

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE
FOR SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS
& ENTREPRENEURS

**Better Marketing Results
in 3, 2, 1 ... *Go***

3 things to stop doing

2 things to start doing

1 magic measurement

... and what needs to *go* for any of it to work.

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Part One: Why I’ve Written This

We may believe there is safety in numbers, but when it comes to marketing and advertising in small business, there is very little to be gained by following the crowd.

And yet we all do it. Why?

Human nature. Fight or flight.

Or freeze.

But in business, most of us don’t really want to fight (well, some do, but it’s not my style and I won’t ever recommend it). So we freeze and do nothing. Or we flee. We take the escape hatch of doing what looks normal, acceptable, safe. Whether we are consciously aware of it or not, we do what others do, because we figure that must be safe, never pausing to consider that the people we’re mimicking are doing their own version of the exact same thing.

But ... safety in numbers, right?

Actually, no. Not really.

And so we blend in with the crowd, which may feel safe, but is pretty much the exact *opposite* of the whole point of marketing.

If you're not going to stand out, why bother?

And so we cop out. We take what we feel is the safe way. We flee. We shrink from the opportunity.

Some businesses spend *massive* amounts of money and time playing small, amplifying white noise, playing to stereotypes and surviving off of sheer volume when the road to being remarkable is ready and waiting ... and completely uncluttered.

But there's a reason why we don't play big (which has very little to do with the amount of money we spend). And we'll cover it in the last part of this report. My challenge to you (and to myself) is to see if you really, truly, honestly want to overcome it. Because if you can, you will reap bountiful rewards.

You'll stand out.

You'll connect with the right people.

And you'll be set up to do it for as long as you care to be in business.

And *that's* what I want, for you and for me.

Who This is For:

I’ve written this for people in small business, entrepreneurs and anyone with some sort of creative or passion project looking to learn how to effectively communicate with the audience of their choice.

When I say “small business,” I basically mean a privately-owned business where someone can make a decision and things can start happening *today*. A small business could have a few hundred employees, or it could be one person (or just about anything in between).

If you go looking for a firm definition of “small business,” you’ll find all kinds of potential criteria and opinion. I don’t think it needs to be that difficult.

If you’ve hired an agency to make your advertising decisions and purchases across multiple markets, I don’t consider you a small business.

If you’re publicly traded, I don’t consider you a small business.

If it takes a fiscal quarter or more to get a decision made, you’re not a small business (or you are, but you won’t be in business for long).

It frankly amazes me how many people get well into their business careers without ever having put much constructive thought into how they’re planning on communicating to current and potential customers. I am equally mystified by the number of business people who make their advertising decisions based on what ad “deal” they can get, or how much like they like their ad rep (or

not), or even based on their own personal preferences and ego rather than what an actual customer might want to hear, see or read.

Here’s how I see it: if you’ve got the guts to step out, take total responsibility for yourself and go into business for yourself, then surely you’ve got the guts to *be yourself* in the way you communicate your work. Don’t you?

Let’s find out.

Part 2: What Makes Me An Expert?

The fact that you're already reading this tells me you're not particularly hung up on my autobiography. Thank you. Because I can't be much help to you by blathering about myself. It's not about me. It's about you.

However ... I'll string together a couple of paragraphs here to satisfy the “what makes you an expert” crowd. It's probably what people expect (which is part of what's wrong with most marketing, by the way, at least in my opinion).

I'm uniquely equipped to help small businesses and entrepreneurs with their marketing, because I have been on all sides of it (and remain an active student and participant).

Buyer. Seller. Creator. Producer.

If that sounds like “all things to all people,” oh well. I can't help that. It's my true story.

I started out in radio broadcasting, which I've since worked on all sides: on the air, off the air, sales, marketing, promotion, production. I know sales and I know programming because I've been in both positions. I'm a published writer, have produced more of my own videos than I can count and have been creating and producing my own podcast since January of 2016.

When I left radio for the first time (in 2001), it was to be the Sales & Marketing Director at a stock car race track called Delaware Speedway, where I later became General Manager. During that time, marketing, advertising, sales and promotion were entirely my responsibility.

Years later, I became a partner in an event management and consulting company. For the next four years, my world was sales, marketing and promotion. I also began working part-time on the air in radio again.

Next, I managed through a time of personal transition by accepting a position as, essentially, a hired gun for a group of radio stations and their digital properties (with a TV station mixed in, but I didn't have a whole lot to do with that), assisting small businesses and a variety of agency accounts with their ad strategies. I maintained that role for almost 6 years, until I decided to focus solely on my own business.

Through it all, my best guess is that I've directly consulted upon, purchased, planned or helped to activate somewhere north of \$5 million in advertising and marketing expenditures. That's a drop in the bucket for a National or multi-national agency account, but in the realm of small businesses who spend between \$500 and \$3000 at a time (if that), it's a *lot* of radio, print or television ads; billboards; sponsorship activations; hospitality events & group outings; digital campaigns; promotional products; trade show space; social media streams; and partnership promotions, among many other things.

And I'm still at it. I have to be, as I continue to learn and grow in my own business as a speaker & coach. Because I am always learning and do my best to

practice what I observe, I know it's easier said than done.

I am fascinated by why we seem to find it such a challenge not to simply copycat what we see from others, and to simply be ourselves to connect with like-minded people, in a way that is authentic and sincere, both in business and in life.

In fact, let's start there ...

Just be *real* about it. Act like a human being.

Part 3: Three Things To Stop Doing

I suppose I should say *why* I suggest you stop doing these things.

It's because it's like putting camouflage on your ads. These things make you worse than “white noise.” They make you what we'd call (in the radio business) a “tune-out factor.”

I know, I know ... you probably hear and see these things all the time (and if so, then why would you want to do the same things “everyone else” is doing?).

1. Stop Falling For These “Ads Traps “

These next three things (“lazy phrases,” “white noise” and “biggest & best”) are the exact kinds of things that feel safe because we hear and see them all the time. We seem to think that if we use them too, our ads will sound like ads. And they do. They sound (read, look) just like all the other ads.

What's the value in that?

Even worse, these things offer very little of value to the people you're trying to reach. And yet, “everyone” does them anyway.

If you can stop it, and put even just the slightest bit of effort into making it more about your potential customers than about you, you'll stand out. Fast.

a) Lazy Phrases

In broadcasting school, I learned to refer to these kinds of things as “crutches.” They’re words or sounds you use when you don’t have anything else useful to offer, or you don’t even realize you’re doing it. Or both.

Examples in broadcasting (that will drive you nuts once you start to notice them) include:

- lip smacking
- “you know”
- “as well too”
- “you know like”
- “like”
- “right?”
- “well”
- and the granddaddy of all crutches: “umm.”

We do it in advertising all the time. I suspect we do it because we hear and see others doing it, so we assume others should do it.

It’s a mistake.

These lazy phrases are what we call “tune-out factors.” Worse than being annoying, they just mean nothing. They’re empty. They literally tell your customer, “I can’t think of anything to say that would actually make you interested, or I don’t want to bother to try, so I’ll just use these phrases

instead.”

Here’s my favourite, by far the worst offender:

“Check it out.”

Why? Why would I want to put my life on hold and “check out” what you’re selling?

Let’s decode “check it out.” When someone says, for example, “Hey, we have a new product available. Check it out,” they’re basically saying, “Just do what I want you to do without me having to put any real effort into helping you understand why you might want to. Just do it.”

This one is like a bad virus on social media.

- “I just posted a new video. Check it out!”
- “We’re doing a fundrasier for Billy’s soccer team. Check it out!”
- “I caught my cat, Snickers, sleeping in a funny position. Check it out!”

STOP!!!!!!!!!!!!

Come on now, think like a human being for a moment. When someone tosses “Check it out” at you without providing any additional helpful context, how would you respond?

Why would you even respond at all?

Please, for the love of all that’s good ... leave “check it out” as far away from your marketing as you can. When you say “check it out,” I hear, “I only really care about me.”

Here’s another:

“Don’t miss out.”

It’s the next worst offender, and it’s all about whoever’s advertising. This is all about them, and not the customer.

“Don’t miss out!”

Oh, don’t worry. I won’t. I don’t feel like I’m missing out on anything.

Here’s another:

“Hurry in.” Or, “Hurry in and save!”

The *last* thing I want is for someone else to be rushing me. I don’t need to be hurried. *You’re* the one selling something. You want me to hurry so your cash register will ring. What’s in it for me? Do you honestly expect me to drop everything and head to your store or click on your site because you told me to hurry? Really?

It’s lazy. C’mon now: let’s do better. Tell me something that actually means something to me.

“A name you can trust.”

Ugh. No. Try again. You say, “A name you can trust.” I say, “Why? Why should I trust you? Just because you say so without any context that means anything to me? That actually has the effect me of trusting you less.”

Here’s another:

“Save now!”

My goodness. Pass the Pepto-Bismal. Let’s decode this one too.

“Save now” = *spend* now, or *buy* now. I realize this works in Wal-Mart and other retail environments; you put a shiny yellow star beside an item and it flies off the shelf, which really says more about the consumer than the “save now” sign. But that’s another book for another time.

The thing is, you are not Wal-Mart. If you’re positioning yourself by offering price as your highest value, you are painting yourself into a very dangerous corner. There is no loyalty when it comes to price wars. One day, Wal-Mart will find that out. You watch.

The only way that “save now” is of any value to me is if I already know, like and trust you and have already determined there is a need for what you’re discounting.

In other words, “save now” is best suited to people who already know you. But for acquiring new customers, it’s a lousy, irritating and unoriginal marketing strategy.

Even my sons see through this one. They’ll see a sign that says, for example, “Save 30%” and they’ll laugh and say, “Hey Dad, you could buy that thing and save 30%! Or, you could not buy it and save 100%.”

Exactly.

These phrases are lazy. They mean nothing to your potential customer. Yes, they sound like “marketing speak” because you hear them in other ads. So you likely feel you should put them in your ads so they’ll “sound like an ad.” Don’t do it. Why would you want to sound and look like everyone else anyway?

And by the way, am I calling some marketers and advertisers lazy? Well, yes. Some of them. But the greater group either are stretched so thin in their businesses that they just can’t manage the time to really attend to it properly, or they just sincerely don’t know. In both cases, it’s okay. It’s human. That’s why I wrote this: so you *will* know.

b) White Noise (“that’s what they all say”)

Price. Quality. Service. Accuracy. And (for some) legacy, or amount of time in business. Add: Selection. Experience

if you want your messaging and outreach to blend in and become white noise to the point where it would put a baby to sleep, use these phrases.

Price, Quality, Service, Selection, Experience.

This is what pretty much *everyone* says they have, and in each individual case, it may even be true. But if you're saying you have the best prices, the top quality in the best selection and the other person is saying some version of the exact same thing, who am I supposed to believe?

When you and your competitors each keep telling me that you have the best price, quality, service, selection and experience, I would love to tell you that there was something in your message that set you apart to help me decide the winner, except I didn't hear you. I didn't hear the message.

I'm sorry, was I supposed to be listening? I wasn't. That kind of white noise puts me to sleep.

I'm just going to go ahead and assume that you are going to try to offer a fair price for what you're selling. Remember, we are talking about small business here. We are trying to connect with a community of people who we are uniquely equipped to serve. We are not talking about price-checking wars

between retail giants. If you are in a sector where price is going to be an obvious talking point (like a car dealership for an appliance store), address that once you've got somebody's attention. In the meantime, why would you try to “out-Wal-Mart” Wal-Mart?

Well then, that's where some of these other ones come in, where people say they're more experienced or they have better service or higher quality. And all of those things are great. But just saying them without any context or relatability to the people whose attention you're seeking is just your word against mine.

If I'm your potential customer, why should I believe you? What's in it for me? What example can you give me?

Saying, “We offer great customer service” is like saying, “We are trying to be happy.” Everyone is trying to do that (some, much better at it than others)!

Have you ever heard or read an ad that suggested, “We have great customer service,” and then thought to yourself, ‘Wow! I guess I'll go there! They're going to give me great service!’

Come on now, think like a human being. Tell a story. Give an example. Share a time when you failed or let someone down. How did you fix it? How did you learn to do better? Humanize yourself.

If you want my business, you'd better have good prices, good quality and great service. Otherwise, you might get my business once. But you won't get it twice.

c) Falling for the trap of “biggest,” “best” or “#1”

Media sales reps are the worst for this. I know, because I used to be one. And what has happened is that they have conditioned small business owners and media buyers into looking immediately at numbers instead of looking for a deeper connection, not with everyone, but with the *right* people. You don't need everybody. You need only a certain number of the right people. Do that, and the scaling and compounding of your business will take care of itself (so long as you can keep your other organizational ducks in a row).

In the city where I'm in (just under a half-million people in the immediate area), it used to be easy for advertisers. There was a TV station (which was the most expensive option), a daily newspaper (the next most expensive), and a few different radio stations (which were slightly less expensive). If you had the budget to make use of any of those options, you chose the one that you thought reached your audience best, and put together a campaign that took your dollar as far as it could. Your targeting basically amounted to whether or not you wanted to be in the sports section or the entertainment section of the newspaper, or of different radio stations at different times, or certain television shows like, for instance, the evening news or afternoon talk show, depending on what you can afford.

Now, there's good news and bad news, and they're both the same news. There's never been more choice, there's never been more opportunity to target to specific people with certain characteristics that might match up with

what and who you are and what you are offering. The downside is, it can be completely overwhelming to narrow this down and try to choose.

To make this easier for ourselves, we still fall into this trap of what's “number one,” what has the most (“biggest”) audience, which has the “best” and so on.

Stop thinking about trying to get in front of *everyone*. You are not for everyone. Think about creating and nurturing a deeper connection with a certain amount of the *right* people. Depending on the scale of your business, this might be a lot less expensive to do than you think it is, but we are burning through so much of our advertising budget and time by trying to get in front of everyone with bland, repetitive, white-noise marketing messages like what I've already mentioned. You're better to keep your money and just do a better job of taking care of the customers that you already have!

This is one of the single biggest mistakes that small business people and entrepreneurs make. It happens all the time.

Stop worrying about the biggest audience or most amount of people. It doesn't matter who's number one. It matters who matches the people you're trying to connect to. If you are a small business trying to buy mass Impressions like a national agency account, you're playing the wrong game. Never mind trying to get to everyone. Start thinking about trying to get to the right people and make an authentic connection with them.

2. Using one of these tired and tried (and ineffective) marketing stories.

There are three typical stories I hear and see people trying to use. They are, in no particular order:

1. “I'm so great”
2. “Inventory overload” (otherwise known as “blah, blah, blah...”)
3. Gimmicks.

None of them are good strategies. Let's look at each one in a little bit more detail.

1. “I’m So Great!”

By far the most common story or approach is what I call, “I'm so great.” This seems to have been inflamed by this narcissistic, “look at me” social media society that we have (d)evolved into. But in a marketing sense, I don't think we're being narcissistic so much as just either lazy or ignorant. Or both. We don't know what else to do and don't trust ourselves to do something different.

“I’m so great” is an easy trap. Trying to convince somebody they should work with us by telling them how wonderful we are is what we see and hear everywhere we turn. But again, who is that about?

“I’m so great” stories keep reminding people of awards that they've won, sales numbers that they've achieved, number of years they've been in business, how they are “number one,” or the “biggest,” or the “best.” It is essentially a tactic of, “look at me, look at me, look at me!”

There's nothing wrong with mixing in the mention of your accomplishments as part of your communication plan. You have every right to be proud of them. But think about this as if you were communicating with another human being. If all they ever did was spout off about how great they were, how many awards they've won, and why they are so wonderful, is that not the kind of person that we all work to try *to stay away from* at an office party or social occasion?

“I’m so great” is a common marketing story. But it’s lazy, obnoxious and off-putting. You’re better than that.

How about focusing on making your *customer* great?

2. “Inventory Overload” (aka, “Blah, Blah, Blah”)

Then there's the next most common marketing story: Inventory overload.

This is where we shove the proverbial 10 pounds of stuff into a 5-pound bag. The listener, viewer, or reader has no choice but to tap out because they're

completely overwhelmed and exhausted and end up hearing and seeing none of what you have to say.

And “inventory overload” approach is making the mistake of trying to cram everything into one session rather than taking our time, picking out one point and more fully exploring it in a way that might relate to the people were trying to reach. Instead, we bludgeon them with bullet points, vomit numbers and bury people in exposition and inventory.

Slow down. Take a breath. Say *less*. The illusion is that if you don't get all of the bullet points of how wonderful you are and how great your price, quality, service, selection and experience are, people won't know and you'll never be able to afford to do another commercial campaign.

The reality is, hardly anyone is actually hearing or pausing to consider what you're saying anyway because they can't keep up. They don't even want to try. So they don't.

3. Gimmicks

And then there are gimmicks. Small business owners and entrepreneurs seem to look at large national or global businesses and think they need to come up with the next clever slogan, gimmick, mascot or theme.

“Where's the beef?”

“Yo quiero Taco Bell.”

“30 minutes or it's free.”

Unless this is a statement that accurately reflects who you are and who you *are always going to be*, then it's a gimmick. And trying to market yourself with a gimmick is like trying to remember what lie you told last. It is so much easier to just tell the truth, because you won't have to remember what you said and it will never go out of style.

Still, I see it all the time: people think they need a catchy hook line or a jingle or a character. This is the marketing equivalent of people being afraid to just be themselves.

Another reason why you don't want to tie yourself to a gimmick is that you should be thinking about things over the long-term, as opposed to just the next 30, 60, or 90 days.

Which brings me to my next point.

3. Stop Thinking “Lottery” and Start Thinking “Seeds”

Think of your marketing as a process rather than an event. Or another way I like to say this, is to think of it like planting seeds instead of buying lottery tickets.

When a farmer plants some seeds, would you expect them to be out there the next day, arms crossed, tapping their foot and impatiently waiting for the crops to come up? Of course not. The thought is absurd. And yet, that's what most people I've encountered do when it comes to marketing and advertising their small business. I've been guilty of this myself on more than one occasion (far more recently than I care to admit). I know how easy a trap it is.

When I was helping businesses put together radio and digital marketing campaigns, I lost track of the number of times people would tell me something like, “Well I tried radio before and it didn't work.” Inevitably, on the rare occasions when you could actually get them to be honest with you about what really happened, you would discover that “trying radio” really meant “buying 5 overnight show commercials on the wrong radio station, because they were the cheapest, and not having the cash registers ring the next day.”

Or, to be fair, there were occasions when people had given it several weeks, or even months. But of course, these conversations would never factor into account things like the actual messaging, the timing of it, the targeting of it, the expectations going into it, and the process of effective measurement, if there even was one to begin with (which there almost always is not).

The far more common approach is to bring a radio station out for a remote broadcast, or doing online takeover of a media website, buy a bunch of high-profile commercials in the highest-rated TV shows, sink a bunch of budget into boosting posts on Facebook and creating one-time events or promotions. And these things, taken into a greater context, are not bad if they're a part of a

bigger plan. But in my experience, most people fail to consider what happens after that.

Trying to boost your bottom line in one shot is like buying lottery tickets. It almost never works, and even if you do get a little pop, it never lasts. You've got to consider what happens after the promotion, once the hangover is gone and the bills come in. Where is the next business coming from then?

Think *process*.

Let's suppose you wanted to build some muscles. Would you get yourself all psyched up, buy a bunch of new fitness attire and then go to the gym once, do one big workout and expect to wake up looking like “The Rock” the next day? Of course not. The thought is absurd.

And yet, that is basically what I see smart people in small business do over and over and over again. They wake up without any new muscles, so they cancel their gym membership and quit.

As I suggest in the mindset coaching work that I do, “race like a turtle.” Slow down to go faster. Slow is smooth and smooth is fast.

Look up the old fable about “The Tortoise and the Hare” and remind yourself who comes out ahead, with less stress and better results.

Part Four: 2 Things Start Doing Now

1. Start Building Your Own Distribution Channel & Start Creating Content

A radio station is a distribution channel. Same with a newspaper, website or television station. Their model is simple: we have access to “X” amount of eyes & ears. Pay us “Y” and we’ll distribute your message to “Z%” of “X.” And then you hope they magically arrive at your door and say, “I saw your ad on the side of the bus, so here I am!”

But here’s the thing.

Two things, actually:

Thing 1 - Those typical kinds of distribution channels are fading. Fast.

Thing 2 - You can, and should, be building your *own* distribution channel so you can communicate with whomever you want, whenever you want.

Thing 2. 5 - You can actually use Thing 1 to build Thing 2.

Neat, huh?

Here’s an example that even the people I used to work with inside a group of radio stations didn’t seem to understand:

In radio, they sometimes use a word called “Cume,” which is basically short for “Cumulative audience.” At least around here (in Canada), that’s calculated by the total number of people who might listen to that particular radio station for at least 15 minutes in a given week.

Cume. Total number of listeners. Or in other words, it’s the overall potential size of the distribution channel at any given moment. Cool?

Okay, so where I used to be, there were 3 radio stations: two FM stations and one AM station.

One of the FM stations had organically built a following of over 110,000 people that were following its Facebook page.

Meanwhile, the AM station’s “Cume” was roughly 40,000 people per week.

The Facebook page following of the FM station is, simply put, another kind of distribution channel. And it was almost THREE TIMES the size of the AM radio station’s distribution channel.

In other words, the FM station’s Facebook page alone (never mind their over-the-air or online broadcast) had become a more robust distribution channel than the AM station’s over-the-air audience. When I tried to point this out to clients and colleagues, they would go into brain freeze because (I suspect) they were so locked into the old paradigm of the “over-the-air” signal being biggest and best. But that’s just not necessarily true anymore.

Am I suggesting you dump all your resources into Facebook (or any other social channel)? No. It’s fine to build a good Facebook following, but what happens when their rules change, their algorithms get adjusted, or if it just suddenly goes dark one day?

That’s why you should be building an email list that you own. You don’t own a Facebook following or YouTube subscriber base any more than you own a radio station audience, people that pass by a billboard or eyes on a television set. You’re just renting them for a spell.

I’m not saying *not* to use those opportunities. But understand that they’re tools you can use to feed your larger purpose: building your own distribution channel via email.

Now, some people say that email is dead or dying.

Seriously. That’s nonsense. If anything, the trouble with email is that we have too many addresses to manage the load of everything that’s being sent to us.

Ah, see, but I can already hear you: “Well doesn’t that mean that when I email

someone, they’re unlikely to see it anyway?” Perhaps. It depends on a number of factors (like, for example, what you’re emailing them about. If it’s a constant parade of “check it out” and “hurry in today,” you’ll get turned off just as much as you’ll get tuned out with any other media). But here’s an important thing to understand:

You’re not going to get your message to the entire audience of *any* medium you choose. That’s why you’re looking to build connection and relationships over the long term (remember: think process). Email is no different. But at least you’ll *own* that list.

If you’re not collecting email addresses, start. Now.

The next logical question might be, “Okay, well, how do I attract people to my email list, and what do I send to them once they get there?”

Good question. I’ll answer it by suggesting what you should be doing anyway, regardless of whether or not you start to build your own distribution channel:

Create your own content.

“Wait, what? Create *content*?”

Yep. Here’s why:

First, a video or helpful blog post offers a much more authentic view of who you really are. It humanizes you. It makes you more relatable.

Here’s an example: Just the other day, I was looking a new car dealership’s Facebook page (a painful process). Almost all the posts were photos or graphics of how great they think they are. White noise. But then there was a post from one of the sales reps who had just done a really simple video, with his phone, showing how to pair up your smartphone with the new stereo systems in their cars. The video had zero production value. It was shaky, there were no graphics and you couldn’t even see the guy talking. Didn’t matter. It was helpful. It addressed a question and experience that an actual customer would have, and as a result, that one post had more engagement than all the other ones (which were all versions of either “I’m so great” or “inventory overload”) put together.

So why wouldn’t they do more stuff like that?

One reason. We’ll cover that at the end of the report.

Now, here’s the other reason you should be creating content:

It works for you while you’re not there, and doesn’t go away (unless you delete it). In simpler terms, you get much more from your investment than a traditional “one and done” message like a radio or television ad.

Think about it. Suppose you pay for a radio ad. It comes on the air and within 30 seconds, it’s gone. You can’t hit “replay” or bookmark it for later. It’s just gone, into the ether. Sure, it’ll come back around again, as long as you’ve paid for another occasion. But if you’ve created and shared your own content, it will

always be there, working for you. It can be shared, replayed or read over again. It can start discussion, add context, build rapport and relationships. And the more of it you do, the better you'll get.

I'm not for a moment suggesting not to invest in radio or TV or billboards or sponsorship or anything like that. Depending on what kind of business you're in, they have their place. What I am saying is that, if you're pumping big budgets into ongoing radio or TV campaigns and you're not using that exposure to build your own distribution channel and send people your own content, you're flushing opportunity down the toilet.

Constantly relying on buying access to other distribution channels is expensive and will not compound or scale your own audience. But creating your own content and building your own distribution channel will.

2. Start Being Yourself, Telling Your Own Unique Story

Most of us think we're already doing this. We are not.

In most cases, we're re-telling some version of “I'm so great” or “inventory overload” and then putting our name and location on it thinking *that's* our story.

It isn't. And yet the window of opportunity awaits, wide open, for someone who will away from the “tired and tried” marketing speak to simply communicate in an authentic, human way by sharing what's true about themselves and what they do (or do not do).

We’re afraid to do this because we think, “well what if someone doesn’t like me?”

Honestly, some people already don’t like you. Who cares?

What’s more interesting: being the “#1 car dealer in your region” (yawn), or sharing the story of how you got there?

- How did you get into the business?
- Did you grow up dreaming of being a car salesman? *Really?* If so, what was the reason? Did you grow up around it? Did you follow in someone’s footsteps? If not, how did you find yourself there?
- What was the first car you sold? Who bought it?
- How is selling cars different now than it was back then?
- What’s the craziest thing that ever happened? How did you deal with it?
- Which customers do you remember the most and why?
- What is something that people don’t realize about your business?
- What’s the toughest challenge you ever faced? How did you deal with it?

I mean, really. Answers to *any* of those questions would be immediately relatable to the people you’re trying to reach. But instead we get, “Hurry in today for the greatest sale of the century! These deals won’t last long! Don’t miss out!”

Be human with us. Tell us your story. Be who you are, and allow yourself not to be who you are not.

Stop trying to capture everyone, and start connecting with the right people. The business will take care of itself.

Part Five: 1 Magic Measurement

We’ve covered a lot of ground already. As you’re going through these things, how can you know if you’re on the right track?

With anything you post, share, say, write, advertise, broadcast, tweet or print, before it goes live, ask yourself:

“Is this about me, or the people I’m trying to serve?”

If you’re like 99% of all small business advertising and entrepreneurial posts you’ll see, what you will find is that your communication is pretty much all about you. And as someone in small business, that isn’t going to work very well for you.

But, wait! Didn’t you just tell me to be myself and tell my own story?

Yes, I did. And the reason I did is so that you can have a chance to relate to other people in a way that *they can relate to* and understand. There is much more potential opportunity for connection to someone who tells a very human story about a very human issue than there is to yet another marketer belching

empty phrases like, “Hurry in! Don’t miss out on our great selection from XYZ company, a name you can trust! Check it out!”

If you want to know if you're on the right track or not, there is one magic measurement you can use in a heartbeat. It is really simple to say but what you will find is that it's not quite as easy to do and the reason why is that we are so conditioned by seeing the exact opposite of what I'm about to share with you. But if we just pause and consider it as human beings and evaluated from our own experience for just a moment the error of this thinking will become clear.

Here is the magic measurement... in whatever you are communicating, can you look at it from an outsider's perspective? Can you honestly and objectively put yourself in the shoes of the person whose attention you are seeking and then ask yourself, **is this about you or is this about me?**

In other words, before you send out that social media post that shows yet another picture of you somewhere or doing something, ask yourself honestly: who is this about? What story is it serving? (“I’m so great”)

If the shoe were on the other foot, and you were the other person, how would it look to you?

Consider this in the way your website text reads, in the way your radio ad script sounds, in the way that your billboard is positioned, the way your newspaper ad reads, how your Facebook posts are put together... honestly... is it about *you*, the advertiser or *me*, the potential customer? Are you at least making an effort?

Here’s a little bit of tough love (and trust me, I am saying this to myself many times a day as I try to get this through my own thick skull):

If it's your attention that I want, then it's not about me.

Or, put the other way around:

If it's my attention that you want, it's not about you.

Again, to be a little cold about it in an effort to get my point across: For the most part, I'm not thinking about you. I'm thinking about me.

You can tell me how great you think you are all day long. I don't care. What I care about is: How can you help me? How does what you have to offer relate to something that will either add value to my life and experience, solve a problem for me, or generally make my life easier or more enjoyable?

Your default reaction is likely to be, “But I’m number one,” or, “I have the best this or that,” or, “Look at all my testimonials!”

Let's suppose you are a car dealer. You can shout financing numbers and pride in your brand at me all you like but if you don't give me some reason why I should care, then I generally don't. If you treat yourself like a transactional commodity, why should I think of you any differently?

I know, I know, in our Instagram-driven celebrity culture, we follow, like, retweet, repost, tag and dream of being like the people that we follow. The madness of that kind of carrying on as a separate conversation. But the fundamental question is:

Why are you acting like a celebrity when what you are really trying to do is connect with the right audience and build a relationship so that you might have an opportunity to increase the amount of satisfied customers for your product or service?

Do you want paparazzi to start following you around and tracking your every move? Then why do you behave like that on social media?

The irony is that when you actually do reach out, seek to understand and cultivate interaction rather than constantly broadcasting “I’m so great,” you actually will become a mini celebrity to the people you’re serving. But just remember: they will love you because you make it about *them*.

In your marketing, communication and outreach efforts, always, always always ask yourself honestly: who is this about? If it's always about you, you're missing out on so much opportunity.

Warning: You are going to find that this is a lot more challenging than it sounds. If you take this to heart, you're going to hear see and feel ads and social media posts differently and you'll come to realize how extraordinary and exceptional it is to encounter somebody or something that communicates in a

way that relates to the people that they're trying to reach as opposed to making it all about them.

In fact, the conditioning is so strong that my bet is, you won't do it. You won't do it unless you can get around the one thing that is standing in your way, which is what will cover next.

Part Six: The One Thing That Has to Go ...

Go through *this*, or none of it matters. You'll be a copycat forever.

Fear.

You're afraid of the very thing that will make you most successful: standing out from the crowd. It's the “tall poppy” syndrome. We fear this in our personal lives as well as in business. And so we mimic, we copy, we follow. And in the process, we are burning through precious time and resources that could be having much more impact for us.

How do I know this applies to you?

Because you're reading this, which means you're likely looking for a fix, a map, a tool, a trick or a system.

Here's the system: Be yourself. Be who you are. Do not be who you are not. Do that, and you'll win and will have fun doing it.

Actually, it's not really fear that has to go. Fear never really completely goes away. What needs to go is being paralyzed into inaction because of your fear. That has to go. You've got to feel that fear and do it anyway. The more you do it, the less you will feel that fear but you will grow into new and more challenging opportunities. But the one reason why you will not stand out and change the tone of your marketing messaging is because you're afraid.

It's the same phenomena we go through in our personal lives. We're afraid to stand stand out, to truly be ourselves. What if we look weird, or different or people judge us? How will we deal with the peer pressure?

Through logic.

I've long since lost track of how many times I've been part of a conversation where a business owner or manager tells me all the reasons why they're different or better than everybody else in their field but then when it came time to communicate that message through some sort of ad or online posting, it almost always ended up looking, feeling and sounding pretty much exactly the same as what you would hear from everybody else. Which completely defeats the point.

Why would they do that? It's because it feels safe.

If you have shown yourself to be bold enough to put yourself on the line to the extent where you start your own business, surely you can be bold enough to use your own voice.

Amplifying a message that is essentially saying little more than, “look at me, look at me, look at me!” is a lousy marketing strategy. But it's what most people use.

Think about this from the other point of view. How does that kind of message make you feel if you are the potential customer?

So here's my prediction. Even though you've read all the way to the end, you're probably going to find it hard not fall back into the waiting arms of “check it out,” “don't miss out,” “here's why I'm great,” and “here's a picture of me being great.” It's easy. It's human nature. It's the path of least resistance.

What I would love is for you to prove me wrong, and for you to tell me so.

Blending in is not a sound marketing strategy. If you can be among the few to break through the anxiety of having to blend in and you can do that in an authentic way, you will win. I am certain that you will win. You cannot help but stand out and connect because you will be so different from all the others who will settle back with the rest of the pack.

I wish you good luck, and I am here to support you however I can

Part Seven: Now What?

If you're reading this, I assume that you're already on my email list in some capacity. But if not (like, for instance, if somebody passed this along to you), start there by going to www.NoScheduleMan.com/contact and entering your email address so you can stay updated on more small business marketing hints, tips and insights.

I've also got scads of free videos and podcast episodes (“Journeys with the No Schedule Man”) just waiting there any time you like. You can find the videos and subscribe at [Youtube.com/NoScheduleMan](https://www.youtube.com/NoScheduleMan). If you're more of an audible learner, subscribe at iTunes (or Google Play Music, iHeart Radio or Stitcher) and listen to the audio feed of the podcast. You can also find links to all the episodes on my website at NoScheduleman.com.

If you really want to dive into this further you're welcome to reach out to me to inquire about coaching and consulting opportunities with your business or to have me come and deliver a workshop or seminar to work with you and your team or perhaps deliver a keynote at your event or some version of all of the above.

The best way to stay in touch with me and to collaborate on a daily basis is through my online community, The No Schedule Man’s Mindset & Marketing Mastermind (aka, “The Turtle Tribe”), presently hosted on Facebook. You can learn more about it at www.NoScheduleMan.com/mastermind.

If you’d like me to come to your place of business, association or event to speak or lead a workshop, contact me at kevin@kevinbulmer.com. More information about my speaking and workshops can be found at kevinbulmer.com/speaking.

About the Author

If anybody knows about the evolution of small business marketing, it’s Kevin Bulmer. With over 20 years of combined experience as an award-winning broadcaster, business owner, manager and marketing coach & consultant, Kevin is now passionate about helping other people in small business overcome hidden fears and limiting beliefs so that they can exponentially improve the results of their marketing while increasing productivity and effectiveness. A dynamic and empowering professional speaker, Kevin also hosts the podcast, “Journeys with the No Schedule Man.” He lives in London, Ontario, Canada with his sons, Eddie and Jaden.