

The Biggest Crime In Small Business

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The biggest crime in small businesses today goes unnoticed by most outsiders. It is not reported in the media. There are no police reports filed and companies do not even mention it on their websites. People don't talk about it on the street and employees often overlook it. Even though this crime is rampant among small businesses, its presence is so subtle that many business owners fail to recognize when it is happening! Unfortunately, this crime is the same one that is most likely to kill a small business. It is not stealing by employees, burglaries, trivial lawsuits, or industrial espionage.

The biggest crime in small business today is the crime of being forgotten. Think about it-you can recover from most other crimes by installing an alarm system, filing patents, or buying insurance, but if your business falls victim to the crime of being forgotten it is on the fast track to failure. There are opportunities every day for your business to be forgotten by existing clients, potential clients, your best employees, surrounding businesses, your neighborhood, vendors, the media, and your potential investors.

SIGNS OF THE CRIME

Have you fallen victim to the crime of being forgotten? Here are some of the signs of being forgotten:

- Lowered top line sales
- Few people visiting your website
- Less customer inquiries
- Losing large accounts
- Losing long-time accounts
- High employee turnover
- Inability to attract top candidates to help run your business
- No "new" news
- Fewer repeat buyers
- Less revenue

STEPS TO SOLVE THE CRIME

There are many things you can do as a small business owner to help people remember you. I am not of the opinion that hiring a big PR company is the only solution. Here are some things you can implement today:

1. Focus on the question that every customer and client wants to know: What's in it for me?

At the end of the day, every client is selfish. With so many things out there vying for their time, attention and money, they have become more and more cynical and self-centered. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but more a self-protective measure.

Your job as a small business owner is to tell them what your service can do for them personally and remember-they do not want to spend time looking for the answer. The answer to this question must be one of the first things your clients see on your website and in your company-wide communications. If your clients are going to remember you, you must first answer the question "What's in it for them?"

ACTION STEP: List everything your client receives from your service or product. Closely examine all of your corporate communications with a critical eye. How accurately and consistent are they in answering this question to your clients and customers?

2. What differentiates your service or product from everyone else?

If you believe there is nothing new under the sun then you must recognize that for every product or service you provide, chances are very good that someone, somewhere else does almost exactly what you do.

Then the question becomes, not WHAT do you do, but HOW you do it. In other words, what is your U.S.P.-your "unique selling proposition"? What can a client get from you that they cannot get from anyone else? Perhaps it is your broad-based expertise or that every solution is completely customized to meet their needs or your company's 100% satisfaction guarantee. You must determine what differentiates your business from anyone else and market that point.

When defining your U.S.P., one of the keys to being remembered is to not use either of these two characteristics: quality or service. The reason is that EVERY business says they provide quality and service (even though we know they don't). Therefore quality and service have become meaningless when it comes to differentiating your service because every customer EXPECTS quality and service and will not do business with any company that doesn't have both already. Your U.S.P must be creative, yet accurately reflect who you are and what you offer that no one else does.

ACTION STEP: Set aside a few hours this week to brainstorm with your partner and employees on what your company offers that other companies do not. Do some research to find out how other companies in your field are differentiating themselves. Be sure to develop a U.S.P that your clients will not confuse with your competition's.

3. All of your communication must be emotionally impactful.

Anyone can quote statistics or develop an advertisement on a cognitive level, but the most effective way to ensure an impact on your clients is to communicate with them on an emotional level. You must find their "pain." What is it about their business, life, family, time, or environment that is causing pain? Are they not working or working too much? Is their business growing too fast or too slow? Is their family falling apart? Do they feel too old or overweight? Do they have a hard time tracking their projects or employees? Find their pain and communicate with them on an emotional level about

how you can help heal their pain and make their business, life, family, time or environment pleasurable.

ACTION STEP: List all of the things you want your customer to feel when they think of your company: excitement about the future, feeling younger or prettier, more balance, more fun, more time, closer to their friends, better organized, safer, etc. Evaluate how well your current communication creates this feeling and specific areas where you want to improve.

4. Distinguish your benefits from your features and communicate them clearly.

Features are what your product or service does. Benefits are why your client needs your product or service. For example, a famous company advertises "our servers allow your website to be up and running 99.999% of the time." That is a feature, but you must also tell your client what the benefit of this is to them. Well, if their on-line business sells \$200,000 worth of product every day, then being on-line only 98% of the time will cost them serious money in lost sales. For every feature you have, you must tell your client what the benefit is. Is your product better, faster, cleaner, guaranteed or longer-lasting? Will your service create more clients, decrease turnover, or increase margins? These are all great features, but you must tell your clients how this benefits them specifically.

You must get in front of your potential market and detail your specific benefits. Build value into what you do and how you do it. If you fail to clearly communicate what your benefits are to customers, rest assured-your competition will.

ACTION STEP: Take a piece of paper and draw two columns on it. Label on side "Features" and the other "Benefits." List all of the features of your service or product and for every feature state what the benefit is to your target client. Integrate these statements into all of your communication efforts on a regular basis.

5. Reduce the risk of working with you.

Many entrepreneurs have products or services that are similar to what much larger, more established companies have. Why should your potential customer buy your product over the big company's product? Are they taking a risk with a company that may not be around 5 or 10 years from now? Will your 10 year guarantee really mean anything in 10 years?

While no one can predict the future of your business, the smart business owner recognizes the need to develop creative ways to reduce the risk of their clients in working with them.

ACTION STEPS: List what your company is doing to reduce the risk potential customers see in working with a small, entrepreneurial business. Do you offer a written guarantee? Will you stand behind it? Do you offer a trial period? How have you

achieved success with other clients? Will you provide them with case studies on previous clients? Do you have a strong reference list?

6. How effective is your cheapest form of advertisement-your business card?

Examine your business card as if you were one of your target customers. Does it tell them succinctly who you are, what you do and how you can help them? If not, perhaps it is time to redesign it.

ACTION STEP: Ask several of your existing clients what they think of your business card. What does it say to them? Is it memorable? How could you improve on it? Thank them for their suggestions and implement them in your redesign.

7. Can people find your product or services on the internet?

Near the beginning of the internet age only Fortune 500 companies had websites. It was seen as a sign of being on the "cutting edge." Today that perception has changed. More and more consumers perceive a website as a sign of legitimacy. Many consumers now believe the lack of a company website to be a sign of a questionable business. With an increasing number of ways to create a decent website on a small budget (\$2000-\$5000), lack of money is not an acceptable excuse any more. Not every business will benefit from having a web presence, but most will. The question is not, "how long can I get away with not having a website?" but, "how many potential customers am I losing without having a website?" A good website can be a great source of passive income.

For those of you who already have a website, how many of you regularly profit from it? How many people are visiting your website every week? What is your conversion rate for these visitors? What percentage of your existing customers found you from your site? How can you better serve your existing clients on your website? What are you doing to increase the visibility of your site on search engines?

ACTION STEP: If you do not have a website you should have several REALLY good reasons why not. If you can't come up with several reasons then you should commit to getting one. If you do have a website, ask the company who hosts your website to sit down with you and explain all the statistics about your site (how many unique visitors, how long do they stay, what page do they leave from, how do they find you). After that, sit down with your web designer and talk strategy: how can you increase your search engine rankings, what can you do to convert more customers, does your current site accurately reflect who you are and what your benefits are to your target audience, etc.

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