

BUSINESS LINE

To Your Success

MAKE SURE YOUR WEBSITE'S A POWERFUL PLAYER IN YOUR MARKETING CAMPAIGN

by Andrea Obston, Andrea Obston Marketing Communications, LLC

Congratulations! You are the proud owner of a printing press and chances are you're not even using it to grab and keep clients. I speak, of course, of your website. That's right – your website. That thing that you hung out in cyberspace the day you opened your doors that hasn't been changed since 1996. If you've been ignoring the powerful abilities of your website, you're missing out on one of your most powerful marketing tools.

Why do I call it your "printing press?" Because, like Guttenberg's invention that hit the streets in 1440, it gives you the ability for mass communication directly to the world. You control the message and you facilitate its distribution. So why aren't you using it to market your business?

The truth is that many customers see your website as your front door. And, if you expect your marketing efforts to pay off, you better make sure your front door beckons them in. The Financial Times of London calls online shopping "the engine of retail sector growth, with Internet sales accounting for almost half of the expansion in retail spending last year." They say Internet spending rose 15 times faster than the overall retail sector in 2005. Isn't a fresh coat of paint on your old front door worth it to get a piece of that kind of growth?

Now, before you start whining about how expensive a good website will be, consider taking a few baby steps towards making your current site a more functional player on your marketing team.

Maximize what you've got - If customers can't find your website, you're invisible.

Search engines send out "spiders" that track the key words written and encoded into your website (meta-tags) and report back on what they've found. All search engines index websites differently and refuse to tell

us how they do it. So to give your business a fighting chance, make sure you do all you can to make sure your site is search engine friendly. Decide the two or three key words that your customers may type when

looking to find you and make sure they show up in your front page copy. Make sure you have meta-tags on your site too. Don't know what they are? Ask your web person.

Drive them through the door – If you honestly believe that "to know you is to love you" then you've got to put out the welcome mat that will urge prospects to sample what you've got. In all your marketing efforts, from ads to press releases and brochures to kitchen magnets, make sure there's a reason for customers and prospects to come to your site. Use it as a way to offer recipes featuring your product. Or post unique self-evaluation tests that will help them be better managers and show off your expertise. Or allow website visitors to sign up for your blog where you comment on your industry's news.

Publish your own news – Make sure you've got a News Section and fill it with your up-to-date press releases and feature stories. Self-publish your own news so people searching the web can find it.

Make sure you put real news in that section, not pictures of your staff at last year's holi-



IN THIS ISSUE:

Meeting Your Clients' Expectations

Valuable Information for your Business Including:

- *Hiring 'Right'*
- *Increasing Traffic to Your Website*
- *Listening to the Marketplace*
- *Tips for Marketing to Different Generations*
- *Your Website as a Valuable Marketing Tool*
- *Effective Invoicing Tips*

The contributors to this newsletter are independent professionals providing general information. Business owners should consult an experienced professional for assistance suited to their particular needs.

(continued on page six)

HIRING "RIGHT"

By Pam Butterfield, Business Success Tools LLC

As business owners, we always try to meet our customers' expectations. Because customer expectations continually change, we are never done learning what our customers need and will require next. One of the keys to meeting your customers' ever-changing expectations is to choose the "right" people to work in your organization.

If your business's success depends upon meeting your customers' expectations where they live today and where they will live in the future, the people you hire need to buy into your vision and your company's mission. They need to understand what your standards of behavior and excellence are. They need to understand what they must do to be successful in your organization. You, in turn, have the tremendous responsibility to hire people that will understand what it takes to be part of your winning team.

HAS THIS EVER HAPPENED TO YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW?

When I talk to company decision makers who are struggling to hire "good people", they are often surprised when I ask, "What did you do to get ready for your new employee?" The answer is often, "I put an ad in the paper. I didn't get many good resumes. But, I hired someone that I think will work out. They only lasted three weeks and they didn't even have the courtesy to call me to let me know they were quitting. People are so rude today."

INCREASING YOUR ODDS AT HIRING RIGHT

Let me offer three tactical/practical suggestions that will help you increase the odds of improving your ability to hire and keep good employees.

1. Prepare for your new employee. Put yourself in a new employee's shoes. Would you want to start a new job, only to find that the person you are working for does not know what he or she wants you to do? How would you feel on your first day of work if you didn't have the proper work space and equipment to use? Imagine what your new employee will say, when asked by a loved one at dinner, "So, dear, how was your first day in your new job?"

2. Get "stuff" out of your head and onto paper. Could you be successful if your new boss pro-



You have the tremendous responsibility to hire people that will understand what it takes to be part of your winning team.

vided you with "on-the-job training" (i.e., they talked and talked and talked to you, telling you everything you need to know and do, between answering phone calls, fighting fires and serving customers). Develop written procedures, forms, checklists and job aides that will help your new employees. These documents don't have to be fancy but they do need to be written. A large number of human beings are visual learners which means talking at them will not help them. It will only serve to confuse them.

3. Have Standards and Communicate Your Expectations. It is your business. Make it world class. Have high standards (and put them in writing) for how you treat customers, how you intend to treat your employees and how you wish to be treated in your role as business owner. Often I hear business owners say they have settled for mediocrity. In their heart of hearts, they question why anyone would want to work for them. After all, they cannot pay a high salary ... blah, blah, blah! Therefore, they settle, and hire someone that in their heart of hearts is not the right person. Do not settle. Hiring the wrong person is extremely costly in lost time, energy and money!

If you are planning to hire new employees in the months ahead, individuals who will work hard to meet your customers' expectations and support your growing business, start making appointments with yourself. That's right, block out time in your calendar to work on your business. You'll need time to prepare for them, get things out of your head and on to paper, and clearly define your standards and expectations.

BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME –MAYBE

By Ellen Jennings

The “build it” theory for increasing business via a web site will not work for most companies. Traffic to a web site is the result of a combination of factors, and with planning and some work you can have more visitors, which is the first step to getting more business through your web site.

Following are four ways you can increase traffic to your web site that do not involve Search Engine Optimization or Paid Search Inclusion, two topics that need their own article.

USE YOUR WEB SITE ADDRESS

A sometimes-overlooked way to get more traffic is to make sure that your web site address is listed on all of your communication materials, just like you do your phone number. This includes

your business cards, letterhead and brochures, advertising and public relations pieces. Everyone in your company should include the web site address in their email signature and be sure to include it if you publish an e-newsletter. If recipients see your web address they may just type it in for a direct hit.

USE INCENTIVES

Current clients or prospects may be more likely to go to your site if given an incentive. Attorney Gedge does this by offering a link to legal tips when she gives a seminar. Include a coupon for dollars off, free shipping, a free consultation, or a free how-to sheet in your e-newsletter or printed handouts to induce readers to go to your web site.

USE OTHER SITES' SUCCESS

Links from other web sites can capitalize on that site's efforts to increase traffic. Web sites where prospects may be looking for your services include trade associations and membership business groups, such as your chamber of commerce. Take advantage of any listing opportunities they offer.

In some industries online directories that have free or fee listings may be appropriate. Business.com is a directory that is devoted to web sites with a business-to-business theme. A listing is \$199 per year and they also have preferred “pay per click” listings. Because they only include businesses, a search for “public relations” will produce a list of PR subcategories and agencies, without the

clutter of encyclopedia definitions, government statistics or how to get a degree online.

Before signing up for inclusion in any directory, conduct a few searches. If the results are filled with unrelated sites or you are too distracted by the ads, your prospective clients most likely won't use it. You also don't want to get listed in “link farms,” considered a spam tactic by most search engines, and any directory that “guarantees” top listings should be avoided.



You can find out which sites are linking to yours at Yahoo.com by typing link:http://www.yourwebsite.com in the search box and clicking search. Click on each of the resulting links to view what your prospective clients are seeing about your company. Perform this search

on your competitors' web site addresses to get ideas on other places to get listed.

USE FORUMS

Participating in an on-line forum or discussion group in your area of expertise can be worth the time invested with increased traffic to your site. Some trade associations and special interest groups sponsor forums where you can answer questions or comment on industry issues. Both Google and Yahoo! host thousands of groups on any number of topics.

The more you contribute the more likely other readers will want to find out more about you, so make it easy by including your web site address in your signature, as a link if possible. A small warning: think twice before you click submit. A flip remark can follow you through cyberspace for a very long time.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Following these suggestions should bring more traffic to your web site, creating the opportunity to convert that traffic into increased business. For additional tips, including how to determine your web site's Google and Yahoo rank and other site monitoring resources go to www.jtechworks.com/tips.

Ellen Jennings, principal of JTechWorks, LLC, helps businesses develop online strategies and business solutions. (860-563-5930 or on the web at jtechworks.com.)

MEETING OUR DIFFERENT CLIENTS' DIFFERENT NEEDS

By Attorney Judy Gedge

As a small business lawyer, I help many people start their own businesses. They look to me for help in navigating the often-confusing 'waters' of launching their businesses. I spend time with each of these clients individually to find out what their plans are for their businesses, both short-term and long-term plans. I'll find out how they plan to finance the business, market their products/services, meet their staffing needs and much more. Having a full background of their plans allows me to provide specific legal advice tailored to their particular needs. In addition, I prepare the documents required to organize their LLC's or other entities.

But, you know what...not everyone wants/needs this level of service. How do I know this? From the number of people who would call just to ask: "What do you charge for an LLC?" I would explain the totality of the services I provide to someone starting a business and then tell them the legal fee. And then I wouldn't hear back from many of these callers. Sometimes this would leave me frustrated and confused. Why wouldn't someone avail himself of all I had to offer to help him start his business?

LISTENING TO THE MARKETPLACE.

It's probably obvious to you but it took me some time to identify it. They might value the legal counseling and advice I could provide but their budget just didn't allow for it. They'd skip the lawyer and invest in inventory or advertising instead. Makes sense. But this also meant they would be operating their businesses as sole proprietors, exposing all of their personal assets to the risks of their businesses. Or, perhaps, they'd decide to 'do the LLC' themselves without a lawyer. They might think it was as simple as getting a dog license. But it's not! Forming an LLC properly means strict compliance with the governing statutes. It means doing it right in order to minimize personal liability.

RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF THE MARKETPLACE.

For these potential clients price was their key factor. Personalized legal counseling was not on their list of high priorities. They wanted an LLC and that was all. My challenge was to devise a professional way to meet their needs. All of which leads us to LLC Express, a new



LLC Express provides a low-cost document preparation service to form and properly organize a single-owner LLC

service I recently launched. LLC Express provides a low-cost document preparation service to form and properly organize a single-owner LLC. It provides a cost-effective way for the small business owner to properly form an LLC for his business.

(For details, see www.LLCexpress.com)

This service isn't right for everyone. For someone who wants one-on-one legal counseling to help launch his business, that level of service is still available. Also, LLC Express is not available for a business that has two or more owners. (This type of business needs to be properly structured to address such issues as management, finance and business continuity.) But for the person planning to start a single-owner business who wants a cost-effective way to make sure his LLC is 'done right', LLC Express may be a perfect fit.

Through LLC Express, my firm is trying to respond to the needs of the marketplace by meeting the different needs of different clients. Perhaps this 'case study' from my own business will help you to think of a new approach for your business.

MARKETING EFFECTIVELY TO DIFFERENT GENERATIONS

By Ruth Mitman, PhD

Today more than ever, businesses need a competitive advantage – something that sets them apart from others who sell the same products or services. Extraordinary customer service can provide this competitive advantage. We know that customers are not all alike. There are, in fact, five generations of American adults each of which reflect different core values. Understanding the values, attitudes and consumer behavior of these generations, gives us deeper knowledge of our customers and their expectations.

A generation of people share the same historic environment and similar life experiences and they share buying habits and customer service expectations. While every member of a particular generation is not exactly the same, recognizing the generational influences of our customers will help us understand their expectations as consumers. Some of these generation groups are well known, such as the 'baby boomers', but there are actually a total of five distinct generation groups:

GI Generation: Born between 1910 and 1930, they grew up during the Depression and World War II.

Silent Generation: Born between 1933 and 1945, they grew up in easier times. With rising prosperity, jobs were plentiful.

Baby Boomer Generation: Born between 1946 and 1964, they experienced the Vietnam War and conflict at home with the civil rights, feminist and environmental movements.

Generation X: Born between 1965 and 1977, they are the product of latch-key parenting and unprecedented divorce rates. The most unsupervised generation of young Americans in our history, they developed a fierce 'I can take care of myself' attitude.

Generation Y: Born between 1978 and 2000, they have been raised in the most child-centered environment ever. They have been nurtured and programmed with a slew of activities since they were toddlers resulting in both a high-performance and high-maintenance generation.

What does all of this mean for your business? Knowing how to effectively interact with your customers and your potential customers is crucial. As an example, let's look at how the differences between two of these groups might affect your marketing approach.

GI GENERATION

Members of the GI Generation are often frugal and cautious, seeing debt as a literal sin. They believe their goals will be achieved by sacrificing, saving and working hard. Given their experience of the war years, they trust in government, big business and each other.

- They will see you as an authority figure. They will ask for your advice and recommendations. You must earn their trust.
- Use the formal, "Mr. or Mrs. Jones", never "Henry" or "Helen". Respect is important.
- Use the age of your company and your years of experience to your advantage.
- Take extra time when serving these older customers. Personal service and relationship building are crucial.
- Expect to interact with more older women than men as women live longer than their husbands. They may be less experienced in business matters and may need more attention.

GENERATION X

Members of Generation X grew into independent, goal-oriented entrepreneurial thinkers where ease with information and technology became one of their most important survival skills. They look for jobs that satisfy curiosity, ambition, financial needs and work-life balance.

- Have a Gen X-er review your website. Gen X-ers invented the art of Internet comparison shopping and are very comfortable with online shopping.
- Strive for excellent customer service and righting mistakes. Gen X-ers are more cynical than those from the previous generations. They are not brand loyal. You must earn their trust with each purchase.
- Note that Baby Boomers often seek Gen X-ers' counsel before making technology purchases. Even if Gen X-ers are not your target market, they may be influencing the buying decisions of your actual target market.

Recognizing the generational influences of the marketplace is critical to your business success. It provides a broad context for understanding your customers and their expectations. It helps build strong customer relationships. It helps you fine-tune your marketing strategy and communicate more effectively. It is the true definition of having a competitive advantage.

Ruth Mitman, PhD, is a 50-plus market advisor and President of the Mitman Group LLC. She helps companies increase their market share by understanding and speaking to older customers better than their competitors do. Ruth can be reached at mitmangroup@snet.net or by calling 860-313-0056.

DOES YOUR CUSTOMER INVOICING SUIT YOU OR YOUR CUSTOMERS?

by Annabel Pedemonti, Accounting Software Services

As business owners we understand that we must do our best to anticipate and meet our customers' expectations, and work with them in a mutually comfortable way. When we begin working with a customer we find out their needs and how they like to work, and this creates the understanding of mutual expectations. The overriding concern is for their comfort level and confidence, for if we fail to achieve this we will soon have no customers to service.

You have probably already spent time and effort on customizing the proposals, invoices, and statements to reflect the appropriate image of your company. However, have you given any thought to how you deliver these to your customers? Are you invoicing them in a way that suits both you and your customers? Too often our communications with our clients are dictated by the business owner with no regard to the preferences of the customer. There are three basic ways to send written billings to our customers – snail mail, email, and fax. Which do you use? Do you know which your customers prefer? Anecdotal evidence suggests that emailed proposals, invoices, and statements generate faster response and payment.

Today's accounting software allows you to choose between these methods, and use different ones for different customers. You can customize a variety of cover letters for the emailed sales forms, and you can email batches of invoices or statements. Before you send your first batch of emailed invoices, do a Print Preview to view what your customers will see, and to be extra cautious, email one to yourself.

YOUR WEB SITE *(continued from page one)*

day party. That's not news and few people care how Sally looked in a lampshade. Keep that sort of fun and games on your intranet or the bulletin board in the lunchroom.

Also, organize the stories by topic not date. No one ever wakes up in the morning and asks themselves, "Gee I wonder what press releases my cell phone company put out on Oct. 1, 2005." But, they might just pay attention if they saw a topic called "Connecticut's Hands-Free Cell Phone Law."

Lastly, when a publication uses one of your stories or quotes one of your executives, make sure to get permission from the publication

Another area of customer billing where preferences vary is frequency of billing and the detail included on the invoice. Do you bill monthly, at the end of each project, or at pre-agreed stages? Is this what both you and your customers prefer? Do you include detail on work done, hours and/or days worked, or simply a summary for the time period? Do you know if this suits your customers?

Once you have identified the invoicing communication preferences of your customers, you are left with the dilemma of managing this information without turning your billing into a nightmare. You can do this by using the extra fields in your customer set up to note the sending method and detail level for each customer. Make sure that this field is visible on your screen as you invoice, acting as a prompt for your customers' preferences as you invoice them.

In addition to using your accounting software to communicate billing information to your customers, you can also use it to generate a variety of reminder or collection letters for overdue invoices. This will save you time, as these letters automatically include all the relevant financial information for each customer, while maintaining the friendliness or urgency of each request for payment.

Using some of these ideas you can extend your philosophy of meeting your customers' needs to include your billing communications with them as well as the way in which you work with them.

to post the PDF on your site. Or, put up a link to the publication's on-line version in your News section. You can even link to any television stories in which you appear. Two clicks of the mouse and visitors to your website can view the whole story. Then, drive prospects and customers to that story with an e-mail featuring the link on your site.

Your website offers you an inexpensive, ever-changing opportunity to attract customers with the messages of your own choosing. It's a great way to drive customers to your doorstep and right onto your bottom line.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Yvonne Bruno, CPA

Bruno & Associates
533 Cottage Grove Road
Bloomfield, CT 06002
860-242-8844
yvonnebruno@snet.net

Pam Butterfield

Business Success Tools,
LLC
15 Country Club Drive
Manchester, CT 06040
860-643-4744
Pam@BusinessSuccess
Tools.Biz

Judy Gedge

The Small Business Lawyer
977 Farmington Ave.
Suite 200
West Hartford, CT 06107
860-231-7711
judy.gedge@gedgelaw.com

Andrea Obston

Andrea Obston Marketing
Communications, LLC
3 Regency Drive
Bloomfield, CT 06002
860-243-1447
aobston@aomc.com

Annabel Pedemonti

Accounting Software
Services
P.O. Box 371
South Windsor, CT 06074
860-289-7239
annabel@
quickbookservices.com

Please contact any of the members of the Editorial Board to obtain additional copies of this newsletter.

We welcome articles by guest contributors. To obtain our submission guidelines, please contact any member of the Editorial Board.