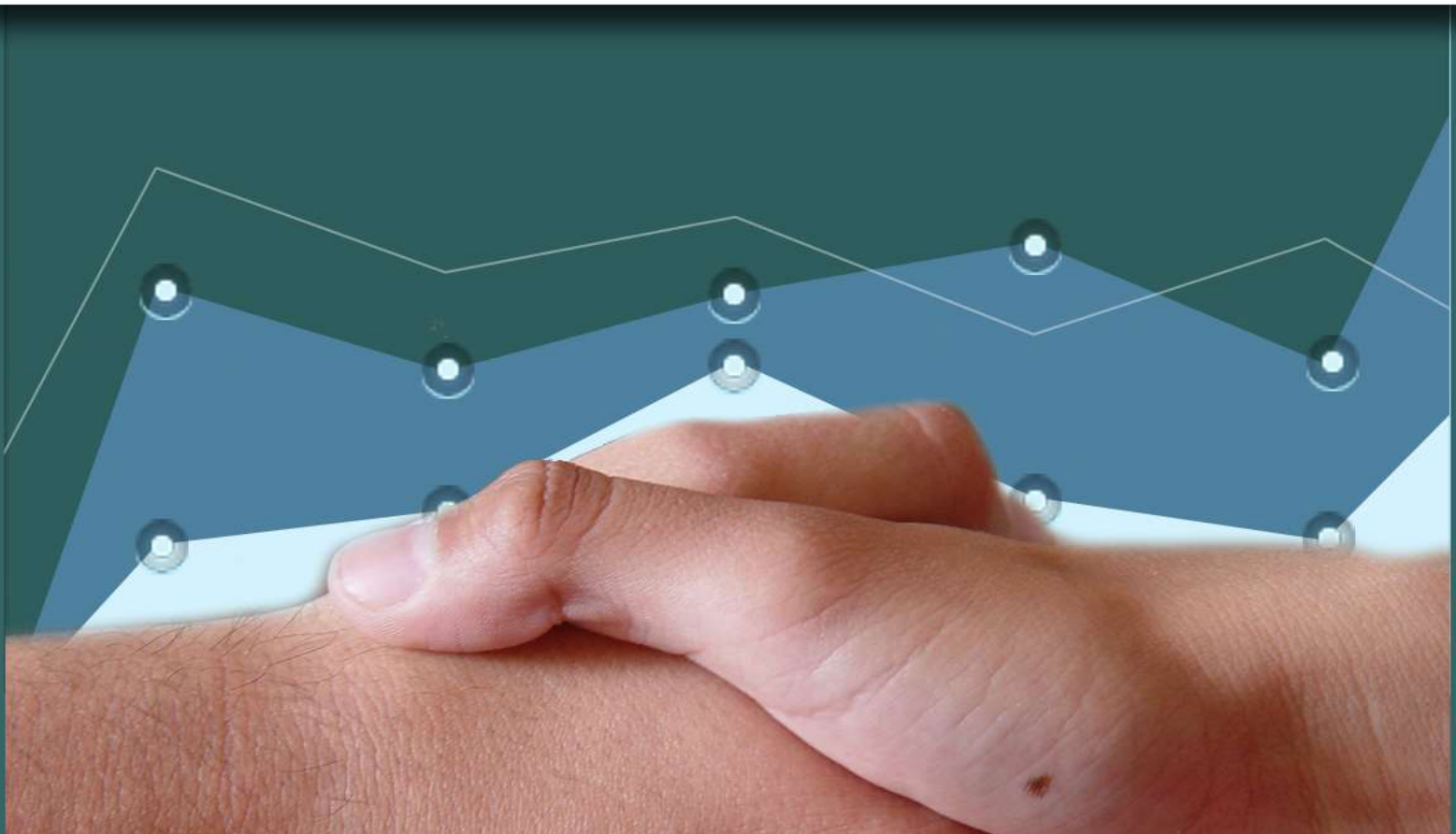


Relationship Marketing



***Grow Your Relationships,
Grow Your Income***

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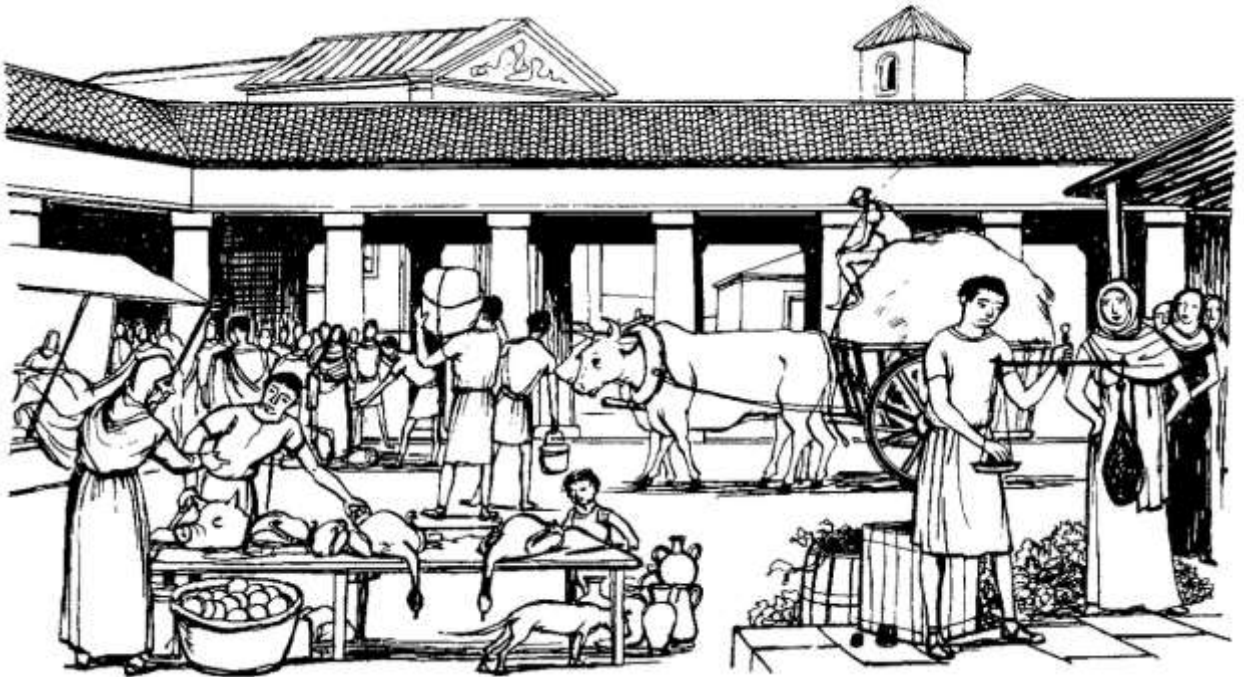
Introduction

People will tell you that “relationship marketing” is something new, but the best business relationships have always led to long-term business success. “Relationship marketing” has become a watchword of the twenty-first century – but if you look back historically, it has always actually existed.

The ancient Romans had set market days (called *nundina*): If you had goods to sell, that was the day you took them to the market square – sharing news with your neighbors and customers, and becoming known as a trusted part of the community.

The Right Way

Credibility was as important then as it is now. People soon came to know whether or not they could trust each vendor. Reputation back then, as now, was everything, if a vendor wanted to build a stable of loyal, repeat clients.



The Wrong Way

If he was a traveling peddler, however, never in the same place twice, he cared nothing for quality or customer satisfaction: Only about making the sale and moving on quickly (before people found out his goods were defective, poor quality or not as-represented.)

It could be said the peddler also indulged in a form of relationship marketing – but it was all about dazzling and charming the customer for the short-term; i.e. the immediate moment. Follow up – a crucial part of real relationship marketing – was absolutely non-existent. If you care about building your online or offline reputation, growing a solid pool of loyal customers or clients who will come back for your services again and again, you will need to focus on two things:

- Building the relationship
- Dedicated follow up

.It doesn't matter if your business is online or local – building relationships is the way to steady, successful growth.

Consistency – Your Secret to Credibility

Consistency and credibility are core elements to successfully growing and nurturing your business relationships. They provide the strong foundation that later allows you the latitude to select and use specific techniques for relationship building, each one tailored to the people you are seeking to serve and the cultural climate in which we all work and play nowadays.

But here's a fact that many people overlook: You can't create consistency without some degree of **organization** and **planning**.

People who organize their social and business lives, carefully building routines and developing good planning habits also tend to deliver. Their good habits create the sort of consistency that becomes a watchword for others. If you promise a blog post every Monday, people can count on a new post on Monday and – if they like the information you share – they start to look forward to it. Miss it once, and that's an exception: Miss presenting that Monday post twice, and they're already off looking for someone else to follow.

If you market on eBay, you are obliged to ship immediately your customer pays. It is part of your terms and conditions. What happens if you don't do so? You get a bad rating and damage your own reputation.

There may be no "terms and conditions" in your particular business to bind you to delivering as promised, but if you want to build strong relationships, start focusing early on **being consistent** and **keeping your word** – no matter how small the issue – before you've ever sold a single item.

If you promise to find a web resource for a potential joint venture partner or future customer, do so. If you promise to write a review for someone, write it. If you promise to share seven secrets to perfect cake decorating, make sure you really share seven secrets – not six – and that these seven secrets outdo your competitors in **perceived value** to the people you are sharing them with.

The Secret to Making People Love You

Say, for example, you're trying to promote a coupon via a QR code on your Facebook page. It's not enough simply to place the QR code graphic prominently on your page with a call to action: **You have to get people to your page to view it** before they can click on it.

If you've never acknowledged comments on your posts (either wall posts or Facebook Page posts) by at least pressing the "Like" button, and never actually replied directly to a comment or post by others on your Page or wall, don't expect your followers to come flooding to your page, eager to see what your QR code is all about. You simply haven't built a relationship first; and that's what it's all about.

Think about the gossip magazines people like to read when they're at the hair salon. What really makes people pick up a particular magazine above all the others in the first place: Is it a clever, catchy headline? A provocative photo?

Well, both of the above... but you have to look a little deeper: What is it about the catchy headline that works? What is it about the provocative photo that makes people want to find out what it's all about?

Look at the bottom of all these techniques, and you'll find the common denominator of human emotion: Specifically...

- **Curiosity** (e.g. You really want to find out exactly what Shocking Items lie hidden away in six celebrity closets)
- **Empathy/identification** (e.g. Finding out about your first husband's long-term infidelity was such a traumatic life event, you really identify with Maria Shriver's heartbreak in discovering her husband's long term unfaithfulness and genuinely want to know how she's doing)
- **Dislike** (e.g. You "can't stand" Tom Cruise, so you want to find out how Katie Holmes whopped him – and if she really did)
- **Liking** (e.g. You've always liked Sandra Bullock so you're really interested in her new baby)

Remember words are just words: It's *how they trigger into human emotion* that makes them effective. So invest time – consistently, of course – into your social networking. Be interested in others. Care about others. Ask them questions. Give them answers. Share in their joys (even if you just press the "Like" button) as well as their sorrows (*don't* press the "Like" button. Say a couple of words in the Comment section to let them know you care.)

And be there – every day – when your target audience members are online.

Understanding Triggers

When it comes to building relationships, not enough has been written about triggering emotions.

Triggers are small cues that powerfully re-create a feeling, mood or experience for individuals.

Triggers can be both good and bad. For example, Olivia smells the distinct fragrance of Angel's Trumpets (*Brugmansia x Candida*) and is immediately transported back to her honeymoon in Hawaii. There was a flower-laden Angel's Trumpet shrub growing just under the window of her cabana, releasing a "heavy yet delicate" scent every night. For Olivia, this particular "trigger" – the scent of the flower – brings joy. Her body floods with endorphins and she has "a great day". It's her "lucky flower".



On the other hand, Nathan was caught in a tornado and suffered a broken arm when a wall fell on him. He is, funnily enough, not triggered by the sound of wind or greenish skies (though they make him “cautious”) – but if he hears any sort of “wood creaking noise”, he jumps out of his skin.

Nathan describes the physical symptoms he experiences:

- Heart hammering
- Adrenalin flooding
- Hyper-alertness (“experiences tend to ‘jump’ and time telescopes into chunks, with gaps in”)
- Extreme agitation

In other words, Nathan finds himself in a classic “fight or flight” mode.

Most of us don't usually experience triggers as physically distressing or euphoric as Nathan and Olivia, but understanding that everyone is triggered in small ways – emotionally and sometimes physically – by various external stimuli is essential, if you want to fast-track your relationship building.

When you write to your target audience, they start out reading your web copy, posts or sales letters with their senses somewhat detached. If you want to engage their positive and empathetic triggers, it's up to you to:

- Figure out their exact triggers
- Attempt to provide them

If you can tap into a positive trigger, you've got them hooked.

Example: You want your target audience to buy your new fiction novel, set in the early nineteen-seventies. It's a horror novel that starts out nostalgically, but gradually the mood changes as danger draws near.

Before you write your web blurb or sales letter, you need to re-create that mood and feeling, so you can immediately hook your fifty-ish, mostly female audience.

You make a list of positive and negative trigger words (these will all be words that create action and/or involve the senses). You do a little word association exercise:

- Summer = cicadas, chicory, heat haze, oat fields, hollyhocks, Tab cola, dad's Ford Falcon (positive associations)
- Summer = stifling closeness, humidity; the rusty trailer in the empty lot next door, being left alone unexpectedly by parents, acid rain, the scissor man (negative associations).

You might trigger your potential reader's senses, when setting the mood, by talking about the lazy sound of cicadas in the shimmering summer haze, lying in the grass staring at a forever sky, walking along the dusty country road hemmed with pale blue chicory flowers – and to someone who grew up in the same place and time you did, all you really have to say is "cicada", and you've triggered a sense-based memory and hooked them into investigating further. (If you're trying to market this novel to people exclusively in the U. K., however, the word "cicada" would just mystify the average reader, since those insects do not exist in the British Isles.)

You can start introducing undercurrents of anxiety by talking about the “stifling closeness” as the day wore on; how your heroine had only just heard about “acid rain”. And then the heroine hears the rhythmic creak of the scissor sharpener’s cart and the slow clanging of his bell as he trudges down the empty, stifling street – and suddenly the mood is beginning to shift towards a more ominous feeling.

This has all been created by small cues and triggers engaging the senses: And even if the reader never had a scissor man walk down their childhood street, the heroine’s reaction to the sound will sympathetically trigger the memory – and response to the memory – of whatever repetitive sound haunted their own childhood, sending their imaginations into overdrive.

Words Make it Real

Thus is the power of words. You can make Olivia suddenly become overwhelmed with the joy of her honeymoon by describing a similar setting or by displaying a photograph of moonflowers. You can frighten the socks off the most stolid citizen by describing any repetitive sound that is incongruous to its present setting.

Always remember: When you provide triggers, what you are doing is **using highly specific words, images or described sounds to provoke universal feelings and emotions.**

In relationship marketing, realizing the power of words and images can provide you with endless opportunities to engage your target audience’s emotions, memories, feelings, sympathy – and empathy. So be aware – watch for clues in conversations you have with local customers, social media posts they share, the sort of magazines they subscribe to. See:

- Which words they habitually use
- What sort of photos they post
- What type of humor they have (Gentle? Sarcastic? Dark? Slapstick? Witty?)
- Whether they like to complain or look for the silver linings in life
- Clues as to their pace of life – are their posts short, terse, straightforward? Poetic and vivid? Chatty and cheerful? Erudite and philosophical?

In short, analyze their conversations – in print and in person. It’s no mystery. You are surrounded by clues, online and off, about your ideal

audience member. All you have to do is pick and use them wisely to increase the level of interaction, identification – and trust.

Mirroring – Allison went to Scotland for two years after accepting a post-graduate job through Edinburgh University. When she left, her accent was pure Wisconsin. When she came back, she had a Scottish accent, and seemed quite unaware of this.

Within a few weeks, she had reverted back to her old accent – but when she ran into a group of Scottish tourists several months later and engaged in a conversation, she “flipped” back into her Scottish accent again – which she found “highly embarrassing”.

Allison was not doing this deliberately: She was succumbing to the phenomenon of “mirroring”, a natural survival technique we adopt in order to fit in with a social group. (Just watch small children in any playground.)

You can mirror your customers, ever so gently, in:

- Body language
- Slang they use
- Idioms they employ
- Pacing in speech delivery
- Writing style
- Speaking style

And more.

Don't overdo this, however: It should never feel – or seem to others – artificial, forced or faked.

But a small dab of mirroring can go a long way in building trust.

Finding Your Community

When you admit people into your social networks, be selective: You do not want a random sampling of the global population (fascinating though this might be). You want to interact with people who:

- Are on your wavelength
- Share your niche interests
- Share common life details and conditions

- You can empathize with
- You understand
- Who will empathize with and understand you

In short, all the people you would want to hang out with in life's playground!

But there's a catch, of course...

You've got something they need. They need to know about it. You need to sell it.

So how does that affect how you interact with them? Are you going to chat about adopting a shelter dog if your market consists of single, busy, thirty-something professionals?

That's up to you: But if you decide to post about your new dog, make your posts relevant to their lifestyles. Talk about parts of the experience they can empathize with.

For example, you might post a photo of your new dog at the front door, looking happily and expectantly back at you, with the caption: "I didn't expect this, but it's like having an instant family!"

If they are mostly apartment dwellers in a big city, you might post something like: "Cody got out and made it onto the elevator without me today – carrying his own leash!" (Post it with a photo of your "hero" -- the doorman who stopped him trotting out into traffic.)

What you are doing here is sharing personal details, thoughts and emotions that:

- Hint at what sort of person you are
- Are important to you
- Might interest them
- Are genuine and honest expressions of your life – socially

If your sole product was a book on dealing with female Alopecia, you would not endlessly post about baldness – but you would share really cool blog posts, scientific studies and resources you came across (mixed up with your other personal posts).

You'll know you're engaging successfully and naturally when:

1. It's not a chore to write social media, blog or forum posts to your target market
2. Time flies by while you're engaging with them
3. You have to rein yourself in and terminate conversations in your store
4. You feel like you're "chatting" with people – and they feel like you're having a conversation with them (not preaching at them)

TUESDAY, MAY 29, 2012

Bald Bold Natural Hair Style



The big chop is my bald bold start on my natural hair style journey. I call it a journey because it has been a long time coming to this decision. For me it is a symbol of change; confidence in my personal style; a chance to embrace and love-on my natural hair; and lastly freedom from relaxers and sitting under the hair dryer..LOL.

This is actually my second time doing the big chop. I did it about 5 years ago when I began to experience extreme hair breakage. Then, I vowed to never get another relaxer only to eat my words and get a relaxer within a year. My hair texture was very difficult to manage, so I wore wigs, weaves and braids but those looks were so time consuming and drained my wallet. So my

1

A last observation about “mirroring”...

Your social interaction with your business peers, clients and customers should imitate life. You should feel one hundred per cent real and

¹ http://www.twostylishkays.com/2012_05_01_archive.html

authentic – without worrying that people “might not like” you. (If they’re put off by you, that’s good! They’ve just pre-qualified themselves and now they are not wasting your time and energy, or dragging you down.)

Finally, remember this one, huge secret...

Getting people to identify with you emotionally – through a story, through language, through triggers, through mirroring, through similarities – dramatically accelerates the process of trust building.

Six Useful Benefits of Being Liked

Here’s another great secret: **When people like you**, they will:

- Read your emails
- Feel positive emotions when they see your name in their inbox
- Be interested in your products
- Trust you and your products
- Overlook faults
- Give you recommendations

These will be the best sort of recommendation, too – the sort where they are falling all over themselves to gain brownie points and delight their friends and family by telling them how your product helped them – and what great customer support you have.

When people like you, you have succeeded in engaging their emotions. They feel they know you – which means you can spend less time “proving” yourself to them (and you can use those great testimonials and referrals on your website and landing pages).

“Well, all that is wonderful,” you might say. “But how does that help me grow my income?”

If you don’t get the point of building a relationship, where people feel they “know” you (and therefore have some degree of trust), you will probably never be quite as successful as the person who genuinely likes people.

But here’s the thing: Getting into the habit of *paying attention* to your customers

Section Two: Strategies, Tips – and What Not to Do!

So what are some of the strategies you can (and most probably should) implement, in order to grow your business through business relationships?

We've already touched up on social media, so let's start there...

Social Media: Conversations are Two-Way...

You've found out where your clients or customers like to hang out – and when you can find them there. So you send out "Friend" requests or "Follow" them... or put them in Groups or Circles...

What next?

We're back to consistency – and keeping it natural.

Don't just read their posts: *Comment*. Think of the sort of input you would like to receive. Think about how pleased you are when someone posts a comment or reply that really gets the ball rolling on what should, after all, be a **conversation**. Their comment incites other responses and that magical things happens – all of a sudden you've got thirty-four comments (and rising).

Others share your post -- you've hit a nerve in the collective unconscious or raised a point that needs discussing: Or maybe you've simply just touched people's hearts, brightened their day or made them laugh (or cry).

Here's the basic, simple rule that so many people keep forgetting:

If you want to receive lots of comments from subscribers and followers, you first have to *make* lots of comments!

This doesn't mean running around commenting on every single post or issue by every single person among your followers or friends. But it *does* mean **taking the time to respond**, if a post evokes any sort of response in you, emotional or otherwise (and especially when that post involves a subject dear to your audience's heart).

It also means:

- **Acknowledging people** – Even if all you do is press the “Like” button on Facebook or Retweet Tweets.
- **Remembering details about your contacts** – Asking them how the broken ankle is coming along; sharing a recipe for chocolate cherry soufflé because you remembered they were looking for one, the month before; calling their children by name, if they habitually do that themselves.
- **Calling them by name** – Using someone’s name usually makes them feel important and acknowledged
- **Thanking social network contacts or email subscribers** – For answering your poll, giving you that feedback you requested, sharing something helpful with you; and more
- **Sharing information** or tidbits of entertaining news or inspiration that you think your friends and followers would enjoy or find useful
- **Sharing yourself** – your values, opinions, tips and treasures
- **Celebrating their successes** – One of the nicest things you can do for your social media contacts is cheering them on. There is nothing more flattening than posting that you finally got your weight under one-fifty for the first time in ten years... and not receiving one comment (or even a “like”)

Remember you’re engaging in real-live conversations – not peeping over someone’s shoulder, reading a newspaper.

Six Social Networks That Can Help

Specific networks serve different demographics – but as long as your target niche members frequent a network, you should too.

There are strengths peculiar to certain networks:

Facebook – This is the most social – and active – of all current social networks. This is where you can “chat” about things frivolous or profound, business or pleasure.

Above all, it’s the place for you to be seen. Your photo will always appear beside your post, so make sure the Profile Photo you use is (a) current (b) friendly without being effusive. (Don’t post your business logo – save that for your Facebook Page, if you are really only focused on branding a company or product.

Facebook Tips:

1. **Organize your Facebook contacts into lists.** And especially have a separate list for game buddies! (Do you really want your Financial Packages clients to know you play Castle Ville and dress like a princess?)
2. **Create a Facebook Page for your business.** (We shouldn't really have to include that tip, should we?)
3. **Engage your followers with a strong mix of balanced posts.** Alternate photos with personal ponderings; videos with article links; jokes with inspirational quotes, etc. etc.
4. **Plan your Facebook persona.** Physically write down (on computer or a physical notebook) exactly how much of your life you will share. And whatever you exclude or include, make sure it supports the image you want to portray – and that it's a true image you feel comfortable with.



- Refer to husband as "D.H."
- No kids' names, but photos okay
- Won't post about my knitting
- Pet names and photos okay
- No engaging in political arguments
- Won't discuss health issues

5. **Be selective in your contacts.** Don't succumb to "I need 5000 likes"-type posts. (We call these "sympathy posts"; just the way your third set of \$300 candles that you bought from your niece, Judi, are "sympathy purchases".)
6. **Be consistent and post regularly.** (You knew we were going to say that, didn't you?) And while we're at it...
7. **Stick to your Facebook Plan.** Just because you're flaming mad at your telephone company doesn't mean you have a License to break that "no venting" rule.
8. **Create interactive content.** Polls, surveys, sweepstakes and contests can be successful ways to involve fence-sitters and die-hard fans alike
9. **Use photos** – especially if your audience is female. Women respond well to visual cues. And Facebook will ensure more people see your posts, if they can smack an ad in the corner of your photo.

Twitter – This is one social network where it's better to:

- Know exactly who you want to reach – as in a small, specific number of people you can't find on Facebook or Google Plus
- Know exactly when they're liable to be Tweeting

Otherwise, your Tweets are liable to vanish, unseen, off into the Twitosphere.

Twitter can be a handy tool if you're running a contest or promoting a blog post. People who like you should respond fairly well to suggestions that they **Tweet their answers** or spread the word about a post.

Having a Twitter presence also allows you to **place Twitter sharing icons on your web pages** (hey, really – the more shares, the more chance of reaching a larger segment of your audience – especially those that don't frequent other networks).

You can also **use widgets and apps to cycle your Twitter feeds on your website home page** – a good way of increasing the chances those disappearing Tweets actually get seen.

Twitter is a good choice if you have a local, physical business. You can quickly connect with other local business owners – ones who aren't direct competitors but whose services complement yours.

It's also a good choice if you are in the entertainment or sports industry, since members of these industries seem to prefer Twitter over Facebook or Google Plus.

LinkedIn – This social network is a “must” for establishing credibility. It's like a calling card, admitting you to certain circles whose members might otherwise be more suspicious of you, if you're a newcomer or have kept a low profile till now.

LinkedIn still tends to present a more formal and business-like face than Facebook or Twitter, even though the demographic has radically changed. Its focused groups and the chance to follow true experts and companies (local and global) make it the top choice for **true business-to-business networking**. (Comments-wise, however, it can be a tougher nut to crack than Facebook; the latter with its “come one, come all” stance.)

Google Plus – This network – especially if you make use of Google Plus Local – is a necessity for any sort of local, physical business. Its

geotargeting opportunities and **mobile interactivity** make it a powerful backdrop for your marketing activities.

You can also selectively group people into Circles and Hangouts. Many people find these to be a lot easier and more effective in targeted communication building than Facebook's private messaging chat system and Facebook Groups.



The Google +1 button can dramatically aid in shooting your site to top Google search results; and do take every opportunity to outright ask customers and clients to “leave a review” on Google Plus local.

Digg – Google gives considerable weight to this bookmarking network so don't neglect it: This is where others can be encouraged to refer your site... and you can **include a sharing icon on your site** (as with Google Plus, Twitter and Facebook).

Yahoo – Although Yahoo has declined in recent years in popularity, and (like Facebook) has issues with privacy.

Where Yahoo really comes into its own: It is a great place to find **specialty niche forums**! Building relationships on these can allow you to test out ideas, see what your niche really wants and hear about their problems and desires... before anyone else does.

Why Forums Are Grrreat!

In addition to letting you solicit (and sometimes get unsolicited) feedback, forums create a much stronger sense of community than social networks – provided you are willing to invest the time in becoming a “regular”.

You will often hear of industry news or discover a niche need long before the general population: And, while social networks tend to be general, your forum will consist of people passionate about your specific niche subject.

Best of all, forums often have a “Special Offers by Members” section – the perfect venue for:

- Trying out beta versions of new products
- Gathering feedback, criticism – and testimonials
- Trying out price points

- Being found by pre-qualified people actively looking for the service or product you're posting. (HINT: Titles are important, in Special Offer posts. Be descriptive and tell them clearly what they are going to get.)
- Offering your services (especially when you're just starting out)
- Breaking into a niche in a business capacity
- Offering product samples
- Selling your goods!

Local Events

Get into the habit of attending local events – whether these be charity auctions, business networking groups, local hockey games, county fairs or book fairs.

Chat about your business at every opportunity (being sensitive to cues that you are either interesting or boring people, and reacting accordingly).

Take your business cards to every event – whether you think this is a relevant step or not. Even if you just want to exchange phone numbers with someone so you can meet them for a casual coffee, a business card is a quick, handy contact resource.

And that person just might pass it on to someone else – people enjoy giving recommendations and solving their friends' problems. ("I met someone who might just be able to get your lawn mower running again...").

Personal recommendations go a long way in relationship marketing – even though, in the setting of a local event, you may never see the initial referrer again.

You are also exposed to real people. You hear their actual questions – not the ones you looked up on the net or are assuming from your own experience they may have. You are able to discuss ideas (which often generates even better "twists" or ideas.)

It opens up the chance to be asked to guest-speak at future events – a wonderful way to both increase your confidence and cement your expert status.

And you become well-known in your community.

Why Volunteering is a Win-Win Situation

Don't discount volunteering as a valid way to build relationships – and new contacts or clients. Many a volunteer has picked up clients or a position in a company as a direct result of volunteering. (But keep in mind many haven't, either.)

It shows people you care about your community. If you're a restaurant, donate water bottles (with your company name on) or an urn full of coffee (with free supplies and accessories) for a charity swim meet or marathon – you'll generate enormous goodwill in your community, which is priceless if you're a local business.



(TIP: Have a supply of coupons there for the taking. Color-code the coupons and track the results, to see if your involvement is providing an adequate ROI.)

You can usually also promote your business – donate samples, prizes or gifts, give out “goodie bags” or even simply just wear a t-shirt or baseball cap with your company logo, slogan and website URL or phone number emblazoned on it.

Volunteering is good for your soul: It gets you focused outwards, which helps you escape from the little hamster-wheel of your mind and gain fresh perspectives on what's really important.

A Fresh Approach to Emails

Email marketing is still a “must”, no matter what type of business you have – but do stay on top of your stats and pay attention to:

- Your click-through rate
- Your ROI
- Feedback (or lack of it)
- Sales
- Your subscribers' preferences

For example, if they are a highly visual bunch, try HTML graphics-based messages, and see if you get a better response.

If your subscribers are addicted to their mobiles, adjust your contact forms to allow them the option of receiving texts instead of emails.

Make sure your emails contain a valuable mix of subject types – with just enough free, valuable giveaways to keep them eager to open the next one that comes in.

And – you know what I'm going to say, don't you? -- Be consistent! Email regularly (but don't over-saturate them).

Get them addicted to your newsletters – put your best information in your monthly or weekly newsletter.

Most of all, write from the heart. Stay on top of current events and industry changes, and make sure your emails are always fresh and relevant – but never, ever use public tragedies as “post fodder”. That may initially generate floods of comments, but will backfire on you in the end... especially if you keep on being “controversial”. (People get tired of that very quickly; and it can come off as supremely egotistical, which clashes with the sort of subscriber/customer-focused persona you're trying to build – though if you're promoting an Assertiveness Training Course, this might not be the case!)

A Taste of the Feast

Make sure the way you write, communicate and interact is just a taste of what you've got to offer – whether they are thinking of buying from you at this time, or no. Let them know you are a quality act, through and through – and so are your services or products.

Why People Fail at Relationship Marketing

The really surprising fact is that marketers and small business owners all seem to consistently make the same basic mistakes – one reason why they receive only a small return on their investment in relationship marketing.

If we realize that the average business owner's approach is more like “token marketing” than “relationship marketing”, these sins and omissions come sharply into focus. They hear the words (“build your relationships, care about your customers”) but it's really all about doing as little as possible – not because these business people are mean or uncaring, but because there is just so much to running a business: And when your money-making passion is developing an amazing piece of software or coaching people to set themselves up for retirement, it can seem like a chore to focus so much on staying connected.

The best way to ensure you don't slip into this habit: Make a plan. Figure out:

- How necessary it is for you, personally, to spend a lot of time talking to people.
- How much time per day you can devote to personal contact
- How big your budget is, for outsourcing part of your relationship marketing
- Whether or not there are areas you can outsource. (For example, you could easily just outsource Autoresponder management and email marketing, if you use a VA who specializes in your Autoresponder and in writing or customizing email series' – or you could hire a consultant who specializes in relationship marketing and let her make the plan.)
- The social networks and online and offline hangouts where your market is most active. (Forums? Facebook? A Yahoo group? Google Plus Circle?)

- The social networks and online and offline meeting places you enjoy engaging with the most
- What time of day your market visits these meeting places and social networks
- Your availability at that time of day

And any other factor you anticipate will affect your ability to **follow through**.

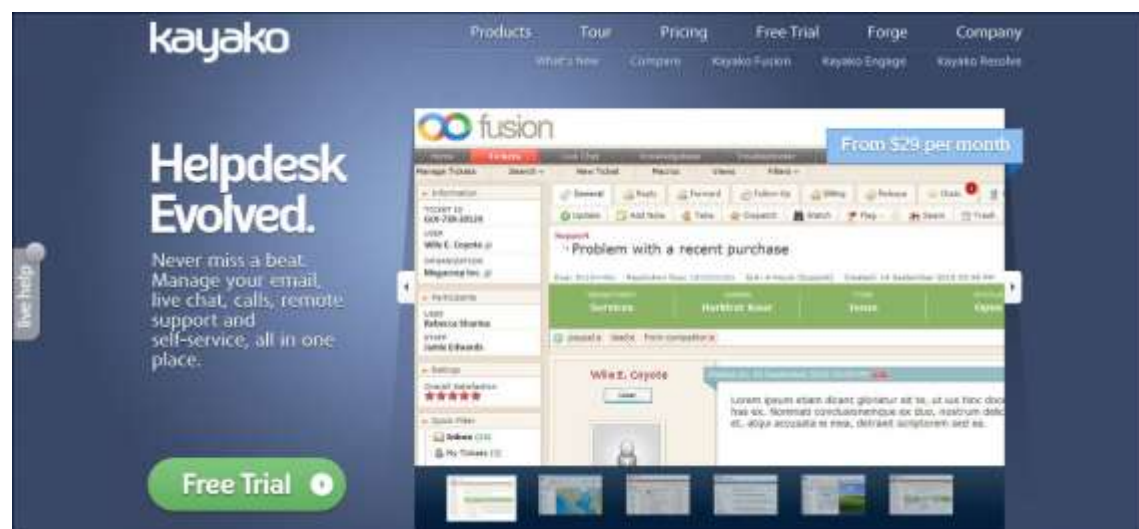
Follow Up: The Forgotten Ingredient

It's a simple point to make – and it's mystifying why so many small business people seem to fail to get it: Strong customer service and consistent follow up are both as important as the product or service itself.

Keeping in touch – regularly – is a follow up must. So is having a system that works for you, when it comes to customer service.

Research these, since customer service methods vary dramatically. You can choose to...

- Handle customer service yourself – acceptable if you're only serving four or five clients, maximum
- Hire an outsource contractor who specializes in customer service (highly recommended, if you've got the budget and you're dealing in a steady stream of bulk sales)
- Use a "Help Desk" program or system
- Contract with a "Help Desk" company, having them handle all queries



Having a business plan and keeping a clear eye on your goals will help make follow up a breeze.

And when it comes to your customers, making it easy to buy – and easy to use – guarantees you'll also make it easy to keep building the relationship.

“But What If I’m Just Not the Social Type?”

Try to set up your social meeting so that you gain maximum satisfaction and enjoyment from it. Be creative, if circumstances don't fit your personality and lifestyle.



For example, Keith Benson² described himself bluntly as an “anti-social loner”. He found people on chat forums and social networks “irritating” and preferred, instead, to spend his time developing and tweaking the low-end, custom software packages he was known for.

Keith described his chief bugbear as “clients”. He wanted nothing to do with them, claiming they kept changing their minds, asking him “to do the impossible the day before yesterday” and “expecting six thousand dollars’ work for two hundred and fifty dollars”.

² Not his real name

Keith “accidentally” hired a VA who turned out to be “a whizz” at customer service. “Pretty soon she had me organized. She dealt with the ninety-percent petty crap I used to have to deal with every day, and we had a system. That was cool. I can live with systems.”

Keith felt less pressure as he concentrated on his specialty and chief passion – app and software development. Relationship marketing wasn’t for him – but his VA made sure his customer service ran smoothly and his web presence was professional. In that way, Keith was ensuring he was building relationships, even with minimal personal involvement.

Within a short time, to his surprise, he discovered an app development forum he really enjoyed. “I hung out there just to relax and bounce ideas around, but people from the forum started sending me clients and telling people about what I do.”

His income “more than doubled” within six months and he found that, even paying his VA, he was making consistent and comfortable income... one that was slowly and steadily growing as happy customers spread the word even more.

“What do people want, when they have someone develop a piece of software, a script or an app for them? They want it just to run without a hassle. They don’t want me lecturing them about code and incompatibilities and I don’t want to have to deal with people who don’t know how it works.” Keith admits that the consistent system he has now allows him to satisfy both himself and his clients.

And, to his further surprise, he discovered that he actually enjoyed (and had time) to write emails to his list, so he is “more involved” in corresponding with repeat clients.

The difference between Keith and other similar coders with similar personalities:

- Keith recognized his own shortcomings. He decided what he could do... and what didn't work for him
- He developed a system and a plan to compensate for that
- Keith and his VA developed vigilant and consistent customer service and marketing strategies
- Keith's income is **steadily and consistently growing and expanding** (unlike many of his peers, who soar to huge heights with big contracts and crash when the work runs out)
- Keith played to his strengths – and made sure his weaknesses were outsourced

He still doesn't entirely credit this to "building relationships": He admits he saw hiring the VA more as "solving a problem that was really bugging me, which needed to be solved".

Sometimes, contract the right person to take over the right tasks can be your best relationship strategy of all, if it results in increased consistency in delivery and service – and happy customers and clients.

Relationship Marketing Mistakes

Here are traps you don't want to fall into. Pay attention, and take these tips to heart.

1. **Customers, clients and business peers who join you on social networks are not your friends...** that comes after a long-term relationship in which you truly get to know each other
2. **Real friends don't sell to friends. It's unnatural!** (Remember those Home Parties; and how friends and relatives would turn pale and bolt, after they'd spent way too much just because it was You?)
3. **You are not building a relationship to enable you to directly sell:** You are building a relationship to become known and trusted.
4. **Venting on social networks.** Sure, you're human... but do you really want people to tippy-toe away from you quietly? Or think that you're less than professional? Or offend twenty potential clients into feeling less rosy about you?

5. **Forgetting that almost everything on social networks has the potential to go “public”** – No matter how carefully you set up your Privacy settings.
6. **Not including calls to action in your posts and comments**, to keep conversations going and incite interaction. You may not be directly selling on a social network – but that doesn’t mean you can’t slant your posts and comments to gain more response.

Remember that when people do buy, and turn into repeat buyers, it doesn’t even seem to matter what you’re selling: They buy because you, the person they like, identify with and trust, are selling it.

Relationship marketing is a subtle art. It’s the furthest thing from a “quickie money-making technique” you’ll ever invest in so don’t treat it as the latest cash-generation scheme, or you’ll be disappointed

It can ultimately result in a steady, consistent growth in your income... but only if you’re willing to invest the time.