

THE JUICY GUIDE TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

ADVICE ON HOW TO:

ENERGIZE YOUR BRAND

AND

SQUEEZE MORE SOUL INTO YOUR BUSINESS



MARIA ROSS

The Juicy Guide to Entrepreneurship:

Advice on How to Energize your Brand and Squeeze More Soul into your Business

Maria Ross

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So You're an "Entrepreneur..."

It doesn't matter whether you call yourself an *entrepreneur*, *business owner*, *freelancer*, *service provider*, *artist-for-hire* or *contractor*. The point is, you've officially said goodbye to working for someone else and opened that coffee house, started writing that novel, started that non-profit, launched that coaching program or hung out your own shingle to live the life you've always wanted. Congrats!

Whether you've been at this game a while, or are just starting down this journey, you'll find that the freedom, challenges and joys are unlike any other profession.

I started my business in 2008 and you could say it was accidental. Sort of. Really, there are no accidents and the idea to start my own consultancy and help businesses create brand and marketing strategies always seemed a pipe dream. My corporate career was extremely successful—taking me from a management consultant at a top-tier global firm, to a marketing manager at Discovery Networks (yay, Animal Planet!) to Account Manager at a small ad agency and then eight years as a Silicon Valley marketing executive. I lived through the technology boom and bust and always landed on my feet. But I'd often get bored quickly or look to the next new adventure. And, perhaps like you, I longed for more flexibility in my schedule to pursue other passions: in my case, writing and acting.

Red Slice started as a personal blog full of whimsical wine, film and cultural musings. It then became a business website I would tinker with on the side as I dreamed, *"If I worked for myself, how would I position my services? What message would I want to convey? What brand would I build?"* When the writing was on the wall and my last tech company laid off the marketing department in prep for a sale, opportunity knocked. I flipped the switch on that hidden website and Red Slice as a brand consultancy was born.

Lesson #1: Opportunity favors those who prepare.

Fast forward all these years and I've been fortunate to have worked with fabulous and passionate clients all over the world—and gotten undeservingly kicked around by one or two nasty ones. I've crafted brand stories that have resulted in joyful client screams, and even a few tears (the good kind). I've made costly mistakes and learned valuable lessons about mixing trust with business. Many of my amazing clients have gone on to build successful brands and this never fails to thrill me, even now. It's been an honor to

delight large crowds and be interviewed on national TV, as well as on countless podcasts and talk radio shows. Oh, and I wrote some books. I'm blessed.

The road was not always easy. Maybe you can relate: I am often still unsure of what the hell I'm doing. But amazingly enough, once you start down the path to what you want and put it out there, all of the sudden an advisor, article, connection or opportunity will magically appear right when you need it most.

Lesson #2: Don't worry about the *how* so much as the *what* and *why*. The *how* will find you (or you will find it) when the time is right. Just take action and keep moving forward.

This Juicy Guide series is designed to help you on your own ambitious journey—or rather “live the entrepreneurial lifestyle.” And I mean “entrepreneurial” in whatever form makes sense for you: starting a business or a non-profit, freelancing, launching a big project, or even selling your art as an author, actor or artist, which requires you to *think* like a business owner. In these pages, you will find some of my best content to guide, inform and delight you. Think of this eBook as a virtual coffee date, where you can pick my brain for some business advice!

Someone once remarked that entrepreneurship is the ultimate act of self-discovery. You learn more about your strengths, your weaknesses, what makes you tick, and how resourceful and resilient you are than almost anything else you can do. And while I **can't speak to how climbing Mt. Everest compares**, I *can* see parallels on this journey to a near-fatal health crisis I faced early on in my entrepreneurial career. Many of you who may have dealt with personal crisis may not put it on the same level as running a business—and surely business ownership may not be as poignant or meaningful. But in many ways, there are similarities. You learn about overcoming challenges, adapting to change and resilience.

Entrepreneurship—or business ownership, or freelancing, or whatever term you like to use—is an amazing adventure. Hopefully the lessons and tips in these pages will help you ignite your brand, your business and your soul in a whole new way.

If it does, please kindly share your thoughts with an Amazon review and recommend **this book to other entrepreneurs you may know.** You'll soon find, if you haven't already, that one of the coolest perks of an entrepreneurial lifestyle is the willingness to share resources with each other.

And you are invited to [join my Red Slice Nation email tribe](#) for regular wit, wisdom and insights. We are a community of rockstars and changemakers out to create, invent and delight. At Red Slice, I serve up business and brand advice, with a side of inspiration for accomplishing whatever your big dream might be. I may not have all the answers, but I can point you in the right direction and am happy to share resources and lessons that **will help you on your journey. We're all in this together.**

Please share any and all of your feedback with me on Twitter [@redslice](#). Would love to hear from you!

Best,
Maria Ross

12 Things You Will Never Regret Saying In Business

We all have had that moment when our mouth moves three milliseconds faster than our brain. Often, the heart has bypassed the brain's filter completely and as you say something, you can almost literally see the words flying out of your mouth in slow motion but can't stop them and stuff them back in.

As a feisty redhead, this has happened to me *way* more times than I care to admit.

With age and experience, I can honestly say it's getting better. But tell that to the sassy 8 year-old who walked out of a TV commercial audition for a new snack cracker only to exclaim loudly to my brother, "God, those were *sooooooooooooo gross!*"—with the casting agent and client walking right behind me sporting nervous smiles and shocked expressions. Yeah, not one of my finer or more tactful moments.

But I came to a realization in recent years that there are some things you will never regret saying in business. You will never want to take them back and, however uncomfortable it may feel at the time to say some of these things, the regret would be in not saying them:

1. *You're right. This seems like a great idea and offer. Let me think it over before giving you my answer, ok?*
2. *I adore working with you, too! Let's just make this official and put it in writing, so you get exactly what you're expecting and we're on the same page. Protects you and me.*
3. *I'm sorry. How can I make it right?*
4. *That's a really good way for us to go. Or, another option we may want to consider is....*
5. *It would help me serve you better and ensure I'm delivering on my end if you overcommunicate rather than undercommunicate. I don't mind multiple emails or calls if it means we can be successful.*
6. *Let's set up a weekly status call for this project. Sometimes, voice is easier than going back and forth on email.*
7. *I would love to help you with this project but I am just too overcommitted right now and would not be able to give it the attention and care it deserves. Here are three other people who may be able to help you out.*
8. *Please*

9. *Thank you*
10. *You're welcome*
11. *How can I support you in your efforts?*
12. *Great job!*

You would be hard pressed to find any situation where you'd regret saying these things, regardless of how the other party may respond. You'll at least be able to sleep at night!

NO is Not a Dirty Word

I think we're programmed to see "No" as a dirty word from a young age. No candy before bedtime. No, don't touch that outlet. No, you can't have the car tonight. No, you absolutely cannot date that guy who's ten years older than you and plans to pick you up on his motorcycle...

Here's the truth: *Saying No* is actually a gift.

Why?

It's a gift *for you* because sometimes we need to say no in order to focus on what matters. We need to keep our eyes on the prize. If you say no to the wrong clients or customers and focus on serving the ones you enjoy, who will pay **you what you're** worth and who will gladly spread the word about how awesome your products or services are—your business is going to be a lot more successful.

I don't care how big or small your company is. You've got to treat loyal customers better than **the rest**. You've got to serve their needs first and offer then special perks, privileges or rewards.

Remember your brand strategy. Who are you talking to? Who are your "people"? Who matters to your business? Your customers and clients represent your brand to others, so choose wisely.

I'm not suggesting you act rudely toward prospects or those in your audience. Not at all. I'm talking more about better managing your time, attention and budget so you can invest in the right people for your business. **If you are too busy dealing with the wrong people, you won't have the bandwidth to serve the right ones.**

Saying no is also a gift *to those to whom you say no*. You enable them the freedom to find a better fit, to find what they are looking for at a price they are comfortable paying. You also avoid becoming bitter as time goes on and just making both you and **the customer unhappy in the end**. If something is a bad fit from the start, it's better to cut bait right then and there.

Also, you give them a gift because you **don't agree to something you don't have time, energy or passion to deliver**. Instead of overcommitting and making everyone unhappy, focus on quality rather than quantity. It may hurt to say no to that client, customer—or even volunteer opportunity—but remember that you do them more

harm if you can't truly deliver your best for them. Let them find someone who *will* invest their best.

See? No is not a dirty word and, frankly, it needs to be said with love and respect way more often.

Is Accountability Dead?

Sometimes, it feels like our world has turned into a giant game of tag. People and organizations are constantly pointing fingers to blame mistakes, gaffes and actions on someone else. The ink is **barely dry on headlines, and people are shouting, “Not it!”** in an effort to get the spotlight off themselves.

Consider:

- GM uncovers ignition flaws on their Cobalt years ago, but instead of fixing the problem at the time (too much money and time), recalling the vehicles immediately, or even doing a full recall to ease public concern, they blame the drivers: “... the Cobalt and other recalled small cars were safe to drive as long as drivers used only a key and not a heavy key chain.” ([WSJ](#))
- Retailer West Elm backorders my table by over two months without notifying me. When I email to complain after checking my order status, there is no apology or offer to rectify—it’s simply “the manufacturer’s fault.”
- An overnight dog-boarding facility skips my dog’s dinner, a fact that I discover due to food being left over upon pick up. While they made attempts to investigate the cause, their response to me was, “We’re sure he was fed but it was probably another dog’s food.” Which is also not a good thing. No apology, no mea culpa, no offer to make it up to us, compensate us a free stay, etc.
- An intern fails to report status of the work she’s doing. When asked to correct this going forward and work on improving her communication skills, she responds with, “But it’s not my fault. You never *asked* for a status update.”

Is apology a dirty word? When did accountability go out of style? Whatever happened to “Forget the reason or blame. The situation is what it is. How can we now make it right?”

When it comes to your brand, how you respond to crisis says more about you in a louder fashion than the thousand heroic acts you may do when things are going right.

Explanation is not a substitute for accountability. Make things right to protect your brand.

It may indeed be factual to blame someone or something else for why you've disappointed your audience, client, or customer. Traffic, lost shipments, sudden illness, or a personal emergency can all distract you. All valid, all believable, all true.

But that doesn't give you or your brand a free pass to disappoint and go back on your word. I can't even count how many virtual assistants or interns I tried to hire who had something interfere with doing what they said they were going to do, leaving me and my business hanging.

Responsibility is defined as: the state of being the person who caused something to happen. Accountability is defined as: the quality or state of being accountable, *especially*, an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions.

Simply put, you may not be responsible, but you need to be accountable.

Hey, I get it. Life happens. Believe me, I know this better than anyone. I was in the middle of a client project when I had a brain aneurysm. The firm under which I was subcontracted immediately sent in one of the principal partners to replace me so the client would not be left in the lurch.

I once gave an overseas client back a non-refundable deposit and lost money on the deal—after delivering all the work promised in the contract that she (allegedly) read and signed—simply because she abusively claimed it was not at all what she needed or asked for. English was her second language, so I think there may have been a major communication gap. But at the end of the day, in her mind, she did not get what she asked for and it was not worth it to me to argue with a crazy person. So I took a loss: I still had to pay my subcontractor who did her part. I wished the client well and told her **to use the work we'd delivered if she wanted.**

You can be creative. You can find solutions. You can ask for patience as you honor your commitments. You can offer an alternative or line up a replacement. Or like a dedicated writer I know, you can go a night without sleep to deliver what you said you would if someone is counting on you.

What can you do to make things right? What can you do to turn disappointment into delight? What can you say to make the person feel heard and appreciated? **It's not**

enough to say, "Well, this is why it happened. So deal with it." It's YOUR responsibility to turn the situation around as best you can.

Epilogue: After a tweet, West Elm told me to contact elevated support, the woman personally located a comparable item from a sister company, credited me back the difference and added a 15% discount on top of it all to boot. Nice. I told her that my biggest frustration was the cavalier attitude conveyed in the initial email exchanges. True, I didn't get this service level until I took to Twitter to complain (that should not be the case) but in the end, she turned around my negative experience. It was not "Judith's" fault this happened. It was not even West Elm's. But they are the face of the transaction and they (finally) took care of it. Nice.

7 Questions to Help You Ruthlessly Prioritize

"Don't put off to tomorrow what you can do today."

How quaint.

I used to live by this mantra. But in today's world of 24/7 smart phone access, juggling business/kids/relationship/self-care/community and an avalanche of data coming at us, it's not really sound advice for staying sane.

As a new mama who owns her own business, I have graduated to a whole new level of "prioritization." Whereas before I was overwhelmed by choices on when to write, create, strategize, serve clients, invent a new course, conduct a webcast.... limited pockets of time these days force the most basic decisions: Do I wash my hair or feed my son before daycare? Do I do a load of laundry, pay the bills, or finish that blog post? Do I eat or shower?

These days, you've gotta practice "ruthless prioritization."

Something that has helped this Type A overachiever has been to ask myself seven key questions before any task. Depending on the answer, you can decide to:

- Do it right away
- Do it by day's end
- Schedule it
- Outsource it
- Say no
- Ignore it

When you're having one of those crazy, busy, fire-drill days where it feels like your to-do list is as daunting as Mt. Everest, ask yourself these questions before doing each task. You may just feel lighter, less stressed and more in control:

1. **Is someone I care about depending on this and by a certain time?** The key words here are "someone I care about" and "depending." This could be a client, a vital partner or a family member who truly needs you and needs you *now*. If you get asked for a favor by someone you barely know that will take time away from more important tasks, it can wait...or be politely turned down. When I

choose to skip a shower on a crazy busy morning so I can feed my baby on time—well, **that's** pretty much a no-brainer. The boy needs food. But please **remember: often, someone else's urgency does not constitute an emergency** on your part—unless you choose to let it.

2. **Can I quickly deal with it and get it off my plate?** When someone emails me for the name and number of that great designer I know, it takes me two **seconds to send them the person's contact** info. Simple. Done. If they want me to send an email introducing the two of them—something I may want to spend some thought on—well, that can wait until tomorrow.
3. **Does it generate revenue?** We small business owners tend to waste time and energy on things that are not adding to our bottom line, which is sometimes totally okay. But on busy days, given a choice between updating a website page or conducting a paid client call....well, I don't know about you, but I'll take the money.
4. **Is there a point-of-no-return consequence for not dealing with this today?** If a reporter from *The Wall Street Journal* asks for an interview today, heck yeah, **make time for the call. You're on their deadline and you could miss your shot at national press.** If someone from a blog you've never heard of before emails you out of the blue and asks you to fill out a ten-question email interview? You can schedule time to deal with that next week—and if they won't wait, so be it. Compare the urgency of these two tasks: "Pick up my only suit from the dry cleaner by closing time before **my big meeting tomorrow**" versus "Brainstorm with my colleague **about a joint event she wants to do in six months.**"
5. **Am I the only one who can personally handle this?** Do you really have to be the one doing it? If not, give it to your virtual assistant, refer it to a colleague, or hire someone from [TaskRabbit](#) or [Fiverr](#) to deal with it.
6. **What happens if I say no?** Sometimes we *think* we have to do something when really, it's just our own internal pressure. I used to freak out if I missed a week of posting to my blog. But, really...is it a case of life or death if I miss a week to deal with something more important? Will my readers riot and take to the streets just because Red Slice did not post something new this week? The realistic answer is no. Everyone's busy and while consistency is important, the sky won't fall because my blog is not the most important thing in my readers' world each week (but if it is, that's totally cool...)
7. **Will it help me breathe easier?** Sometimes, I choose to spend time catching up on email or another solitary project over the weekend simply because it takes a weight off my shoulders and allows me to relax. So my husband and I

sometimes schedule a “work hour” on Sundays and then put our laptops away.
The payoff is an easier, breezier return to Monday.

Follow this thought process when approached with opportunities (or distractions) and get a better handle on your work—and life.

Are You a *Solopreneur*? 3 Perks to Enjoy and 3 Downsides You Can Easily Combat

Going solo in your business is either a launch strategy or a deliberate business model choice. Sometimes you are just getting off the ground and you're a party of One, doing everything from accounting to marketing to product development. Other times, though, you are intentionally creating a lifestyle business and don't want extra complication from staff, tax requirements or overhead.

I've deliberately chosen a "solopreneur" model for my business and have no plans to build an agency. I like being in control, not managing people and being able to handle the ebbs and flows that writing and consulting bring. Plus, I find it's easy to keep overhead low and ramp up or pare down by partnering with others as needed.

Being a solopreneur both rocks and sucks—but you can combat the latter. Perhaps you can relate?

Three perks to being a solopreneur business:

- **Control:** You maintain control over all business and marketing decisions. There are no politics to deal with or egos to soothe. After my long stint in corporate America, this is a godsend for my stress level.
- **Creativity:** You can get crazy creative on marketing ideas, promotional pushes and even which projects you take on.
- **Speed:** When you make a decision, you're done and off to the races. No internal selling, pleading or persuasion required. I have decided on marketing efforts in the morning and implemented them by that afternoon, easy peasy. I can take advantage of last-minute opportunities and react fast.

OK, couldn't resist a fourth bonus perk:

- **Selectivity:** You can work with whom you like, when you like. And if it doesn't work out, you never have to sub-contract that person or continue with that client or customer ever again if you don't want to.

With upside, comes downside, though.

Three challenges of being a solopreneur—and steps you can take to alleviate the pain:

- **Lack of collaboration:** If you're extroverted like me, one of the joys of working on a team is a meeting where you're all hashing out ideas on a whiteboard. You can get out of your own head and vet ideas with other smart people. Working solo, you miss out on that sanity check from others and potentially limit your thinking, creativity or perspective. Those voices in your head may be leading you astray and you might never know it.

COMBAT THIS! Pull together your own makeshift Board of Directors or accountability group of other solopreneurs. Choose people you respect but who also come at things from a different point of view. I collaborate with a few key partners and often ask to bounce ideas off of them or seek their advice when making a major decision. Another colleague of mine often will email a close group of trusted partners to get a consensus or conversation going when she needs to make a quick decision. Your collaborative team won't be handed to you when you work alone, put one together yourself—and offer to play that role for others if they need it.

- **Loneliness:** If you're an extrovert like me, this is kind of related to the one above, but it's more than that. I miss shared office moments, blowing off steam with others, lunch dates—heck, even water cooler gossip. I even go in to my husband's office or a coffee shop every now and then to work just to be around other people. Talking to the dog only gets me so far, and even he gets bored with my running commentary and retreats to the other room every now and then.

COMBAT THIS! Get social on your own. Make time for coffee dates to form relationships with other freelancer colleagues. Join local groups and associations. Participate in online forums. Attend conferences. Force yourself out of your office at least two to three times per week just to be social. Arrange phone or Skype meetings with other solopreneurs where you can each just unwind for 30 minutes, laugh, share, vent and support each other.

- **Lack of resources:** It's all you, baby! You are chief cook, bottle washer and accountant. If you don't do it, it won't get done. Your to-do list is never complete and there are always way more ideas than hours in the day or mental energy that you can expend. It can be hard to unplug when you are all you've

got. And this can lead to stress, headaches, poor health and damaged relationships.

COMBAT THIS: Ask for help. You are not supposed to be an expert at everything. Why do you think companies and org charts exist? If you are not technical, outsource your website maintenance and design. If you hate writing, hire a part-time writer to put together your materials or blog posts. If you know something will never get done if it stays on your To-Do list, hire someone else to do it for you! The flip side is that this scarcity mentality helps you pare down to the most important tasks in your business right now. Save the stuff you love to do, or the tasks only you can do for your precious time and attention: everything else? Get help. Hire a virtual assistant. Send your receipts to a bookkeeper. One **big caveat here: don't barter for everything. You simply** exchange one set of tasks taking up your time for another. If you want to really free up time, make the investment in paying someone else to do it.

Bottom line: There are joys and pains to working on **your own. It's how you appreciate** the good things and manage the bad that will spell success for you in the long run.

Why Do You Do What You Do? Ideas to Reconnect With Your Purpose + Passion

Your business is an extension of you. It started with an idea and a hope and problem you were itching to solve. A vision of how you could **improve someone's life, work, relationships, self-esteem or home.**

For a moment, forget about the features and functions. Forget about the “tricks.” Forget about the bonus materials or free reports or “Act by this date” price promotions or 6-week programs or loyalty cards or sales numbers or social media stats and think back to your idea, *your story*.

What did you want to put into the world to make it a better place than when you found it? What problems did you want to solve for people to make them feel joyful, empowered or efficient?

People connect with stories + people, with passion + purpose....not products, not services, not even brands.

Without a story, without standing for something, you are simply a transactional commodity. And when was the last time *that ever* rocked anyone's world? There's no loyalty there. That's like saying you're loyal to the DMV simply because they renew your driver's license and registration every few years.

If you're having trouble remembering your story or have lost sight of your purpose amidst the chaos of everyday entrepreneurship, here are some inspirations to help you find your mojo again:

Ask your best friend, mentor, or close confidante to remind you of what you told them when you said you wanted to (fill in the blank) and what got you jazzed about it. You know, those nights when, after a few too many G&T's, your eyes lit up and you said, “If I could create this, people would love it!”

Create a simple “Value Proposition Hack.” If you need a way to explain your big idea in a format that you can post at your desk to constantly inspire you, you will love this. Brand storyteller Bernadette Jiwa of *The Story of Telling* created this handy “fill in the blank” tool to articulate your value clearly and crisply:

We/I do _____, so that you can do/feel/be _____.

We/I created _____, so you don't have to do/feel/be _____.

Revisit that old mission statement you once wrote long ago. You know: the one that was imperfect and raw and beautiful and captured every essence of hope you had when you first started.

Stay inspired by soaking up goodness from others who have found their stories and made magic in their worlds. And know that if they can do it, you can do it, too. Like Alexandra or Ali or Warren and Betsy.

Watch **Simon Sinek's now famous TED talk**, *How Great Leaders Inspire Action* and find your own "Why?"

Bottom line: If even you don't know—or have forgotten—why you do what you do, why should your audience care? Remind yourself often so you can remind *them*.

Stuck in Neutral? 4 Ways to Reboot Your Business and Rekindle Your Fire

Ah, the first blushes of entrepreneurial love. The romance! The energy! But what happens when the passion fades and the reality of demanding customers/clients, overwhelming marketing options and painful tasks (bookkeeping, anyone?) creeps in? Suddenly, your business becomes a grind and you find yourself working harder for less reward, less return...and less joy. **Your once appreciative and dreamy-eyed business starts angrily demanding more of your time and energy—but in return, rewards you with the wrong customers, a weak profit margin and just doesn't take you salsa dancing or wine tasting anymore.**

I've been where you are. I know what it feels like to have your business success lead you down the wrong path. How choices innocently pile up—each one seemingly rational—paving a perfect road to discontent.

So a few years ago, I took a step back. I sought the objective counsel of colleagues, a wise coach and a wondrous wordsmith and tweaked my business model and messaging. Basically, my core brand elements. I started doing more of what I loved and ditched what wasn't working. And you know what? **My heart (and success) soared.**

If your business (and heart) feel stuck in neutral, you need to reboot your plan and rekindle your fire.

Here are four ways to do just that:

1. **What do you hate doing? STOP IT!** If you've piled on more and more business offerings to simply cater to every single need under the sun, you need to take stock and simplify your business model. What activities bring you the most joy? Do you love teaching and strategic planning but hate detailed tactics? Then start doing more workshops or retainer projects **and don't offer hourly** project work. Do you love doing massage and energy work but hate giving facials? Then cut down your services list. This also translates into how you talk about yourself (i.e., maybe you're no longer a "full-service spa" but a "body care studio")
2. **Play with pricing or packaging to attract the right customers/clients:** You may find that the people you are attracting pay little but demand a lot, offering little profit margin in the end. How about adding more value/quality to your

offerings and increasing your prices to deter more budget-conscious folks and attract a more affluent market? Or offer a tiered set of products or services to give more cost-conscious folks a self-service option, while freeing up your time for deeper, higher-value work that you adore.

3. **Revisit your messaging:** Take a good, hard look at your web copy, company descriptor or even job title. Are you saying you do everything for anybody? Are you too vague and not focused on clear, crisp benefits? Does it sound boring, even to you? This could be either a) attracting the wrong type of customers or b) confusing the prospective customers whom you *really* want to attract. Remember, when you try to create a brand that is all things to all people, you end up being nothing to no one. Detail out your ideal customer or client and only focus on content, services or products—and the appropriate messaging—to attract those people. **Don't worry about pleasing (or offending) anyone else but that target. Trust me, they'll be fine without you.**
4. **Audit your visual brand:** OK, this one may require an investment to make some changes. Based on the people you really, *really* want to attract and the kind of work you really, *really* want to be doing, is your visual branding way off base? Do you need to modernize your colors, select bolder fonts or change out your imagery to better appeal to those people? I once consulted with someone trying to attract high-powered Alpha-male executives— and yet her website was all pastel colors and flowery script fonts. She was beating her head against the wall and wondering why those powerful male executives were not hiring her. She needed to update her look and feel to match her new offerings and target clients. Side benefit? Updating your visual look and feel might also get your heart racing with pride again about your business and give you a new opportunity for some word of mouth buzz.

With these tips, you can shift out of neutral and into overdrive again. In a good way, of course. **Don't drive yourself crazy. It's a long road ahead. OK, I'll stop with the driving metaphors....**

8 Unexpected Places to Find Your Next Client or Customer

It's simple.

If you solve a pressing problem or have a story to share that moves, ignites, provokes, heals or amuses people, you can find your tribe. The first step is that you have to *really believe* in what you're selling. In fact, don't think of it as selling. What is the mission behind what you do? I don't care if you're writing a book, offering massage services or developing enterprise software. *Why* do you do what you do? What will others gain from it?

Your "why" is what is interesting. That's what gets people hooked.

Now, take that mission—that story—and bring it to these eight unexpected places to capture your next client or customer. Or better yet, think of it as "to capture your next client or customer's *imagination*."

1. **The elevator:** Not just the networking luncheon or conference itself, but the elevator. Classic place to engage one on one. Often, people are feeling a bit of trepidation going into a big conference hall or luncheon alone. So start the **conversation with one person while you're both trapped in this big metal box.** This is how I met one of my favorite colleagues with whom I exchange business referrals. In the span of one minute, she and I connected based on our passions and missions—and even found out we both had written books.
2. **LinkedIn groups:** I posted a comment in an Indiana University alumni group once and a week later got an email from **someone, saying he liked what I'd written and asking to chat about his company's current project. Really.** It was that simple. Same thing with another group recently, where someone contacted me after I posted a helpful comment. Of course, make sure your comment is insightful, adds value without asking for anything in return and related to what you do. That helps.
3. **Guest blogs:** Reach out and share your expertise with others in related fields. Who really resonates with your brand? Who rocks your world? For whom do you think you can be a missing puzzle piece and add value to their community? Make an effort to guest blog at least once a month and this will open you up to so many more potential clients or customers.

4. **Your butcher, baker, and candlestick maker:** So often, we tend to separate our personal lives from our professional lives. For the longest time, I didn't reveal to anyone outside of "work situations" that I had written a book about how to create a brand strategy. I thought they might not "get it" or wouldn't care out of context. **Why?** That's just stupid. **Why not tell your massage therapist, your Crossfit buddies or your local UPS Store owner what you do for a living?** You'd be surprised at how often people whom you think would never be interested in your business actually know someone who needs what you've got. A parenting coach I know complained at a restaurant because of bad service. After talking with the owner and learning about his troubled teen son, he became one of her clients.
5. **Personal business transactions:** Selling your house. Buying a car. Renting event space for your teen's graduation party. **Why not talk up your business to someone with whom you are already engaging in contracts?** A Twitter buddy revealed to me that, when he was closing on his new house, he turned the guy across the table into one of his best clients.
6. **Vacation:** While we often let our hair down on vacation and try to do as much as we can to unplug from our work, there are times when an unexpected opening may present itself. Be prepared—and make sure you are always **keeping your personal brand in mind, even when "off the clock."** A friend of mine found a new client while dancing with her cousin and a Michael Jackson impersonator in Vegas at 4 a.m. Some people came over to chat with her and—boom—she gained a new client.
7. **Random bump-in:** We've all run into people we haven't seen for a while when out in public. Turn that next chance meeting into an opportunity. A publicity expert I know had a chance meeting at a natural foods market with a person with whom she used to work. After catching up, the person told her, **"Call me next week to chat about a project" and offered her card.** My friend followed up, and they worked together for several years. ALWAYS remember to follow up!
8. **Volunteer committees:** A writer I know worked on a convention committee for a car club. The committee chair was also president of a company and, after getting to know each other, he hired my writer friend, becoming her very first client.

If you believe in what you do and why you do it, client and customer opportunities are everywhere. Be prepared!

4 Powerful Business Lessons from James Bond and *Skyfall*

James Bond...entrepreneurial guru?

When I saw *Skyfall*, part of the Bond movie franchise, I thought it was incredible. Not normally a Bond fan, I loved *Casino Royale*, wiped the awful *Quantum of Solace* from my memory, but thoroughly enjoyed this latest turn. The characters were complex and flawed, the performances brilliant, the pace lively and Daniel Craig does wonders for an expensive suit. I left the theatre like I'd just gotten off a roller coaster. My husband—a native Scotsman— even dared admit, “I have to say that Daniel Craig can now be crowned the best Bond, even better than Connery.” Blasphemy! But very true.

That said, our favorite Secret Agent can also teach us some powerful business lessons. So strap on your Rolex submariner, put on your X-ray sunglasses and climb inside your tricked-out Aston Martin as we review Bond's best advice:

1. **Stick to the basics:** We've grown accustomed to Q loading Bond up with spectacular gadgets before each mission. In *Skyfall*, we watch with delight as Bond confronts his age by meeting the newest Q, a young techie hipster that **wouldn't look out of place at Apple's Genius Bar**. One assumes Bond will get some sort of iPod meets Kinect device or some Google-developed driverless car. But no: Q simply hands Bond a Walther PPK, which is a small automatic pistol, and a **tiny tracking radio**. Even Bond is surprised but it turns out that's all he needs when in a pinch and Q mocks him by saying something like, “What? Were you expecting another exploding pen?” In our age of the next new shiny object coming out every five minutes, **it's easy for entrepreneurs and business owners to forget the basics and get lost in the glitz. But often, it's the old, simple secrets that make the best weapons for your business success: building your brand strategy before throwing away money on random tactics, delighting customers, collaborating in person over coffee, providing quality products/services, delivering what you promise.**
2. **There's always a way through:** Many scenes in *Skyfall* leave viewers thinking, “Oh, he'll never find a way out of this one!” And then, of course, Bond continues to chase the bad guy onto a moving train, escape an island run by a madman and outsmart an evil mastermind and all his henchmen with just his wits, resourcefulness and resolve. No matter how bleak it seems, no matter how much you think you'd stop running or surrender, **Bond shows us that ingenuity can help you see every problem in a fresh way. If you are facing business challenges, step back and look at the issue from another angle. If sales are**

down, should you offer a new product or service, or adjust your prices? If no one is reading your blog, can you clarify your brand value or find other avenues to promote each post? If prospects don't know who you are, can you partner with someone who is better known for more exposure? There's a million ways to look at a problem and a million levers you can pull before you throw in the towel.

3. **Stay calm under pressure:** There's an awesomely sexy scene in *Skyfall* where Bond crashes into the passenger car of a speeding train. As the surprised onlookers gawk, he gains his balance, straightens up, adjusts the cuffs on his impeccable suit and proceeds to walk through the train car calmly as he continues chasing his man. That's grace under pressure. When things hurtle out of control, customers demand attention and you are juggling 637 things at once, how do you respond? Do you handle everything calmly and get the job done, or do you freak out or run and hide? It's up to you to tame the chaos and say no to things that prove distracting.
4. **Control the conversation:** Towards the film's climax, Bond realizes he's constantly one step behind his nemesis. Bond is reacting to, rather than controlling, the conversation. He sets a trap and then lures the baddie to his turf where he can now proactively make the moves *he* wants to make and keep his enemy off-balance, rather than vice versa. Sometimes, in business, we react to the everyday fires and demands that others are making on us, rather than keeping our eye on the ball and charting a clear course to our mission. We end up slaves to a to-do list, rather than making time to achieve our long-term vision. We need boundaries: checking email at set times each day instead of constantly, or making sure people know we only return phone calls between 3 and 4 pm, or whatever system works for you. Get your strategy sorted first and work towards that before you let the seemingly urgent but ultimately less important demands on your time take over. Change the conversation to the one *you* want to have.

The Art of the Deal

Negotiation. Partnership. Bartering. Often, it's the "people management" part of business that causes the most anxiety and challenges. Once, I was honored to moderate a panel for women entrepreneurs titled *The Art of The Deal*. Here are the key takeaways that will help you create better deals.

Forging Effective Partnerships

When you're partnering on a project or marketing activity, there are various landmines to avoid. First and foremost, **clear communication is key**. Discuss up front the roles and responsibilities of each party. Outline who is responsible for what.

In my view, there are three areas you need to ensure you map out clearly before getting into bed with each other:

- **Marketing:** Who is promoting what to whom? Are we using our email lists, placing ads, **posting on social media**? **Map out how you're splitting this so there's no, "I thought you were the one doing that" conversations after the fact.** And clearly discuss how you split all costs and expenses so there is no ill will. Attached to this, how will you follow up and split leads after the event or activity? Make sure you are both aligned or your prospects will be left confused and caught in the middle.
- **Operations:** **Who's responsible for booking the room, ordering the food or writing the copy?** Who is developing the sales page and processing payments? **Who's project managing?** Work out all the details beforehand, list the tasks and assign an owner.
- **Financials:** Money issues can turn a partnership sour faster than anything. Clearly establish your joint budget and how you will split both expenses and incoming revenue. Sometimes 50/50 may not make sense if you're leveraging one person's larger mailing list or brand recognition. Have the conversation upfront—trust me, it will be even more painful and awkward later if you don't.

To Pay or Barter?

Collaboration can take many forms and two ways of bootstrapping your growing business can be either to pay for services rendered or barter. How do you decide? It depends on your budget and what you need. **Only barter for things your business**

really needs. Otherwise, it's not a good deal and you end up giving away products or services that could be earning you money for something you never needed anyway. Finally, be sure your expectations are clear. **When you're not paying someone for something**, this means you will fall to the bottom of his or her priority list. Are you okay with that? Is your timing flexible? If not, it may pay to *pay* instead.

When you're on the other end of the barter, you also need to ensure you can commit to giving away your time. **Don't do it if you are crazy busy** or it will just leave a bad taste in your mouth. You owe it to the other person to be honest and to only take on work to which you can give your very best—and give it in a way that doesn't make you bitter or resentful.

Be selective about your chosen collaborators and partners.

Make sure you're both committed to delivering on time and ensure that aligning with this business is not going to impact your brand in a negative way. That is the best way to truly create a deal that benefits you both.

4 Ways to Jumpstart Your Business after a Break

New baby. Extended sabbatical. Major health crisis. Six months abroad...heck, six *years* abroad.

People ebb and flow out of big businesses without a peep. But when you're a business of one—or even five—who's left steering the brand awareness ship while you go island hopping?

I had my major health crisis just six months after launching my own consulting business. You know what happened? Well, for one thing, time did not implode upon itself—everything that seemed urgent faded away, as it should. While I did miss a conference call the day after my brain aneurysm ruptured (I bet the client never **thought they'd hear** *that* excuse from my husband), the world did not end. But practically speaking, the blog went cold, the networking ceased and the cacophony of market noise enveloped my absence like a black hole. In the blink of an eye, my business profile faded.

So how is it that many years later, my business is thriving? How is it that I had the best business year financially not long after I fell into the void?

When you take a voluntary (or unexpected) break from your business, you need to crank up the brand awareness engine again.

Here are four tips that served me well in getting my business back up and running. These are also useful if you simply need to revive your personal brand after a long absence:

1. **Rev up your blogging:** When you emerge from your cocoon, one of the few things you have in your control is the ability to add useful content to the world again. And besides, perhaps your client work is dried up for now so what else have you got to do? Build out a new editorial calendar and maybe amp up your blogging for the time being. Maybe you normally blog once a week, so increase that to twice. Make your content super useful, super sexy and super keyword-rich so you get back on the web radar again. Combine this with sending out Tweets or Facebook updates about your latest post and you can boost your exposure efforts.

2. **Jump into the online conversation:** Again, you can control your content output, so leverage all those great new blog posts in industry-specific online forums, groups or communities to which you belong. Start commenting on relevant blogs or articles on those same places on a consistent basis to raise your profile again. Just target three groups or blogs per day and keep this **“interaction” time** to about 30 minutes per day, just to keep your sanity. Or maybe pitch a few contributed articles to online media outlets such as American Express OPENForum or Entrepreneur.com for even more exposure and street cred.
3. **Invite key people to your welcome back party:** When I returned from my hiatus, I reached out to several colleagues with phone calls or personalized emails letting them know where I’d been and that I was up to my old tricks again and ready for action. You may think people know what’s going on with you but really, they don’t. They are too busy. Reach out individually to trusted contacts via email or LinkedIn and take them out for coffee to let them know what business you need. Kindly ask if they can spread the word for you. Don’t be afraid to ask **“competitors”** as well—they might be so busy that they are turning folks away so you can help them out, and maybe give them a referral fee in exchange. And always ask how you can help them in return. People are kinder than you think—and it’s a great way to reconnect.
4. **Get out there, live and in person:** Pick two to three key local networking groups or clubs and amp up your face time again. Attend lunches, happy hours, and book signings. When I was returning to work after my health issues, this was quite a challenge for me as I was still recovering and suffering from massive fatigue—plus I couldn’t drive at the time. But I forced myself to try to go to one live event per week. And I asked gracious friends to drive me. They were only too happy to help, since they didn’t want to go alone either!

There are some people on the periphery of my professional circle who did not even realize I had been out of commission for six months—**not sure if that’s good or bad!** But it tells me I did a good job of trying to stay connected and present as much as I could.

The key to revving up your business after a long break is to be strategic and methodical.

Don’t bite off more than you can chew, but make progress every day with some targeted goals and tactics. Once you get in the groove of publishing valuable content,

inserting yourself back into the key industry conversations (online and off) and asking others for help, many people will never even realize you were gone.

Face the Fear

Building a business is scary. And building a breakthrough brand is even scarier. And in other earth-shattering, breakin g news, spinach is green and red lights mean you should stop.

Everybody wishes they were Apple. They wish they could just be so hip and cool that no matter what new products they roll out, people will line up for miles just to own **one. They wish their own brands would have that “hipness halo effect.”** But I’ve noticed in my years of marketing and branding, that there is one common trait across many of these **types of “wanna be”** companies:

Wanna-be brands don’t want to take the risks and they don’t want to do the work.

They think they can just revamp their website and update their colors and all of the **sudden people will think they are “cool.”** They forget the fundamentals of brand—and that they need to revamp their company, culture, innovation inside and out. And that takes balls, to be frank. You have to be willing to lead, **to say “black” when all of your competitors are saying “white”,** to take the road less traveled or try not to use the same old industry jargon in all of your marketing campaigns. To differentiate and stand out, you have to DIFFERENTIATE AND STAND OUT.

And that scares the bejeezus out of most risk-averse CEO’s and the people who work for them.

Sometimes you have to face the fear if you want to advance. This was a powerful lesson brought home to me by, of all things, nearly dying from a ruptured brain aneurysm. While I was lucky to be alive, recovery presented its own challenges. And as I recovered and got back into my business and life again, I realized that so many of the lessons learned during recovery were actually some of the very same lessons I give to my branding clients! And one of the biggest lessons was facing your fear.

I was scared of so much during my brain injury recovery, but I just kept at it. I **“faked it until I made it.”** I could choose to crawl up into a ball and hide from life—but I chose to take a deep breath and plunge myself back into my life again over and over until one day, it felt comfortable again.

It's the same with your brand. Innovative leaders don't get there by doing what everyone else is doing. They do it by taking chances, by standing out. They face the fear. I'm not advocating doing this willy-nilly, but if you have a well thought out brand strategy, you can make smarter choices—and take smarter risks. And part of that brand strategy should include doing things differently from the inside out.

Being a trailblazer and building a breakthrough brand is scary. But when you blaze a trail that naturally means *there is no trail there*. You have to make it. Take the risk. Face the fear.

Why Do I Need A Mission Statement?

It's funny how entrepreneurs and employees alike get caught up in the tactical details of their business on a daily basis, but when faced with the ultimate question of *why* they do what they do, they seem to freeze up. My theory is that a lot of the meaning behind the company mission is so "feelings-based" that we often find it hard to articulate it in the right words.

I help clients with the mission and vision statements only *after* we think through the Brand Strategy. Why? The mission and vision become much more clear as you move through the branding process. As you think about your company's reason for being, your goals, the image you want to project, and the people you serve, you begin expanding your definition of what you want your company to be. I find just talking to a business owner and asking, "Why did you start this business?" can yield the seeds of a mission or vision statement. They use certain words or phrases over and over again. As you think through the Brand Strategy, certain themes that consistently emerge will be strong clues to your mission and vision.

The mission and vision not only help you keep the end in mind at all times, they will also inspire your customers—and your employees.

Yes, we know your primary goal is to make money, but customers and employees want to connect with your business on a deeper level. They want to know their buying choices and work efforts are relevant to a higher goal. This motivates people and helps them form loyal connections.

So what is a Mission statement?

Your mission statement is a precise definition of what your organization does on a daily basis and what you want to accomplish. It should describe the business you're in and provide a definition of why the organization exists. Try and keep this to one or two sentences in length. Some example mission statements:

- "Make flying good again" (Virgin America)
- "Our mission: to inspire and nurture the human spirit—one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time." (Starbucks)
- "The mission of Southwest Airlines is dedication to the highest quality of Customer Service delivered with a sense of warmth, friendliness, individual pride, and Company Spirit." (Southwest Airlines)

- “To provide effective means for the prevention of cruelty to animals throughout the United States” (ASPCA)
- “Women for Women International provides women survivors of war, civil strife and other conflicts with the tools and resources to move from crisis and poverty to stability and self-sufficiency, thereby promoting viable civil societies. We’re changing the world one woman at a time” (Women for Women International)

Small businesses can create a mission statement so inspiring they may not require a vision statement. But if you have a loftier goal in mind for the future of your company, then a vision statement is a great way to frame that.

Articulating the Vision

Rebecca Rodskog of [Rodskog Change Consulting](#) helps businesses and individuals get from Point A to Point B. As an experienced change management consultant and personal development professional, Rebecca is often tasked with crafting vision and mission statements for complex projects, so companies don’t lose sight of the end goal. She also creates mission and vision statements for individuals. Rebecca advises clients who are creating a vision statement to ask themselves: **“What is your ideal preferred future?”** and be sure to:

- Draw on the beliefs, mission, and environment of the organization.
- Describe what you want to see in the future.
- Be positive and inspiring.
- Don’t assume the system will have the same framework as it does today.
- Be open to dramatic modifications to current organization, methodology, teaching techniques, facilities, etc.

Ask yourself:

- Where will my company be in the long term? Will it be the premier provider of a particular product or service? Will it be in the top ten international players in a particular market?
- What is the ultimate “to-be” state for my company?

You may not require an actual vision “statement”, as long as you can paint a clear, compelling picture that drives the business forward. These could be ideals or lofty goals that rally the internal troops and help customers connect with you. Below you’ll find sample vision statements from several companies. You’ll note these contain ambitious visions that go beyond day-to-day operations and the specific market spaces in which these organizations play today. They paint a picture of an ideal future if the business does well:

Women for Women International envisions a world where no one is abused, poor, illiterate, or marginalized; where members of communities have full and equal participation in the processes that ensure their health, well-being and economic independence; and where everyone has the freedom to define the scope of their life, their future, and strive to achieve their full potential. (Women for Women International)

I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the Earth. (President John F. Kennedy, 1961)

Coca Cola’s vision statement is actually a multi-part credo:

- **People:** Be a great place to work where people are inspired to be the best they can be.
- **Portfolio:** Bring to the world a portfolio of quality beverage brands that anticipate and satisfy people’s desires and needs.
- **Partners:** Nurture a winning network of customers and suppliers, together we create mutual, enduring value.
- **Planet:** Be a responsible citizen that makes a difference by helping build and support sustainable communities.
- **Profit:** Maximize long-term return to shareowners while being mindful of our overall responsibilities.
- **Productivity:** Be a highly effective, lean and fast-moving organization.

In summary, **your mission is what drives you on a day-to-day basis.** It’s the reason your product or service is in existence, and it defines the “why” behind the thing you’re creating. Your vision is the end state: what you ultimately want your company to become and the impact you want to have on your customers and the world.

Your mission and vision create the framework and inspiration your organization and its employees need to be successful. An old Japanese proverb eloquently states the important symbiotic relationship between vision and action: *Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.*

**This particular chapter was adapted from my book, Branding Basics for Small Business, 2nd Edition, (Norlights Press).*

What Is Your Artistic Work Manifesto? Yep, **You Need One....**

Run, don't walk and pick up a copy of Seth Godin's book, *Linchpin*. It's a super easy read with a powerful message—and you need this message whether you run your own business or work for someone else. It has absolutely changed (and validated) how I approach my work.

Seth is essentially calling us to “be artists”: whether you are a product designer for Apple or a waitress. It's not about the slog of punching a clock, or working for the man, or putting yourself on autopilot until 5 pm.

What the world needs now are creative problem solvers.

They are the ones who will achieve job security because they will make themselves indispensable. They will not be order takers, but change makers who want to innovate in countless ways big and small **without being asked or “paid.”** He talks about our cultural shift from an industrialized workforce to an artistic workforce.

The beauty of this is that it applies no matter what your job. Bringing artistry to your work does not mean you have to work in paints or clay. It is the barista who sees you coming and immediately has your regular coffee drink ready at the bar, thus delighting you and starting your day off right. She may be working for \$9 bucks an hour, but she has just made herself indispensable by being an artist. Is it in her job description to do this? Heck no. But her passion to make you happy, to overdeliver, to humanize the transaction has now created a loyal customer—and I would bet, given her more back in return in job satisfaction and appreciation.

We've often heard the phrase, “If you're going to be a trash collector, be the best damn trash collector you can be.” There is nobility in that. And the world needs more of it.

For me, it comes down to caring about your work and being the best (*blank*) you can be by creating, problem solving and innovating. If you have a knack for taming angry customers and turning them around, that is an art. If you can lead a meeting effectively so all attendees leave motivated, aligned and clear on direction, that is an art. If you can brighten the day of every person who steps on your bus, then that is an art. **You can change one person's life, viewpoint, mood or business by acting in this way. You can change the world.**

Thinking about all of this, I wanted to see what my own artistic work manifesto would be. **My personal and business mission is “To engage, inform and delight.”** But what does that really mean day to day? Here goes—maybe it will help spark yours as well?

- I will delight clients by articulating their mission and brand in exactly the way **they desire, so they get goosebumps and shout, “Yes! That’s it! That’s what I’ve been trying to say and could never find the right words!”**
- I will care more about their business than even they might by always giving honest and candid feedback—even if that means extra work or losing the account.
- I will touch and inspire every partner or client I work with by showing passion, energy and kindness during our time together. I will treat people well.
- **I will connect people that can help each other just because it’s the right thing to do, not because I get anything from it.**
- I will teach others how to think about their business as a mission that enriches lives in some way and not just a widget-producing factory solely after profits—and I will show them that passion and profit are not mutually exclusive.
- I will surprise people by remembering their interests or our conversations and send them an article, press lead or whatever just to show I care.
- I will seek to work with clients who are passionate about their business and avoid those who I can clearly see will suck the energy out of me or my team. This will keep us positive, **motivated and give us “mindspace” to delight the clients who are worth it—even if this means less money for the year.**
- I will continue to write and tell stories that inspire, provoke thought, inform, or even just entertain, whether via my blogs, books, or speaking engagements.

Having an artistic manifesto goes a step beyond a mission or vision statement. It is a statement of beliefs that can guide your everyday actions. Try creating one—and see if **your work isn’t better for it.**

3 Tips for a Sizzling Personal Brand

Just because you have a cool logo, it doesn't mean your brand is covered. Brand is much more than that, as we've heard many times. It's your core story, promise and reputation and it is communicated in three crucial ways: visually (looks) verbally (words) and experientially (actions).

Just as you do with a business brand, when you are creating the brand of "You, Inc." it's important to articulate what you do, who you serve and why it matters in order to create the right brand. Brand is all about making a promise and then delivering on it.

The fundamental brand strategy process is the same, regardless of if you are creating a brand for your company, your non-profit, you cause, your art, your book—or for yourself!

Here are three tips for creating a powerful personal brand:

Tip #1: Be Clear and Consistent

Clarity attracts people to a brand. But *consistency* makes it stick. You can wow someone in that first presentation or on your home page, but if you don't consistently deliver that same punch with every interaction, you'll be a one-trick pony. What are your core talents and how can you consistently showcase them through every touch point? Does your website tone scream "funky and irreverent" but then you bore people to tears with a static 60-slide PowerPoint presentation? Be very clear about which space in people's brains you want to "light up" when they hear your name and consistently deliver on that across everything that you do. It's better to laser-focus on a few core attributes to a well-defined audience, then to try to be all things to all people.

Tip #2: Dress the Part, Walk the Talk

Have you ever seen a company's ads that claim impeccable customer service, but then get dropped into a hellacious voicemail maze when you call? You can *say* you are (*insert attribute here*) but if you don't back it up, these claims will quickly be ignored. If you are going to talk the talk, you *must* walk the walk—and that includes personal appearance. You can say you are "professional" but if you show up to a client meeting in ripped jeans and a tank top just because you are your own boss, your brand will be

impacted. Same holds true if you convey a “modern, hip” brand personality and show up wearing something more suitable for an insurance company picnic. Dress to their brand expectations so they can justify the money spent with you.

Tip #3: Overdeliver to Create Brand Ambassadors

Ultimately, brand is not what *you* say it is; it's what *they* say it is. The only control you have over your brand is to remain clear and consistent and walk your talk. But if you do, something magical happens: those who have *experienced* you firsthand will evangelize for you. **And don't be afraid to ask your community or clients to spread the word via social media or sizzling testimonials.** When you deliver the goods, most **people are happy to champion you so don't be afraid to ask.** Personal branding is most effective when it comes from others, not just from you.

5 Branding Myths...Shattered

People sometimes let the myths get in the way of the reality when it comes to branding.

When people think branding, they often just think it's a logo or business card. Or they think of the opposite extreme like Apple, Nike or Virgin and assume they will never have the budgets to **"brand effectively."** While dazzling branding is more than just pretty pictures, it also is something that is easily attainable, if entrepreneurs put the right thought and effort into it.

Let's dispel five popular branding myths right now. Once you slay these myths in your own mind, you will be well on your way to creating an irresistible brand of your own and transforming your business.

Myth #1: Branding Is Hard

Branding is not rocket science. It simply requires focused thought about what you want your business to stand for and to whom, and then a commitment to communicate that message through everything your audience sees, hears and experiences. I normally boil down brand strategy creation with my clients through a simple ten-question process, at the most basic level. But caution: once you build your brand strategy, you are **never "done" nor do you ever stop being a steward for your brand** once all the processes, websites and logos are in place. You need to constantly **be vigilant and regularly do a "systems check" on your materials, business practices,** customer service and messaging to ensure your brand is clear and consistent. You also just need to commit to living your values and ensuring all of your employees and partners can verbalize and live those values as well.

Myth #2: Branding Is Expensive

Effective branding can be done **on any budget.** I've worked with \$12 million dollar budgets and \$1000 budgets. The real key to effective branding is making sure you have your ideal audience detailed out and that your business messages speak directly to their needs and the benefits they value. Once you have those thoughts together, you can then work more effectively with a designer to put together your logo or website and a writer to craft your copy. Consistency and clarity in messaging (visual and verbal) is what makes a brand effective and creates rabid fans and evangelists, not how much money you spend promoting it. So if you can only spend \$200 on a logo,

you can still ensure it communicates exactly what you want to say to the very people whom you want to attract. True, you may not be able to do multi-million dollar ad campaigns or sponsor extravagant sporting events. But with clear, consistent and strong messages, you ensure that even those three or four activities you can afford to do are laser-focused.

In addition, since brand is more than just your logo or advertising, you can live your brand through aligned corporate policies and processes. You can easily and cheaply craft a voice mail message or email signature that furthers that brand. You can extend the brand to free social media that captures customers with limited dollars. And you can ensure your product or service quality and price map consistently to your brand promise. Those are all things you need to do anyway to run your business, so you may as well align them to a strong **brand for maximum “oomph.”**

Myth #3: Branding Is Just Fluff

Brand equity can make or break a company. And if you think branding has no financial **impact, just ask private equity firms who “buy” brands for billions of dollars, all for the brand cache or loyal customer base. It’s the reason people will pay** three times as much for a white t-shirt at Nordstrom than they would at Target. Brand translates into **bottom-line sales when done effectively. You can’t deny that if you build a strong** foundation and communicate it to the right people at the right time, you will attract just the interested customer you seek. In addition, a strong brand guides all the other **marketing decisions that fuel your company’s growth: where to advertise, who to** partner with, how to price your product, etc.

Myth #4: All Designers Are the Same

All designers and branding firms are not the same when it comes to small business branding. While you can save lots of money thinking through a brand strategy on your own before you engage with a designer on communicating anything visually, some **designers get it and some don’t. And sometimes, you do get what you pay for in this** regard. If you are talking to a designer who does not ask who your target audience is or what you are trying to convey to them through your visual elements—merely asking you what **colors or concepts you “like”**—you need to run the other way. While you may only spend **\$100 on them and think it’s a steal, you will lose more in sales and** customers by not communicating the right message visually. Good designers understand how imagery, font, color and spacing impact the subconscious connections people will make about your company and what it offers. And they

should be experienced enough to make some clear recommendations in that regard. **It's worth it to spend a bit more on this if you can and work with someone good who asks about your brand and your ideal customer.**

Myth #5: Branding Works Immediately

Branding and direct response marketing are two different things. People need to experience your brand multiple times before it sticks. You will need to have it out there, present in all of your customer touch points, before being able to decide if it works or not. **Branding is about awareness and “mindshare”—what spaces do you occupy in people’s minds when they see your logo or hear your name. This takes time to build.** The Nike swoosh did not have meaning within the first 3 months it appeared. Avoid the temptation to change branding every few months in an effort to chase quarterly sales growth. Yes, if you get feedback that things are not working, you should make changes, but hopefully, you will have put the upfront thought and effort into the brand strategy and messaging before implementing it, so that maybe only slight tweaks are required. Branding and messaging can be refreshed over time—but not before customers get a chance to respond to it. And while you might be sick of your brand and messaging after 3 months, remember, your potential customers may not even have seen it yet, with all the noise that is in the marketplace.

Letting go of these five branding myths will take the pressure off so you can focus on actually building an amazing brand to attract the right people with the right message at the right time—through every single thing you do.

This particular chapter was adapted from my book, **Branding Basics for Small Business, 2nd Edition, (Norlights Press).*

3 Things You Must Do For Your Brand Story to Bloom

It's all well and good for us to talk about having a strong brand story. But that's only part of the story (pardon the pun).

We're not talking a "Once upon a time..." story here. We're talking about how your business walks, talks and acts on a consistent basis. That tells a more powerful story to the people you come in contact with than any fairy tale ever could.

Whether you are a one-person consulting business or a 1000 employee technology player, there are three **phases to brand "storyhood"** that **must all be** addressed in order to have real market impact—from hiring the right people to attracting the right customers or clients.

Define, Articulate, Share: You must go through these phases in order for your brand story to bloom.

Define: Sure, everyone who works here "knows" your quirky brand personality or strong values, right? Wrong. If your brand story is simply a wispy tale that only old-timers will understand—or worse, simply lives in the minds of the founders—you are lost before you even begin. How can you expect the market to know your story if **YOU don't even know your story? What is it? Have you defined your brand strategy? Have you nailed down the most important points, stories and practices that make up your business' DNA? If you talk to different people across the organization, will you get a different answer? And don't forget the one answer that makes me cringe: "Well, I don't know...it's kind of hard to explain. You just know it when you see it."**

If you can't define your story, how can you expect your customers or clients to do so? You know your business best. **Define your brand position internally: What are we about, what makes us tick? What is our vibe? Who are we talking to? Where do we fit in the competitive landscape?** Button this down for yourself or your internal team before moving on to Step 2...

Articulate: Now that you've hashed it all out, pulled it apart, examined it from all angles, gathered the stories, emotions and benefits that make you special, you have to **WRITE IT DOWN.** Articulating the brand story is where most businesses fall down. It's not enough for you to know your own story if you can't give the market words to describe it. What is the mission and vision? What are your value statements? What is the tone of your copy? Which benefits will we tout over and over that we want to own

in the marketplace? Bring in a talented copywriter if words are not your thing because you must choose your words wisely. **Words matter.** What is the script you want others to say? Wal-Mart is about low prices. Nordstrom is about exquisite customer service. Virgin America is just wonderful, hip, cool and cheeky. ASPCA is a voice for abused and neglected animals. Tom's Shoes gives a pair of shoes to kids in need when you buy a pair. **What is the story you want repeated? If you can't articulate it, who will?**

Share: Now that you've defined who you are and articulated the story, are you just going to pat yourselves on the back and adjourn the meeting? Heck no. It's time to *share* the story internally first **before you'll be ready to share it externally.** Are you sharing this story with every single functional area such as HR, Finance, and Customer Support so they can apply the story to their own everyday actions and practices? Does HR know the brand story so they can hire the right people who will support it? Does everyone in marketing know the story so they can make smart campaign decisions? Does sales know the story so they can pitch to the right prospects about the right value? **Build your brand equity from the inside out.** Once everyone inside understands the brand story, then you can better share it with the outside world to generate leads, serve customers and differentiate from the competition.

The Secret to Differentiating Your Brand? You.

“Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.” – Oscar Wilde

What makes your brand, business or creative endeavor uniquely *you*?

When we’re insecure teens, it seems easiest to just copy someone else. At that age, originality is just too risky. Or is it?

Let me take you back to 1988. My best friend and I were inseparable. Whether it was busting out dance moves to Whitney Houston’s latest hit, swooning over teen heartthrobs (she: River Phoenix, Me: Kirk Cameron—before he went all oddballs) or taping our own version of *Siskel and Ebert at the Movies* (hopefully that video has been lost forever), we found comfort in our shared interests and tastes.

But the scandal that threatened to rock our friendship? We bought the exact same denim miniskirt jumper.

I admit: it was adorable when she bought it and, naively thinking it would fun, I went and bought one, too. It fit both of our lean frames to a T. But she was not pleased at all and as you can guess, the inevitable happened: we wore it to school on the same day. Now granted, our high school teemed with more than 2000 students, but still....she didn’t speak to me for a whole day, which back then felt as long as the Civil War.

And I realized I had messed up.

In trying to take a short-cut and simply copy her style, I failed to cultivate my own identity—and ended up coming off like a first-rate fool.

What works for someone else may not work for you. Either it’s not at all believable, or it just looks desperate and sad. Just think about all the Apple lookalike ads you may have seen for sub-par (and not as cool) technology. **But the inverse is also true: what works beautifully for you may be laughable for someone else to even attempt.**

You need to walk your talk and authentically deliver what you promise. How do you do that? **By embracing and owning who you authentically are. It’s *your* story.** Only you—with your perspective, experience, worldview, sensibility, taste, emotion and intelligence—can tell it the way you can tell it.

While visiting the UK, I caught a news program on an MSNBC-type network. The pundit shouting at me sounded an awful lot like American broadcaster Rachel Maddow, whom I happen to like. But it was a sad attempt to mimic her success, right down to the cadence and tone with which she spoke. It was clear she was trying to **replicate someone else's success rather than create her own.**

Why do we think it's easier to copy someone else rather than break new ground? Why do we feel that our story is not as valuable just because others have told something similar? If we all thought that way, another new book would never be written, another new painting never created, another innovative clothing design ever produced.

Can you imagine? *"Well, we all have enough shirts in the world, don't we? No need to design another one."* Please.

When working with my branding clients, our process always starts with the unique spin, strengths, perspective and benefits they offer that no one else in their field can. Most of us, save for true inventors and innovators, are not really inventing anything that has never existed before. It **doesn't really matter** if you offer something that thousands of other people do. *No one else can do it like **you** will do it.*

That is how you build a breakout brand—find your uniqueness and let it shine.

I mean, there's tons of branding strategists out there, right? But you're here, now, reading my words and soaking up my advice. Thanks for digging *my* unique style!

Flaunt your uniqueness and put your unique stamp on your personal brand, blog, business, or creative project. Otherwise, why bother?

How to Separate the Founder from the Brand

When Steve Jobs passed away in 2011, folks wondered what would become of the Apple brand.

Many companies, especially small businesses where the founder is still active, struggle with how to parlay one person's personality and values into a company brand that can live on without them. I've worked with a few clients on how to bridge this transition so that their companies could scale and grow.

According to a [Wall Street Journal article](#) written around the time of Jobs' death, Apple had a game plan for avoiding culture shock. These guys are smart and did not start thinking about what to do when Jobs passed away at the last minute: they'd actually been working on this since at least 2004. The culture Jobs worked hard to create lives on without him—as expressed through the company's structure and processes. Apple “encourages creativity within a formal structure of product development and launches.” This is part of their product concept and rollout process now and is baked into everything they do. This is in very sharp contrast to the free-for-all, “let's just wing it” feeling of a young startup.

The best testament to this is that roles are clearly defined—even in such a creative culture. Steve Jobs believed that both creativity and structure coexist equally, and this plays out in how the company functions now without his input. One company source cited in the same article stated, “Apple is ‘an army...everyone has a role.’” So, clearly, while creativity and innovation might seem at odds with process and structure, the very process and structure put in place at Apple helps that creativity to continue to flourish. Ironical, huh?

The company worked to “develop ways to convey the company's culture and business lessons to new executives.” This is what I often talk about when I talk about “operational branding.”

Brand is more than just pretty pictures or **slick ads**. **It's a value and belief system** that is codified and informs everything from process to policies to product development to hiring and training.

For example, if you don't think HR plays an important role in building the brand, then you are kidding yourself.

Steve Jobs was a unique man. But it doesn't have to mean that Apple falls apart without him. By transferring his own values (product innovation, sleek design, challenging the status quo) into corporate brand tenets, the company can put in place everything it needs to keep that vision alive.

Your business can be built on your own brand personality and values, but ultimately, as a past client of mine had to do, you need to formalize that so all business development does not hinge on your personal reputation, but on the company reputation. This client needed to scale business development and it was not feasible for him to sell every project himself. So what did we do?

1. Wrote a brand positioning statement that aligned to his personal values as to why he built the company and what value he wanted to offer clients
2. Adopted his trademark tone and manner in the brand personality and copywriting
3. Used aspects of his background to create a unique brand slant that no other competitor could claim
4. Created a Values Manifesto that was grounded in his personal values but phrased as guiding principles his whole team could adopt and deliver.

Creating a process to codify and share your brand ensures the company brand can go beyond just you, the founder, and become part of the way the company does business at every level. But you have to be intentional about it.

How to Pass the Brand Torch from “The Founder” to “The Company”

This is the number one brand challenge I hear from small business owners. “But so much of my business is tied up in my own personal reputation and who I am. How do I ensure the *company* builds its own brand, independent of me, so I can expand?”

Take a tip from investment mastermind Warren Buffett, who was quoted in a *Wall Street Journal* article as saying, “*I can define the culture as long as I am here. But we want a culture that is so embedded that it doesn’t get tested when the founder of it isn’t around.*”

A culture that is embedded. Ah, Warren: a financial *and* branding genius.

Companies do this all the time, so it’s not as hard as you think. The company brand reflects the values and philosophy of the founders, but in a way that applies to the corporate entity. See Disney, Nordstrom, McDonald’s, Facebook, Microsoft, Nike, Wendy’s. Many of these companies end up with very strong brand stories about their founders’ passion and values and serve to further attract customers.

Here are three tips on how to inject your personal brand into the DNA of your business so that it lives on even if you are not at the helm:

1. **Depersonalize:** The most important aspects of personal brands are the values and attributes that the founder shows as a human being. Take those and make those the values and attributes of the company as a whole and how you do business. If your own reputation and image is based on honesty, integrity and **straight talk, then bake those attributes into your company’s standard** operation procedures, policies and visual identity and make sure they live somewhere that the entire company can see. Turn what you are known for into what your *company* is known for. I also call this “operationalizing your brand.” If people come to you because you are the type of gal who always returns calls the same day, then make that a company policy that any call is returned within 24 hours, no matter who received the call.
2. **Document:** You can’t measure and manage something that just exists inside people’s heads or is inherent in only your own personal actions. How is that repeatable? Once you develop your values, mission, and the brand attributes for which you want to be known, *write them down*. Revisit this brand playbook periodically: it may need to evolve as you grow. This playbook can then start to

inform all of your brand communications: visual, verbal and experiential. This is the whole premise by which I consult with my clients and why I wrote my book. **You've got to WRITE IT DOWN** if you want to standardize it.

3. **Hire Right:** Warren Buffett and others understand that brand informs culture, and culture informs how you hire and whom you hire. Do you recruit people intentionally who understand and embrace your brand? (Hint: if it is not **documented anywhere per #2 above, that's your first problem**) Or do you just hire the marquee names and checklist of skills on their resume? I recently heard a recruiter talk about how they hire by the Iceberg principle, which means that above the waterline, you look for the right skills and resume from a candidate. **But it's the skills *below the surface***—if the person embodies your brand, culture and values—that matter even more to the success and longevity of the company. She said more often than not, the problems occur because of misalignment on these **"below the water" soft skills and attitudes**.

If you have personal values and a reputation that is the number one reason people do business with your company, then you'd better make damn sure you're hiring people who reflect that same work ethic and brand. See Mr. Buffett's quote above.

Use your brand strategy to guide cultural and hiring decisions—not just to decide upon your colors or packaging.

5 Clever Ways to Position Yourself as a (Real) Expert

Guru. Master. Legend.

Wouldn't those be nice words to hear after someone introduces you?

Maybe. Personal branding is all the rage these days. But most of us don't have to be THE leading voice on a certain topic, but a unique, thoughtful and useful voice that is part of the conversation.

I say: Beware the *lone* guru.

There are so many “personal brands” out there, claiming to be expert in this, or someone who can teach you the secrets of that, or the end-all, be-all source for (INSERT TOPIC HERE).

How nice for them.

The ones who claim to be experts in helping you establish yourself as an expert make me giggle the most. I mean, you should at least have some experience or competency in your chosen field before you expect that article in *Fast Company*: **Experts are not invented, they are cultivated.** What are your special skills, talents, experiences that can form a solid, authentic foundation for you to then learn even more and become a valid expert?

My vocation of choice is as a storytelling expert: small business brand strategy, marketing, messaging. Do I know all there is to know about these topics? Hell to the no. I am one of *many* brand strategists and experts. And that's totally cool with me.

It's not about offering people one authoritative voice to follow, one cult to join, or one Kool-Aid flavor to drink.

There are so many talented brand strategists out there—some may say competitors—whom I admire, follow, learn from and even cite. **No one built up their knowledge and competency on their own. They learned it from somewhere, from someone.**

But if you want brand awareness for yourself or your company, if you want to get press + customers + love + speaking gigs + influence, it *is* a good idea to establish yourself as part of that expert tribe, as someone with a valuable perspective and keen insight

into this area. So the next time you get frustrated when you see one of these vocal, self-promotional, personal brand “experts” instead of pouting, why not follow some simple tips to join the conversation?

Here are five tips on how to establish yourself as an expert

(And no, I’m not claiming to be an expert in expertise—these are just tips I’ve used that have opened up new opportunities for me to help brands + businesses). All of these assume you already have a true level of education, knowledge or experience in your chosen area:

Keep soaking up knowledge:

That’s right. Think you know all there is to know about your topic? You’re done before you even start. Read the best-selling authors out there, attend conferences, read blogs and newsletters. Find out how others are approaching this area, stay up-to-date on trends, and pick and choose which bits of wisdom resonate—or don’t (see Tip #2)—with how you view this topic area. Keep a list of 5-10 sources to follow regularly so you don’t get overwhelmed.

Present a point of view:

It’s not enough to go out there and agree with every expert you read or follow in your space. Often, if you can present a valid, contrarian point of view, people find that much more interesting—and the press may bite. I have often used contributed articles (see Tip #3) and blog posts to say why I thought a certain expert got it wrong, and put my own unique spin and experience on the situation. Being willing to challenge the status quo—for real reasons, not just to be a pain in the neck—displays confidence and authority that people will notice.

Write & pitch contributed articles/stories:

Not every piece of content you write should be about selling your products or services. People don’t pay to subscribe to news feeds or publications to read commercials. But can you convince Entrepreneur.com that you’re the perfect person to comment on five ways companies are actually making money from better SEO? Can you convince Katie Couric that five overlooked stressors are making women and mothers ill? Can you persuade TechCrunch to accept your premise that Big Data is changing the way companies roll out new products

and features? Think about the macro trends and theories rather than just your own offerings and present a thought leadership point-of-view that benefits everyone. *Sidenote:* Offering guest blog posts to robust online communities or influential blogs in your niche space is also very effective.

Speak in public:

Nothing impacts your street cred more than presenting to a **group as the...you guessed it...guest expert! Have you contacted your local Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Administration or chapter of a national association?** Pitch yourself as a speaker on your topic of interest (no sales pitches, please, unless they allow you to have one slide at the end to promote your book, service or special offer). Start building your buzz locally first and then you can start to point to those successes when applying to national event and conferences. Nervous about presenting? Hire a media + presentation coach or other developmental coach to squash those fears and help you get your message out there. Some great resources for creating an online speaking profile and finding gigs are [SpeakerMatch](#) and [eSpeakers](#).

Blog:

Cue the groans. But I'm telling you, **blogging is one of the single best—and free—ways to share your philosophy and highlight your expertise on an on-going basis. You don't need permission or acceptance like you do** for scoring a media article or on-camera interview. Think of your blog as YOUR media outlet where you can say whatever the heck you like. Did you write a contributed article about the new rules of workplace etiquette and no publications bit? Fine, post it on your blog. Have you seen a juicy new trend in your space that **you're dying to comment on? You can post it tomorrow. The other added** benefit of blogging regularly is that you become search engine-friendly around these topics, and the more content you have online, the better to establish your expertise when people are searching for info on those topics. Want proof of the power? I often receive both media and sales leads from blog posts that **I've written** three or four years ago. Need help on where to start and what to write about—or even how to work with your blog? Take a session with [this woman](#) now or check out [Prologger](#) for fabulous tips.

Follow these tips and soon you will be the go-to expert in your industry. Besides, increasing your online mentions and valuable content helps translate to more brand awareness and more sales, too!

What is Your Customer Script?

Oh, wait, you didn't know they needed one?

If brand is all about reputation, than nothing beats it when that reputation spreads organically through word of mouth. You can't be all places at once, so it pays to turn your customers into your own private evangelist army.

Many power brands revel in the fact that customers love them so much, those fans will generate content on their own accord—without pay—that promotes the company. Virgin America enjoys YouTube videos created by their happy passengers. Local businesses love seeing hundreds of stellar Yelp or other online reviews from fans.

But you also want those messages highlighting the things you want your brand to represent. Meaning, **you have to find some way to give your customers a script**, or the main talking points, so that the message they are spreading is aligned with the one you want out in the world. Do you want people to talk about your low prices or your artisan craftsmanship? Do you want the first thing they talk about to be your generous return policy or your quirky and fun email newsletter and brand voice?

What do you want to be known for? What is most important? One way to ensure customers know the script is to ensure that YOU do. I work with clients to build messaging platforms. Messaging platforms are internal tools designed to keep all your marketing on script for the three main messages you want to communicate about your brand. It then digs into each benefit and provides proof points that can be cited to explain why you can make that benefit claim.

Imagine a conversation between a customer and one of her friends. What do you want her to say about you? What do you want the headline to be? Craft your messaging platform to ensure three clear benefits are conveyed in everything that you do, such as your website, your marketing, your ads. This way, you are arming your customers with the right script to share with others.

Don't just hope your customers will say the right things. Arm them accordingly.

In order to control the external message as much as you can, you need to clarify the message internally first. Craft your messaging platform based on your brand and your

authentic strengths and then bang the drum around those three main messages over and over again. Pretty soon, your customers will learn the script, too.

What's Your "Hook"? If You Don't Know, How Will Your Customers?

Telling your brand story is sort of like a newspaper article: **it's all about the lead.** Some folks may call this the "lead offer." What does your business hang its hat on? When customers have that certain need or desire that certain experience, is it *your company* that comes to mind first?

Having a lead offer doesn't mean you can't have secondary messages. I often use the example of Nordstrom and Walmart. Nordstrom leads with a quality customer service experience as their main offer; Walmart leads with "lowest prices." Does this mean Walmart is rude to their customers? Heck no. It just means that when you are looking for low prices, they want you to think of them. If you are thinking of a stellar customer service experience *first*, then maybe you should go elsewhere.

A while back, Delta announced they were going to start leading their brand story with "service" not "size." After acquiring Northwest Airlines, they became the largest player by traffic—until United merged with Continental. Delta had to switch the story and focus their investments and marketing message on *service*: new flatbed seats, video on-demand and upgraded facilities in key markets.

United may decide to focus on size for a while in terms of the benefits it provides to customers: more routes, more convenience to get where you want to go, a larger partner network, etc. (Sidenote: *big* is only a relevant claim if it benefits a customer in some way and makes their life better or offers them something more. *Big* for "*big's sake*" just becomes chest-thumping.)

Why do you want prospects, customers or clients to turn to you?

Service? Selection? Style? Lowest price? Convenience? Personalized plans? Speed? Cutting-edge technology? Determine your lead offer. In fact, determine your three topline benefits and articulate them over and over in everything you do so people will file your brand into the right "mental file drawer" inside their brains.

Which Problem is Killing Your Business?

Since publishing two books since 2010, I have learned a lot about the publishing industry. **I've pretty much been riding by the seat of my pants and unspoken rules are** revealed to me each day, much like an onion shedding its layers. I used to think publishing a book was fairly straightforward—and it can be if you self-publish and have millions of devoted fans ready to devour your product. But you have to work to get to that point. Seth Godin is able to bypass the traditional publishing establishment and self-publish direct to his legions of fans **because he's had many best-sellers** and has cultivated a large fan base.

Sure, anyone *can* do this. But do they have the foundation that Seth has to make that a successful proposition? Well, guess it depends on your goals and the size of your tribe.

Putting all that aside, I've heard a lot of hoopla casting eBooks, Kindles and iPads as the assassins to the traditional brick and mortar stores and your lovely independent **bookseller around the corner. There's been much hand-wringing** that publishing as we know it is dying due to the new vehicles and opportunities that people with good ideas have for spreading their words.

Well, I have a different theory: it's not these new technologies or shrinking margins that are going to kill the traditional publishing-**bookseller industry: it's going to be** themselves. And the same could be true for you and your business.

Unless there is a willingness to adapt and get the heck out of their own way, companies are doomed.

I present my exhibits to the court below. **Is your business suffering from any of these ailments? If so, better change course before it's too late:**

Exhibit A: Refusal to Acknowledge:

At a past 600-person writing conference I attended, the elephant in the room was self-publishing and alternate options. While the conference focused heavily on how to sell your book and build your marketing platform, two funny things happened: A breakout session on alternate publishing forms erupted in a minor mutiny when attendees demanded to know why the conference was **focused on the "song and dance of pitching to big agents and editors" but no** one was talking about eBooks and self-publishing as credible options. In this

session, a so-called book marketing expert even said: “I don’t believe in social media or authors needing websites. It’s a waste of time.”

Your takeaway: Is there a market change or customer need that you are ignoring or refusing to see to protect the status quo?

Exhibit B: Refusal to Adapt:

In the large editor panel, I asked what they thought about the long time-to-market when going the traditional publishing route when I was able to publish with an independent press from contract to book in four months? The response: “Given that reviewers want galleys three-to-six months in advance of the publishing date means you’ll always need a long lead time. Plus it helps with quality control and editing.” Really? The reason we are not going to adapt the model is because the REVIEWERS (*Publishers Weekly*, et al) won’t adapt *their* models to current market dynamics? By the time my book’s “galleys” were ready, so was the final book!

Your takeaway: Are you allowing the tail to wag the dog when it comes to adapting your manufacturing, marketing or distribution model—instead of adapting to what your customers want and need?

Exhibit C: Refusal to Trust:

I had to convince my publisher to post an excerpt on Scribd, an online discovery site for writing of all types. She said she’d heard bad things about it and forwarded me an article about an author suing them for copyright infringement. I explained that Scribd itself did not pirate the work; someone else must have posted it and that Scribd is just the channel (like YouTube). I also explained why we should get in front of it and post our excerpt ourselves to control the marketing and message. After all, Chapter One is already available on the publisher’s website: What’s to stop someone from stealing it from there? At least Scribd is driving people to their website who will actually see it and ultimately purchase the book. This fear of piracy and infringement is real, but the upside of promoting the full book is so well worth it.

Your takeaway: Are there marketing channels (like social media) or new technologies you are ignoring out of fear, when they could be prime ways to reach your customers?

Exhibit D: Refusal to Coordinate:

Because my book is a short-run printing (my publisher is not Random House and doesn't print 50,000 at once) it is listed in a separate "small press" database (DB) on Ingram, one of the big distributors in the business. This same DB houses self-published books, and the retail bookstore chains refuse to carry those, mostly because of the lack of return policies and quality concerns. We had to make it very clear to local booksellers that my book is not self-published and is 100% returnable to convince them to carry a local author. (PS: Authors can make their self-published books returnable as well if they like.) I've had a hell of a time getting my branding book into Barnes & Noble stores because of this, as the book is marked incorrectly in their system and the stores are saying they physically can't order such books through the system and we have to talk to headquarters in New York. New York has said they will fix the issue, but that the stores are wrong and can order anything they want. I've since learned that certain forward-thinking store managers can "go rogue" and find a way to order the local authors that their customers want but it's not "policy." Authors are stuck in the middle, as they try to give any local booksellers great content and events that will boost sales. So now indie bookstores get me for signings because we don't have to deal with this bureaucratic mess, while a Barnes & Noble competing down the street can't get out of its own way. One indie bookstore owner even told me "People are craving local authors right now, similar to the local food movement!" Bottom line: Because of finger-pointing, system constraints and lack of communication, Barnes & Noble stores end up missing out on great local marketing opportunities unless that store manager is particularly savvy and motivated.

Your takeaway: Are you not communicating effectively with multiple locations, partners or employees to the point that the losers end up being your cash register—and your customers? Are your policies getting in the way of you staying competitive or giving your customers what they want?

Heed the lessons large publishers are painfully learning and don't let this kind of stubbornness and lack of vision cloud your success.

4 Clever Ways to Make It Easy for Others to Promote You

Whether you're launching your website, promoting a special deal or simply sharing with the world your newest creation, one of the best ways to exponentially reach more people with the news is to partner up.

We've all done it: You create this gorgeous new six-week course, fabulous summer sale or value-packed free webinar and you send an email to your friends, family and colleagues asking them nicely to *"Please share this!"*

But too often, I see everyone from entrepreneurs to authors standing in their own way when it comes to rallying others to spread the word. They put all the burden on the people whom they are asking for the favor. They expect them to take time out of their busy day to look up the information, come up with the copy for the post, find the email link to the sales page—and, in some cases, these well-intentioned creators actually leave out the ACTUAL name of the thing they want promoted!

We're all busy, folks. Your big launch or new book is not even a blip on someone else's radar. They have their own stuff to deal with. I mean, seriously, they have work to do, kids to raise and past episodes of *House of Cards* to binge on. Respect their time.

It's your responsibility to make it as easy as possible for someone to promote you so they don't even have to think twice about it.

Here are four clever ways to make it super easy for people to promote you:

1. **Be Brief and Use Bullets:** Don't simply make them link to a page they'll be forced to sift through. Or worse send them nice paragraphs painfully detailing the ins and outs. Instead, give them the highlights in the email: Name of (whatever it is), dates, cost, target audience, and **WHY** that person's own tribe should care. People are often reading this on the go, so respect that. Bulleting out the main points can help.

Example:

Hi Trish! Hope this finds you doing well. Would you mind sharing the news of my latest coaching program with your community of working women? It's right up their alley as they look for new ways to save money and fund their dreams! Here are the details for you:

- *From Strapped to Solvent: A 6-week virtual coaching program*
- *10 am to 11 am Pacific Time starting August 1 and ending October 5*
- *It's perfect for anyone in your tribe who is struggling to pay off loans or credit card debt to help them fund their future.*
- *Registration and Details: (the registration page).com*
- *Cost: \$250*

2. **Write the Copy for Them:** If you are asking someone to Tweet, post or send info in their next email newsletter, don't just say, "*Would you please promote this for me? Thanks!*" Instead take the time to craft the actual tweets, posts or copy so they can easily cut and paste. Give them some options so they can choose the platform that works best for them. When you ask someone a favor, you have to make it a no-brainer because even if they really, truly do want to help, they've got stuff to do. And PS, don't forget to **SHORTEN THE LINK** and embed it for them! It's crazy to make them cut and paste the link, embed it and then share it.

PS: This is the part where you *can* link them to a promotional page that specifically has all the copy/posts ready to cut and paste. I see this with book promotions all the time. It's useful if you are offering a lot of options yet you want to keep the email itself short and sweet. Just depends on how much you're offering them for the promotion.

Example:

Here are some snappy tweets, Facebook posts or newsletter copy you can use which I crafted to save you some time—but please feel free to edit and add your own flair!

Tweet: In debt? Check out this new course from my gal @twitterID to get footloose and fancy free: bit.ly/6weekssolvency

FB: We all know being in debt sucks. It sucks your money, energy and even health. Make this the year you stop the madness! My good pal, Jane Doe is a money expert and wise woman who can help you get from stressed to solvent in no time. 6 Weeks to Solvency starts on August 1 so sign up now and grab your spot! Details: bit.ly/6weekssolvency

Newsletter Copy: (You get the idea....!)

3. **Make images available:** Images help our social media posts stand out so why not offer them an option to share some cool ones? Especially if they use Pinterest or Instagram. You may want to send them to a page where they can download images of various sizes to use (unless you think your images are small enough to avoid clogging up their email server). Not sure of how to size the images for each platform? Check out this [image size cheat sheet](#).
4. **Offer an incentive that helps *their* brand:** Why not make this opportunity one in which they can earn brownie points with their peeps? Create a special discount code just for their community or throw in a little something extra that can boost their brand as well. And PS: you can add this unique code straight into the pre-written posts for each person—again, to make it super easy for them to share.

Example:

If you'd like to offer them some extra love, please accept this unique discount code just for your people. Just have them type the code SAVVY at checkout and they will automatically get \$50 off!

Or

And let's do something special for your community: if you're game. I'm willing to put together a free webcast and co-host it with you (I'll do all the work!) that we can promote exclusively to your list. This way, we can promote the course and code, but you can also talk to them about what you've got cooking, too!

Bottom Line: When you ask for promotional help, you have to make it as easy as possible for the person to say yes and take immediate action.

The Dreaded “S” Word

Entrepreneurs love being creative, dynamic, bold, innovative....but they often hate *selling*. Which is kind of funny, seeing as how that is the key to generating revenue. Women business owners especially struggle with what they perceive to be “annoying”, “slick” or “deceitful.” But if you don’t believe in the value of your goods and services—since you are the person who knows them the most intimately and cares about them the most—how can you expect anyone else to do the same?

Marketing and sales go hand in hand—and they both stem from having a strong brand story. As someone who has sold and marketed online courses to end customers, as well as put marketing processes and campaigns in place to “stock the sales pipeline” for enterprise software companies, I can tell you for a fact that they can easily work together. This is true for everything from simple to complex sales, for products or services and for business-to-business (B2B) or business-to-consumer (B2C) companies.

Effective selling is about telling your story and addressing your customers’ needs.

It’s a *conversation* showing how your offerings can solve someone’s problem or help them achieve their goals. Good salespeople don’t try to cram something down someone’s throat that they will not get any value from. Too often we try to say what *we want* about our company without addressing the value we provide *to others* and why they should care. Both solopreneurs and million-dollar businesses are guilty of this.

Good selling is also about empathy—putting yourself in the customer’s shoes, addressing their pains and offering solutions. A past Harvard research study stated “empathy” was the #1 trait for a successful salesperson. This is often why people who are excellent listeners, whether introverted or not, make the best salespeople.

Here are five of the most common sales mistakes made by business owners:

1. **Assume it takes one call to close the deal:** As I often share when talking about branding, you have to consistently be in front of someone at least five or seven times before they may be willing to buy. There is a lot of noise in the marketplace these days, so the key is to communicate multiple times and offer new and different value each time. When trying to sell to prospects, cultivate the

relationship over time. This is where a blog or a regular email list is critical to building trust and a relationship that will ultimately lead to a sale. Send prospects or contacts interesting articles you know they will appreciate, personally invite certain **people to events, stay in touch about promotions and special offers. Don't** assume once is enough.

2. **Not clearly communicating what you sell:** I see this one over and over with my branding clients. You need to clearly communicate what you sell, who it benefits and what value they get. Your message gets muddy when you try to make **everyone your market. And "everyone" is not a market. Not even everyone who needs what you've got is your market. You present a unique value and style that a** subset of those people will be drawn to. Who is that ideal customer? Who are you talking to? What problem are you solving for them? For small companies, stick to no more than three core markets or ideal customer segments. Otherwise, you will never communicate consistently or **clearly enough to any of them because you'll** be spread too thin.
3. **Selling features, not benefits:** Don't tell me about all the widgets and technology and **"things"** you sell, offer or provide. That is all about you and customers want to hear about what *you can do for them*. Tell me how your product or service makes my life better, my family safer, or my business more successful. **Then, once I'm hooked, you can start delving into the "how" you do all of this. A feature is an attribute, a benefit is a value.**
4. **Lack of qualifying:** Not all leads are good ones, so you need to answer three simple questions to determine if someone is worth your time: Do they have a budget? Do they have a reasonable timeframe? Do they have the ability to make **the buying decision? I've seen** software sales reps on million dollar deals not answer these questions effectively, so you are not alone. If the answer to any of the **above is "no," you need to get to the right people within the organization, or focus** your time on more qualified leads elsewhere while slowly nurturing **those "no's"** to turn into **"yeses."**
5. **Failure to close:** At the end of a killer presentation, you need to ask for the business. Many business owners do not do this and just assume that if the pitch was good enough, the client will contact them. **Wouldn't that be nice? Instead, set** an action plan or a next step. **Ask when they want to get started. "When is a good time to come in for our initial session?"** Or let them know the consequences of stalling: **"To get this work done by Christmas, we need to start on Monday."** Create the next event at each phase of the sales cycle until they sign on the bottom line. Leaving it up to them will simply give them more time to research your

competitors. You don't have to stalk them or be intrusive. But you do need to create milestones and reasons to follow up until the deal is done. And, again, ask for the business at the end of each contact.

Sales should be a productive conversation, not an icky strong-arm. If you've created a strong brand foundation, targeted your ideal customers appropriately and deliver real value, you're halfway there.

Closing Thoughts and Book Extras

Thank you for reading these entrepreneurial insights and brand-building tips! Hope they prove useful to whatever creative or commercial endeavor you are pursuing.

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Books by Maria Ross to Enjoy:

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About the Author, Maria Ross



Maria Ross is a brand strategist, author, and speaker who believes cash flow and creativity are not mutually exclusive. She is the chief brand strategist and creator of Red Slice, a digital elixir of stories and strategies to boost your business, brand and brain. Maria is the author of [*Branding Basics for Small Business*](#) and a humorous and heartfelt memoir, [*Rebooting My Brain*](#). She is also the author of *The Juicy Guide Series for Entrepreneurs*.

A unique entrepreneur, Maria started her career as a management consultant with Accenture (formerly Andersen Consulting), advising Fortune 500 companies such as Walgreens and Allstate. She then spent years in marketing and advertising on both the client and agency sides where she crafted brand, marketing and communications strategies for notable players including Discovery Networks and Monster.com.

After eight years as a Silicon Valley marketing executive for tech companies such as Business Objects (now SAP) and a host of startups and fast-growth companies, she started her own consulting firm, Red Slice, in 2008. A mere six months later, however, Maria miraculously survived a ruptured brain aneurysm that almost killed her. Against the odds, she got back on her feet, relaunched her business and today successfully advises startups and small businesses, blogs weekly and speaks on both business and inspirational topics. A dynamic speaker, Maria has delighted audiences ranging from the Chamber of Commerce to BlogHer to *The New York Times*. Maria has been featured in numerous media outlets, including MSNBC, ABC News, NPR, *Entrepreneur* and Forbes.com and she writes for The Huffington Post.

A lover of food, wine, Crossfit, football and film (she's an actress in her spare time), Maria is also passionate about giving back to the community. Her favorite causes include helping children, women and homeless or abused animals, as well as advocating for brain injury awareness as a keynote speaker, writer and advisory board member for the Brain Injury Network of the Bay Area. Maria lives with her husband, son and precocious Black Lab mutt in the San Francisco Bay Area. Learn how to tell

your irresistible story at [Red Slice](#) or spark a Twitter convo with Maria @redslice or connect on Facebook at www.facebook.com/redslice.

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