The best from the Graham Jones Newsletter

2013

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Should I sell products instead of services?

This week I was running one of my regular telephone consulting calls when my client pointed out that it is becoming increasingly difficult for him to sell services online because people have such low attention spans. He reckoned that they simply want to click on a "buy now" button and don't want to read long explanations of how a service might work.

I didn't agree completely because there are plenty of service-based businesses doing very well indeed online. However, he does have a point that people do increasingly want to get "instant solutions" via the Internet - something which a service business cannot easily tap into.

However, there is a way around this - turning services into products. You can already see this in your local supermarket, for instance. You can pick up a box and take it to the till to buy your "product" - a holiday travel insurance plan, for instance. Or you can go into almost any department store today and buy a box which is actually a present for a loved one. A nice big box with a pretty picture showing what is inside - a complete hair-do and make-over for instance. But what is inside the box...? A leaflet asking your recipient to phone up and book an appointment quoting a special code number. Your gift is a service, but it has been turned into a boxed product.

So, what do you currently provide which can be turned into a "product"? For instance, let's imagine you run a law firm and you offer a will writing service. Instead of having a web page about this service what you provide is a "boxed" "Will Writing Kit". Inside is a booklet with advice on what you need to consider in a will as well as a "certificate" entitling the purchaser to your complete will writing service.

Or what if you run a local garage which offers car servicing, MOTs and the like? You have a "product" which is a box you can even sell in your showroom or service centre which is "The Motorist's Car Care Kit". Inside there is a voucher for an MOT and a certificate entitling the owner to an annual service.

All kinds of services can be "productised" in this way. And it is more important than you might think. The day after my consultancy call, I discovered this blog post, which shows clearly that having products to sell can boost website traffic significantly.

If you want some examples of businesses that have turned services into products, click here. Otherwise look out soon for my product which will help you turn your services into products...!

What is Content Marketing Optimisation?

I was asked this earlier in the week after a talk I had given and it showed me that the person asking was clearly "on the ball". That's because "content marketing optimisation" is a relatively new online term currently beginning to get favour amongst the marketing and search engine experts.

I suspect you have heard of "search engine optimisation" (SEO) and that you may well use some of its techniques to help you gain a good position in search engines like Google. The problem for SEO is that Google, in particular, keeps moving the goalposts. What worked one week, might not work the next. So, the SEO pundits are moving on to this new thing, "CMO" or "Content Marketing Optimisation".

It all stems from developments at Google, which fiddled with its algorithm again last week, demoting 2 in every 100 web pages from their search rankings as a result. They are promising even more changes to come in the next few months. The aim of all this work is to make search more accurate and to prevent you from being given rubbish sites in the results. But to achieve that Google has to affect all of us.

Essentially, it means that the search industry is putting much more emphasis on quality content. Short articles which don't really add much to the world knowledge on a subject just don't cut it any more. And content which doesn't really offer links to even more knowledge is also deemed to be rather poor in the search industry's eyes.

It means that simply adding content to your website isn't enough any more if you want to get the undivided attention of the likes of Google. If you want to be top of the rankings you are going to need more than just good old-fashioned articles in the future.

The changes that Google are introducing will take several months to arrive, so you have time now to plan and think about what to do. But here are my tips for making sure that your content is "optimised" to take advantages of the impending changes in the search arena.

Firstly, start writing longer articles. The old adage that a web page or blog post only needs to be 400 words is what worked on the old web. Nowadays search engines expect more depth - as do people. There is too much superficial, same as everything else, short form content around. Less is no longer more.

Also, start adding variety to your articles - include video as part of the content itself, not just an add on. Add PowerPoint slides to enhance what you say or provide further depth. See each piece of content as a multimedia production. And make sure you include extensive linking to other in-depth information.

It may well mean that you have to start adding content less frequently, but what you do add will have more depth and more substance to it because that is what the next wave of search engine changes will be focused on.

Now is the time to start planning how you are going to produce optimised content, rather than just content.

How can I keep up to date with the web?

Last week after my newsletter was published I had an email asking me "how on earth do you keep up-to-date with everything?" Coincidentally, I was asked the very same question in a coaching call the other day - and again at a workshop...! It's another statistical cluster suggesting it is a question that needs answering...!

As you know, the web changes daily. It seems that almost every hour, on the hour, there is some new kind of web service, or an organisation we know and love has changed the way it works. Keeping up-to-date with what's going on could be a full-time job...! Not only that, you also need to make sure you are using at least the same level of technology as your competitors so you don't get left behind. And that means you need to constantly keep an eye on what they are doing too. It is a potential nightmare trying to keep on top of it all. Gosh it used to be so easy in business when things were changed about once a year...!

The answer to keeping informed and knowing "the latest" is to have a system. Firstly, you need to know where the information is located. If you want to keep informed about web developments then Mashable is a good starting point as is ReadWrite. Of course, there are also technology news sources such as Bloomberg or The Guardian. On top of sources like these you may want to find specific information on sectors or industries you work in. For instance, in the meetings sector in which I do a lot of work there is MeetingsNet.

Once you have located all your sources of information you now need to find their "RSS Feeds". Most sites include an RSS Feed Logo - the orange and white logo pictured above. Then go to Google Reader and either log-in or sign up for an account. Now, just "subscribe" to each of your RSS feeds you have selected and combine them into meaningful groups. For instance, I have groups (or "bundles" as Google calls them) for things like "marketing", "social media", "blogging" and "social psychology".

Your system is now almost ready to use. What you then need is a timetable. For example, you might want to check on the latest information just once-a-week. So you might decide that 5pm on a Friday is good for you. At that point just go to your Google Reader page and check the headlines - it will only take you a few minutes to scan the latest information.

If you find something important that's worth keeping, then I'd suggest adding the web page directly to an Evernote notebook. That way you will always have access to the important news and information you collect.

It really is a simple three step system: 1) collect your sources into Google Reader; 2) check your headlines according to a regular timetable; 3) Store the important information in a permanent notebook.

Setting up the system is what takes the time - but it only now takes me a few minutes each day to keep up-to-date with the latest on the web. You can easily do the same I am sure.

Is it time to forget offline marketing?

The other day I was running a workshop when during the coffee break one of the delegates asked me if the only marketing they should be doing is online. I had said in the opening of my talk that by the end of 2013 some 80% of all purchasing decisions would start online. So, the person asking for my thoughts on marketing was wondering if we were going to reach a point where it was daft to consider offline marketing.

The answer to the question was actually provided by my client who was running the meeting. He proudly showed a new regional magazine in which he was featured. Prior to the magazine being printed his LinkedIn profile would get about two or three people a week checking him out. On the day the magazine was published, he had 82 individuals look at his LinkedIn profile. If anything proved that offline activity leads to online activity, this was it.

Coincidentally, this example of the power of offline marketing and its impact for your online presence came the day after I had been reading a report about the effective marketing of ebooks. This was a study conducted in the USA amongst publishing companies who had produced printed books and ebooks which had sold more than 5,000 copies in one year. In other words, these are "best-sellers".

The study found that compared with books that sold less than 5,000 copies there were two stark differences in marketing. Almost all of the excess sales produced by the best sellers had arisen as a result of two marketing initiatives. Firstly, personal appearances by the authors were important. Secondly, postcards and traditional direct mail letters led to additional sales.

Remember, we are talking about ebooks here. Books that you can only get via the Internet. Yet the most successful ebooks in the USA last year were the ones that had the highest amount of offline marketing.

Far from offline marketing activities being unnecessary any more, they are probably more important than ever because they drive people to your website or to your online product sales pages.

I recently wrote a blog post about this very topic - so click here to find seven ways to get your website noticed without using the Internet.

How can I sell more?

This week's question comes courtesy of a telephone coaching client who was doing quite well online, but simply wanted to sell more - much more...! His sales had reached a reasonable level online, but had levelled out, not achieving any real growth for several months.

When I looked at his website, I could see no technical problems or web design issues that could affect sales. Equally, his message was clear and it was obvious what the site was selling and what benefits the product provided to people. In fact, if you went through the "how to set up an online sales operation" rule book he had ticked all the relevant boxes. So what was it that was preventing him from selling more?

I asked a simple question: do you know if people really want what you are selling? True, some people must have wanted it because they had bought it, but were there enough potential buyers "out there"? Was the product meeting a real need?

My client had to admit he did not know. In fact he had done little questioning of potential clients - a handful at most. As a result he might be selling something that relatively few people wanted, thereby limiting sales.

But he should not feel too disheartened. Research by the American marketing firm, Smart Advantage, has shown that over 90% of businesses have no idea what their customers really want. Worse still, 98% of companies in the study have no internal agreement as to what are the important features of their products and services. Indeed, research consistently shows that what most businesses think are the important aspects of their products and services are amongst the least valued by their customers and potential customers. Most sales are therefore rather lucky...!

To get more sales you need to get a deeper understanding of your customer needs. You need to find out exactly what they value and why. You also constantly need to research their needs, likes and dislikes so that you can focus your products and services much more closely on their precise requirements.

Surveys, questionnaires, feedback forms - they are all vital and are not just useful add-ons. We should all use them much more than we do. If you are looking for a survey tool, then Survey Monkey is the market leader, but there are others such as QuestionPro or Smart Survey. If you want a free survey system then try KwikSurvey - it is useful, but has some limitations.

Of course, you can always construct paper surveys using your word processor. There are plenty of free templates for Microsoft Word, for instance.

But whatever you do, if you want to sell more you need to know more about what your customers really, really, truly want.

How can I generate more leads for my business?

You might have several good customers who keep giving you repeat business, but doubtless you always want more. For a start, you want to be sure that if one customer stops buying from you that you have another in the wings. Also, you probably want to grow your business and gain more income. Getting new customers is therefore essential for many businesses and to find them you need to generate leads you can then persuade to buy from you.

The whole issue of generating new leads and how the Internet can be used to do that job was discussed in a workshop I was running this week. One delegate felt that lead generation was something that the Internet was designed for and could replace much of the traditional ways of getting new customers through automation. But another person on the workshop felt that lead generation needed to be done personally and that the Internet was actually getting in the way of finding new customers.

We had a bit of a discussion about it and I decided that when I got back home I'd do some research on the subject. Clearly, there appears to be a nice academic debate to be had about the degree to which you can either automate lead generation using online software or use face-to-face methods instead. But when I looked into the details of this dilemma I was rather unprepared for one substantial finding that kept popping up.

The methods don't matter very much. You can generate leads using the phone, or using email or stands at exhibitions and so on. The online methods are increasingly popular because they tend to be less expensive. So the costs of generating each lead via the Internet tend to be much lower than traditional methods.

But several studies demonstrate it isn't really WHAT you do that matters. Rather it is how much of it.

In a study conducted at the end of 2012 by the digital marketing agency Optify, the most successful people at generating new business leads were simply the ones who spent more time on marketing and lead generating activities. Whether the method was content generation, or email marketing, or traditional public relations the most successful marketers were the ones who spent most hours on each activity. The only activity in which the least successful people spent most time was on "pay per click".

The research showed that by far the most successful people were those who spent 15 hours a week or MORE on content generation. The best companies also spent 15 hours a week or MORE on social media. In other words, if you spent most of your week on content generation and then getting that shared using social media you end up generating more leads.

Perhaps the reason why so many businesses find it tough to generate new leads online is that they simply are not devoting enough time to it. If you want to get more business, you probably need to devote more time to trying to get it - that's all.

How can I take payment from people more easily?

Taking money from people is good for business owners...! After all, your profits are not going to rise if you cannot receive your customers' money.

Credit cards and debit cards are popular forms of online payment, of course, but accepting them is not easy. For a start, you have to pay relatively hefty commission fees, unless your turnover is significant. Also, nowadays the security paperwork can be time-consuming and confusing.

Some online services, such as PayPal allow you to accept credit cards and take away from you the security nightmares. Other services like 2Checkout go further by not acting as a credit card processor on your behalf, instead technically buying products and services from you and then selling them on, for a commission. When someone buys "from you" using such a service what happens is the product is sold to the "processor", such as 2Checkout, who then sells it on to the customer.

Many of the credit card processing companies also only work in particular countries; indeed, for businesses in the UK, the options are rather limited meaning that for many businesses they have to stick with their own bank and their comparatively high charges.

On top of this, many people still don't trust online credit card payments, services like PayPal or anything that requires them to type in secure information to the web. Which means you are rather scuppered.

Not only are you either paying high prices for credit card transactions online, or having to do all the security work yourself, you might also be missing out on customers who would rather have an invoice. And then what do you do about people who want to pay you in the "real world"?

There are services like SagePay or PayPal's Virtual Terminal, which let you take phone payments or face-to-face credit card payments from people. But they are going to cost you around £300 a year, every year, before you even take any money using them. And because of the reliance on "chip and pin" these days people are more security conscious and are less happy with giving out credit card details. They prefer something more secure.

Enter chip and pin devices for all of us. The concept is simple. For a one-off fee of around £50 you get a small, pocket-sized chip and pin device. It connects to your mobile phone using Bluetooth where it communicates with a smartphone app to do all the clever processing stuff. PayPal is about to introduce their new service that does this called PayPal Here and Payleven is providing a similar device.

What these new machines mean is that any of us can take face-to-face credit card payments with the security of chip and pin without having to get a merchant account and all the hassle that goes with it. Not only that, because these systems have fancy apps that go with them, they automatically produce and email receipts to people. They mean you can now take face-to-face credit card payments easily, giving people peace of mind with chip and pin familiarity.

But don't forget, the more options for taking people's money the better. So a new-fangled Bluetooth chip and pin device will help, as will online credit card systems like PayPal, plus invoicing and don't forget...you can also take cash...! But just having one option for customer payments limits your ability to be paid.

What are the best social media marketing tactics?

The other day I was speaking at an event where a member of the audience said that my ideas were all very well, but they didn't have the time or resources to do everything I suggested. So, they wanted to know, which one aspect of social media marketing should they concentrate on?

It is a common issue, of course. None of us have the time to do everything that could be beneficial to our businesses. There just isn't the time in the day to do a host of online social media activities and do some actual, real work...! So we have to be selective; but what should we select?

Of course, if you ask an "Internet Marketing Guru" this question they'll suggest you concentrate on building up your mailing list using "squeeze pages" and "pay per click". Then if you turn to an "SEO expert" they'll say that what really matters is being found in the search engines so you should devote most of your efforts to optimising your web pages. Meanwhile a "Social Media Manager" will tell you to forget all that and spend your time connecting with people constantly via Facebook. Twitter and LinkedIn. Meanwhile, you are supposed to make sense of it all...!

The real answer to this conundrum, of course, is to look at independent data. Check research in your own sector and testing you conduct yourself, but also look at studies which have been run across business as a whole. Places like Hubspot and eMarketer have plenty of these. Over the past few years they have published several pieces of research and they all come down to the same conclusion.

Content. That's it. The most effective marketing tactic is adding content to your website. In fact, in research published at the beginning of this year the top three most effective online marketing methods were blogging, publishing white papers and creating videos. Distributing such items of content via social networks added the icing to the cake.

But there's a problem. Even though these are the three most effective ways of social media marketing, the research also finds that these are three most difficult things for businesses to do. It turns out that marketing techniques like SEO, Pay Per Click, squeeze pages and so on are all relatively easy to achieve. But they do not have the impact of producing good content.

So what does this mean for business owners? It means that the best thing you can do to help improve the effectiveness of your social media marketing is to learn more about producing good content. Take courses on writing, learn about making videos, discover the best ways of producing documents like white papers. You can obviously find plenty of advice online, but a good place to start would be Udemy. Not only can you take online training courses in things like creative writing, but you can also set up your own training courses which you can sell. It could be a way of earning while you're learning.

How Can I Increase Conversion Rates?

Twice this week I have found myself talking about "conversion rates" and pointing out that online the average is around 2%. Essentially, this means that for every 100 people who visit a website only two of them will go on take some kind of action. Frankly, this is abysmal and online businesses should collectively be ashamed of this statistic.

If you ran a real world "bricks and mortar" store and your conversion rate was 2% you would not be able to afford to pay the rent. Typical retail conversion rates are 20% - ten times higher. And even that is poor. It means that eight out of every ten people that a shop engages with, who comes through the door, walks out without buying a thing. Sales assistants appear to have forgotten that the word "sales" is in their job title.

Online we are fooled into believing that a 2% conversion rate is OK. A High Street shop could get 1,000 visitors a week and get a conversion of 200 people. Online, 1,000 visitors is much easier to get, so a company could still get 200 conversions but needs 10,000 visitors. Indeed, check out what most businesses worry about in forums and business discussion groups and you'll find that "getting more traffic" is a frequent request. You only need more traffic if your conversion rates are low.

So, perhaps it is better to focus on increasing that 2% rate, rather than trying to get more visitors, most of whom will take no action. What you need is more action, not more visitors.

The first step in doing this is to decide the actions you want people to take. Start with the end in mind. Say, for instance, that you run an accountancy firm and that you want to sell a tax advice package. Your end goal is the "thank you" page when people buy that package. But to get them there you may need to get them to sign up to your newsletter first and then your newsletter may need several reminders about the package before people get prompted enough to go to the page where they buy it.

If you have a process like this for everything you want to happen with your website, you can then measure it. Our accountancy firm can analyse how many people who sign up for their newsletter eventually end up at the "thank you" page. Data can be collected to show how many reminders in the newsletter are necessary, or if they work at all. And once you have information like this you can then "tweak" your process taking people from sign up to thank you, so that you get more people at your final goal. In other words, by having a goal and collecting information about how people reach that goal, you can then ensure that more people get there. And in turn, that increases your conversion rate.

There are no fancy tricks to moving your average conversion rate upwards. It is down to planning the pathways you want people to take and then measuring everything possible so that you can then enhance things so that more people complete that pathway.

Simply having a website and hoping is hardly a strategic approach - yet you would be surprised at how common that is...! Planning routes through your website and measuring what happens will provide you with useful information to help you change things. Start with the end in mind.

How do you get media attention for your business?

It has been another busy media week for me, thanks to a couple of studies being published about the impact of the Internet on children and families. I've been on a few radio programmes and completed several newspaper interviews on the topic in the past couple of weeks. So much so, that one of my clients even saw me talking on the BBC TV programme, *The One Show* (pictured right) and called me to find out how do I manage to get the media interested in my work.

Media coverage for every business is not only possible but also essential. Google, Amazon and Facebook all share the fact that they used media activity as fundamental parts of their launch. It worked for them...! Also, every time I am in the media I get a surge in web traffic - even if I haven't mentioned my domain name. People still look me up on Google, I guess. For any business, therefore, media coverage can be a boon as it brings people to your website.

There are a few things you need to do in order to get media coverage. For a start, have a "media section" on your website. Make sure you have details of how you can be contacted by journalists and the kind of things you are prepared to talk about. Also, this media section should have high resolution images that can be downloaded as well as examples of coverage you have received and an indication of the newspapers and magazines or broadcasters that have interviewed you. This gives other journalists confidence.

In addition to this media section, make sure too that you are listed on Expert Sources. This is the principal way in which journalists find experts, if they do not already know someone to talk to. Your listing on Expert Sources will get you in front of journalists. Every week I am interviewed by journalists I have never been in touch with previously who open the conversation with "I got your name from Expert Sources".

Another important point is being seen on Twitter regularly. Journalists monitor Twitter for experts who comment on the news in their sector. So, up your Twitter game so that you are noticed by the media in your locality or professional arena.

If you have news to announce, get a professionally prepared press release and pay for it to be uploaded to a distribution company such as PRWeb. This will get your news listed on Google News, which is constantly monitored by the media too. If you are not sure how to write a great press release that will grab the attention of journalists, then find out by taking a training course.

One important part of getting more media coverage for your business, though, is to be available whenever you are called. It is no good wanting to do things on your terms. Journalistic deadlines mean that frequently journalists want your answers now, not later. If you say, "sorry I am busy", they will not call again. If you say "certainly, glad to help", then you get marked down in their little black book as a good contact and you will get asked again and again. So, extending your media coverage for your business is as much about attitude as it is about those online things you can do to increase your chances of being called.

What are the top email marketing tips?

At a workshop this week, a delegate attending told me that they had given up using email to market their business because "email was dead". They assured me that few people check their email any more for marketing material, instead only concentrating on essential business messages. The rest, they told me, went straight into the bin.

It was an example of assumption and something I was able to deal with thanks to some recent statistics I had published on my website. These showed that far from being dead, email is the most profitable form of marketing currently available online. This new information ties in with research published a year ago that showed that email marketing works. Indeed, for every £1 spent on email marketing the average return is £49. That's not bad going is it? So, to suggest that email is dead is probably premature.

However, there is certainly growing concern about open rates or getting conversion from emails. So what can you do to "up your game"? One of the key things is to send out more emails. People are often concerned about sending out too many messages because they think they will annoy people. The chances of annoying people are slim. They are unlikely to see all of your messages because there is so much online and email "noise". The average individual receives over 150 email messages a day. If you send out one email a week, you have a visibility of 0.1%...! If you send out ten emails a week, you are still only 1% of what people see. You are going to have to send out an enormous number of emails before people start to get annoyed. Besides, you want to annoy some people - that will shake out the people who were never going to buy from you in the first place. They will unsubscribe, giving you a much cleaner and more focused list from which you will get higher conversion rates.

The next thing to do is to ensure your subject line is enticing and makes people want to open it. To achieve this you need to use emotional wording and you can check that with the emotional marketing headline analyser. Normal human speech has 20% emotional words. Good copywriters will generate text that has around 35% emotional wording. You should strive for the highest value you can get. I am going to boast a bit - the subject line for this email has an emotional content of 57.14% according to the analyser...! Whoopee....! Well, it must have worked - you did open this email after all...!

Your emails need to contain content of value to your audience too. You can more easily get people to buy things as part of emails that provide valuable content. However, it does not mean you cannot send out the occasional "advert". People do respond to them - it is a question of balance. If all your emails are "buy this", then people get annoyed.

Another way of getting more from your emails is to re-send them. The people who have already opened them will simply ignore them - but other people who did not see them the first time may well open them. Repeat sending of emails increases open rates, studies show.

Finally, you will improve your rates of opening and conversion if your email list is "clean". Last week I dumped over 1,500 people from my list. They were people who never opened anything I sent them in the past six months, or were from countries where I was never going to do any business. Clearly, they were getting no value from me and I was getting nothing from them, so what was the point of them being on my list? A clean list that is focused on your target audience is the one that is going to produce the best results.

- *An excellent article on email marketing appeared in Forbes Magazine last year - well worth checking when you click here.*

How can my business be seen as the expert in its field?

When you have your car serviced do you want to take to a garage where they know "a bit" about cars, or do you want it left in the hands of "the experts"? Similarly, if you have a commercial legal problem and you need advice, do you want an expert in that aspect of legislation, or your nephew who has an A-Level in Law? Even more important, if you need major surgery, do you want an expert surgeon, or someone who has just left medical school and who knows roughly what to do with a scalpel?

Even if we cannot afford to buy the top experts, we do want as near to the best as possible. Your customers are the same; they don't want someone who knows something about your topic - they want an organisation that is run by "experts". The problem these days is how do you tell who is a "real" expert?

After all, thanks to superbly designed web templates it is possible to set yourself up so that you look like an expert. You can fill your website with content written by freelance copywriters, you can add beautiful stock images that convey the impression you know what you are doing. And you can have all sorts of "bells and whistles" provided by free software that make your website look highly professional.

So, true experts need to stand out from the crowd; they need to demonstrate their expertise, rather than just state it. True expertise is rather like those "show and tell" sessions you had at junior school. The fake experts do the "tell" bit, whereas the real experts do the "show" bit.

Online there are several ways in which you can "show" your expertise, rather than "telling" it in pages of well-crafted web copy. For instance, imagine you run a plumbing business. Instead of saying you are a wonderful plumber, show it by producing a range of videos on YouTube demonstrating the basics of every plumbing task. Similarly, if you are an accountant, produce a range of online videos showing exactly how to prepare a profit and loss account or do some bookkeeping on Excel.

Equally, if you are management consultant publishing all of your "tools" as PDFs will show that you know what you are talking about, especially if you were then to add some kind of audio commentary taking people through a worked example.

In other words, put your intellectual capital on the web for all to see. False experts cannot do this because they do not have such intellectual capital. And before you say, people will steal your business, consider those plumbers that do have videos online showing how to do plumbing. They get bookings because the videos show they "must know" what they are doing. There are plenty of videos on YouTube showing you open heart surgery, but the chances are slim for anyone actually saying "Oh I don't a surgeon to replace that faulty valve; my wife can do it for me after watching YouTube". But what those videos do is give you faith in that surgeon.

In addition to revealing your expertise by demonstrating it, you also need some elements of "status". Experts tend to have higher status than non-experts and so you need the accoutrements of status in order to confirm your expertise. One of these is a book. Write a book if you want to be seen as "the experts". Equally, get qualifications or academic backing - ask your local university if you can do some "visiting lectures" on your topic. They are frequently keen to get industry and professional people in to talk to students and getting the title "Visiting Lecturer" can help you achieve expert status. For qualifications, you can even get "credit transfer" for your existing qualifications and add more to your CV from places like The Open University, celebrating 40 years since its first graduation this week.

Another more modern marker of expertise is a regular blog. If your company is seen to be blogging about current issues in your sector it gains status compared with a static website that merely looks good and is falsely appearing as "expert".

But whatever you do for gaining expertise it is back to that school session - SHOW, but do NOT TELL.

Should a business blog be separate to the website?

Earlier this week I finished speaking at an event and someone came up to me at the end and asked me should their blog be separate to their website. It is a fairly common question which people often ask me during workshops; people are not really sure whether they should have a blog that is separate or part of their website.

There are of course several ways that you can blog. You can host a blog with something like WordPress, Blogger or Tumblr where you create a blog on their hosting service, which is completely separate to your website. Or you can add a blog to your website, either as a separate section, or as the entire website. But which way is the best way? That's what confuses people.

But it is only really confusing if you think there is a "best" way or a "right" way. What if you don't think about the "way" but the "result"?

Why might your business want a blog in the first place? There are several options, such as demonstrating expertise or updating clients on your recent activities. Or you might simply be using it as a traffic generation device, getting people to visit and then to click through to some product or service you are selling.

So the issue is not what is the "right" way or "best" way to blog, but to think about which way is going to be more likely to achieve the results you are after.

For instance, if you are wanting to establish expertise then you could use a blog hosted on one of the blogging services such as Blogger. Remember, people do not visit "websites" these days, but they visit "content". All they will see is your expertise on that page - they will not care where it is hosted.

However, if you are using a blog for specific lead generation it would make more sense to host the blog as part of your own website, so that visitors could switch back and forth if necessary and see the blog post and the item on sale all as part of the same web experience.

Some people might think there are search engine benefits from having a blog on your own site. That might be true - if the blog is so completely focused and matches the rest of the site's material. But if the blog raises different subjects, your website loses focus and the likes of Google don't really know what you are about. So there can be search engine benefits from having the blog on your own site, but equally there can be search engine problems if you do…!

So, there is no right or wrong way to handle blogs. Neither is there a "best" way. The effective way is to consider what you want the blog to achieve and the kind of content it will include. That will then point you in the right direction.

How can I create a web publishing system?

This week I was running a workshop when several people all came to the same conclusion at the same point. They understood my suggestion that you need to target your web activity to specific groups of customers and their differing styles of web usage. However, they all realised this could mean a seemingly endless amount of work to do. After all, said one of the delegates, if we have to produce content for people who like reading blog posts as well as content for people who live their lives on Facebook and yet more content for people who prefer bit-sized chunks on Twitter, then we could all spend much of our time re-crafting content and not actually getting any work done..! Isn't there some kind of short-cut system, they all asked at the same time.

Now I am glad they asked, because it reminded me that I do indeed have a "system", but I have become so used to it that I have forgotten to mention it to people. So, the prompt they gave me during the workshop has ensured that I mention it this week to you...!

My system depends on a website being able to produce several different "RSS Feeds". RSS stands for "Really Simple Syndication" and it is the system that allows people to receive your web content without having to re-visit your website. The syndication system can send it to their email inbox or to a special "RSS Reader" for instance. A good way of producing multiple RSS Feeds is with a content management system, such as WordPress.

With your RSS feeds at the ready you then need an account with HootSuite. You also need an account with Zinepal and another one with Scribd. You will also require social network accounts on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

You then take each of your RSS feeds and hook them up to your social networking accounts using Hootsuite. Each time you write a blog post, for instance, Hootsuite will then automatically send out a Tweet, post the item on to Facebook and record it in your LinkedIn status updates.

Meanwhile, Zinepal collects all of your RSS feed items together and automatically produces a PDF "magazine" based on your most recent pieces of content. Zinepal then publishes your "magazine" on Scribd for people to download. You can take a look at a recent sample of mine if you click here.

The result of this system is that all you have to do is create a single piece of content, such as a blog post. In the background your publishing system then distributes your content automatically through the social networks. Furthermore, it creates a new piece of content as a magazine and automatically publishes that for you.

The result of just one piece of work is that it can be seen by people who read your blog, those who use an RSS Reader, people on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn as well as those who read via Scribd or on a Kindle, because Zinepal can also distribute directly there too..!

This is all a great timesaver and produces more web traffic as well as getting your message out to as wide an audience as possible.

How Can I Produce Creative Business Ideas?

The other day I was working with a telephone coaching client when the discussion turned to the need to come up with new ideas for their online business. They had a handful of products that they were selling, but they felt they needed more because their online shop was looking rather bare.

This got us onto the whole area of how you come up with new ideas generally and I explained that one good method is to connect two different things and see what happens. Indeed this is a technique used by comedians in writing jokes. They look at one headline in a newspaper, turn over a few pages, look at another headline and see if they can join the two together in some way. For instance they might see "Government campaigns for more speed bumps" and then "Supermarket profits rise". They could then join the two together by suggesting that the profits are rising because they are slowing us down in the aisles with those extra speed bumps. Not funny, I know, but you get the idea...!

Well, what's good for comedians can also be good for business people, I said to my client. But he wanted something more practical and down to earth...! So I suggested setting up a database in Zoho Creator. This allows you to set up three projects free of charge for each one of your email accounts, so you can experiment to your heart's content.

What you do is set up a form that allows you to enter three things: topic area one, topic area two, resulting idea. That's it. If you wish you can pre-populate the individual topic ideas with a "drop-down" list. As an example, I created one of these simple databases to show my client what can be done. One of the database fields is a pre-set list of psychology topics, such as memory or attention. Another field has a pre-set list of Internet topics, such as email marketing or ecommerce. Then what you do is create a new item. Up pops my list of psychology topics, let's choose "memory". Then, up pops the list of Internet topics let's choose "email marketing". Now you end up with a box to type in your idea where you can combine the two things. In this case I might be able to produce a white paper on "how to get people to remember your marketing emails" or something like that.

You could produce a similar system using a spreadsheet, with the first column having one category of topics and the first row having a variety of other category topics. In my example the first column could be psychology and the first row could be Internet. Then all you do is fill in the boxes with ideas that join the two together.

The beauty of the database over the spreadsheet is that you only see two specific items at any one time, whereas the spreadsheet presents you with the entire list. The database therefore helps you gain more focus. Similarly, once you have entered one idea into a spreadsheet box you cannot produce another idea combining the two topics. But with a Zoho Creator database you can produce as many combinations as you like.

Of course you might not need a technical solution. Pencil and paper can work quite well. Create two sheets of paper each with one list of topics on them. Now take a third sheet and copy one topic from each of the other sheets to it. Set the first two sheets aside and you now have a piece of paper with two unconnected items on it. Think about how you can connect them and you will come up with a new business idea.

Do I need a social media strategy?

The other day I was talking to a client about their use of Twitter and I asked them "what is your reason for Tweeting anyway?" There was a pause and an embarrassed look before I was told, "Well, everyone is using it so it just seemed the right thing to do."

I took a deep breath and launched into my well-rehearsed diatribe on failing to plan or planning to fail.

Whilst it may well be true that "everyone" in your business sector may be using Twitter or LinkedIn or Facebook or Pinterest or whatever, that does not mean you have to. Neither does it mean because they are using social networks in a piecemeal fashion that you have to do the same.

Otherwise you will waste your time only to find it has little impact. Indeed, as I wrote in a blog post back in May, if you use Facebook in a bid to improve your business, unless you are a big, well-known brand, you may as well not bother. Almost two-thirds of businesses using Facebook for commercial purposes have failed to gain anything as a result, the study I was quoting said.

However, this does not mean you should not use Facebook; it depends on your strategy. What are you using Facebook for? Why do you use Twitter? What is the purpose of your profile on LinkedIn? You need different answers for each social network and depending on your business, the sector you are in, what your competitors are doing and what you want to achieve.

As an example, I use Twitter for two inter-connected reasons. My Tweets include links to my website or to other websites offering similar information. These Tweets bring me traffic at the same time as showing that I have my fingers on the pulse of what is going on in my world. I also use Twitter to establish my presence at conferences and events relevant to my market.

On LinkedIn my strategy is to demonstrate my expertise to specific people I am trying to do business with. They see my profile and my latest blog posts as well as my most recent PowerPoint presentations, helping to give them confidence that I know what I am talking about. I don't use LinkedIn to tell people what I am up to.

Of course, you can use LinkedIn or Twitter in completely different ways. It doesn't matter. What is important, though, is that you do have a strategy. In turn this makes it easy to work out what to post on each of the networks you use. With a strategy in place you know where to post certain items and what not to place on a particular network. If you had no strategy, other than to "put stuff on social media" then you'll end up repeating much of your effort as you go from network to network and you will potentially annoy some of your connections by being irrelevant.

So, do you need a social media strategy? You certainly do if you want to save time and get a clearer focus on your online activities. If you are not sure where to start, my handout on the Pros and Cons of Social Media could be useful for you.

How Can I Get More Website Visitors?

Getting more visitors to your website is a perennial problem. This week during a workshop one of the delegates pointed out that every time his business gained more traffic, so did everybody else meaning that he needed to get even more visitors. I do sympathise; there does indeed appear to be a "treadmill" effect where you can only succeed by getting even more visitors.

In previous newsletters I have pointed out that the number of visitors is not as important as who they are. You need the right people to visit, your actual business targets. If there are, for instance, 100 potential customers "out there" for you then, in reality, you only need those 100 visitors. Getting more is worthless.

Even so, most businesses do need more visitors so that they can gain more leads and become visible amongst more of their targets. But how can you do this without getting on that "treadmill" of having to constantly get more traffic because your competitors are doing the same?

STEP ONE: Get the same people to come back for more. Instead of getting new visitors, get repeat visitors. The easiest way of doing this is with regular, fresh, interesting, relevant content for which your site becomes a "hub". Don't just add blog posts, but add downloads, free reports, videos, slide presentations and so on. Add a variable feast of content and you will get repeat visitors. Plenty of research from places like HubSpot shows that repeat visitors come to sites which have a variety of useful content.

STEP TWO: Let people know about you. The other day I was being interviewed for a teleseminar when I made the interviewer laugh because I said that so many people still believed in the nonsensical adage of "build it and they will come". Far too many businesses seem to think that all you have to do is add new content to your website and somehow through psychic ability their potential customers will discover it. Wrong...! Even your repeat visitors need reminding that you have new content. Tell them via social media, send out emails or include it in your newsletter. Do not be afraid to let your "regulars" know about your new content...!

Although it is clearly good to get more people to visit your website, it is much better to focus on getting repeat visitors. Not only will this mean increased engagement, it also means higher conversion rates. In addition, it leads to greater word-of-mouth because these people are "fans" of your work. And that word-of-mouth leads to - guess what - that's right, more traffic.

It is good business sense that it is more profitable to sell more things to existing customers than to spend your time trying to find new customers. Yet on the web, people seem obsessed with getting new visitors rather than getting more out of their current visitors. If you concentrate on repeat visits from people who already like your web content, you will get more visitors as they spread the word about you.

So, rather than trying to find new visitors all the time, it is better to spend your time nurturing your "fans". That way you are not on that "treadmill" trying to constantly grow your visitor count, yet you will get more visits. And that's the important point, it is *VISITS* you want not *VISITORS*.

Who should I get to help me with my website?

I was running a workshop on "web success" the other day when I pointed out that sometimes businesses needed to look outside for help with their websites. But I didn't mean "outside" the business, as in "outsourcing", what I really meant was "outside" the world of the Internet.

When businesses look to improve their web presence or to change their website the usual starting point is a web designer. Indeed, many businesses appear to be in a cycle of producing a website with a new designer, using it for a couple of years without significant success and looking to "solve" that issue by appointing a new designer who produces a lovely fresh site. This sits on the web looking pretty for a couple of years without producing much income and so the owners decide to try another web designer. And so this cycle goes on and on, without many people interrupting this pattern to think about whether there might be an alternative.

And there is. Let's think about some hugely successful websites. Consider Amazon. The company is not doing too badly, with revenues of around $20bn per quarter. Yet is their site the pinnacle of design? Hardly. But are they experts in manipulating data - sure thing.

Consider too the BBC News website. Is it a dream design? It is clean and tidy, but frankly it is not much more than anyone can produce with some standard blogging software and a reasonable template. Even so, the BBC News site is the 5th most popular website in the UK, according to Alexa. It can't be the originality of design that has got it to this position; it must be the writing and the video and audio content.

Hugely successful websites don't start their mission with design. They start with thinking about the function. For Amazon that led them down the database route. For the BBC that led them down the writing route.

So, for your website,what is the central function? Is it about manipulating data or is it about content? If it is about data then you don't need a web designer to help you improve your web success, you need a database specialist. On the other hand, if your website is mostly about content, again you do not need a web designer, you need someone who can produce good content such as a creative writer or a journalist.

In other words, rather than thinking about a web specialist to improve your website for the future, think about the professions that are most closely allied to the central functions of your website. Often these people are not web specialists at all.

For most business websites, content is king and that means the people most likely to be able to help you improve your website are writers or journalists. And if you can't afford them, then I reckon sending your own staff on writing courses is the next best thing, so that their input to your website can be improved. Indeed, writing is the number-one key skill needed these days to improve web success. Design is not unimportant, but lower down the priority list.

Is keyword research worth doing?

The other day I was running a masterclass on web success when the issue of keywords came up. The company I was working with had conducted some in-depth keyword research a few months ago in a bid to prepare web pages that would attract visitors. However, they discovered that the only keywords that were really relevant to their business had so much online competition they would be the proverbial needle in the haystack. The other keywords that they had on their list were really specific, the only problem was that the keyword research tool they had used reported that no-one was searching for them.

This self-same issue came up in my Mastermind Group the other day when one of my friends said that keyword research was intensely frustrating. He said: "Either the keywords that are useful are so competitive because everyone else is using them, or the keywords you choose are of no use at all because no-one is searching for them."

This sums up the situation nicely. Keywords are what search engines thrive on. You type in a few words into the search box and the search engine skims through its giant index looking for the words you have just typed in. You might be interested in getting people to find you for the phrase "management & leadership training", for instance. That sounds logical until you discover that in the last month only four people have typed that phrase into a search engine to find it - in spite of the fact that 42 websites are optimised for it (says Market Samurai). So, you probably would want to go for the plain vanilla "leadership training". That had over 5,000 searches last month - but the problem is you would be competing against more than 3,000 optimised websites all trying to get that traffic.

Therein lies the problem with keyword research - the obvious terms are just far too competitive and the less obvious terms just don't have enough people to give you any meaningful traffic.

Except, that is, if you forget using keyword research in an attempt to optimise web pages. Instead, consider keyword research as a way of finding terms for your blog posts. Every month, says Market Samurai, there are 13 people who search for "purpose of leadership training" for which there are no websites targeting that term. Similarly, no-one has an optimised page for "leadership training for college students", in spite of the fact that 17 people a month search for it.

If you have two blog posts with those two phrases in, you'd get 100% of the potential traffic - 30 people. Now, all you need to do is find the dozens of other small traffic keyword terms and write a blog post around those titles. The number of people in total searching for those smaller terms can add up to more than the number trying to find plain old "leadership training".

So, keyword research is immensely valuable - but mostly if you use it to find low volume terms on which you can write a blog post. Not only does this give you more traffic, but it also gives you

How do I avoid email overload?

I know you have just opened this email to read it and so in a sense I have to apologise for adding to your email overload. On average, each of us gets 150 emails each and every day and that does not take into account the amount of spam that you do not see, because you have filtered it out. The other day I was writing about email marketing when I pointed out that if you printed out your emails the stack of paper would be 10 metres high. Can you imagine a pile of post that high? Like me you would just turn around and walk away from it.

Yet online we wade our way through this pile of material because we do not have any physical sense of how much there is. Also, when we are facing a screen full of emails our brain does funny things with time. We think we are doing things quickly, when in fact it is taking much longer than we anticipated. The typical office worker is now spending three hours a day on email. They never spent that amount of time on printed letters before.

Email has taken over our lives to a significant degree. Indeed, I think email is responsible for the economic downturn. In previous recessions we were able to clamber out of the pit fairly quickly. But here we are, almost six years on from the beginnings of the current problems and we appear to be ecstatic when growth reaches 0.3%.....! Whoopee-dooo...! This time, though, productivity is dramatically lowered because workers are so busy managing emails they haven't got time to do enough productive work to kick start the economy.

And if you run your own business this all adds up to lower profitability. Making more money depends upon getting to grips with email. But how?

Firstly - some basics. Use webmail. Get Gmail or Yahoo! Mail or something similar and have all your email accounts diverted into that. Studies show that using webmail is faster than using an email "client" programme. If you must use Outlook, using it via Outlook.com will be quicker. Besides, you can much more easily access your email out and about with webmail.

Secondly, make sure you have folders and filters set up - folders for clients, for instance, and filters that send their emails direct to the right folders. Use the system to do half your job for you automatically.

Next - and this is the thing that most people I talk to about email stress have the most difficulty with - only check your emails once or twice a day. NOTHING is so urgent that it cannot wait a few hours. If it really is that important people will phone you, rather than send an email. Studies show that people who check their email only a couple of times a day are significantly more productive than those of us who are constant checkers. Indeed, the research shows that even for the same number of emails, the once or twice a day crowd tend to get everything dealt with in one hour LESS than the frequent email checkers. Simply by checking emails twice a day you will save yourself an hour of time.

Another key factor is having a three-point decision about emails. When you look at the inbox just ask whether the message is relevant to your or not. If not, throw it away. If it is relevant, then ask yourself "can I answer that email in two minutes?" I f you can, answer it and then file it away in the relevant folder. If you cannot answer it inside two minutes then make an appointment in your diary to answer it. When you have done that, move the email to an "In Progress" folder, so it does not clog up your inbox. This three point method is:

- Delete it
- Do It
- Delay it

If you use this system with webmail that you only check a couple of times a day and you have a well ordered set of folders, then you will dramatically reduce the impact of email on your life.

You can find other ways of making email work better for you in my book, [Effective Email](#).

Should I change my web hosting company?

The other day a friend of mine said that he wanted to change his web hosting company. When I asked why, it seemed that he wasn't satisfied with the technical support, which appeared to be farmed out to some call centre in foreign parts. He was making an important point - if you need support for your web hosting you need to be able to access that help when you need it, in the way you want it. My friend preferred "online chat", but the hosting company he was with did not support that, hence his decision to look for a new host.

But then came his next question: which one...? There are thousands of potential web hosting companies and if you decide to move how do you know whether you might be going from frying pan to fire?

Even so, at this time of year it is a good thing to review your current web hosting arrangements. Web hosting is highly competitive and functions and features change on a monthly basis. What your host offers you, is bound to be available with more upgraded options and often at a cheaper price. Indeed, reviewing your web hosting should be an annual event.

But there is a problem. If you look at the review sites that tell you the "Top 10" web hosts, for instance, you will not actually see the real top 10. That's because these so-called review sites are mostly affiliate sites where some enterprising individual has built a simple site full of affiliate links, bringing them in thousands of dollars in recurring fees.

And if you look at the directories of web hosting, you might not find an unbiased list there either. That's because the directories tend to make their money by charging the web hosting companies for a listing. Some web hosting companies decide not to pay to be listed and hence the directories exclude many possible good options. Having said that, Serchen is probably the best directory around and is well worth a look.

But what else can you do? Well, just ask around. Ask your contacts, clients, suppliers and so on who they host with. You will hear tales of good or bad service, for instance, as well as plenty of people happy with their hosts. Take a note of what you learn.

You could then take a look at the web hosting reviews at Review Centre. These are reviews written by "users". But there is a health warning - sometimes the reviews could be written by people with an interest of some kind in the company they are "reviewing" and others might be written negatively as spoilers. So, take what you read with a pinch of salt, though you will get an overall impression. One good thing to look at is how the reviews have changed over time.

Once you have a shortlist you'll then want to make a comparison. Things to look out for are whether or not there is 24/7 support and how that is delivered, whether there is at least 99.9% uptime guaranteed and whether or not there are any limitations on traffic. You will also want to be sure that the technical capabilities match your requirements. Furthermore, many web hosts now offer "green hosting" with environmentally aware capabilities, which might be important to you and your customers.

One error made by many businesses is to simply accept the web hosting provided by the company that designed their website. It seems easy, but often it is an expensive route. Far better to control the hosting yourself as this provides you with flexibility and the option to change hosts whenever you want.

I am on my second hosting company this year - and I used three different ones last year. I am promiscuous with my hosting...! Plus I have a second hosting account, as a backup. But this arrangement saves me money and increases the features available to me.

My current host is A2 Hosting - and I am very happy with them. It is "green hosting" with my server now in Iceland. Their customer service is also excellent and rapid, with any question I have asked being fully answered or dealt with in less than one hour.

The Sales Bible
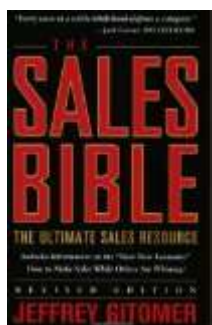
Whatever you are selling - whether it is a product or a service - this book, The Sales Bible, will help you. It is another of those "oldie but goldie" books I sometimes recommend. The book is 10 -years-old and it has been on my bookshelf throughout the past decade and I regularly dip into it for advice and tips. There is no real advice in this book for selling online - but it will help you with face-to-face selling and telephone sales. Having said that, the principles covered in this book are as applicable to the online world as they are the offline one. No matter what you are selling, this book can help you sell more; it has certainly helped me over the years.

Web Hosting for Dummies
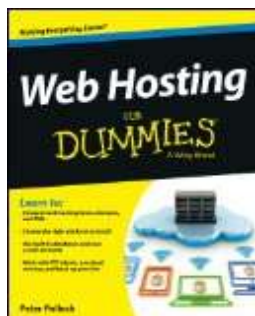
When you consider changing your web host it is a good idea to know what you are doing. This book helps you make sure that you get your web hosting right. And given that the best hosting is the one you control, then this book becomes essential because it demystifies the jargon and helps you evaluate the various options available. Considering that many businesses now "self host", by appointing their own web hosting companies and not using an agency, it is all too easy for them to get the wool pulled over...! This book helps make sure you are aware of what's what when it comes to hosting your own website. For a book on a technical subject it is well-written in "plain English" making it approachable and easy to follow. The book covers everything from selecting a web host to some of the finer points of setting up a server. You'll find this book a useful volume to have by your side if you have organised your own hosting.

Blog Planning Tool – FREE...!

This week the "must buy" item is free of charge..! It is my Blog Planning Tool. This is a two-page spreadsheet which will give you a complete plan for your blog for the next month. All you have to do is enter a few details on page 1 and then, as if by magic, on page 2 you will have a schedule of blog posts - what to write about and when. You can download the Blog Planning Tool direct from my website.

The Massive Goal Principle
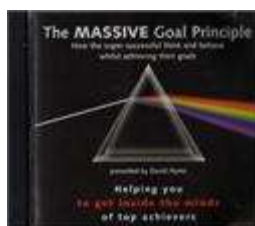
I heard my good friend David Hyner this week talk about his Massive Goal Principle. Having interviewed 149 highly successful individuals in all walks of life - including well-known entrepreneurs, gold-medal-winning athletes, politicians and entertainers - David has been able to prove that only people with outrageous, massive, seemingly unachievable goals are the ones who succeed. Indeed, in this audio CD you will hear David tell you that the standard mantra of having "SMART" goals that are "realistic" and "achievable" is the route to mediocrity. If you want to be mediocre then save yourself £20 - you don't need this CD. But if you want to do better than ordinary, get this CD and discover how you can achieve true success.

Successful Seminar Selling
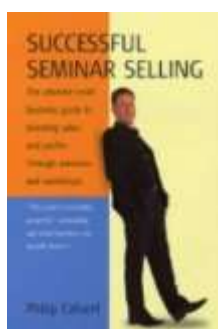
Last week I was speaking at a conference where my friend Philip Calvert was also a speaker. I was reminded that for ages Phil has successfully used seminars to sell his services in the financial sector. He is a great fan of "live selling" and is passionate about the use of seminars to sell services. Not only that, he sells tickets to those seminars too..! We are often all too focused on selling via the web and can easily forget that face-to-face selling, especially using seminars, is still worthwhile. So, this book by Phil, Successful Seminar Selling, is essential reading because it explains exactly how you can get people to attend seminars on your topic and then use those seminars to sell other services. If you run any kind of service business, this book is just what you need to help you boost your sales.

Business Writing Made Easy
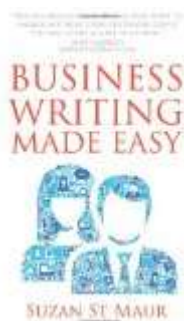
The most important skill anyone needs to develop these days is writing. Never before have you needed to write so much - emails, blog posts, web content, video scripts are all essential items for online businesses. So, to make sure you improve your business this book by writing expert Suzan St Maur, Business Writing Made Easy, will guide you through the maze of making sure you produce the best content you can. The book has sections on email writing, blogging, PR and advertising. It is full of tips and gives you straightforward, practical advice on how to make sure you write well. Even if you think you write well and can produce good web content, this book will give you even more tips on improving. Remember, producing web content is the number one way of marketing your business online, so buying this book will help you ensure that your content stands out from the rest by being good quality.

OMG - Observational Marketing Greats

The author of this book is the Milk Tray Man - at least that's who he would like to be. That's because in iconic adverts of the 1960s and 1970s a man climbed buildings to secretly place a box of chocolates in the boudoir of attractive ladies. The advert was vastly different to any other advertising for chocolates and even now, 40 years on, many of us still remember it. That's the point of this book, OMG by Geoff Ramm. How much marketing material that we see today is so different that it will be remembered in four decades? Will yours? This book is packed with examples of brilliant, stand-out marketing and ideas to stimulate you into re-thinking your marketing.

## E-mail Selling Techniques (That Really Work!)
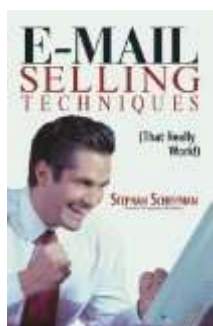
This is another one of those books that is comparatively old, yet sits on my bookshelf as a faithful friend that helps me from time to time. Published back in 2007 before you had heard of all that Facebook and Twitter malarkey, E-Mail Selling Techniques explains exactly how to get the best out of email for selling products and services. There is nothing in it about tablets or iPads, of course, nor how to get your emails opened on smartphones. But what it does contain is solid advice about the emails themselves. For instance, the book explains why email is not enough on its own - you need something behind the email such as a blog to which you send people after they had read your message. The book talks about building relationships with email, how to add in selling signals and has ideas for structuring your content. All of that applies no matter what method people access your emails. Sometimes we worry too much about design, technicalities of modern email systems and choices of software. This book ensures you get the basics right first.

Publishing E-Books for Dummies
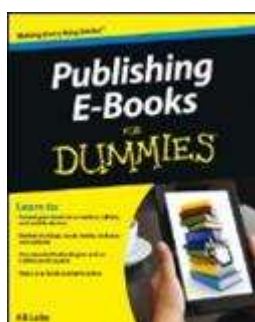
Whether you are an author or a business owner looking to enhance your credibility, e-books are important. There are PDFs, Kindle formats and those for Kobo and other e-book readers. But how do you go about producing your e-book and getting discovered and into the right format? Publishing E-Books for Dummies is the complete guide on producing e-books from start to finish. Not only does this book cover the creation process of e-books, it also looks at marketing, distribution and sales. There is also a handy guide to fixing problems with e-books and useful information on marketing your e-books using social networks. Even though I have produced and sold several e-books, I found the tips and advice in this book really useful for my next project...! And don't forget - e-books are more than the latest thing for publishers. E-books are really useful for general business marketing, establishing authority and boosting business credibility. As a result, this book is valuable for every business owner.

Principled Selling
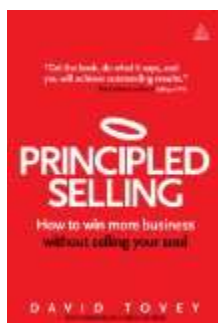
This book was handed to me the other day by the proud author, David Tovey. And he has a right to be proud. I started flicking through the book when I got home, only to find that my "flick through" had transformed into actually reading it - I was drawn into the book immediately. Principled Selling is designed to help you win more business and as I started reading it I realised that it was crammed with advice and ideas that will inevitably do just that. But the way David advises you to sell may surprise you; in fact he says "stop selling". Oh what a joy to read just those two words...! Gone from this book are those tired old notions of "sales techniques". In their place you get solid advice on building relationships that work, both for you the salesperson and your customer. There are dozens of case histories, lots of useful charts and diagrams and several lists of action points that will help you sell more without actually selling. In fact, if you hate cold calling then you will love this book.

Inbound Marketing
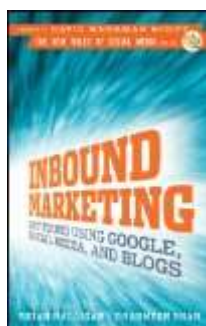
Having explained what Inbound Marketing is, it would be remiss of me not to suggest you bought THE book on the topic..! Inbound Marketing is the definitive guide to the subject and shows you how to use the Internet to get customers to come to you, rather than you having to do all the leg-work. The book asks you "Shopping has changed...has your marketing?" and "is your website a marketing hub?" The book explains how to go about creating the right kind of online content and presence and how to ensure you convert the traffic you get. Not only that there are plenty of tools and resources in the book which will help you make the most of the web to market your business. If you have a website to market your business online then you need this book.

Web Copy That Sells
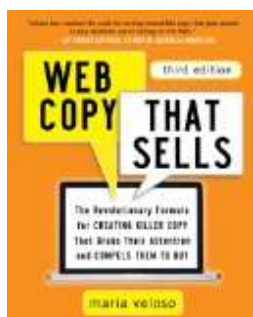
Even if you were to employ the services of a journalist to write all your web content at some stage you are going to need some copy that sells. When that situation arises, then you will need this book...! I bought the first edition of Web Copy That Sells when it came out several years ago. Now, a new third edition is on sale with up-to-date consideration of the way the web has changed since the book first came out. The book takes you through the process of writing excellent sales copy that works online, where people do not read in the logical ways that they do in print. The fact that people scan web pages, rather than read them from top to bottom means that the style of your sales copy has to adapt to that situation and this book shows you how to do that. When you want to improve you web sales copy then a copy of this book would be essential to have by your side.

Social Media Marketing All-in-One

This week I had an email asking about book recommendations for "how to" manage social media. I suggested this book and DVD from the "For Dummies" series because it is excellent. Not only does it show what you need to do on all the main social networks, it also demonstrates how to do it as well. Of particular value is the way the book helps you ensure you have consistent brand imaging throughout each of the different networks. Far too often you see companies looking slightly different on Twitter than they do on Facebook, for instance. Social Media Marketing All-in-One shows you how to avoid that. The book covers Pinterest, Google+, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Groupon, Foursquare, and more, so you have all the important social networks covered. If you need something to help you ensure you gain the most from all the main social networks, then this book is well worth it.

SEO Made Simple
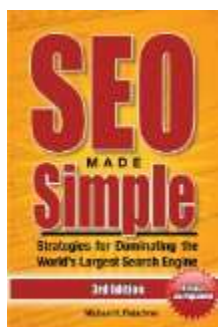
SEO Made Simple is exactly that, a book that simplifies the whole process of search engine optimisation. For instance in the keyword research section of the book it shows a really easy way of determining what you need to look out for...do a Google search and look...! Many of the SEO programs do this for you and tell you what words your competitors use – but all you need to do is look yourself. This books takes this kind of down-to-earth approach to helping you get your website noticed on search engines. It also discusses whether you can do the work yourself, or whether you really need to outsource. The book has an interesting approach on that topic too. Overall, this is a great guide to getting your site noticed by the search engines and it was updated earlier this year to take into account the latest changes from Google.

Neuro-Sell: How Neuroscience can Power Your Sales Success

This brilliant book by sales expert Simon Hazeldine explores what goes on inside our brains when we buy something. The book exposes how sellers can use that information to sell more. This highly-readable and engaging book contains the latest information from the leading edge world of neuroscience but translates it all into something that is completely understandable. The book is easy-to-read and is completely clear as to what you need to do in your business to tap into the minds of your customers. The book's eight-stage selling principles that engage the minds of customers are particularly easy to follow and put into practice. I also liked the illustrations of body language - so many other books that explore body language have no images...! Inside this book you will also discover the fantastically useful PRISM brain mapping model which is bound to help anyone in sales. If you want to sell more, then buying Neuro-Sell is a "no-brainer".

7 Reasons to Get My Weekly Newsletter

Every Saturday you can sit down with your morning coffee and read my newsletter before you've got to the bottom of your mug. Here are the key reasons to subscribe.

1. It arrives on Saturday morning when you are less hassled
My newsletter arrives every Saturday morning, around 10am. That means you get a chance to read it when you are less interrupted by emails, phone calls and so on. It means you can digest my newsletter more easily than something which might come mid-week when you are more busy.

2. You get practical advice to boost your online business
Each week the newsletter answers a topical question about online business and provides you with practical guidance as to what you can do. There will be links to practical resources which will help you as well as my advice on what steps you need to take to solve the issue of the week for your business.

3. I don't try to sell you anything
Although I recommend a book or some other product, I don't use my newsletter to sell you my services. The product I recommend each week is something which I use in my own business and which I value. If I recommend a book it is because I have read it myself.

4. You can learn from my mistakes
Each week I look back at my business week and pick out something I have learned and used to improve my own business. I share my personal learning with you, so you can learn from my mistakes.

5. It's personal
You get to know me, my thoughts, my ideas, my inspiration and experiences. I share with you my business growth and activity and provide you with the tips and thoughts I have discovered along the way.

6. The newsletter is FREE…!
There is no payment – it is yours with my compliments.

7. The complete archive is online
Each newsletter is saved as a web page and you get access to the complete archive so you can check up on things you recall from past newsletters. So, if you want to boost your online business you need my weekly newsletter…! Sign up right now…!

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