

GYB 2014

04



GROW YOUR BUSINESS

IN THIS ISSUE:

- ▶ Get Financially Fit

- ▶ Tips for Effective Content Marketing

- ▶ Gadgets and Gizmos -Keeping Up With Technology

- ▶ How to Avoid Becoming a Customer Service Robot



Get Financially Fit

Gyms statistically report that member activity drops off significantly every year around mid-February. The luster and vigor of the New Year's resolutions have dwindled, energy levels plummet and resolve is but a distant memory.

Around this same time, small businesses can suffer the same drop off- financially speaking.

Staying financially fit can be just as challenging as keeping up that workout regime. It requires a strategy of attack, bolstered with realistic goals and timelines.

Start with a little self-reflection. What did NOT work in the past? Repeating past mistakes is a common yet costly error.

A simple four-step approach can be effective:

1. Keep track of all spending - as important as it is to know how much is being spent, it is just as vital to record where and on what you are spending it.
2. Pay on time - set up reminders and reminders for your reminders

and become the customer that all your vendors like to work with. Not only does it boost your reputation, it will help keep you out of the red.

3. Be prepared and set aside an emergency fund. This could be utilized in a number of situations but will no doubt relieve the stress of an unpredictable cash-squeeze.

4. Write down goals and be numerically specific, 'being rich' isn't what we mean.

“Start with a self-reflection of what did not work in the past?”

Don't panic if you feel a bit green at the start - financial intelligence is garnered through picking up bits and pieces during the process.

Have a built-in flexibility to your strict regime. Exterior factors like a recession or market fluctuation will inevitably call for some readjustments.

Constantly monitor and manage your fixed operational costs. Depending on what your cash flow status is, you may need to focus on areas such as

advertising, subscriptions, office supplies, and customer entertainment to ensure there is a good return on investment.

Blast the bulge and burn off that excess fat. Consider staffing changes during slower seasons, combining job roles or taking on interns, freelancers and contracted workers during busier times.

Financial fitness is like any other diet or exercise regime - it requires lifestyle changes and the implementation of a constant learning curve. Signing up for the race is one thing, crossing the finish line is a whole different feat!

CHECK YOUR LISTINGS

Moved recently? Changed numbers? Even the smallest mistake can prevent a customer from reaching you, killing a potential deal. Always double-check your listings, however small or obsolete they may seem. Make a point to search through all listing platforms and verify your contact details- phone numbers, addresses and more are often entered manually and are susceptible to mistakes.



Tips for Effective Content Marketing

As if navigating the waters of social media and online marketing were not already challenging enough, strap on your life vest folks, because now it's time to talk about how effective your efforts actually are.

Jumping into the deep end and learning to swim among the social media sharks was a great start. But now you have to build an effective content marketing strategy that can act as a raft and actually keep you afloat in the rough seas of small business marketing.

Content marketing is not rocket science. Listening to your clients and giving them what they want is an organic part of your business plan. Your content should always be driven by a call to action, converting a lead into a customer.

Ever typed a question into a search engine? Those suggestions that pop up as you are typing are typically the most relevant to your question. Capitalize on that by answering the common questions that your clients may have.

Always write your content for your audience, not for your search engine. When done right, effective

content will drive traffic to your site naturally.

Stop selling! Instead, start developing a conversation. Leave the selling to your sales people and take on the more intricate task of inviting a dialogue that will, in turn, continue to produce relevant content.

Struggling to start? Repurposing content and applying new relevancy is a great way to release writers block.

Don't let the pressure of becoming the next great blogger overwhelm the task at hand.

Blogging is the most flexible, relevant and convertible way to deliver your content. Set up a blog section on your company website and keep it updated on a regular basis.

Once you have created the content and set up a delivery platform, utilize your social media to act as beacons, driving your clients toward it.

Consider videos and infographics as regular players on the stage of content marketing. Text alone is no longer going to cut it.

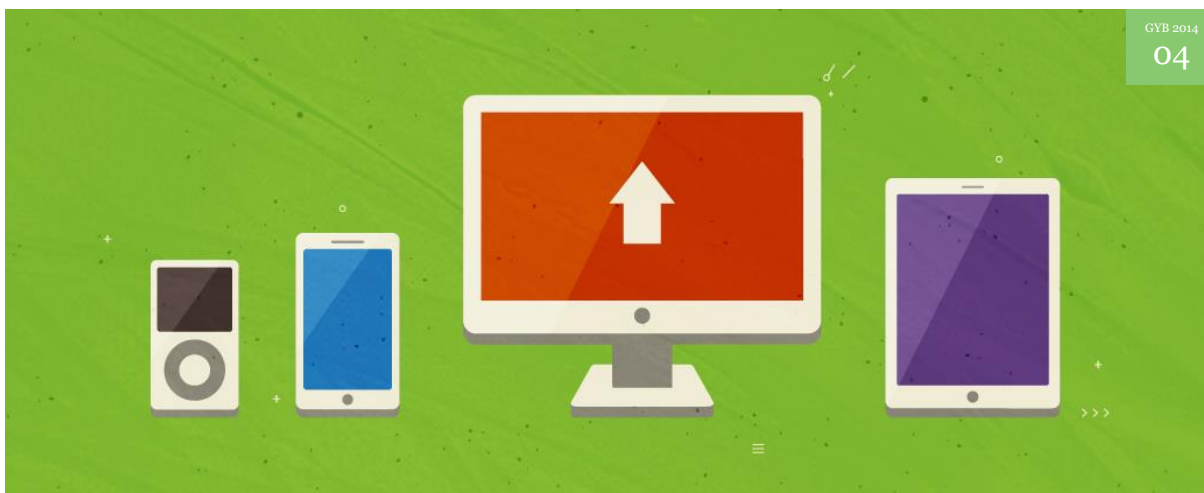
A system of monitoring and analysis, such as Google Analytics, is vital, as it actively reflects what strategies are garnering a response and where the majority of your traffic is originating, and landing.

Being consistent is one of the foundations here. Sporadic and random content will never build up the following that is necessary to determine your content marketing as effective.

“Write your content for your audience, not for search engine.”

Remember:

1. Be familiar with content marketing, in business terms. How does it relate to your goals?
2. Create compelling and unique stories (minus the sales pitch).
3. Assess, audit, and repeat is the mantra of effective content marketing.



Gadgets and Gizmos - Keeping Up With Technology

If you are someone who still utters the phrase 'gadgets and gizmos', chances are, you are also the kind of person who always feels lost in those tech-type office conversations.

As a small business owner, it is imperative to stay current, if not to stay cool in the eyes of your younger employees, then to actually utilize those that can benefit your business!

Let's start simple... it is 2014 and its time to purchase a Smart Phone. Yes, those fancy gadgets that seem much too complicated are now so user-friendly and intuitive that you are missing out on one of the simplest ways to streamline your business.

To-do lists, notes, orders, invoices, contacts, emails and social media all become mobile and for the more adventurous, scanning documents and importing files as well.

Invest in a 2-in-1 portable computer. Often, the number one complaint with tablets is that pesky touch screen that doesn't facilitate typing

or working on large presentations. A 2-in-1 allows the user to switch between tablets or laptop formats with a simple snap or click.

In an effort to clear the clutter, a professional document scanner can be a worthwhile investment. Scan all your loose papers and organize the files into folders on your computer and effortlessly cut down on that paper pile. For under \$400 they are an office essential.

“You will never miss an important message from a client.”

A Wifi Hotspot or a Wifi portable projector can ensure that you never arrive at a meeting unprepared. Hotpots can be provided through your network carrier and allow for internet access for multiple users at one time.

For presentations, portable projectors can now clip on to your mobile device, laptop or camera and can project any presentation onto any blank wall.

Need help creating a website? Wix is a service that employs a 'no coding' service, allowing users to select templates and drag and drop to build their site. Best of all, the service is free!

Surfing the web for other online services and technologies that can benefit a small business owner can be fruitful- take a look at Mail Chimp, Dropbox, HootSuite, Evernote and Odesk.

A USB notification device can help to ensure that you never miss an important message from a client. These gadgets let you know when you have messages or emails, coded by different colored lights.

Just like that you have created a mobile office that can operate where you need it, when you need it. Not too complicated after all!



How to Avoid Becoming a Customer Service Robot

The scenario is always the same: you find yourself dialing the customer service number and furiously hoping beyond hope that an actual person will pick up, only to be ultimately let down as you hear the false cheer of an automated computer system...

We've all done it. Hung up, yelled at it, and perhaps even thrown the phone. These are all reasonable reactions.

Customer service robots are possibly the biggest customer-deterrent that we could employ. After all, computerized answering systems imply that our time is more important than that of the client.

What is it that keeps small businesses afloat in the sea of major corporations? It is simple, personable and one-on-one service that is no longer possible in the big box world.

Preventing your customer service system from feeling robotic is how to keep them coming back.

There are some old tricks of the trade that can prevent your customer

service agents from sounding too much like our computerized counter-parts:

1. Be wary of over-promising. Be realistic when offering solutions and avoid additional disappointment.
2. Be timely in your responses as delays imply that you are too busy to attend to their needs.
3. Avoid apologizing insincerely. An inconvenienced client will only be satisfied by action. Apologize and move on with the solution.

“Offer an interactive problem solving and become an active listener.”

Do what the robot cannot do- offer interactive problem solving. An active listener (aka human being) can mutually work towards a solution that works for the client as they can respond in kind to the clients' complaint.

Be available. That might mean checking with your clients to see if you are open when they need you. Clients will take their business elsewhere if they feel like they have to operate on your schedule.

Set up auto-responses promising a communication time frame for those times you know that you cannot be reached and encourage staff to respond to emails with out-of-office replies after hours.

Learn from a script, and then toss it. Encouraging employees to read directly off a list of predetermined responses is transparent. Clients will feel like you are not really hearing them. It also relegates them to being 'one of many' and derails the work you have put into to fostering each individual relationship in one fell swoop.

Humanizing your customer service practices is one of the advantages of being a small business and redefining your company culture to include consistent, reliable and real-life customer service can help keep that edge.



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