniques that worked with one team and use them with another.

Here are 10 causes of team failure:

1. No alignment of goals. Great teams need something to work toward. They need goals: a point on the map that they are moving toward and the common purpose that has brought them all together. Without clear goals, the team will start to drift apart, wither, and die, even when the members of the team enjoy each other's company. A lack of goals will eventually reduce motivation, interest, and involvement, and the entire team construct falls apart. Most unsuccessful teams lack clear goals.

2. No alignment of the plan, commitment, or behaviors. Beyond alignment around some clear goals, we also need alignment around three things that will contribute to the team's ability to meet its goals: the plan to achieve the goals, the expected commitment level, and the necessary behaviors. If we don't agree on the plan, commitment, and behaviors, *having goals is meaningless.* Goals are required, but so is an agreement about how we'll reach the goals.

3. No sense of ownership. Investor Warren Buffett said, *"No one washes a rental car."* We care about the things we own much more than the things we rent or borrow. *No one paints a rented house.* But once you own that house, your behaviors toward it change dramatically. So, too, with your teams and their projects. If your team consists of people just *punching the clock*, you'll have a bad team experience. The team will underperform. Find a way to cause the people on the team to care about the outcome, to *own* it.

4. One-size-fits-all attitude toward team members. The great UCLA basketball coach John Wooden was often accused of *giving his star players special treatment*. Wooden *embraced* the fact that he did, in fact, treat people differently. He preached that everyone is different, and each needs different things. Why, then, would he treat everyone the same way? Now, some things should apply to all members of the team, *and Wooden agreed with that*. In his world, everyone was expected to, for example, show up for practice on time and wear the team uniform. In business, everyone should have the same opportunities for salary increases and benefits and be entitled to professional respect. Many things can, and should, apply to all. Beyond those things, people can be treated differently. *Some people are more productive when they are pushed hard, others like to be left alone. Some people need an extra pat on the back. Others don't. Some not only accept negative feedback but actually seek it*. People are not the same, and treating everyone as if they were results in underperformance.

5. Rigid application of the lessons of the past. I often hear: *This has always worked for me, so I'll keep doing it.* On the surface, this is reasonable. But when we apply this to team behaviors, it falls apart quickly. If we accept the premise that *every team situation is different*, then we have to adopt a flexible approach toward team leadership and participation. Just because something worked before, with a different team and under different circumstances, doesn't mean it will work this time. It might work—but it might not.

6. Dysfunctional or insufficient communication. On dysfunctional teams, *communication* is always a problem. People need to believe that they can discuss issues openly and honestly. When the lines of communication are closed or cloudy, team members believe they have no outlet, and when a person has no outlet, stress builds up and the team dynamic deteriorates.

7. Leadership's unwillingness to eliminate a bad performer. Members of great teams push each other to excel, and *all members are motivated by the belief that everyone else on the team also wants to perform at a high level*. When some members perform poorly, the leader has two choices: try to rehabilitate the situation or eliminate the bad performer. Often an attempt at rehabilitation is appropriate. But at some point, leaders must make a change. If a leader won't do so, it has a severe impact on the morale and motivation of the rest of the team. *Sometimes change is unavoidable.*

8. A holier-than-thou leadership attitude. *Nothing hurts team motivation faster than leadership that holds itself to different standards*. Leaders must exemplify the behaviors and commitment it expects from the rest of the team. Leaders need to demonstrate that they are willing to do the same things that they expect of others.

9. Disengaged leadership. When team leadership cares about the outcome and shows it, the team is more likely to care about the outcome also. When leadership does not care, no one else will, either. Great teams care about the outcome. Leadership has to care and *has* to *show* that it cares.

10. Lack of respect and trust. The *common denominators* of the previous nine points are respect and trust. Good teams have them. Bad teams don't. People on good teams trust that everyone else will get their job done, and treat each other with respect. People on bad teams don't. Distrust and disrespect become toxic on the team.

Good teams don't waste any energy focused inwardly at others on the team. They are aligned, have ownership, good communication, good leadership, trust, and respect. Hence, members of good teams can point their competitive energy outward at *the competition* or *the task at hand* (where it belongs), making *successful outcomes* more likely. SSE

Dean M. Brenner is the President of The Latimer Group, executive coach, public speaker and author of Move the World *and* Sharing the Sandbox *(AG Books). Visit www.thelatimergroup.com.*

ACTION: Avoid these 10 reasons for team failure.

Become Remarkable

By being led by your customers.


by Sara LaForest and Tony Kubica

NO LEADER DREAMS OF BUILDING AN *average* company, or hopes that their customer service is *poor* and their employees *uninspired*. Yet, often a gap exists between *wanting* and *doing*.

Becoming a remarkable company starts and ends with your customers. When you learn how the business is perceived in the market and what else the business can do to better serve customers—and then develop ways to fill the gaps in customer needs, interests and expectations—you can reinvent your products, services or delivery, which leads to *growth* and *sustainability*.

The only person who can honestly tell you what the customer believes is the customer. Hearing *the voice of the customer* represents a growth strategy. And *responding* to what the customer is asking for can make you *remarkable*.

Do you know your customer's perception and satisfaction with your business? To be a *remarkable company*, you must know and respond to both your *external customer* and your *internal customers* (employees). This involves: 1) *Client satisfaction*—how your clients and customers experience satisfaction with your company, products and services, *as delivered by your employees*; and 2) *Employee satisfaction*—how your employees perceive the company and experience their work, and what their satisfaction is.

What *customer satisfaction* means to you, personally, or to your management team, doesn't trump *what is* in the eyes of external *and* internal customers.

Seek to understand your customers and prioritize what actions to take based on what you learn. Asking *external customers* provides you information on your *brand perception* in the market, and asking *internal customers* (employees) provides you with information on your *culture*. Brand is the promise you make to the market; culture is how you deliver on that promise. If you miss one, you miss being remarkable.

To do this requires *courage*, as you'll test your thinking, assumptions and hopes regarding what your customers believe and value about you.

Do you know what your clients believe and say about you? Effective client surveys include *questions* about your company's: *communication, responsiveness, quality of work and people, timeliness in delivery, resource management*, and *perceived value*.

You need to know and respond to ***four things*** about your clients and external customers: *1) point of entry—how did they get to you? 2) satisfaction with your products and services; 3) their likelihood to recommend or refer your company to colleagues, friends, and family; and 4) what they want you to do differently or additionally to meet their needs.*

Effective *Climate Surveys* (*Employee Surveys*) include questions on: *mission, vision, values, direction, communication, culture, retention (loyalty), opportunities for growth and development, leadership perception, rewards and recognition*.

Conducting a *Customer Satisfaction Program* helps you stay close to your clients, build client satisfaction and loyalty, and enjoy ***seven benefits***: *1) ensure regular touch points with your clients; 2) drive industry measurements; 3) build and strengthen client relationships; 4) manage project methodology and delivery efficiency; 5) correct course fast; 6) monitor the performance, talent and leadership of your people; and 7) expand your client outcomes portfolio (work endorsements).*

Employee satisfaction surveys (ESS) focus on building a remarkable culture to attract, keep and grow great talent.

How close are you to your customers? What are you doing to *be remarkable*? SSE

Sara LaForest and Tony Kubica help executives and entrepreneurs build remarkable companies. Visit www.kubicalaforestconsulting.com or email info@kubicalaforestconsulting.com.

ACTION: Become a remarkable company.

Disrupt the Industry

Act smarter than your customers.


by Michael Hinshaw and Bruce Kasanoff

MASS PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION of news, entertainment, products, services, and ideas have given way to *personalization* and *customization*.

Many companies let inertia and internal obstacles get the better of them. Databases of customer information remain in silos, their divisions don't cooperate, employees aren't paid to focus on customer needs, and most systems and processes remain inflexible. Meanwhile, *everything and everyone is becoming interconnected*. Customers have smartphones loaded with apps that let them check prices, compare service, read reviews, and check in with friends (and strangers) as they examine your offers and products, and those of your competitors. Consumers research, connect, and purchase online and over their phones. With these tools come *higher customer expectations of experience, greater demands for personalization and customization*, and *lower tolerance for mistakes, for running through inane hoops, or for interactions that require mindless repetition*.

This is the rise of smart customers (and they're here to stay). And they can spot a lie, won't tolerate wasted time, have access to better information, and have more choices, more flexibility, and more negotiating power.

Four Disruptive Forces

The speed of the rise of *smart customers* is staggering, and ***four disruptive forces*** are changing the *ground rules*:

- ***Social influence*** inserts other people and their opinions between a company and its customers, disrupting traditional notions of *customer relationship lifecycles*.
- ***Pervasive memory*** is *the data that accumulates as we interact through digital devices*. Firms that leverage this data to benefit customers enjoy competitive advantage.
- ***Digital sensors*** are the trillions of devices that see, hear, and feel what is happening in our world. They bring *intelligence* to everything around us. *Smart companies must have smart products and services*. Sensors make products smart, and *change competition*.
- ***The Physical Web*** is allowing us to browse, bookmark, tag, and manipulate the physical world. Now, we're not just linking *devices to devices*. We're linking *people, places, ideas, and things*—changing how we define *corporations, innovation*, and *competition*.

Together, these forces will bring customers *more choices, better information*, and *new services*. With millions of bright people working to provide your customers with ever more disruptive tools, more innovation is coming. SSE

Michael Hinshaw and Bruce Kasanoff are co-authors of Smart Customers, Stupid Companies. *Visit SmartCustomers.com.*

ACTION: Start acting like a smart startup.

Body Language Mistakes

Male leaders tend to make these often.

by Carol Kinsey Goman

We look for two sets of body language cues in leaders: *power/status/authority* and *warmth/empathy/likeability*. Power and status are non-verbally displayed in height and space. Men are taller and tend to expand into space (an example would be leaning back with hands behind head, elbows wide and legs loosely crossed in a *four* shape—a predominately male posture).

So, before uttering a word, male leaders already have the advantage over their female counterparts in projecting power and authority. That's a strength. But, like any strength, when overused or inappropriately used, it can become a liability.

Power signals make male executives look like leaders, at least in a hierarchical, command and control setting. But when it comes to leading collaborative teams and building high trust work environments, those same behaviors can undermine a leader's efforts. After all, if you act like "the boss who has all the answers," why would anyone else need—or dare—to contribute?

Here are the ***five body language mistakes*** that male leaders often make, and tips on how to avoid them:

1. They keep a poker face. A male leader's ability to hold his emotions in check is viewed as an advantage in negotiations. But that doesn't mean that men shouldn't allow their feelings to show in other professional situations.

Tip: Whether you are promoting collaboration, building employee enthusiasm for a new corporate direction, or addressing the negative consequences of a major change, showing emotion is not only a good thing—it is a powerful leadership strategy.

2. They don't listen. Or, they don't *look* like they are listening. As a leader, the amount of eye contact you give is telling if you reserve it only for those whose opinion you agree with. Men are comfortable talking side-by-side, but women prefer face-to-face (eye-to-eye) encounters. In fact, women often cite *lack of eye contact* as evidence that their male boss "*doesn't value my input*."

Tip: Increasing your eye contact (and making sure you are not just looking at *some* members of your team and ignoring others) will send signals of inclusiveness and warmth.

3. They lack empathy. Well, not exactly. While another person's emotional pain activates mirror neurons (the "empathy" neurons) in both genders, a second system (the temporal-parietal junction, or TPJ) quickly takes over in the male brain. The TPJ in turn activates their "analyze-and-fix-it" circuits and leads men to immediately search for solutions, rather than understanding that sometimes people just need to be heard.

Tip: The next time someone comes to you with an *emotional* problem, try being an empathetic sounding board rather than an executive problem solver.

4. They infringe on other people's territory. Highly confident and powerful men tend to occupy greater personal space, infringing on other people's territory. Space invasions are better tolerated when the invader is attractive or of high status. But people's territorial responses are primitive and powerful. When someone uninvited comes too close, it triggers an increase in heart rate and galvanic skin response (sweat gland activity and changes in the sympathetic nervous system) of the invadee.

Tip: You can tell if you infringe on people's space by the way they react—stepping away, withdrawing their head or neck, angling their shoulders away, or placing an object (laptop, purse, cup) between the two of you. And when you notice any of these signs, back off!

5. They look intimidating. Many male leaders need to *monitor their facial expressions*, especially those that come across as intimidating, overpowering, or deliberately forbidding. Such visual power cues are useful in some situations, but not useful in others. The problem is, hard looks can become habitual in all your business dealings without your actual realizing it. You're the boss, so you scowl—period.

Tip: Once you're aware of how you come across to others, you can modify your facial expressions to suit the situation. An encouraging smile, for example, can go a long way if your goal is to energize your team and stimulate dialogue. You'll still be the boss, even if you warm up a bit (and you may be surprised to find your team responding with more positive contributions).

Get on the Boss's Good Side

When we say, "He's the boss's *right hand man*," we suggest that the boss relies on his support and values his opinions. Now we know that this saying can be taken literally—*if the boss is right handed*. Research by Daniel Casasanto, a psychologist at the New School for Social Research, shows that *we associate our dominant side with good and our nondominate side with bad, preferring products and people that happen to be on our "good" side*. For example, the 2004 presidential candidates, John Kerry and George W. Bush, are right handed; and the 2008 candidates, Barack Obama and John McCain, are left handers. The right-handed 2004 candidates made more right-hand gestures when expressing positive ideas and used their left hands for the negative. For the left-handed 2008 candidates, *the opposite was true*.

Casasanto's theory was that *we're more fluent using our dominant hand*. As a result, *people associate positive things with their dominant side*, and negative things with their weaker side. The way people use their hands should influence their judgments about value, intelligence, and honesty. As he predicted, when participants had to decide which of two products to buy, which of two job applicants to hire, or which of two alien creatures looks more trustworthy, right- and left-handers responded differently. Right-handers tended to prefer the product, person, or creature they saw on the right side of the page, but left-handers preferred the one on the left. His experiments also show that *right-handed people tend to view things situated on the right hand side of a page as being more positive*.

Since 90 percent of the population is right-handed, to sell products, *the right side of a page or a computer screen may be your best bet*. And in the next meeting with your boss, determine if she is right or left handed, and then position yourself on her dominant side. SSE

Carol Kinsey Goman is an international speaker, leadership communications coach, and author of The Silent Language of Leaders: How Body Language Can Help–or Hurt–How You Lead. *Visit www.ckg.com.*

ACTION: Use body language that helps you.

SERVICE/LOYALTY

Customer Loyalty

In spite of the retail recession.


by Robert Passikoff and Amy Shea

U.S. RETAIL SALES HAVE DECLINED IN recent months, and weak employment numbers buttress weak spending. So, lower unemployment numbers don't help boost retail sales. Even for those with jobs, marketplace despair and ennui seem to sap consumer confidence—no matter how many discounts, promotions, low-price offers, or coupons you come up with.

This long recession has taught leaders to introduce tighter inventory controls. So retailers are likely to cut back orders to keep inventory, consumer spending, and their bottom lines in sync. That, of course, impacts the manufacturing sector, which slows down, and sometimes results in staff reductions, adding to the unemployment numbers effecting consumer confidence and . . . you get the point.

Consumers aren't excited to spend money freely. But we continue to make buying decisions every day. Two critical differences factor into all this.

First, there's been a big shift in the timing of purchases consumers make—or in the timing of promotions trolling for those purchases. *All* retailers live in fear that *if they don't get out there early and advertise and promote their wares, consumers will buy something from their competitors first*. The competition feels the same. That's why *Back-to-School sales* started just after July 4th, with sales and promotions for Independence Day starting up shortly after Memorial Day. Sales periods that used to be *two weeks* have stretched into *two months*.

Second, the decision-making process has shifted as well. Brand names have increased in importance for the third year in a row, contrary to predictions of their demise, and the inaccurate view that cheap trumps brand. Why? It's about the value equation. If the consumer is more careful in spending, then what the brand stands for—the meaning behind the logo—becomes more, not less, important. In a weak economy, consumers stare harder at what they buy, and, no matter how long or short the promotional period, consumers want *meaning*—real meaning, not just image but something that counts to the consumer. Smart brands continue to build on that value-laden real-estate to build the engagement and loyalty that help them make the cut.

Yet, while *loyalty* and *engagement* are indeed leading indicators of profitability, they're not, unfortunately, a guarantee of economic consumer confidence.

Of course, some loyalty guarantees that you won't have to market your goods on price and promotions alone. Even in a bad economy, the *Rule of Six* kicks in: *loyal customers are six times more likely to rebuff competitive offers, especially price-based offers*. And they're *six times more likely to buy more of your products*. "Loyalty is a good thing," as one famous retail brand might say.

According to consumers, via Brand Keys *Customer Loyalty Engagement Index*, here's how Department Store brands currently rank when it comes to loyalty and engagement, which matches up pretty well when it comes to profits: 1. T.J. Maxx 2. Marshall's 3. Macy's 4. Dillard's 5. Kohl's 6. Sears 7. JCPenney.

The *Rule of Six* does, however, come with some reassuring metrics concerning *consumer confidence*. Consumers are six times more likely to think better of you, and six times more likely to recommend you to friends. And, when decisions are being made *more carefully*, that's one rule no brand wants broken. SSE

Robert Passikoff is President and Amy Shea is Executive VP of Brand Keys, a leader in consumer loyalty and engagement measurement. Call 212-532-6028 x12.

ACTION: Build the loyalty of your customers.

MANAGEMENT/BEHAVIORS

Bad Managers

They ruin good employees.

by Charlyne Meinhard

YOU CAN HIRE THE RIGHT employees, but if you poorly manage them, they'll likely *mess up*, rather than *step up*.

When you're quick to blame people for mistakes, you may be blind to your own failure to give *direction* and *encouragement* to them. You don't see how *poor management skills* contribute to *low performance*.

Bad managers may be *new* to managing others; or may have *been promoted reluctantly* into management. Good technical managers can be bad at managing people when they haven't received training.

What to Do About It

Managers who help *good employees* become *top performers*, exhibit seven key behaviors (CREATES).

C = Challenge employees with new opportunities. Identify which employees are ready for cross-training, are excited to take on additional tasks, or show interest in growth—and challenge them with new opportunities.

R = Recognize results in real time. Learn to observe employees' on-the-job performance and praise an employee's good results at the time of achievement. People feel appreciated for their efforts and want to achieve even more.

E = Ensure a healthy rate of change. If you change directions often, you pass along knee-jerk reactions that confuse employees and drain their confidence. Hold short huddles every morning with staff to clarify goals and direction.

A = Adopt an open climate. Set specific times to meet with each employee each week. Encourage them to list their questions and issues to cover in their weekly 30-minute individual meetings.

T = Transcend the goal of making a profit. Help people see the bigger picture and heighten their awareness of their role in customer perception and long-term satisfaction. Employees respond readily to meeting and exceeding customer expectations. They are more committed to accuracy, completeness, and timeliness.

E = Encourage flexibility and innovation. Visit key client sites to see and hear client problems in real-time. This will open your eyes to *the need for change*. Regularly initiate problem-solving discussions with employees. They may surprise you with solutions.

S = Strengthen employee strengths. Stop complaining about the faults of employees. Set *individual goals* for their development, hold private discussions on performance strengths, and work positively with each employee to create a *personal strength-development plan*.

When you practice these seven behaviors, your employees will increase their productivity and make progress. You'll upgrade your management skills, create better employees, get better results, and have less rework. SSE

Charlyne Meinhard is Chief Results Officer of Next Level Consulting, and author of Change Agents to the Rescue! *and* Ahead of Change. *Visit www.NextLevelForYou.com, email Charlyne@NextLevelForYou.com.*

ACTION: Use CREATES to improve management.

Social Power

Seven ways to gain from it.

by Ron Kaufman

CONSUMERS OFTEN USE SOCIAL media to tell their fans, friends, and followers what products they are using and what businesses they like. Yet few companies are capitalizing on this social behavior.

Until companies embrace this social reality, they'll miss out on the social power of their satisfied customers.

Companies that aren't embracing social media are missing out on huge opportunities to capitalize on the voices of their customers. These voices can contribute immediately and powerfully to a better service experience.

Companies should say to their customers, "If you did not enjoy our service, please tell us. If you did enjoy our service, please tell someone else." Tell happy customers to be social about their great experiences and encourage unhappy customers to come to you via social media so that you can make it right and improve your service.

The trick is encouraging customers to use social media *in the most beneficial way for your company*. How do you keep them spreading great things about the company while bringing their complaints only to you? Take these six tips:

1. Make it easy for them to go social. How many times have you received an email survey after a pleasant hotel stay that didn't include a link and a few lines encouraging you to *share your experience* on Hotels.com or TripAdvisor.com? It's like companies don't know if their customers are happy or not so they opt not to give you the link. When you provide such links, you show confidence in your service and you open up your company to the possibility of a lot of great word-of-mouth publicity.

2. Say thank you. Showing a little love for the love your customers show you goes a long way. All it takes is a *message of gratitude* that says, "*Thank you so much for spreading the word. As one of our happy customers, when you tell other people about us, it helps us grow and serve you better*." Or, "*Your voice counts. Thank you so much for spreading the word. You make us love what we do*." Show your gratitude for your happy customers.

3. Invite them to reach out. Every flight that takes off today has a captive audience of about 200 people, but few of them are encouraged to tell their social networks about their flight. Think of all those people arriving at their destinations and nice hotel rooms. They *love* it. But again, nothing in the room encourages them to share it. The time of delivery is a great time to capitalize on your interaction with your customer and turn the experience into a positive invitation to them to share their experience with your company. Create a *Thanks for Being Social* promo piece that includes the company's Twitter handles, Facebook pages, Yelp and TripAdvisor pages, or helpful Twitter hashtags with a line that reads, *If you enjoy our service, please let the world know.* Put it on the desk in a hotel room, in the backseat pocket on airplanes, or beside your cash register. The *positivity* you receive from customers will be *priceless*.

4. Ask how you can improve. Twitter-savvy companies are using the medium to provide customers with a way to get instant feedback and resolve problems. It's a great way to encourage customers to *bring their complaints directly*

to you so that you can begin service recovery right away. Encourage customers to bring their complaints to you. Explain to them that you are looking for ways to serve them better and that their feedback matters. Tell them, *We appreciate it when you share your experiences with us. Please don't hesitate to let us know how we can improve*. The invitation should always be open to share with you the good and the bad. Hear them out, provide them with great service, and then thank them for sharing their experience with others. You'll turn them into loyal customers.

5. Encourage them to recognize great one-on-one service. United Airlines began its *Outperform Recognition Program.* MileagePlus members can participate via the company's mobile app. The program encourages customers to let United know when its employees have provided great service. Customers simply enter the employee's name via the app and then both the customer and the employee become eligible for a random drawing for cash prizes, mileage points, and even roundtrip tickets. Through this program, United shows it understands that *getting customers to recognize great customer service leads to more great service*! They make it easy by running the program through their mobile app. Such programs boost employee morale, focus customers on *what employees are doing right*, give employees *measurable* feedback for giving great service, and create *social input* from customers. A bonus is the content—complimentary comments—to use in publicity.

6. Funnel customer questions through social media—and share best answers. Much feedback you receive from customers comes in the form of questions. Whether it's customers asking your service providers to clarify a new discount offer or when a new product will come out, when you funnel these questions through social media, you can easily share useful information with other customers. If you ask your customers to post such questions on your Facebook wall, you can answer the question there for other customers to see. You also build your informational capabilities. You learn immediately from customers what information isn't clear and what you need to do to clarify messages so they are easy to understand.

7. Make talking about your brand irresistible. The best way to ensure your customers are spreading positive, encouraging messages about your company is to provide such great service that they simply can't resist telling people about it. That's what Ritz-Carlton did. In a blog post on *The Huffington Post*, Chris Hurn, CEO of Mercantile Capital Corporation, shared how the hotel staff went above and beyond after his family accidentally left his young son's favorite stuffed animal behind after a recent stay. Not only did the staff find and safely return the stuffed animal, they took pictures of its extended stay to show Mr. Hurn's son what a great time his stuffed animal friend had while staying longer. Going the extra mile was a way for Ritz-Carlton to *get people talking about their brand*.

Social media provide a great way to engage your customers' voices, to turn one customer's great experience into an ad that attracts new customers and gets current customers thinking positively about you. It's also a fantastic way to *address customer concerns* and *improve your service culture* in real time. SSE

Ron Kaufman is author of the New York Times bestseller Uplifting Service *(Evolve Publishing). Visit www.UpliftingService.com).*

ACTION: Gain much more social power.

MANAGEMENT/NEGOTIATION

Getting More

Negotiate to succeed in work.

by Stuart Diamond

NEGOTIATION IS PART OF every encounter—and *most of us do it badly*. Perhaps you're unhappy with a product and want a refund, or you can't close a deal with a new client. You might use the power of logic, raw power, or win-win methods in these situations. But these methods are *outdated* and *miss the point*.

By finding and valuing the other party's emotions and perceptions, you can create four times the value of traditional negotiation methods.

When stakes are high, people get *emotional*; then they are uninterested in *win-win* or *logic-based* conversations. They want their emotions to be valued, no matter what they are, or they won't be persuadable. *Using raw power* or *walking out* just wastes time and causes people to withhold their best ideas.

Today, companies like Google, Microsoft, and Facebook are starting to accept my *new negotiation model* to train their employees. The model was also used to quickly settle the 2008 Hollywood Writers strike *after a year of conflict*.

Here is some negotiation advice:

• ***Find out and value their perceptions.*** Even if people are angry, ask what is behind their perceptions, and value them. This will make them more open to listening and to your arguments since you have heard them out.

• ***Make emotional payments.*** If they are mad at your company, it does no good to explain product quality, show them your spreadsheets, or tell them about win-win. They are emotional and not listening, so they are not persuadable. Open them up to persuasion by sincerely valuing their emotions. That means an apology, a small concession, empathy, or showing you care truly about their feelings.

• ***Trade items unequally valued.*** A CEO in Philadelphia once said *the most important thing he did for a 20-year client* was to pick up the client's mother-in-law at the airport one Saturday night. It had nothing to do with any deal, but it affected every deal. Try to find unequally-valued things to trade. And the more you know about someone, the more things you have to trade—professional or personal, tangible or not.

• ***Be incremental.*** If you can't get all that you want now, ask for a smaller step. Then later ask for another one. Ask to try things on a trial basis. This gets people comfortable with what you are asking, and reduces *perceived risk*.

• ***Value differences and disagreements.*** The pressure to conform is often less profitable. Groups that embrace perceptual differences and discuss them create *three times as many marketable ideas* than consensus groups. The *clash of ideas* promotes *innovation* and *creativity*.

• ***Never walk out.*** One of the most common negotiation tactics, it's one of the worst. It's a signal that you don't even value them enough to give them the time of day. The only options then are war, litigation or no deal. Sticking around gets you strategic information every time they talk. Ask questions. The NBA learned this the hard way.

• ***Use their criteria.*** How do *they* make decisions, choose vendors or clients? Don't make a proposal until you know this; *fit your proposal to match their standards*. Learn the standards the company uses to reward people and show how you fit them. If there are contradictions in *what they say* and what they do, *nicely* point this out and ask for clarification.

• ***Find exceptions to your criteria.*** Did they ever make *exceptions* to their policies or practices? Under what circumstances? Try to fit within an exception.

• ***Get commitments explicitly.*** Find out how *they* make commitments (it may not be their word, handshake, email, or contract). Ask what will happen if the commitment isn't fulfilled. Ask for a time to check back. Do all of this *nicely*. SSE

Stuart Diamond teaches negotiation at Wharton, and is author of Getting More: Negotiate to Succeed in Life and Work *(Three Rivers Press). www.GettingMore.com*

ACTION: Improve your negotiation skills.

MANAGEMENT/HIRING

Moneyball Hiring

Create championship teams.

by J. Allan McCarthy

GREAT COACHES TAKE INTO consideration an athlete's talent and heart when they're building a team, but they consider group dynamics, too. It's not just a matter of getting the fastest, strongest and smartest players on your side.

To build a championship team, you gauge how individual athletes fit together; how their personalities, talents, drive and abilities mesh to meet team goals. You do the same to build a winning sales or service team. As Michael Jordan, put it, "Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships."

In the 2011 film *Moneyball*, Coach Billy Beane picks his players based on analysis and evidence. He doesn't just *go with his gut*. Here are ***five key points*** for building an effective team:

• ***Lead with a team, not a group:*** A *team of leaders* behaves differently than a *group of leaders.* The difference comes down to clear goals, interdependencies, and rules of engagement. You may hire *the best and the brightest*, but getting them to function as a team is challenging.

• ***Know your goals:*** Bill Gates said: "Teams should be able to act with the same unity of purpose and focus as a well-motivated individual." Many big-name CEOs like to say their talent runs free with innovative ideas. It makes for compelling literature, but would that work on a football field? Corporations need their people to not only think out-of-the-box, but also be able act within a *prescriptive culture* or *system* to achieve common objectives.

• ***Realize that not everyone can be the coach or the quarterback:*** Executives want to lead, not follow. They don't naturally work well as a team. It's better to define responsibilities and build a *foxhole mentality*, wherein one person has the gun, the other the bullets. *It's in the best interests of both for each to succeed*.

• ***Be adept at resolving conflict:*** Hiring the *best and the brightest* generates friction that can sabotage progress. So, *sensitize team members* to early warning signs: know-it-all attitudes, multitasking during meetings, exhibiting dominant behavior, not responding in a timely fashion or engaging in avoidance. Agree *how to manage and minimize counterproductive behaviors*.

• ***Create individual and team agreements:*** Plan *who will do what for team objectives*, and agree on *team rules and interdependencies*. Ask individuals to commit to what they will do, and how the team is to function. The public declaration stresses *employee obligation* and *collaborative management.*

You get the team that you *plan for*, not necessarily what you *pay for*. If time is money, invest it in creating and building a championship team. SSE

J. Allan McCarthy is principal of J.A. McCarthy & Affiliates and author of Beyond Genius, Innovation & Luck. Visit *www.mccarthyandaffiliates.com.*

ACTION: Create a championship sales/service team.

Social Selling

What are the best strategies?

by Kurt Shaver

SOCIAL SELLING INVOLVES using Social Media applications for selling purposes. IBM recently reported a *400 percent sales increase* from a Social Selling pilot. Social Selling refers to activities performed by an individual salesperson as opposed to activities performed by the corporation's Marketing department.

Typical *Social Selling* activities include outbound prospecting (*identifying ideal target customers and connecting to them via introductions*), as well as inbound marketing (*posting an update, commenting, writing a blog*) to attract prospects.

Social Media gives every person the ability to be a worldwide publisher. For individuals, it's empowering. For sales teams, it can be confusing.

Apps like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter were conceived for individuals. They make it easy for each salesperson to become a Marketing department. Salespeople can become the corporation's *trusted information delivery channel* at a time when customers' trust in marketing messages is plummeting. More than ever, customers are basing buying decisions on information from their social networks. So, a salesperson who can establish trusted relationships with prospects is better positioned to earn their business. The challenge then becomes, how do corporations standardize processes and manage a large team of individual Social Sellers?

Leveraging Social Selling requires a strategy. Since LinkedIn is the leading Social Selling application, let's look at the *four stages of LinkedIn strategies* that a company usually moves through. Learning *Social Selling* skills follows the four stages of the *Conscious Competence Learning Model* developed by Gordon Training International. The stages in order of increasing sophistication are:

1. Unconscious incompetence: Initially, the corporation doesn't understand how to leverage LinkedIn as a selling strategy and often does not even recognize that a gap exists. The gap could be in total sales or new customers or other sales metrics. This belief may be caused by a lack of awareness of the benefits of LinkedIn or a culture of rejecting new technology until it is mainstream. Before moving to the next stage, the corporation must recognize its incompetence and the value of LinkedIn.

2. Conscious incompetence: Though the corporation does not understand how to leverage LinkedIn, it does recognize the value of LinkedIn in addressing the gap. This results in sales management encouraging the individual use of LinkedIn without establishing any formal programs. This approach is misleading because management thinks that their sales reps are fully leveraging this powerful business-networking tool, but only a small percentage of sales reps actually take the initiative to learn LinkedIn on their own. The result is that management underestimates LinkedIn's power because they are not seeing significant results. Would these same corporations install a CRM system with zero training and expect huge gains? It is not likely.

3. Conscious competence: The corporation implements a *formal LinkedIn sales strategy*. However, practicing *LinkedIn selling skills* requires ongoing training and reinforcement to build solid *Social Selling habits*. It's not habit yet, and there's much conscious involvement in executing the new skills.

4. Unconscious competence. Salespeople have had so much practice with Social Selling skills that they become *second nature* and can be performed easily. Sales mangers have systematized standard processes and incorporate Key Performance Indicators (i.e. # of Connections, # of Introductions, # of Posts) into their dashboards. This is similar to tracking standard selling activities (i.e. calls, pipeline, sales).

Most companies are in Stage 2, looking to move to Stage 3. With the move toward a strategy and LinkedIn sales training, the question of who should do the training arises. Here are four choices, with their pros and cons:

1. Internal marketing: This is often the intern or *young kid* from Marketing who is a *Social Media wiz kid*. She has a million Facebook fans and Twitter followers and knows about all the latest apps. The drawback is that, having never sold; she lacks an understanding of the sales process and focuses too much on the branding aspects of marketing. Her focus point will be on the *Hows* of the application without first covering the *Why*. The result can be lack of credibility in the skeptical eyes of experienced salespeople.

2. Internal sales: There is always at least one hotshot salesperson that really knows how to make LinkedIn sing. What could be better than having a knowledgeable salesperson train his peers? The drawbacks are that few hotshot salespeople have the extra time to develop a comprehensive program with presentations, workbooks, exercises, webinars, assessments, and the other training materials necessary to build good Social Selling habits. They are most valuable to the corporation when they are selling, thus their time needs to be dedicated to selling, versus training others on the in's and out's that comprise Social Selling. In addition, relationships within the sales team can impact receptivity and the trainer's ability to maintain a level of accountability. Yes, it is hard to be a prophet in your own land.

3. External social media: There are thousands of Social Media training companies, and many are good. The question to ask, like the Internal Marketing resource, is how much real-world sales experience do their instructors have? The big firms that draw the most attention tend to work more in the marketing of B2C products (i.e. Coca-Cola, Disney, Ford Motors) than the selling of B2B products (i.e. software, financial services, business insurance). There are many differences.

4. External sales training: These companies will understand sales and teaching sales process methodologies. They'll know how to impart knowledge and the better ones will have a system for tracking results. The thing to watch for is whether they are up-to-speed on the latest Social Selling tools. Many traditional sales training companies created their original content 20 years ago and it's difficult for them to move beyond their own *sacred scrolls* to train on the new Social Selling techniques.

Customers rely on their social networks to make buying decisions. So, provide the guidance to help your salespeople engage with their prospects via improved Social Selling skills. SSE

Kurt Shaver runs The Sales Foundry, specializing in helping B2B companies implement Social Selling strategies. Visit www.thesalesfoundry.com.

ACTION: Improve your social selling strategy.

MANAGEMENT/SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability

It delivers four benefits.

by Steve Richerson

GOING GREEN TO MAKE GREEN is *red hot* now. Businesses worldwide have gotten into the *going green* trend, and it's paying off big for them. Sustainability-oriented companies have a better stock performance, lower volatility, and a higher return on assets. *Sustainable or green* companies are making more *green*.

Sadly, sustainability is not a clever new software, a sparkly new app, or a cool new office toy. It's a powerful *commitment* (from management to the front line) to switch from focusing on short-term profit to focusing on maximizing the health of people, planet *and* profits.

Sustainability means that we use our planet's resources in a way that won't hinder (no pollution or overuse) future generations' ability to use these resources. With 7 billion people now living on earth, we must use the resources we have in smarter ways.

Sustainability is that way and *business is the perfect mechanism to deliver smart resource use to the planet's people*. So, integrate sustainability into your business for four great reasons.

1. Sustainability can reduce business risk. In business, risk is omnipresent. A sustainability approach (people, planet, profit) can reduce some risks, such as:

- *Litigation.* Finding ways to eliminate the use of harmful materials can align your business with the environment and reduce the risk of litigation.
- *Cleanup.* By using environmentally-aligned safety measures, you can eliminate the *need* for cleanup, and its cost. Brainstorming ways to eliminate accidents (and cleanup costs) before they happen is smart *and* sustainable.
- *Environmental Regulations.* Instead of asking *How do we comply?* ask, *What if there was no need for compliance?* What if we could point our company at the target of low or no waste, emissions, and energy use? What if we exceeded the compliance standard so much that it becomes irrelevant—no legal costs, no compliance costs, fewer problems!

2. Sustainability can cut your costs. Focusing on what you take, make and waste in your buildings, stores, fleets and plants can be a successful sustainable strategy for both the environment and your company. What if you could: *reduce your energy costs by using a sustainable resource or more efficient process? Reduce your waste disposal costs by creating less waste through recycling or precycling? Use the sun to heat the water you need? Reduce your water, energy and waste?*

3. Sustainability can build your brand. You survive and thrive because *your customers choose to do business with you*. If you lose the respect, trust or loyalty of your customers, you're finished. Consumers expect and reward companies that hold themselves responsible for the people the company affects and the planet it uses resources from. A sustainability focus enables you to earn a profit while keeping your eyes on the positive treatment of people and the planet. The more your company acts like a decent citizen, the more your customers remain loyal to your brand.

4. Sustainability can grow your revenue. Develop new products and services use problem-solving skills with sustainability as a guide. Viewing the market through *the lens of sustainability* allows you to see the market in a new way and capitalize on what you see. You'll see solutions that others, focused only on short-term profit, *can't* see. Your products and services will take on *new dimensions*, and you may even take your core competencies and create new problem-solving products for the global market, leading to *long-term revenue growth*! Sustainability is good business. SSE

Steve Richerson is a speaker, consultant, and member of the North American Environmental Education Association. Visit www.greenbizspeaker.com, call 256-710-7216 or email steve.richerson@gmail.com.

ACTION: Manage for sustainability.

MARKETING/SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media

You think you understand it?

by Marsha Friedman

WHEN THE INTERNET FIRST gained prominence, it became apparent that having a Web site was essential. Back then, Web designers were not plentiful, and few people thought to hire a professional to create a Web site. They felt that *any* Web presence was better than none, and they found people they knew to help them who were "into the whole Internet thing."

As a PR pro, when I see a Web site that doesn't represent firms well, I ask *who created it?* Invariably, I hear "My nephew," or "I did it myself." Those days have passed for Web sites and for social media.

Some people regard social media as something they can do themselves. But, social media, done badly, will set you back instead of move you forward.

Here are some ways to know if you are taking the right approach or heading down the wrong path:

- ***My daughter does that for me.*** If your daughter is a college graduate with a broad-based education that includes a degree in mass communications, I'd say you're on the right track. However, if she's 18 and her primary qualification is that she has Twitter and Facebook accounts, I'd say you need to reevaluate your choice of marketing personnel.
- ***I hired a college intern.*** While college students are part of *the social media generation*, it doesn't automatically qualify them to do social media for you. *Social media is one-to-one marketing outreach*. You are communicating directly to individuals, and anyone who has ever posted an opinion in an Internet forum knows the online audience is not to be trifled with. Your reputation is on the line. With the variety of questions and comments you receive, it's critical that they're handled with care and professionalism to avoid any repercussions to your name and brand. A *social media marketing professional* is an astute communicator who ensures each time the right tone, caring and message is delivered for maximum return and keeps your audience engaged. This dynamic is crucial for the success of the program.
- ***I got 11 new followers on Twitter this week.*** Building followers is important, but you'll never make a social media campaign work with the *onesy-twosy* approach. Set a *monthly benchmark for building followers*. This benchmark is not a gross number, but a net figure after you weed out spammers, chronic friend adders, and marriage proposals from men in foreign countries.

Social media is serious business. Do it right, and you create a base of thousands of followers. Do it wrong, and you spend much time and energy, spinning your wheels and getting nowhere fast. And, you'll think that *social media marketing is a complete waste of time*, when in fact it's *one of the most critical components for any marketing strategy*. SSE

Marsha Friedman is CEO of EMSI Public Relations, a firm that provides PR strategy and publicity services. Visit www.emsincorporated.com.

ACTION: Take social media marketing seriously.

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