

grow your **Business**

Edition 4

Making your way in the world today takes everything you've got ...

When you look around the world today with all of the changes we're facing — web sites, e-commerce, new ways of living, new ways of doing business, new ways of communicating, new ways of educating each other, higher standards of living with yet longer work hours, even a new millennium — it's easy to become distracted. Sometimes we become so focused on keeping up, staying competitive, adapting to these changes and moving ahead we can forget the fundamentals and miss the point. So much so that we can ignore some of the most important aspects of our lives, aspects that can actually enhance our business lives.

In this edition we'll be talking about some of the key things that are changing in our marketplace so you can take another perspective. We'll examine web site strategy and why it's important, review the 4th way to grow your business (improving your internal processes), and return to the recurring theme of turning your employees into a team to discover a "gold mine at your fingertips." We'll also review the concept of vision (when you read this article, consider not only your vision for your business, but your vision for your life and family as well).

You need to remember what's important.

Think honestly about this example for a moment. Do you ever keep working when you know you're exhausted? You work on something for hours and hours trying to solve the issue with little to no progress. But you think "I have to get this done tonight." So you keep struggling through, only to find that you fall asleep at your desk with no results. Compare that to when you've said "that's it," put yourself to bed, and told yourself you would find a solution in the morning when you felt more energised. Didn't you find that the same problem takes less than half the time and seems so much smaller?

Of course we're going to be more productive when we've spent quality time relaxing or enjoying time with family and friends. Our health, social lives and the interactions we have with the people who are important to us can keep us motivated and full of life; appreciative of what we have and what we're working toward. Think of yourself as a battery. Like any battery, you have to keep charged up! And very often it's our time away from work — recuperating and enjoying the fruits of our labour like great food, great people, holidays or even just a great night's sleep — that truly keeps us going.

Another great way to keep getting "recharged" is to make sure the most important people in your life — partners, spouses, children, extended family and friends understand what you are attempting to achieve in your life and how your business acts as the medium for achieving those goals. You'll find when you do that, they'll rally behind you even more. This could range from introducing you to people they know that could be important to progressing your goals, to importantly giving you the support you need when the pressure is on.

So be sure to involve the people around you in your goals, and remember to stop and smell the roses to keep that battery charged! A balanced lifestyle makes for a better quality of life, thought and success. In the long run it might mean your goals take a little bit longer to achieve, but at least you will have enjoyed the journey as much as the destination.! Remember

But I don't have a web site ... what has all this got to do with me?

balance brings results!

If you've been watching the news and reading the papers, and finding yourself continually asking this question, you may need to rethink your strategy. Although building a web site can seem incredibly foreign to most of us, it really isn't that difficult or expensive. Yet it is critical because, even at a minimum, web sites are like business cards these days (although they can be far more than that) in that they represent your business to the world at large. Even if you're thinking "our business is locally-based, how can the 'World Wide Web' really be relevant to me?" Read on because that could be misleading. Think of it this way, if you don't have a web site, chances are your competitors do. Let's take a look at some numbers to examine just what that could mean to you.

Some compelling customer statistics.

A poll held in 1999 via e-marketer indicated that the following percentages of people feel the Internet will become a completely accepted part of our lives within:

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Back More Often," and "Get Your Customers to Spend More." In this edition we're going to focus on the 4th way to grow your business: "Improving the Processes Within Your Business."

#4 Improve the processes within your business.

These days the way we do business can be just as important as what we do. As customers become better educated and more discerning, they often expect more in terms of customer service—the way they are treated and how the product or service delivers. Given that, it's important to review the processes – those actions that make up your business – and implement strategies and systems to improve them.

This could range from picking up the phone no later than the second ring (which shows you're attentive to their needs), using "awesome service" to show customers how special they are to you, improving the sales process, better educating your team members on the products and services you offer and more importantly the benefits to the customer of each, going the extra mile when it comes to serving them, improving speed of delivery and more. Sit down with your team and think about what you could be doing differently to improve the way you do business.

An activity to get your team started.

Here's a simple activity your team can use to start examining your current processes and possible improvements.

Using a whiteboard, draw a large square in the middle. On the left hand side of the square, draw 3 arrows hitting the box. On the right hand side of the box, draw one arrow coming off the box. Call the arrows on the left hand side "inputs" and the one on the right hand side "output."

Now get your team to think of any process in the business (for example, the phone process, where inputs represent incoming calls, and outputs represent orders) — literally any process in the business.

Now in the square write the word "Activity." Point out that the only way to get more outputs is to change the activity in the box. Taking the phone as an example, it could be that input is when a customer calls and asks "what's the price of XYZ?" The "Activity" in this case could be a team member simply giving the price in response. The customer then says "I'll call you back," and there is no output. The only way to have changed that situation was to have changed the activity (what the team member said in handling the call).

When you start to look at your business as a series of processes, this method of examining

your business can produce dramatically positive results. Give it a try.

Some more ideas on giving your team a shot in the arm!

In the last edition we talked about building a team in the article titled "Being a 'Team' Is Much More Than a Name Change." Here are some more ideas that could help you build an awesome team and, consequently, your business:

1. Offer an incentive to team members for bringing in customers of the right type.
2. Have "fun breaks." For example, once a month you can call a half-hour fun break with music, ice cream for everyone and team building games.
3. Change your business cards to make them more interesting. Give one to every member of the team. Your team members, just like you, meet all sorts of people at all sorts of places, many of whom might be potential customers. It can also be a great lead for finding new team members, and encourage them to refer people who might fit in well with your business.
4. Empower the team by respecting their understanding of your customer's needs, and giving them the power to make some decisions.
5. Thank your team members. The words "thank you" are usually lacking in most business places. A "thank you" said every single day to each team member on their way out the door can make all the difference.

A "gold mine" at your fingertips.

As a business owner or manager, you're constantly looking for people to sell to. You know, people who match your products and services, people who want what you've got and appreciate that you offer value for money. And yet, each and every day, we DO deal with so many of these very same people. Those people are called your customers, as well as soon-to-be customers who have made inquiries.

Your customer database—a detailed list of customer names, personal details, and, in some cases, spending patterns and other information—is so important to the future of your marketing.

Being a "known quantity" gives you the edge.

Marketing directly to your existing customers gives your business an edge. You see, if someone has purchased from you before, they know you. You already stand out from everyone else. Customers will be more interested, curious even, to find out why you're contacting them. You're

How to make the most of your Newsletter

Be sure to read each article with the mind set "how could this apply to our business?" because sometimes the best ideas come from examples that seem unrelated at first. Thinking of it that way will guarantee you get value. Better yet, take notes as you read and commit to having the ideas implemented by the time next month's edition arrives. Also make copies for each team member. To really make sure something positive happens, arrange a team meeting to talk about the ideas and set a schedule for getting them implemented. Doing that should really jump start things and get some action happening!

For those days when things have gone astray take heart, at least you didn't say this:

*"I have reiterated over again what I have said before."
Former Mayor of New York
Robert F. Wagner*

An Important Message:

While every effort has been made to provide valuable, useful information in this publication, this firm and any related suppliers or associated companies accept no responsibility or any form of liability from reliance upon or use of its contents. Any suggestions should be considered carefully within your own particular circumstances as they are intended as general information only.

already "in," if you like! In addition, contacting a person one-on-one means that you no longer compete with all the other mass marketing forms out there, such as television, radio, print, and so on. Essentially, contacting someone personally means that your business breaks through the clutter of all the other marketing your customer is bombarded with on a daily basis.

Why, then, is the opportunity to tap into this huge resource as a marketing method lost time and time again?

Is it because we feel we're already too busy to add anything else for that customer? Is it because we don't know how to capture the all-important customer details needed to make this asset work for our businesses? For the most part, we don't set up systems like this because it seems more important (and sometimes easier) to concentrate on continually pursuing new prospects, instead of tapping into the hottest list in town—your customers.

What is the database process?

What is the process then? Simple. Gather names and other details from every single customer (or soon-to-be customer) to create your database. In doing so, you'll be building your most valuable asset. In fact, an asset so valuable it can be sold. Here are some useful techniques.

Many business owners shy away from creating a customer database as a tool, thinking it will be too difficult. Actually, it could make your life much easier. (If you already have a customer database and a process to continually build that database, bear with us. You might find out how to improve it and just what it could mean for your business.) All it involves is a few easy-to-ask questions about the customer's name, address, phone and e-mail to build basic database information.

You can also ask questions to track other important information, such as the source of your inquiries. (This in turn can help you make better decisions within the framework of your marketing budget.) For example: "And before you go, can I just ask, how did you hear about us?" Or "How many people do you think will be using the [product or service] regularly?"

Other information you can note could be what was purchased for what cost, and their gender and occupation if you know it. From there you ask questions that help you glean a better understanding of your customer profile – age, income, spending patterns and so on.

Other ways to capture this information is via prize drawings. Offer to give away something your customers would love to have, and ask your team members to encourage every customer to complete an entry form. That can make it fun too!

Built to Last - The Role Vision Plays...

"Built To Last — Successful Habits of Visionary Companies" by James Collins and Jerry Porras, is one of the best books ever written (at least we think so!) on the importance of vision in building a lasting, successful business. There is little doubt that your starting point to growing your business must be the vision you have for its future – the way you want your business to be when it's done, so to speak. Profit goals, staffing needs, what kind of lifestyle you'd like it to achieve for you and more. How clear you are all on that is critical. Refer to the last edition's article titled: 'Working Backwards Takes You Forward ...Huh?'

From there your success may be measured by how well you are able to communicate that vision to the people who will be helping you achieve it — your team — and how committed you are to having them and yourself work on building your business as well as serving your customers. Here's what the owner of what once was a small business has to say about becoming successful:

"IBM is what it is today for three special reasons. The first reason is that, at the very beginning, I had a very clear picture of what the company would like when it was finally done. You might say that I had a model in my mind of what it would look like when the dream — my vision — was in place.

The second reason was that once I had that picture, I then asked myself how a company that looked like that would have to act. I then created a picture of how IBM would act when it was finally done.

The third reason that IBM has been so successful was that once I had a picture in place of how IBM would look when the dream was in place, and how such a company would have to act, I then realised that unless we began to act that way from the very beginning, we would never get there. In other words, I realised that for IBM to become a great company it would have to act like a great company long before it ever became one. From the very outset, IBM was fashioned after the template of my vision. And each and every day, we attempted to model the company after that template. At the end of each day, we asked ourselves how well we did, discovered the disparity between where we were and where we had committed ourselves to be, and at the start of the following day, we set out to make up the difference.

Every day at IBM was a day devoted to business development, not doing business. We didn't do business at IBM, we built one."

Tom Watson, Founder, International Business Machines (IBM)

