

Marketing in Tough Times **SUCCESS** 5 Steps to Success

In the face of an economic slowdown such as the one we are experiencing (and I have now been through 4!), its very easy to become despondent and to believe that the only way to survive is to cut back, keep your head down and sweat it out.

In a dim and distant past I was a biologist and to my thinking recessions are actually rather like the commercial version of the ice-ages. The Ice ages were massive step changes in evolution of life on earth, and we all know what happened to the dinosaurs – but we also know that life did continue after such cataclysmic events – but only life that was able to adapt to the new conditions at the time.

And guess what, when the sun shone again, the ice melted, to reveal a new environment these adaptable life forms thrived. The same is true during recessions – only those companies with solid

business models, great well focused products and a plan will thrive after the recession.

So lets look at 5 strategies to ensure you don't end up like the dinosaurs!

It may seem counterintuitive to take stock and engage in some navel-gazing when the sensible thing would appear to be to work 48 hours a day in the scramble generate new business and revenue onto the books. But that is what we are going to do.

Ironically things like marketing your company probably are not at the forefront of your mind and you may feel compelled to tighten budgets. But by doing that, you will actually worsen your position – you need to believe that you're in business for the long game and that you need to set up marketing activities to produce streams of business in the future when times start to improve.

competitor).



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Step 1

Get the Brand and Product Positioning Right

Its really crucial, in order to make ANY marketing spend effective that your brand and product positioning are absolutely spot on. Now is the time to revisit and fine-tune your proposition!

Here's what I mean. How often have you sat in a meeting where the product has been described as a list of things that it will do – its features and functionality?

While this information is really important, and customers will need this, your product idea needs to be VERY clear about why it should appeal to a prospective customer. You need to apply the “so what?” test.

For example – “Our new patented active PA system has a frequency range of 100Hz to 10kHz, is rated at 1000 watts RMS and weighs only 10lbs per speaker”

“OK – SO WHAT?”

Instead, how about

“Many traveling professional musicians need high quality PA equipment that they are familiar with and trust.

“Equipment at venues is of variable quality which means that musicians tend to take their own gear which up to now has been based on bulky, heavy, traditional technology or they make do and suffer the potential consequences to their reputation.

“Our new, patented active pa system has high power and superb clarity, performing at least as good as Brand X (the benchmark

“BUT weighing in at only 10lbs per speaker means that the whole system can be carried in a small bag in the back of a saloon car rather than a van.”

So not only have you just defined how your product solves real pain felt in your target market, you have given yourself some crucial pointers as to who to target and what messages will appeal to them.

Take time to get this right – test it on friends in the business – a proper product positioning statement is important because this statement will drive everything you do to market and sell your product. It defines the type of people you need to reach without wasting a drop of your marketing budget on people who will NEVER buy your product.

And now, are you still selling the your products in the same way and with the same pricing structure as you were years ago? Its possible this is not what customers want in a recessionary market. Can you repackage your offering in such a way that it solves the new pains that your customers are experiencing now? Move fast to capture the new opportunity and recognise the signs that tell you to introduce new evolved products for the growth after the recession. Focus on customers ‘needs’. Talk to you existing customers - you may be surprised what they tell you.

Research has shown that businesses that innovate their product during a downturn always do well during the next boom.

Step 2

Look after your Clients and GET REFERRALS

It is true that the best way of selling is to get potential customers to choose you rather than beating down their door. We can achieve this through reputation marketing but the first place to start is those customers who have bought off you before. It costs far less to keep an existing customer and grow him than it does to acquire a new one – research varies but its at least a factor of 10.

You need to stop your customer being attracted to new suppliers and you have 2 great weapons in your armory that your competition doesn't – he knows you and if you are doing a good job (I assume you are) and you understand his business. Lavish him with great customer service and let him know that he is important to you.

If a customer moves to a new supplier because of a better price elsewhere – this is not the reason they moved - it's the excuse – rarely does anyone buy on price alone. Get to know your existing customers better, not only will you retain business but existing customers are also great sources of new business if you ask the right questions. Maintain a dialogue, ask about their successes, let them know how successful you are with all the other products or services you offer, ask if there is need for these maybe elsewhere in the organisation and you maybe surprised to get growth.

Happy customers also love to tell their business colleagues about successful suppliers such as you – this helps them demonstrate what great business sense and judgment they have. Ask for referrals, most people do not. Trust me, referrals will come if you ask, especially when times are tough like now. If a respected colleague tells you what a great supplier they have for marketing and design, you would give them a look for your new campaign wouldn't you? Customers don't stop buying during a recession - they just buy more wisely.

Over the past few years, you've most likely built some traction in a particular market. Now is the time to revisit them and build on your repeat business and referral strategy. Look at new channel and routes to market as well – talk to your existing customers - you may be surprised.

Step 3

Get FREE Marketing or at least low cost!

Lets now look at some low cost marketing ideas. The Internet seems to be everyone focus right now and yes it's a very important tool in your marketing toolkit. There are some great low cost ideas to use the Internet. I assume you have a website – if not get one – there are simply loads of people out there offering a massive variety of cost options –pick one that works for you.

3 Tips – make sure that you have your contact details on every page (top right is as good a place as any), make sure you have some testimonials on the front page and have a form to collect email addresses – entice them with a free download – a white paper for example

PR is free and when someone else writes about you it builds trust and respect. Advertising is great but potential customers know that its you telling them how good you are and they expect you to say that! When someone else writes about you, and if the topic is relevant to the reader, then people take notice. Get to know your local paper's business editor. They need to fill pages with content and they need to do this every week - make it easy for them to do this and they'll love you! Here's a mnemonic to remember it's called the PR RAP



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Relevance – pick a topic in the headlines

Angle – this is your particular take on the issue, your angle –

Pitch - why your product/service meets some interesting new needs not yet covered.

Network like crazy. Why not give 2 cards to everyone you meet – one for them and one for someone they might meet later who needs your services. But don't stop there -meet people after the event for a coffee – really connect with them – help them with expert advice from your skill set – they will evangelise for you. And speak at events. There is something in human nature that says that once an individual creates a gap between them and an audience the relationship changes. Speaking to an audience you are suddenly an expert. Again this will create trust and will make people come to you for your services.

Lastly, use the various networking sites to boost your search engine rankings. Your profile allows a signature – this can contain an inbound link to your website –an google loves inbound links from high traffic sites and all networking sites have high traffic. Blog or publish articles – this again publishes your electronic signature and which again creates another inbound link. Blog monthly – you will see improvement in the organic Google ranking and guess what, you will get replies from other people interested in your views – they might even become prospects

I have a list of 40 more great low cost marketing techniques – email me for a copy.

Once you have exploited all those free marketing opportunities and you are going to invest in some marketing, I would suggest that there are 2 criteria that you want to adopt under the current circumstances. Firstly that your investment can last over a length of time, if possible. So think of things that will give you constant exposure. Some

Step 4

Marketing that is Persistent

marketing tools only need to be created once, yet will last a long time. For example, vehicle wraps will last for years and can be seen by every one all the time 24 hours per day. The same goes for websites. If you have a storefront, consider wrapping the entire window, if not what about buying advertising boards at the local football, rugby club.

Secondly if you are spending money on marketing, do not cut corners – do it properly so it looks professional. It is so tempting to try and save money by doing things yourself or getting a mate who can work his way around Front Page to do a website for example – but it is a false economy for 2 reasons. Firstly if you do it yourself, you are using valuable resource that takes you away from what you are good at it - so you are not being productive and secondly your reputation is at stake with a bodge job. Image and reputation is everything right now and the survivors of this recession will be the ones who stand out in the crowd as being solid and professional

Step 5

PLAN the Work -WORK the Plan

It's an often repeated that, if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. This may be trite but it is true. You need to plan everything and, if you aren't good at it, get someone who is, or at least get something ANYTHING - down on PAPER.

You need to put down a roadmap for your marketing - times, dates, collateral needs etc. And finally you need to put numbers down for costs and sales income on a monthly basis. So, detail what sort of marketing materials you will need and when you plan to use these marketing tools. And who will do this.

Then you need to work back to articulate when you need to develop these marketing tools and again who will be doing this for you.

And lastly create a proper budget - set aside a figure and write it off. Do not try and do your regular marketing from cash. If you do you will always be wondering about whether you should spend the money and you will drift off the timing plan.

You may need help on this, but the plan is non-negotiable. And you may feel that the plan is done once a year and you never look at it again right? Wrong! Many people write a beautiful and detailed plan and then put it in the bottom drawer and forget about it. Its much more fun making exciting new developments to your product range - than to monitor progress on your plan isn't it?

But its crucial that the plan is a working document that you stick to it and review progress every month with the team members. Sole traders, review the plan yourself or create a virtual board through your business network (call me - I can put you in touch with some great people). You need to focus on what happened to take you off track, and to take corrective action to bring you back to plan.

So in conclusion, for business survival, its

crucial that you are driven by the marketing and timing plan to keep the sales funnel filled with potential clients. But do not make the mistake of short-termism and assume that once you've landed a couple new customers, you're out of the woods yet. Stick to the plan - market yourself relentlessly - this recession is going to be a long and painful experience for all of us and I for one do not intend to have business archeologists digging me up in a million years and studying me as a curiosity!

Matthew Simmons

PS email me - I'd love to hear how you get on!
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About the author

During a successful corporate career developing and launching technology products in many different fields, Matthew has had over 25 years experience helping businesses at all stages of their development fulfill their potential through planned, creative marketing and business development.



Freelance now for over 6 years, Matthew helped develop Snap-Marketing to offer full marketing solutions to a variety of clients big and small.

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