

Everything Communicates
The One 2 One guide for small business

OPEN

River Path Associates

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www.everythingcommunicates.net

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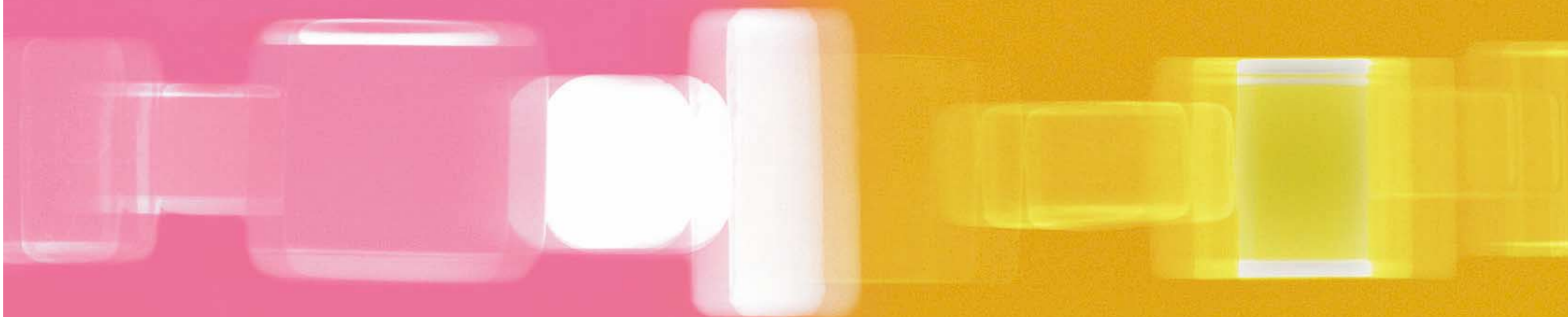
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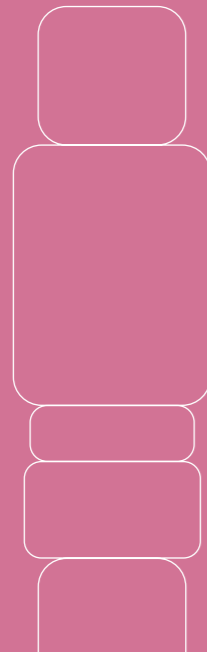
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Introduction Getting It | The 10 communication principles



It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory.
W. Edwards Deming, quality management expert

In this chapter
business communication
signals
messages
strategy
intelligence
jargon
consistency
clarity
clout
creativity
content
stories
originality
people
network
authenticity
speed



You're Busy, So We Won't Waste Your Time

Communication is at the heart of modern business. Every new technology we dream up encourages it.

From smoke signals to telephones, TV to DVD, Morse code to mobile phones, radio to the internet. Signals are sent, messages spread. Good news (or bad) races from person to person.

In short, winning or losing at business depends on communication.

So if you are...

- starting a business
- already in business, but keen to grow
- running a charity, school or community group

...*Everything Communicates* is for you.

It's a guide in two parts: a short book and an interactive website. This book should get you really thinking about communication, while the website offers dozens of free, easy-to-use tools and links to hundreds more resources to help you get going. We highlight relevant web tools on the side of each page.

Taken together, *Everything Communicates* is a systematic way to sharpen every aspect of how you, your people and your organisation communicate. Giving you – and what you do – a vital edge.

So hit our website www.everythingcommunicates.net for a quick test of your communication skills – or read on for 10 principles to guide great communication in small businesses.



10 Communication Principles For Small Business

- 1 **Everything Communicates (even silence)**
Everything a business does communicates.

Whether you like it or not, people will pick up and interpret the signals you send – from the way you invoice to the clothes you wear. How many seconds do customers wait for you to answer the phone? How many hours before you reply to their emails? What does your brochure say about your organisation's style? What do customers, suppliers, competitors, employees (and your bank manager) think when you walk into the room?

Do you know? Can you find out? And what difference will it make if you do?

- 2 **Know What You Want (no-one else does)**
By knowing where you stand, you can communicate strategically.

The smart business stands out because it knows what each communication must do. It says: "let's have a new leaflet" – and knows why. It thinks: "let's get this in the papers" – and knows what it wants that to achieve. And it *never* sends out conflicting signals from one day to the next – because it understands that messages should be consistent.

Strategic communicators know who they are – and find ways to say so. They set targets – and measure them. They look at every communication and ask: "do I know what I want this to do?"

- 3 **Look, Listen & Learn (it's the experts' secret)**
Communication starts and ends with the audience.

Great business communicators start by listening, not talking. Devoted to understanding their audiences, they ask questions first, using research to find out how people tick.

They collect intelligence. Test communications before they go 'live'. And gather feedback at every opportunity. They ask again and again: Will it work? Did it work? How can we improve it?

- 4 **Speak Their Language (they won't listen to yours)**
To reach an audience, speak their language – not yours.

Communication fails when it doesn't see the audience's point of view. The best communicators avoid jargon, hit the right tone, and develop an attractive style to suit the audience. They understand how different types of people interpret what they say.

They have learned to look at their business through other people's eyes. They get heard by speaking in a voice people are comfortable with.

- 5 **The Five Cs (consistency | clarity | clout | creativity | content)**
To succeed, every communication needs consistency, clarity, clout, creativity and content.

- **Consistency** – people need to hear the same message again and again to remember it.
- **Clarity** – there is only time to get a simple message across.
- **Clout** – to stand out from the crowd, do something special.
- **Creativity** – a dash of cleverness adds value to limited budgets.
- **Content** – only people with something to say can say it well.

- 6 **Tell Stories (once upon a time is timeless)**
Once upon a time there were ten communication principles, and principle number six was the oldest communication trick of them all.

If you have something important to say, tell a story. If you want people to remember, tell a story. If you want them to pass news on, tell a story.

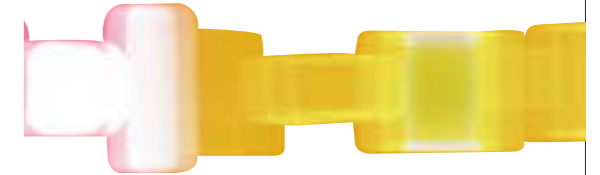
Unconvinced? Sit in the pub and listen to people tell each other stories. Or watch some TV ads and pick out the little stories, from Renault's Papa and Nicole to epic tales from Guinness. Or simply listen to yourself the next time you chat on the phone. Humans like stories.

- 7 **Steal With Pride (there's no prize for originality)**
You don't have to be original – just good.

If you're a small company, don't try to do it all on your own. Take a look at what others (especially those with deeper pockets) are doing. Look outside your area, your sector, your country even. Use the internet to see what they're up to in the States, or browse lifestyle magazines to check out what's on the way. What works? What has impact? What touches the audience you want to reach? Then take that clever idea, this interesting look, that unusual shape – and give it a twist to make it new.

Of course, don't be daft about it. When companies like Phillips, Thorn, ABB and Skandialink talk about "stealing with pride", they always make sure they use a good idea in such a way that it becomes their own. There's no pride in simply being a copycat (and there's a risk of being sued if you are).

- 8 **People First (they're even better than technology)**
People are the beginning, middle and end of good communication.



If people say good things about your business, then more customers will come knocking at your door. But if they're unhappy the chances are they won't complain to you, but to their family, friends and colleagues. And then there's you and the people who work for you. Are you a good ad for your business? Or do you send signals that drive people away?

Before spending money on a new brochure or ad campaign, find out if you've got your people-to-people communication right. Try getting people to tell stories about your business. And get out and about to really make your networks hum.

9 Be Yourself, Have Fun (being genuine works)

A business can *act* for a while, but hitting high standards year after year means staying true to *you*.

Customers have rising expectations. They demand a lot for their loyalty, and are quick to withdraw trust. Yet if you stick to your guns and follow your instincts, people are often surprisingly keen to help you do well. We're programmed to be reasonable with other people – it's the faceless organisation that brings out our stubborn streak.

And if you *are* yourself, you're more likely to have fun too. And that's vital, because energy fuels communication. Which is why 'boring' is the new cardinal sin.

10 Just Do It (speed rules)

You're not going to win if you're not in the game.

Don't stop to get everything perfect.

Do it *now*.

Do it *well*.

Do it *fast*.

In the next eight chapters, *Everything Communicates* explores what communication means for a modern business.

We start by looking at audiences and identity. Then we explore internal and external communication, before moving on to the communication techniques every business should have in its arsenal. Then it's over to you: to audit, plan and act.

So let's get going.

Because communication never stops.



Where Next?

1 Everything Communicates (even silence)

2 Know What You Want (no one else does)

3 Look, Listen & Learn (it's the experts' secret)

4 Speak Their Language (they won't listen to yours)

5 The 5 Cs (consistency | clarity | clout | creativity | content)

6 Tell Stories (once upon a time is timeless)

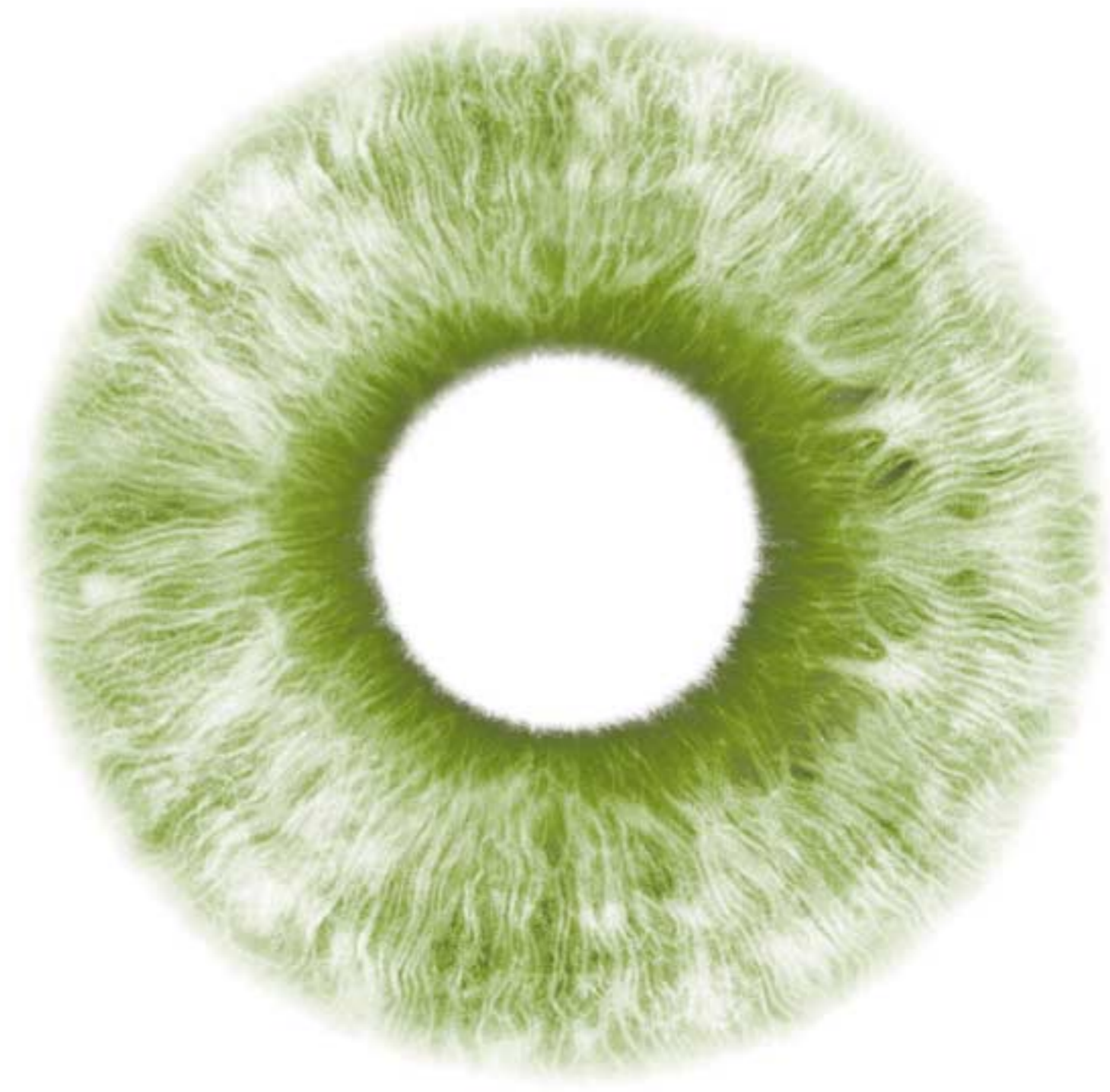
7 Steal With Pride (there's no prize for originality)

8 People First (they're even better than technology)

9 Be Yourself, Have Fun (being genuine works)

10 Just Do It (speed rules)

10 Communication Principles for Small Business



1 See Hear | Finding out what makes people tick

In this chapter
research
listening
market intelligence
testing
feedback
quick-and-dirty
questionnaire
poll
focus group
respondents
qualitative
quantitative
topic guide
telephone research
mystery shopping
pre-testing
testimonials
relationships
*research rewards:
the ice cream story*



If speaking is silver, then listening is gold.
Turkish proverb



Communication is about sending and receiving signals. The aim of all these messages: to convey information and (usually) to alter behaviour.

Communications are as likely to be non-verbal as verbal. The verbals can be written or spoken, whispered or shouted. The non-verbals can be visual (the look), tactile (the feel), and even olfactory (the smell – you may have noticed how some supermarkets pipe the aroma of fresh bread to the store entrance).

Perhaps the most powerful non-verbal signal that people pick up is whether you listen or not. Very few business people are as *obviously* hostile as Basil Fawlty:

You ponce in here expecting to be waited on hand and foot. Well, I'm trying to run a hotel here. Have you any idea how much there is to do? Do you ever think of that? Of course not, you're all too busy sticking your noses into every corner, poking around for things to complain about, aren't you?

But we've all received service from businesses that don't seem to care who we are, what we think or what we want.

The best businesses reverse Fawlty's assumption (customers clutter up my hotel), and make a principle of starting with the customer and working from there.

As Peter Drucker has explained, customers only want to know what your product or service will do for them. They're interested in their values and desires – not yours.

If you want to *really* engage them, your whole business must start with your customers – *their* realities, *their* situation, *their* behaviour and *their* values.

There's a children's rhyme that goes:

*A wise old owl sat in an oak,
The more he saw, the less he spoke;
The less he spoke, the more he heard;
Why aren't we all like that wise old bird?*

In the modern jargon, the wise old owl was an *active listener* – the old bird listened *well*.

Listening well means being a detective:

- **Show interest.** Demonstrate interest in what people say with appropriate eye contact and by asking questions.
- **Clarify.** Make sure you understand both the context and the key points by asking follow-up questions.

Two-Way Street

Listen Here

- **Summarise.** Show you understand people by restating what they have said and feeding it back by asking questions: “so what you’re saying is...?”
- **Empathise.** People don’t just want you to hear what they say; they want you to understand how they feel. Think about the feelings behind a particular conversation and again, signal understanding by asking questions: “so you feel...?”
- **Suspend judgement.** Active listeners don’t jump in at the first opportunity. In short, they engage brain before mouth.

Listening badly is failing to do all this (and a few other sins besides).

The key tool is clearly questions, which should be ‘open’ to draw people out: “What do you think of this?” “How do you think this looks?” Closed questions cut down the number of possible answers: “Do you like this?”, “Is the photo too big?”

Gather Intelligence | Test | Feedback



Organisations can listen well, too. Indeed, the best continually ask questions. Asda, for example, operates a ‘Consumer Buddies’ scheme, where someone from Research and Development is linked up with a ‘real world’ customer. While P&M Products – maker of toys like Blitzler and BLOpen – work with a neighbouring school where kids can experiment at an early stage with their latest inventions.

When organisations actively listen, they call it ‘research’. Every small business should try to run a three-part research process:

- **Gather intelligence** about markets and customers, partners and competitors, employees and suppliers. Find out as much as possible about who they are, what they think and the language they speak. (Before you take up too much of their valuable time.)
- **Test ideas** about how to reach your audiences – whether launching a new product, leaflet or logo, refining a service, or running a PR campaign. That way you can be more certain that the signals you send are the ones that are received.
- **Feedback** to close the loop – on each and every communication. Does it work? Does it meet its objectives? Does it support our image? Does it hit the bottom line? What could be improved next time?

Intelligence-gathering, testing and getting feedback are demanding and can be costly too – which is why so many small businesses never bother. But there’s a solution: ‘quick and dirty’ research. Quick and dirty is just that: it’s done quickly and the information is a bit rough round the edges. It’s:

- the simple questionnaire sent out with every invoice
- the straw poll down the pub
- the fast internet trawl to grab provocative headline results
- the focus group over coffee around a table.

Quick and dirty research is designed to confirm (or disprove) gut feelings. Because unless you pre-test your communications, however rough and ready your method, you might find out they *don’t* work the hard way – when it’s too late. On limited budgets, failure can be unpleasant (you have to live with it) or, worse, a costly mistake.

Quick and dirty research isn’t for purists though (who’ll shake their heads and mutter darkly about *statistical significance*). Here are some rules of thumb to help boost your chances of success:

1 Start with the Internet

It’s the most powerful research tool ever devised. Use it for market intelligence – where’s your market now and where’s it going? Use it to make contacts and maintain links to the cutting edge in your field. And use it to get hold of free headline results from research reports that cost thousands of pounds.

2 Expect surprises

It’s good to confirm hunches – but if your research *always* proves you right, you might be asking the wrong questions. Get round this by having someone else ask the questions. That way you have an impartial observer at work and you get someone else’s ‘feel’ thrown in. Remember, if your preconceptions are challenged, don’t resist. Surprises trigger the kind of insights that can lead to fundamental breakthroughs.

3 Write it up

It’s easy to forget this, or think you got the message because you were there. Not so. Researchers frequently get new insights writing up data *because they’re examining it closely* in a different frame of mind. It’s like a detective resifting evidence to help crack a case.

4 Analyse – and implement

It’s amazing how often big companies waste huge amounts by spending months gathering data, days writing the report, hours working out what it means, and then minutes deciding what to do about it. Quick and dirty researchers get on with it, then step back and really think about their findings.

Quick And Dirty Research



5 Reward your subjects

Like royalty, researchers have 'subjects' – the people who answer your questions. Because they've given up their time for you, reward them – *twice*. First, by giving feedback and telling people the difference their input makes. This is almost never done, and yet it's a powerful communication in its own right.

Second, give something back – like a pint (or bottle of wine), a book token, cinema tickets, vouchers or a special discount. This sends an appropriate signal *and* focuses your attention on getting value for your money.

Here are some quick and dirty research techniques to get you going:

1 Gather intelligence

Research can give you two quite distinct types of intelligence. On the one hand, there's the number stuff known as *quantitative* research (facts and figures like "72% of our customers are men"). On the other hand, there's the less easily counted stuff about opinions, desires and emotions ("our customers like to feel pampered"), known as *qualitative* research. Both are valuable.

To get numbers, use *questionnaires* to reach as many customers or potential customers as possible. Passive contact (like sending a questionnaire by post or putting it in with your product) is easy on you, but relies on them to return the questionnaire. Active contact (you phone them up or stop people in the street) gets more responses, but costs more time, effort and money. Go for short questionnaires (everyone's time is precious), use prizes or rewards to increase returns – and grab a few people to test the questions first.

To get opinions and feelings, try a focus group or two, or a detailed one-on-one interview. To run a quick and dirty focus group, write down a list of topics to talk through, get a few people together, and use lots of open questions (and maybe a couple of drinks) to get a discussion going. The quick and dirty interview: do the same, but one-on-one. Remember to feed back results as soon as you've written them up.

Finally, you can do both quantitative and qualitative types of research by *telephone* (though obviously not if you've got things to show people). But keep it short: around 10 to 15 minutes is best.

Getting Going

Building Profiles

Segment your market.
Build profiles of groups that
think, act and buy alike. Think:

Facts... (as many as you know)
age | sex | race | religion | occupation |
income | sexuality | life-stage
(e.g. single living with parents,
single living with friends, single living
alone, partner, live-in partner, married,
divorced, young children, older
children, retired etc.) | education |
housing | location | pets | smoker |
credit cards | vehicle | computer

Favourites... (take a guess)
newspaper | magazine | TV | film |
actor | actress | book | author |
clothes | music | band | hot drink |
cold drink | alcoholic drink | meal |
takeaway | pudding | chocolate |
holiday | sport | leisure | shop |
technology | brand | celebrity |
place | person | artist | pet hate |
colour | season | (you get the idea)

Features...
(pick the 5 traits that fit best)
stubborn | open | messy | organised |
careful | careless | impulsive |
considered | self-indulgent | self-
denying | quiet | chatty | emotional |
buttoned-up | busy | fun | serious |
outgoing | introverted | rebel |
conformist | courageous | fearful |
friendly | wary | leader | follower |
sporty | bookish | angry | relaxed |
optimistic | pessimistic | (include
any other traits of your choice)

2 Testing

When JP Boden – a niche mail-order clothing company with 250 staff – puts together a new catalogue, they always test it first. *Mock-ups* go to a small number of key customers. If they give the thumbs up, it lives. If not, it gets changed fast.

Do the same with your new brochure (or any other expensive piece of print you're about to buy). Colour print is now cheap, so get your designer to run off work-in-progress, make some colour copies and then show them to as many people as you can – customers, employees, friends, people you drink with in the pub.

Ask open questions. What are their first reactions? What message do they think you're trying to get across? When they look at the brochure, what kind of company do they see?

Watch the way they handle the document. Do they flick through from the back or start at the middle? Do they end up searching for a vital piece of information? Does an image or headline grab attention?

Armed with research, you can now make that last-minute 'obvious' change you didn't think of before. Or scrap it entirely if it's really going nowhere.

You can also test your whole business, taking a look from the outside through the eyes of a *mystery shopper*. First, recruit your spy – a trusted friend and skilful actor – to come in and give your systems a thorough going over. Get them to phone up and really push a complaint. How did frontline staff react? Always have your mystery shopper write up the results in a short report – and make sure they don't go too far (a Chinese Bank recently made the papers all over the world by staging a dummy bank raid in a branch – without telling staff or customers).

You can have some extra fun and games by testing competitors' communications simultaneously, or getting your mystery shopper to visit them too. Be careful though and avoid the embarrassment of getting caught!

3 Feedback

Few businesses realise the importance of feedback. According to the Royal Mail:

- 94% of unhappy customers don't complain, they just walk away. It costs six times as much to recruit a new customer than to keep an existing one.
- 67% of defecting customers go because no-one kept in touch.
- People who complain (and have a complaint dealt with satisfactorily) are happier – and more loyal – than people who didn't complain in the first place.

Feedback is nothing more than *checking* if customers (and others) are happy. Do it on paper, by email, on your website, by phone or face-to-face (ideally, in all these ways).

Running a restaurant? Put *suggestion cards* on tables or bills. Sending invoices? Include a *fax-back* questionnaire on the reverse. Providing a service? Copy the dentist who *calls* patients at the end of the day to check they feel okay.

Feedback is more than listening – it's about being *seen* to listen, too. As results come through, make the most of them by using feedback to build up quotes and *testimonials*. Or go one stage further and simply build research processes into external communications. ("You told us you wanted bigger widgets. You got them. Then you said you wanted your widgets individually hand-wrapped in pink tutus. And we gave it to you.")

Nor should feedback be limited to you or your company – Amazon and Borders, for instance, encourage feedback on the books they sell. This fosters involvement, passion and a *deeper relationship* with customers.

Give your customers a *named contact* and a direct way to get in touch. "Email Jeff and tell him what you think" is a good communication; "If you're unhappy, please write to the Manager" isn't.

And by the way, you can tell us what you think about *Everything Communicates* by emailing us at mick@everythingcommunicates.net, visiting the feedback centre on the website, or writing to the address at the back of this book.



Ever since the George & Davis Ice Cream Company in Oxford started serving home-made ice cream, bagels and coffees a decade ago, they've used research to get close to customers.

One of the company's most powerful ideas is to turn feedback into flavours. Customers can suggest any flavour – no matter how bizarre it might seem – and if 30 other customers sign a petition in support, they'll try to make it. Customers browse through the suggestions book while they queue and sign up to those they fancy.

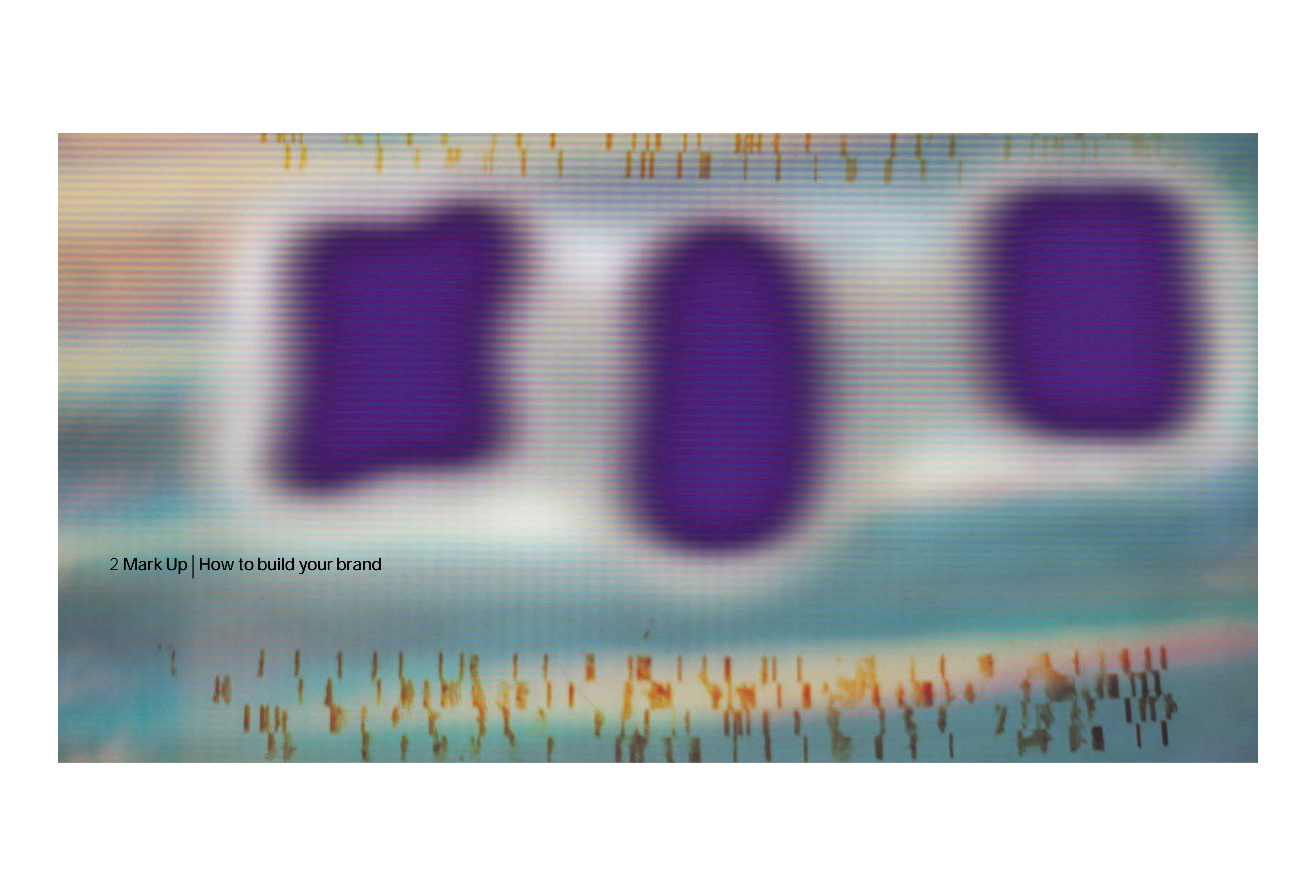
Some of the ideas don't work out. Stilton, for example, proved impossible to turn into plausible ice cream. Other suggestions fail to live up to expectations: "We made Guinness ice cream and it was disgusting", says shift duty manager Sally Tee, one of three people sharing marketing responsibilities. "Lately we've had Malteser ice cream. When they're really popular we make them into one of our normal flavours."

Customers can also fill out cards giving feedback on the food, general appearance of the shop, staff and so on. Customers get a postcard back, thanking them for their ideas or explaining how they'll deal with an issue. Results are collated and fed back at regular Tuesday management meetings.

"Research has always been important," says Sally, "helping us fulfil our mission to deliver good food, friendly service and a bright, upbeat environment – and it's a good way to go back to staff about issues, too."

Case Study Research Rewards | The Ice Cream Story





2 Mark Up | How to build your brand

It's this simple: You are a brand. You are in charge of your brand. There is no single path to success. And there is no one right way to create the brand called You. Except this: Start today. Or else.

Tom Peters, business guru

In this chapter
brands
marks
brand values
customers
consistency
image
personal brands
party line
elevator pitch
Q&A
brainstorm
SWOT
benefits
insight
unique selling point
brand essence
*a simple brand, done well:
the honeywagon story*

Brand Land

There's nothing new about brands: they've been around at least 4000 years. Back then, people burned marks into cattle to stop ownership disputes. Even 2000 years ago some Roman potters used individual marks to brand their goods – a tradition continued today.

Branding really took off when businesses woke up to their value. At Coca Cola (the world's most valuable brand at an estimated \$72 billion), one senior manager claimed the company could survive the confiscation of everything it owned – factories, lorries, staff – as long as it was allowed to hang on to its famous logo (and the recipe). Using the brand as collateral, it would be able to borrow the billions it should take to rebuild.

Everyone – even a sole trader on a market stall – has a brand. A brand combines a range of stuff – a look, sound, attitude, place, way of doing things, feel – into something that sums up the whole act and makes it memorable.

Strong brands make good business. Take that market trader again. If a satisfied customer can easily and memorably describe a stall to a friend – even something as simple as “the guy on the corner with the hat who arranges his fruit in pyramids” – then the brand is doing its job. When customers start telling positive stories about your business, then you know you're on your way up.

There's a myth that brands matter only when you're big, but a brand is valuable to a small business for several reasons:

Brand Power

1 Brands hit the bottom line

Most small businesses need high margins because big outfits can usually out-compete on price – and good branding helps justify premium pricing. Look at ice cream. Why pay more for Haagen-Dazs or Ben and Jerry's? Because of the 'brand values' they express. A premium price supports the idea of indulgence. And this needn't be confined to big businesses. Arran Aromatics and Norfolk Lavender are two small cosmetics companies using location in rural areas, and their classic 'family business' story, as part of their brands – and enjoying premium positioning and pricing as a result.

2 Brands help you see the customer's point of view

By focusing on the brand, a business is forced to look through the customer's eyes – at benefits, emotions and functions rather than a list of features like a new widget, all-natural ingredients, an improved formula or a fully retractable three-way switch. Features offer *reasons* to buy, but buying is a more complex (and less reasonable) process. Benefits and feelings can be hugely influential, from the straightforward – 'works well' or 'tastes good' – to the more subtle – 'exclusive', 'makes me irresistible'. Both have their place, but a brand-aware business starts with what works for the customer.

3 Brands bring clout

In a crowded market, a brand helps you find a clear place in customers' minds. Business writer Al Ries reckons people are now so bombarded with information that there's little space left in their brains to store information about your product. Only distinctive brands – with a clear hook – stand a chance of being remembered.

4 Brands keep customers

Great brands tell stories. And if the story connects with a customer, it will be passed on. Not everyone's 'brand story' is quite as romantic as Britain's oldest curry house, Veeraswamy in London (established 74 years ago by the great-grandson of an English general and an Indian Princess) – but every business has a story to tell somewhere. Let your brand help you tell it.

5 Brands enforce consistency

A brand is good at pulling communications together. It's a yardstick for new communications: "does it fit my brand?" instead of "do I like it?" Ideally, you and your employees 'live' your brand, so it becomes part of your company culture and acts as a clear *quality benchmark* ("do we live up to our promises?"). Take 'The Potting Shed' in the Wirral, who offer same-day delivery of flowers. Their 'brand' is embedded in a



clear set of promises from managing director Chris Mather: quality, expertise, ease, speed and a no-fuss guarantee.

6 Brands are fun

Brands are a chance to express yourself. They're about people and emotions. Building one should be fun for you, your business and your customers. And fun (or personality, at least) makes for believable and energetic communications, from Twiglets and Tango – to your latest leaflet.

So how do you build a brand?

The place to start is with the first thing that probably comes to mind when people think about your business – you.

In particular, the *image* you (or whoever they deal with) project. Even if they haven't met you personally, and have only been in contact by telephone, email or post, the *feeling* people take away from those experiences is the bedrock of your business identity.

Getting your *personal brand* right means spending a little time with yourself working out what you want to say and who you want to say it to. It's about communicating key messages consistently, and *knowing what you want* from each communication. This doesn't mean making a strategic plan before an important phone call, but it does mean spending a second or two jotting down the outcome you want from that call.

The Brand Called You

Good communicators are always prepared – and can say what they want to in a sentence (the ‘party line’), a minute or two (the ‘elevator pitch’), or in meetings (the ‘questions and answers’ or ‘Q&A’). But consistency demands practice. Here are three tools to master.

1 Yourself... in a sentence

Develop a ‘party line’ for confronting that dreaded question – usually asked at parties – “so what do you do, then?” Start by writing out a simple answer – 40 words or less – then try to boil it down still further. Practice it again and again until you sound relaxed and confident.

2 Yourself... in a minute or two

A more sophisticated version of the ‘party line’ is the ‘elevator pitch’, based on the idea that you find yourself alone in a lift with an incredibly important contact and have fewer than 15 floors to attract their interest.

Five *elevator pitch* essentials: your name, party line, market, key benefit and proof (e.g. awards, recommendations, track record, time in business). It’s also a good idea to add something a little bit quirky, so that you stick in people’s minds.

An elevator pitch needs to be practised – ideally with someone you trust to warn you if you have a mad glint in your eye.

3 Yourself... in a meeting

The last thing you should do is all the talking. As well as active listening and asking questions, you need to be prepared for the questions that will be fired back at you.

Ever noticed how people interviewed on TV are seldom stuck for answers? This is because media training has prepared them for the questions they’re likely to be asked.

Even if you don’t expect to be on *Newsnight* soon, some DIY training can make a real difference to how you explain what you are and what you do. So:

- Brainstorm all the things people might want to know about you and your business (including the questions you really don’t want to be asked).
- Write down clear, consistent answers in a ‘question-and-answer’ (Q&A) format.
- Grab a friend and practise, practise, practise.

Finally, with a really good Q&A in place, extract extra value by making it the basis of an FAQ (‘Frequently Asked Questions’) section on your website, or as a handout.

Personal Brand Tools

What differentiators make you stand out from others?

Brand Building

What proof (awards, testimonials etc.) backs up your claim?

What words show your personality e.g. traditional, innovative, friendly etc.?

What is the essence of your business?

What benefits really attract your customers?

What are your core values?

Start with solid foundations

- 1 Research your market and target audience.
- 2 Do a SWOT analysis to check strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities.
- 3 Repeat (1) and (2) at regular intervals - the world changes quickly.

- 'it makes me *happy*'
- 'it makes me *attractive*'
- 'it saves me *time*'
- 'it makes me *successful*'
- 'it makes my life *easier*'
- 'it helps me *understand*'
- 'it increases my *peace of mind*'

3 Start building the brand

Now start pinning down the *values* (e.g. exclusive, fun, modern, traditional) that lie behind your brand and should therefore sit at the heart of your business. Ask:

- What does my brand stand for? (e.g. 'classic craftsmanship with a contemporary twist')
- What values should be at the heart of my business and its communications? (e.g. 'old fashioned courtesy, modern service standards')

You also need to be thinking about the *personality* of your brand:

- How can your values be brought to life? (e.g. each product is beautifully wrapped and comes with a hand-signed certificate, but the logo and packaging are clean and modern)
- How do you want your customers to think about your brand? (e.g. "I get old world reliability but without fuss, and modern designs that fit my lifestyle.")

In an impersonal world, it's often a good idea to build your brand on the foundations of what *you* stand for. Current successes include James Dyson and his Dysons, Richard Branson at Virgin, Ben and Jerry with their face on every tub of ice cream, or Stelios who stands for the cheap airfares you get at EasyJet.

It works even more easily for small businesses. When the Head Distiller of Middleton Very Rare Irish Whiskey personally signs the label on every bottle sent out, he is guaranteeing the quality of the drink and making sure every customer gets a unique product.

4 Now test the brand

It's all too easy to get carried away at the building stage, so you need to assemble *proof* of the promise your brand is making. You might *want* to be "the world's biggest bookshop", but most of your customers probably know that Amazon already owns that space. The key questions here:

- Why should customers believe you?
- What real evidence can you show to give you credibility?

Classic methods include awards, news coverage, testimonials, infrastructure, technology, and length of time in business.

Five-Step Branding

Building a company brand should be an ongoing process – something you keep working at as your company changes and grows. But the most important thing is to get something down on paper from the start – forcing you to be explicit about your brand values, rather than leaving them half-formed in your head.

Before starting this five-step branding process, a few don'ts: don't do this alone, don't take too long, and don't take it too seriously. Branding is about a bold appeal to emotions, and you want to get ideas flowing, not provoke an identity crisis.

1 Think about where you are, now

Working out "who am I?" and "what is my business?" has never been easy – so don't expect to come up with a perfect answer. Instead, use your research results to make an educated guess – which you can then test in the real world. Whatever you do, don't get overwhelmed by data and end up sitting on the fence.

A proven way to build something more definite out of new information is a classic business strategy tool, the *SWOT analysis*, looking at Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Developed in 1965 by a founding father of strategic management, Igor Ansoff, it looks at:

- **Strengths**
What advantages and strengths (e.g. skills and resources) do you and your business have? What do you do well?
- **Weaknesses**
What weaknesses stand in your way? What could be done better? What should you avoid? (Be honest!)
- **Opportunities**
What opportunities are there in the market? What do your target customers want – and need?
- **Threats**
What could go wrong in the market place? What competitors are challenging your position?

Start with a quick *brainstorm* to gather as many ideas as possible. Next, edit the results down into a short, coherent statement under each heading (for the future development of your business, you should also think about how to turn weaknesses into strengths – and strengths into opportunities).

2 Think about what you need to achieve

What will make your customers buy from you? What benefits do you offer that people will value more highly than the money you charge?

Try to pin down a key *insight* that captures what your customers want ("I deserve to be pampered because I work hard", "I need this to become a healthier person", and so on) and then list out the *benefits* you offer them. Common benefits include:

It's important that you have a unique selling point (USP), so think about what makes you stand out from your competitors. Ask:

- What's your edge?
- Why should customers choose *you*?

For a long time, many people saw price as the most powerful differentiator. But now businesses are realising that some customers place a higher value on other factors: excellent service, charm, speed, or being local.

5 Finally, boil it all down....

Now it's time to turn all this into the very *essence* of your brand – the core promise you make to your customers.

Start with something a few paragraphs long, but then cut it back until it's no more than a (short) sentence or two. Some companies turn this into straplines – think of British Airways' "The World's Favourite Airline" or Hyatt Hotels' "We've Thought of Everything". Now try out your version on people. You should be able to get it across quickly, clearly, simply – and with clout.

And always remember – your brand is a promise, and it's a promise you're going to have to keep.



The brand you develop needn't be highly sophisticated or complex – simple brands are often more powerful. The Honeywagon is an unusual but compelling example of such a brand. And it's a story that starts where many small business brands end: down the plug-hole.

Disposing of waste. Emptying tanks. Draining. Dredging. Cleaning. This is not a glamorous business. But Hertfordshire-based 'sewage consultant' The Honeywagon has outshone the competition by single-mindedly building a brand based on service excellence.

Even by its name, The Honeywagon sets itself apart from the bog-standard AAA Septic Services. It starts to tell a story to customers – honeywagons, driven by a 'honey-dipper', have been emptying posh privies since medieval times. As The Honeywagon's owner, John Dicks, says: "our name makes us different and memorable. It's really caught on. Now people phone up and say: 'can you send the honeywagon round?'"

John knows that a good name is only the start. Let's face it, if you need a contractor to deal with the unpleasant aspects of life, you want the job done with minimal fuss – and often you want help fast. So The Honeywagon's brand is based on an obsession with customer service:

They're *fast*. For example, if they send two men in a state-of-the-art truck to clean and empty your petrol station's tanks, they'll finish in under an hour. The competition takes all day, leaving petrol pumps out of commission all that time.

They're *flexible* – John uses the high-tech Global Positioning System to track all his trucks (an idea John stole with pride from the fleet industry), so he can get the nearest one to you as quickly as possible.

And they're *listening* – drivers bring back customers' comments and *every* job is followed up with a telephone call ("is everything OK?"). A feedback form goes out with every invoice. The Honeywagon promises quality and *knows* whether customers think it keeps this promise. They're also reluctant to let a customer escape. Once you're on the database, you receive a Christmas card, a newsletter – and, most important, a reminder when your 'service' is due again.

The strength of The Honeywagon's brand shines through their employees. Rosie Dicks, John's wife, says "they do a great job because John teaches them to think like him."

What The Honeywagon has done isn't hard to *understand*: a clever name (that tells a story), well presented staff and good service. Delivering the brand is tougher. The well constructed brand needs to be diligently practised so that customers know what to expect and staff work to high standards. And margins are high – because the business sells on value, not price. *That's* brand magic. Cleaning up – by cleaning up.

Case Study A Simple Brand, Done Well | The Honeywagon Story



3 Total Communication |
Consistency, clarity, clout, creativity, content





I'm here to live my life out loud.
Emile Zola, French novelist

In this chapter
messages
graphic design
logos
logotypes
livery
creativity
expertise
*living under a new identity:
the footprint story*

Messages, Not Noise

Businesses exude communication from every pore.

There are personal signals: *clothing* (appropriate, clean, odd, memorable, co-ordinated); *grooming* (hair, nails, odour); *behaviour* (timekeeping, courtesy, friendliness, active listening); *communication* (clarity, concision, interest).

There are business signals: *things* (company name, website, notepaper, invoices, logo, adverts, packaging, giveaways, press releases); *events* (meetings, presentations, interviews, press conferences, Christmas parties); *actions* (answering the phone, giving hospitality, making good coffee, saying sorry and thank you).

And there are unconscious signals: *tone* (culture, working atmosphere, employee buzz); *emotion* (warm or distant, professional or sloppy, modern or old-fashioned); *body language* (does your business seem like a leader or a follower, eager for business or plain desperate, genuinely fond of its customers or secretly hostile?).

Total communication means getting all these signals to work together. Whether you're communicating internally or externally, using old or new media, in a one-on-one meeting or running a nationwide advertising campaign, everything needs to communicate your brand values to carefully targeted audiences.

It's a tough task.

To succeed, you'll need Communication Principle No. 5:
The Five Cs of communication – consistency, clarity, clout, creativity and content.

C3 | Clout

Today, people are assaulted by information at every turn – getting your messages heard above the din has never been more difficult. Speaking clearly and consistently is a good start – but today, only communicators with clout get heard.

Clout is about being bold. It means taking some of the money you've saved on keeping it simple and blowing it on something that really stands out.

Think about using an object to make a real impact (a designer hand-stamped apples with his logo and the instruction 'try me'), or turning up in an unusual place (on the back of raffle tickets, on litter bins, at roundabouts or sponsoring local sports equipment – the list is as long as your imagination).

Remember to keep things personal, using your clout to give your business more authority. By and large, people listen to experts (unless they think they've got a motive for lying) – so always build your communication on a solid knowledge foundation. Respect for your authority will get people communicating messages for you: "You should try Bill's Widgets, they know everything there is to know about widgets."

Remember, too, that clout isn't shout. Confidence is often quiet. As artist Peter Schmidt put it, "when everyone in the room is shouting, the one who whispers becomes interesting." Think of mime artists standing stock still in city centres, or the guards outside Buckingham Palace.

Creative energy makes communications come to life. It's a vital tool for small businesses that can't use money to communicate themselves out of a corner.

Creativity is more than the odd good idea – it's a state of mind that pulls all your communications together and makes them fizz. It's also a demanding *standard* that asks "is this really good enough to go out the door?"

The first creative step is to accept that even you can be creative.

Then you need the right stimulation to achieve results (it's a myth that people are creative out of thin air). Build up a bank of creatively stimulating toys, images, magazines, leaflets and so on. Look at really *bad* communications against really good ones – why does one work and one not?

Focus on making odd and intriguing connections (as creativity evangelist Per Grankvist puts it, you need to "think like a kid, but act like an adult"). Ask lots of infuriating 'why' questions. ('Why is it like that?' 'But why?' 'Yes, but why?').

C1 | Consistency

Here's that great communicator Winston Churchill on consistency:

If you have an important point to make, don't try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time, a tremendous whack.

Communication can only be effective if you are consistent – and consistent for long enough for people to notice. A rule of thumb is that people ignore two out of three communications that come their way. They need to hear the same message about nine times before they actually remember it. So you need to repeat a message at least 27 times before you can expect it to have lodged in their heads. (Now please read this paragraph again.)

To be consistent, keep it simple:

- Pick a target audience.
- Brainstorm a list of everything you want them to know.
- Sort the list into 'nice to know' and 'need to know'.
- Commit – *really commit* – to stay faithful to these messages (and vow to consort with no others) until they have well and truly done their job.

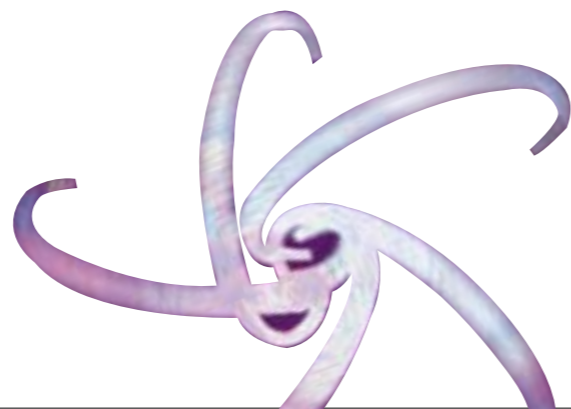
Clarity demands restraint. It's always tempting to put in that extra paragraph, photo, illustration or font. But you'll only be clear if you obey the dictum: less is more.

At the heart of achieving clarity is a clear *visual identity*, where everything you communicate *looks* as if it belongs harmoniously together. It's an area where big businesses can spend millions, but you can do it much more cheaply. As long as the ingredients are fresh and well chosen, the recipe can be quite simple. The core ingredients are:

- A *logo* – a graphic like the Nike 'swoosh', Lacoste crocodile or Apple apple, or a *logotype* – a logo based around how the words in the company name are presented (e.g. in bold, italic or a striking font or colour), as used by most supermarkets and car manufacturers.
- A 'livery' or colour scheme – one or two (rarely more) consistently used and carefully matched colours e.g. Barclays' blue, Coca Cola's red, Harrods' gold and green, McDonald's yellow and red.

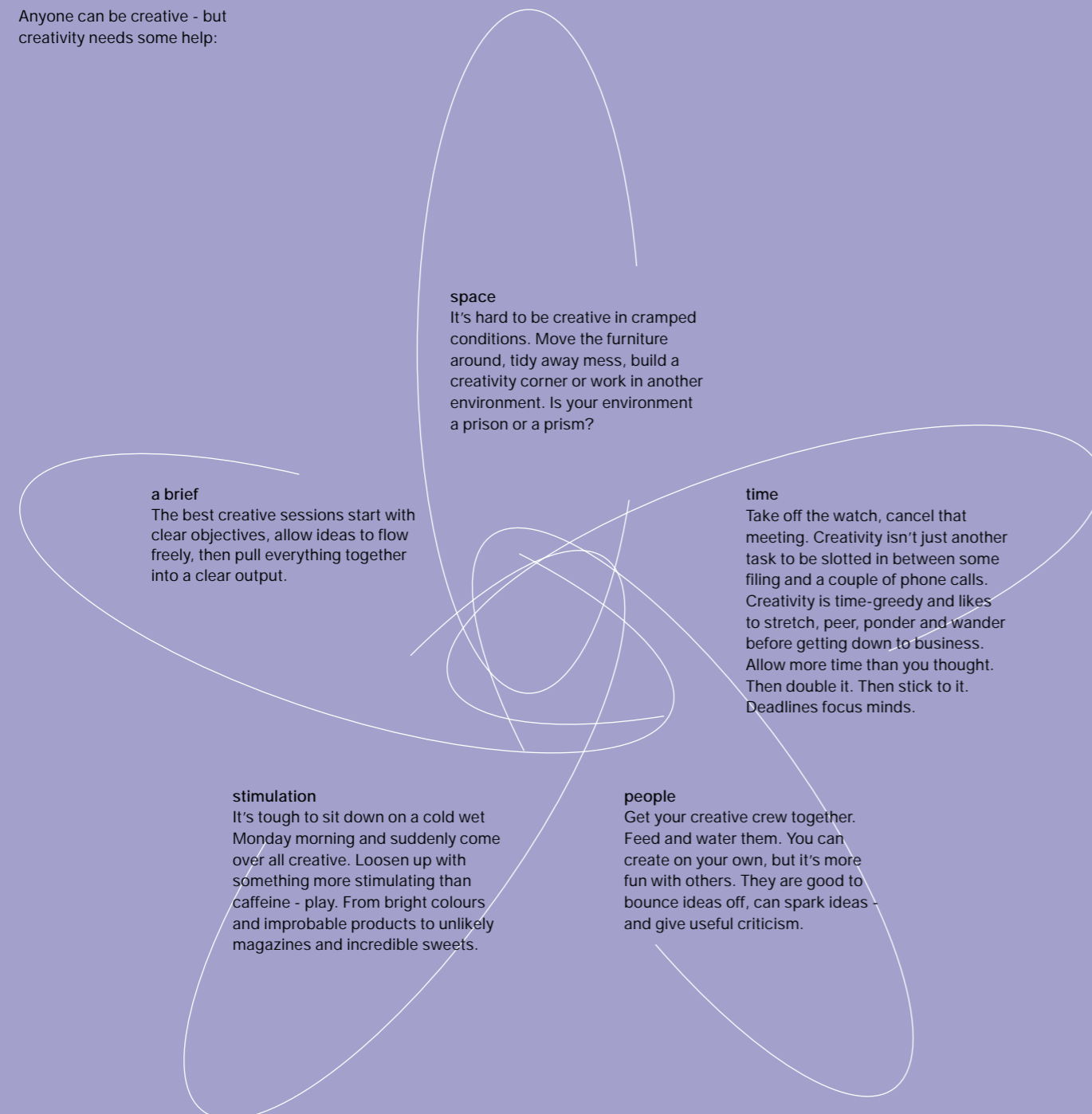
These then need to be built into a 'look', maintained across *everything* you do. Don't neglect verbal clarity, either – clear messages, wrapped in stories, in effective language, are part of your identity too. And once you've built your identity, stick with it.

C2 | Clarity



Creativity

Anyone can be creative - but creativity needs some help:



Finally, to find that twist, turn things around a bit. Mix, match, change, turn, push boundaries. For example, to get a quick, fresh look at a design you've been working on for a while, turn it upside down. Or ask yourself (or your team) the kind of question guaranteed to make you think new thoughts. What if we did it for nothing, or made it cost twice as much? What if we made it bigger, or smaller? What if we did the reverse of what we're planning?

Be consistent. Be clear. Communicate with clout. Be creative. It's pointless to do all of these if you neglect the last C and go into battle without the right content.

C5 | Content

According to guerrilla marketing expert Jay Levinson, communications fail for three main reasons: lack of commitment, lack of clear benefit, and not having a distinct position in the market. If you don't believe in what you're saying, it's not going to work. If you don't give people what they want, it's not going to work. And if you don't open up clear blue water between you and the rest, it's not going to work.

Your brand and research should give you clear clues about the content you need and how to express it. Here are some content tips to get going:

- Say *something* – try to talk about things that matter to people, and show you understand how they feel.
- Say it *naturally* – why on earth should people make an effort to understand your jargon?
- Say it *honestly* – the truth will out, sooner or later. In a cynical world, the best business relationships rely on trust – hard to win, quick to lose.
- Say it *passionately* – if you *really* believe it, there's a chance others will too.

Watch Your Sell-by Date

Your communications need to stay fresh – especially with so much changing so quickly. (James Gleick's book *FASTER – The Acceleration of Just About Everything* came out in hardback in 1999. By the time it reached paperback in 2000 it was just called *FSTR*.)

Change can be hard work, though, so take shortcuts. Watch out for interesting new magazines, to get a head start on new looks, colours, attitudes and ideas. Plug into younger people. Give them time to roam the net. Ask them to show you what they like. It might look ridiculous, of course, but the future often does.

And don't hang around. Start-up Echo Design – makers of fine and eco-friendly furniture – learned this lesson early on. Director, Richard Swift:

When we first looked at websites, it all seemed terribly complicated. In fact, if you keep it simple, almost anyone can do it. Because we were in a hurry to get the site up, and had so little time, we just got on and did it. We're really pleased with the result – I sometimes think if we'd spent longer adding more bells and whistles it wouldn't be half as good.



TFA (formerly The Flooring Association) is the UK's leading independent supplier and installer of raised access flooring. TFA grew so rapidly it hadn't had time to think about its corporate image. Then it realised, in the words of Finance Director Paul Smith, "that we wanted to communicate to our customers a change – that we'd grown up into a company offering a highly professional, rapidly responding service."

They went for advice to Business Link West London's design manager Pamela Frazer. Pamela takes up the story: "The original logo was overcomplicated, didn't communicate what the company did and didn't reproduce well. They'd designed it themselves. I found their main written contact with clients was by fax. When I got them to fax it through to themselves, the logo came out as a blur".

As well as a clearer look and bolder logo, TFA had other needs from their corporate identity. Working with Pamela, they created a detailed brief, asking questions like "Who are we? What are we? What are we selling? Who are we selling to? At what level? What's different about us?" This searching examination formed the basis of a tight brief that included 'humour' – a characteristic shared by TFA's three very different founding directors.

Next they went looking for designers. "The first couple we saw," says Paul Smith, "were not for us – a bit woolly, not very real world. Then we saw Jackson Earle and liked their approach. Like anything, you buy from people, and we related well to them."

Jackson Earle take a strategic approach to their design work – which means asking a lot of questions. Co-founder Peter Jackson explains: "To really benefit from design work, a client needs to put a lot of thought into it beforehand to establish a clear brief. The better grip we have on a client's objectives, the clearer direction our design will have. But clients have to be realistic, too – it's much better to build on what you really are than pretend to be something you're not."

They now have a bold yellow logo, underpinning a strong, clear identity. But what everyone talks about are the cheerful footprints (an oblique reference to flooring), on the back of everything from their business cards to their invoices. Pamela Frazer again: "As a smaller company, I firmly believe you can't, and shouldn't, do the big corporate thing. But what you *can* do is do it *differently*, and add some personality. People remember the footprints – and when it comes to marketing, getting remembered is half the battle."

The new identity got them into the final at the prestigious annual Design Effectiveness Awards and has had an impressive impact on the bottom line. According to Jackson Earle: "Converted sales from quotations increased by 30% immediately after the introduction of the folder/envelope and the new identity – a £1 million increase in turnover."

There's a final bonus, which is that employees have also gained from the new corporate identity. As Paul Smith notes, "it helps communicate to our own people and say 'this is what it's about, this is what it all means', because sometimes there's too much emphasis on selling outwards, and not enough on communicating inwards."

Case Study Living Under a New Identity | The Footprint Story



4 People Power | Communicating culture

In this chapter
internal communication
commitments
planning
satisfaction survey
information sharing
systems
contracts
procedures
handbooks
induction
leadership
teams
tasks
meetings
reviews
*a clear company culture:
the windscreen story*

You can take my factories, burn up my buildings
but give me my people and I'll build the business right up again.
Henry Ford, car maker

Building A Communication Culture

Good communication starts at home.

In a healthy business, *everyone* – even the boss – knows what's going on. Creativity and independent thinking are encouraged *and* rewarded. Employees become brand ambassadors – personally expressing the company's values in every aspect of their work.

Building a *communication culture* isn't easy.

Fib a little to a customer who only buys once a month and you might get away with it. Lie to your employees (or yourself) and you'll soon be in big trouble.

But the rewards for success are great.

Get it right *internally* and your business will radiate positive signals to the outside world. Signals that say "we're well managed, know what we're doing, confident, successful and not about to go bust". A set of signals adding up to one important message: "We are the *best* people to handle your business".

So how *do* you project a powerful, professional and vibrant internal identity? The first stage is to make a clear commitment to internal communication.

Commitment is about adopting three key standards.

- 1 "We'll be open about information."
Traditional organisations restrict the flow of information. Knowledge, after all, is power – and if you can't use your knowledge well, at least you can keep others in the dark. Modern business, however, values *transparency* and operates on the assumption that *all* information should be openly shared, unless someone can demonstrate a pressing reason for privacy (for example, salaries).
- 2 "We won't leave communication to chance."
It's natural to communicate, especially with people you work with. But it's far too easy to take it for granted and leave important things unsaid. People *may* know what's going on without being explicitly told – but you can't be sure. "I'm sure she knows how important she is to the business," is the kind of thing said the day before a star employee announces she's leaving. Build a *systematic* approach to communication into the way you do business.
- 3 "We won't make promises we cannot keep."
Every day, businesses make bold and radical promises. Six months later, when they're in the same mess, they make some

The Commitments

more. And so it goes on. But while organisations have short memories, people have long ones. *Never over-promise*. Instead, communicate an achievable objective. *Record* your promise (perhaps in a 'book of promises'). And when you've achieved a goal, tell *everyone*. "We're the kind of business that keeps its promises" is an incredibly powerful message.

And... Action!

With your commitments in place, it's time for action.

As always, the first step is to ask some questions. An *employee satisfaction survey* will give you a snapshot of what it's like to work in your business. Take great pains to make the survey anonymous – and then take a deep breath. If you haven't done this before, you could be in for some nasty surprises.

Next, you should make sure that some basic building blocks are in place. At the very least, *everyone* in your business has a *right* to expect:

- **A contract of employment.** A basic right, and a legal obligation, but many companies still don't have them.
- **A health and safety procedure.** Another legal requirement, but also a powerful signal: you care about people's welfare and are working to keep them safe.
- **An employee handbook.** A handbook tells an employee *how a business works*. It makes explicit all that implicit knowledge, and sets clear standards. From answering the phone and making coffee to dealing with customers and handling common problems, your handbook will help create the consistency every business needs.
- **A proper induction.** In many businesses, the new recruit is sat at a desk and expected to get on with it. But this is someone you want to live your brand! Take time to introduce new employees to your culture, explain what is expected of them and find out more about what they can contribute.
- **A clear disciplinary and grievance procedure.** If something goes wrong, this must be communicated. An unhappy employee won't perform, while a non-performer can poison your culture. If you don't have a clear procedure – and follow it religiously – an industrial tribunal will find against you every time. And being found guilty of unfair treatment or dismissal doesn't do much for your reputation as a model employer.

You can, and probably should, take information sharing much further. Other key areas include:

- **Business plans.** The best way for people to understand where you want the business to go, and how *they* can help you get there, is through the current business plan. Give everyone a

copy – or run a workshop to take people through it (and encourage input into the next one).

- **Current financial information.** This takes trust, but it's important if you want people to really understand how *they* can make a difference to the bottom line. Why not build a financial 'dashboard', updated weekly or monthly, displaying key financial indicators in a format everyone understands?
- **Individual development plans.** An individual development plan is a powerful way to show you're investing in your people and want them to stay in the long term. These days, training and development are one of the most powerful reasons to take, and stay in, a job. It's a straightforward equation: to grow your business, your people need to grow.

With everyone really talking to one other, you can start building strong teams. Even if there are only two of you, how well you work together is crucial to your success.

According to John Adair – a world expert on teams and leadership – high-performance teams have three characteristics.

- 1 **Everyone is clear about how the team works and their place in it.**
A team needs clear goals and it needs to understand how these fit into the business's strategy and brand. Goals should always be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) – and it is important that they are not gradually forgotten. Just like the business, the team needs to build a reputation for keeping its promises.
- 2 **Everyone is clear about the task.**
A team will take on many different tasks, and perhaps the most common reason for failure is a lack of clarity about what needs to be done, who is going to do it, and when. Good briefing is therefore a *vital* – but often neglected – communication task. Brief formally, face-to-face and with a clear record everyone can agree and sign off. If a task goes wrong, you can then go back to the brief and learn lessons for next time.
- 3 **Everyone knows what is in it for him or her as an individual.**
Most companies expect people to take on *responsibilities*; good companies give people *rights* in return. Perhaps the most powerful way to do this is to tie performance, based around clearly defined objectives, to profits. The more you align someone's interests to those of the business, the better performance is likely to be. Fulfilment is about much more than money or status, though. Give team members the opportunity to do things they are good at, and give them support in the

First-Rate Teams

To grow your business, grow your people. One of the best ways to do this is to become an Investor in People. Over a third of the UK workforce is now in an organisation that has met the Investors in People Standard.

In organisations that have not met the Standard, 63% of staff are unhappy with their jobs. This figure falls to just 6% in companies who have 'invested in people'. Such satisfaction translates into the bottom line, too. 80% of Investors in People report increased customer satisfaction – and 70% report improvements in their competitive edge and productivity.

The Investors in People standard is a set of four principles expressed across 12 indicators:

Investing In People

Commitment

- 1 The organisation is committed to supporting the development of its people.
- 2 People are encouraged to improve their own and other people's performance.
- 3 People believe their contribution to the organisation is recognised.
- 4 The organisation is committed to securing equality of opportunity in the development of its people.

Planning

- 5 The organisation has a plan with clear aims and objectives which are understood by everyone.
- 6 The development of people is in line with the organisation's aims and objectives.
- 7 People understand how they contribute to achieving the organisation's aims and objectives.

Action

- 8 Managers are effective in supporting the development of people.
- 9 People learn and develop effectively.

Evaluation

- 10 The development of people improves the performance of the organisation, teams and individuals.
- 11 People understand the impact of the development of people on the performance of the organisation, teams and individuals.
- 12 The organisation gets better at developing its people.

work they do – and you're well on the way to building a high-performance team.

Finally, remember that there's more to your team than work. Creating the right culture should be fun – so create spaces where people can bond by sharing interests beyond work.

Think about away-days – getting out of the office always brings a new perspective. Why not spend a day 'role-playing' some of the things your customers do? Or arrange a fact-finding tour to a business you admire and could learn from?

As a team takes off, it will develop its own momentum. Because people feel appreciated and heard, they'll feel able to contribute in unexpected ways. New ideas about how to make the business grow, or a more pleasant working environment, will *inevitably* emerge.

Every team needs meetings: occasional ones to set team goals and review progress; more frequent ones to manage a task as it moves from briefing to completion.

However, meetings are often the epitome of failed communication. Either they're dominated by opposing armies fighting for inches of territory, or they're time thieves, swallowing motivation and energy for little tangible output. In many companies, the meeting that gets something done fast is a rare (or extinct) beast.

Successful meetings start with an agenda: a clear idea of what the meeting is supposed to achieve. It's a good idea to categorise each meeting so you get the right people along, and they know what's expected. It's no good getting all creative when you're really trying to tie up loose ends. Equally, getting obsessed with detail is lethal when you want to think up new ideas.

Here are three types of meeting:

1 Pathfinder

Aim: A new idea – and a way of seeing if it works.

Techniques: Brainstorming, creative thinking and prototypes.

Questions: What if? Where do we go from here? How do we do this?

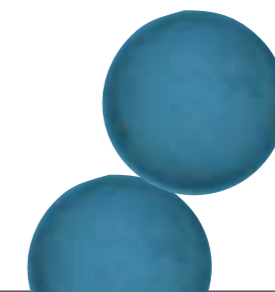
2 News meet

Aim: To keep information flowing through a team.

Techniques: Brief presentations, minimum discussion and a quick finish.

Questions: What progress have we made? What are people doing? Is everyone clear?

Making Meetings Matter



3 Flight plan

Aim: Exert leadership and refresh the team's sense of mission.

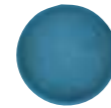
Techniques: Clear, well considered presentations.

Answers: This is how it is. This is what we're going to do. This is the part you'll be playing.

Get people into the habit of spending time preparing for meetings – even if it's only for a couple of minutes. It can make all the difference, encourages people to stick to the agenda (though you don't have to be too rigid about this – there's always 'any other business'). A brief preparation phase might even help you decide you don't need to have a meeting.

Follow-up is also important. Spend a couple of minutes at the end summarising what has been agreed and write this down. Make sure you come back to this document – it's a promise that your team needs to keep.

Feedback



Feedback completes the internal communication loop. A *performance review system* will help you make sure that everyone is contributing to the best of their ability, and help them tell you what is right and wrong about your business.

You need *formal reviews* at least twice a year. At each review you need to:

- analyse performance against objectives over the past 6 months
- discuss training and development needs
- adjust objectives for the next period.

Reviews should be carefully planned and results recorded. It's also important that the *employee* does most of the talking. This means creating an atmosphere where people are confident and comfortable enough to talk about what's holding them back.

Feedback should also be informal. Create as many routes for informal feedback as possible – and try to always acknowledge high-quality work. Aim to give everyone a space to talk about what they do, what they've achieved – and their future ambitions. Use a notice board or, better, a simple *intranet* – homepages on the internal computer system (see chapter 6).

Finally, don't forget to repeat your employee satisfaction survey at regular intervals. Sharing the results is a tangible way to show improvements – especially when, according to business magazine *Fortune*, the ability to attract and hold talented employees is the most important predictor of the world's best companies.

Case Study A Clear Company Culture | The Windscreen Story

When John Reeds, Managing Director (though he sometimes describes himself as 'Team Leader') of Bedfordshire-based Rejel Automotive says "business is about people", he means it. Rejel's eight employees, supplying parts to fit windscreens, have helped the company become a recognised leader in its field.

"It's all about culture," says John, "I take on people who have the basic skills, but are enthusiastic. Then it's about developing culture. It comes from the top at first – but then everybody needs to be a part of it."

The strong Rejel culture is based on:

- **Training:** people have the right tools to do the job
- **Attitude:** all employees live the business's brand
- **Empowerment:** everyone knows they will be backed up in the decisions they make.

Rejel's most powerful initiative has been to publish its 'Aims and Commitments'. Developed by the team as a whole, it's a single page stating customer service goals – and a set of clear criteria for measuring success. Customers also receive a quarterly report, externally audited, which says if those standards have been met.

Staff and customers love Rejel's standards. Some customers even phone up to try catching out the company on one promise – to answer every call within 15 seconds. But competitors hate them – describing their successful approach as 'unfair'.

As John says, "when the competition are unhappy, I know I must be doing something right!"

Rejel's Aims and Commitments

- Our aim is to offer a world class service
- Our aim is to continually monitor and improve quality
- Our aim is to deliver the customer's requirements
- Our aim is to exceed your expectations
- Rejel aim to get it right first time.

If a product fails to meet your expectations return it for your account to be credited.

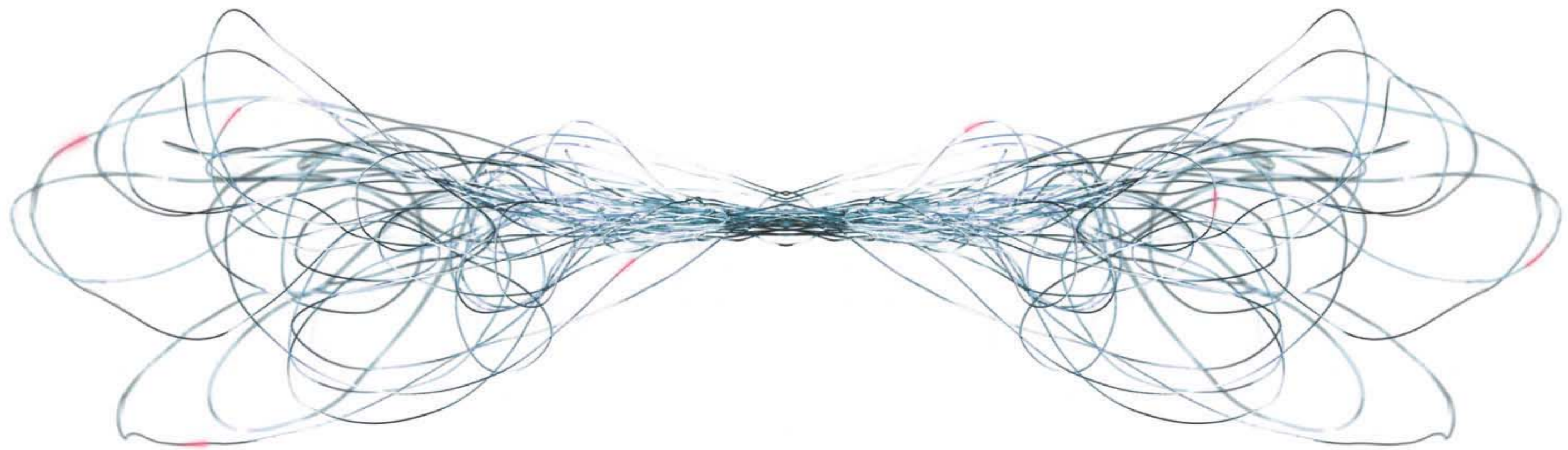
Rejel are confident we can fulfil our aims and commitments.

We will use customer surveys and reports to prove we are "the best in the business".

Our commitment to you is this:-

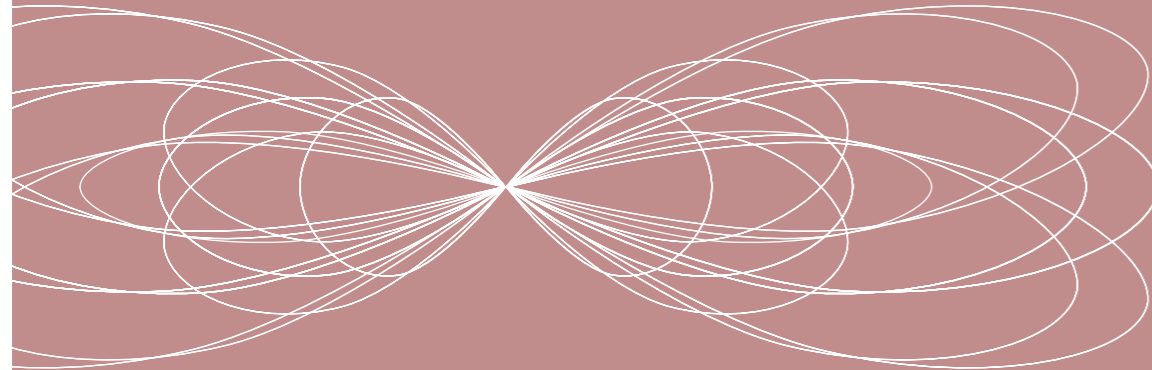
- 100% items delivered correctly
- 100% of lines in catalogue kept in stock
- 98% of all phone calls answered within 15 seconds
- 95% of quantities ordered, available from stock
- 30 minute response time to acknowledge orders and enquiries





5 Getting Word Out | Marketing for mere mortals

Marketing is not a function, it is the whole business seen from the customer's point of view.
Peter Drucker, management pioneer



In this chapter
personal marketing
presentations
direct mail
mass media
copy
design
materials
contact plans
advertising
press releases
public relations
editorial
customer service
testing
freebies
going national:
the toastmaster's tale

DIY Marketing

Big business spends a fortune on armies of sales people, whole departments dealing with direct marketing, promotions, PR and advertising – and a host of external agencies. So small business needs to be cunning, and use any opportunity to talk direct to customers, and get 'free' or low-cost publicity when possible.

DIY marketing has a crucial advantage. Many people think big businesses are soulless, relying on mass advertising instead of one-to-one communication. Small businesses can seize the initiative by remembering the Five Cs:

- consistency – stick to your *brand building*, and key messages
- clarity – keep it simple and get it 100% right
- clout – stand out with crisp, clear and targeted messages to specific audiences (and tell people what you want them to do, not just what you want them to think)
- creativity – tickle people with bold and creative communications
- content – don't use empty slogans: tell interesting stories instead

Today's communication market is extremely competitive. So think quality, quality, quality – too many small businesses accept what they know, in their heart of hearts, to be mediocre work.

There are three ways to get word of your business out and about:

- personally: talking *face-to-face*
- direct marketing: putting materials *into people's hands*
- indirectly: using *mass media*.

Face-to-face communication is hard to beat – but is often taken for granted. Don't make the mistake of letting too much distance develop between you and your customers...

The Personal Touch

1 Create a contact plan

Be systematic about regular contact by creating a *contact plan* for all your audiences. The annual Christmas card is not enough.

2 Practice makes perfect

Your party line, elevator pitch and Question & Answer session (see chapter 2) will help send consistent messages – but only if you practise. Find time to *role-play* common encounters with customers, for example over the counter, in meetings, at a pitch, and so on.

3 Perfect presentations

Giving short presentations each time you meet a client forces you to prepare, rather than just trusting to luck. Unfortunately, presentations can petrify: in a recent poll, asked what scared business people most, 'nuclear war' came eighth and 'death' ninth. At number one? 'Speaking in public'.

Here are five tips for preparing great presentations:

- Focus on your *audience* – not yourself (or the screen). They're usually on your side, and want to hear what you have to say. Face them, look at them, interact with them.
- Bring *visuals* (whether slides or something to hand round) – but think *clarity* and *clout*: make them simple and powerful.
- Memorise the *beginning* and the *end* – and do the rest from notes. Practice at least once. Preparation helps conquer stage fright.
- Tell a story – or two or three. However short, however simple. Stories bring presentations to life.
- Talk less, not more. Know how long you're expected to speak – and then plan (and practise) to be at least 25% shorter. On the day, it'll almost certainly take longer than you expected.

Finally, if you make a lot of presentations, and they're important to your business, consider some professional training.

4 Peer-to-peer

Business is often about being in the right place at the right time – so *network* regularly. Chambers of Commerce, conferences, trade associations and shows will all help you spend time with the right people, practise messages, learn – and pick up business. Make time to take key contacts out to lunch.

5 World-class customer service

Your most powerful face-to-face communication is *how you do business*. This is why the best small businesses pride themselves on world-class customer service. You'll have the best face-to-face marketing if you *really* care about this – because satisfied customers will put out the word for you.

When you can't communicate face-to-face, get your marketing materials *directly* into the hands, eyes, ears and above all *minds* of your target audiences. This means using the right materials the right way – often quite a challenge for small businesses.

1 Materials matter

Traditionally, too many small businesses settle for second best. Poor design. Unwieldy copy. Cheap paper. Predictable formats. So think big, think small, think shape, think colour, think touch, think different. Think: anything to grab attention.

- **Right copy.** Short words, short sentences, short paragraphs. Use language that's fresh, friendly and fun. If you're *not* a natural writer, sketch out what you want to say and find someone who writes well. Finally, delete some text and see if it survives – it usually does.



Marketing Direct

Good Copy

Good copy is a business essential, from advertising and press releases to brochures and direct mail. **AIDA** is a simple mnemonic to help you remember the four cornerstones of writing good copy.

Attract

Grab attention. Fast. Short choppy sentences help.

Does asking questions work? Yes, it does. Questions speak directly to you.

Humour can beguile. Tell stories too.

Having grabbed attention, you have to **Interest** your reader.

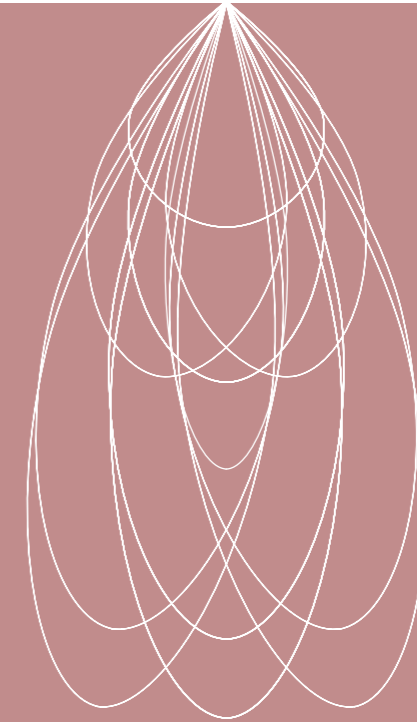
What benefits does your product or service offer? Are there any outstanding features? Have you cut prices or are you running a special offer? Do you have a new product or service? Have you moved, upgraded or won an award? In short, why are you taking up my time?

Okay, so I'm attending, and interested. What **Desire** in me are you going to unleash?

It might be exclusivity or saving money for a limited period only (while stocks last). It might be an emotional need (wallowing in luxury, feeling safer or more healthy) or something intellectual or even spiritual. Whatever it is, you need to tweak one or more desire hot buttons, to stimulate enough hunger to keep my attention and interest, and lead to the next stage.

Aaaaand... **Action!**

OK, I'm nearly sold. But you must tell me what you want me to do. Do you want me to pick up the phone or send an email to get a free catalogue? Visit your showroom at a particular time or cut a coupon for an extra saving? Enter a competition? You name it, but make it as easy as possible to act. Enable people to write (preferably by freepost), phone (24 hours a day), email and or visit your website. Make it easy. Make it clear. Make it action.



- **Right look.** Use a single, bold visual: too many distract the eye. Photographs are effective, especially of people. Cartoons can also work well, especially if they're funny. Avoid visual clichés. Stick to high standards – and be wary of using free clip art from your home computer that looks like, er, free clip art from someone's home computer.
- **Right materials.** Try making your brochure a different size (even when your printer shakes his head and tells you A5 will be cheaper). Or go for an unusual finish. Silver lettering to give you 'a touch of class', or text that's embossed (raised) or debossed (indented), a simple 'die cut' (a cut out through a page), or an unusual paper or card. Ask your printer and designer for their clever ideas.
- **Right testing.** Read it aloud to yourself – how does it sound? Then try staff, friends, family. Then a target audience. Avoid howlers by using an electronic spell checker or, better still, a proofreader – surprisingly good value for money.

2 Reach the right people

There's a trade-off between the number of people you target and the quality of your communication. Obviously if you were 100% successful you could afford extremely high-quality materials – you could probably take them all out to dinner. However, response rates to direct marketing can fall as low as half a percent, with an even smaller proportion resulting in sales. The quality of your *customer* list is therefore crucial.

In order of priority, go for:

- **Frequent buyers** – your core market: make them feel special.
- **Existing customers** – most business is repeat business, so know who your customers are (name, address, telephone number, email, etc.) and keep in contact.
- **People you meet** – getting out and about gives you the chance to put materials directly into people's hands.
- **Warm contacts** – any previous relationship is a chance to re-establish contact. Use a personalised letter to make sure your target knows why you're getting in touch.
- **A mailing list** – in some businesses you need to use other people's lists. Make sure they are current. Some lists are riddled with mistakes, costing you money and goodwill.

3 Use freebies

From vouchers to freebies, everyone likes a little bit extra. The World Bank gives away squeazy globe stress balls and NTL have sweets with their logo on. And T-shirts get worn again and again.

Gifts are powerful communications. If someone has helped you out, a well chosen 'thank-you' will be noticed – and remembered. There are plenty of online resources to send everything from wine, flowers and cheese to chocolates and book tokens.

To reach a big audience you need to tap into the mass media – but it's not an easy game. Either you have to pay for space (*advertising*) or turn yourself into news (*media relations*).

Advertising helps you build *awareness* (people have heard of you), develop *understanding* (people know what they can buy from you), and create *belief* in your product or service. The most important choice is where to advertise. You should be tightly focused on your target audience, and you'll need to carefully measure cost-effectiveness – is it worth it?

Once you've found what works, stick to it. For months, if not years. Advertising takes long-term commitment – and if you can't do that, you shouldn't bother. As guerrilla marketing pioneer Jay Levinson explains, one-shot adverts *sometimes* work, but people sometimes win the lottery with their first ticket, too.

For small businesses, it's clearly crucial to get the most from your budget. Don't expect your ads to do too much: simply generating good leads is achievement enough. Here are some tips from AdvertExpress.com, which helps small businesses buy advertising:

- **Negotiate** – calculate what an ad is worth to *you* before negotiating a price. Last minute and special discounts are often available, so use your figures to strike a good deal.
- **Plan** – you'll get much better prices if you can make a longer-term block booking.
- **Position** – identify the best position for your ads and consider writing a 'blank cheque' for whenever a particular space isn't being used (again, you should get a good discount).
- **Measure effectiveness** – always build response mechanisms into your adverts (freephone number, web and email address, postal address), but use a different 'response' code on each ad so you know which work (e.g. Contact Bill Smith in one ad, William Smith in another).

The space is likely to cost a lot more than the ad itself, so don't cut corners – use really good design, ideally from a professional. Become *advertising aware* by looking through publications to see what grabs attention. Ask yourself *why* it works – and then steal with pride, add a twist, push the boundaries and make it your own.

Having spent good money designing your ads, make the most of them. Display original artwork or send copies to key customers (especially if you've shelled out for a really prestigious publication).

Press Pass

Editorial is the kind of media attention most businesses really crave. And because it's not paid for, it doesn't suffer from the "well you would say that, wouldn't you?" effect.

The Mass Media Game



Inch for column inch, editorial (from opinion pieces to news) is almost always more powerful than advertising. But what's the best way to get editorial coverage? Public relations (PR).

With PR, perhaps more than any other form of communication, the Fifth C – content – is king. Journalists will only respond if you have something truly interesting to say.

Is your story *really* going to grab people who listen to this radio programme or read that newspaper? If unsure, find out. Try ringing to ask: "we're planning to launch a new widget, do you think it's a story you'd be interested in?" If the answer is no (and it just might be), then you need an *angle* to make your story more interesting. Three things always get attention: *win*, *sex* and *free*. So if you phoned and said: "Posh is launching our new widget and giving away free T-shirts, *and* your readers can win Becks for the night," they'd be interested.

Once you've got your story, you need to:

- Write a *press release*. Keep it short and *sell your story*, not your business. Journalists are inundated with hundreds of press releases every day – and most go unread. Follow up with a call. Get on the phone, tell your story – and tell it quickly. If they don't use it, you're likely to find out what they want next time.
- Get *visual*. Send out professional photos taken with your release (labelling each with your name, number and a caption). Or consider a photo-shoot, where you get in touch with the picture desk and try to get them to send a photographer along. You'll need something special – lots of children or a celebrity or two are good bets. Both together? Even better.
- Work out *who to send it to*. It's no good just addressing a press release to *The Times*. You need a named contact. Start building your own press list by working out who covers stories you're interested in. You can buy media lists as well.

Just like your ads, make the most of any coverage you get. Send copies to customers, frame it in reception, use a quote in your next brochure or recruitment ad. Anything to spin out the effect.

However you contact the outside world, you'll soon be *promising* something. But if you make a promise you can't keep, your communications will go disastrously wrong. Instantly.

Always double-check your *content* before releasing it into the wild. Is everything true? Can you prove it? And if it isn't true – are you 100% sure no one will find out, especially in an age of email and the Internet? Almost certainly, the risk just isn't worth it. Remember, a good reputation takes years to build – but is lost in a moment.

Keeping Promises



Reuben Simeon Lynch is Britain's first professional black toastmaster. For years his DIY marketing – word of mouth, some local coverage, and leaving flyers at events – gave him a solid core of local business in the West Midlands. But when he wanted to reach a national audience, he decided it was "time to go to a professional marketing consultancy."

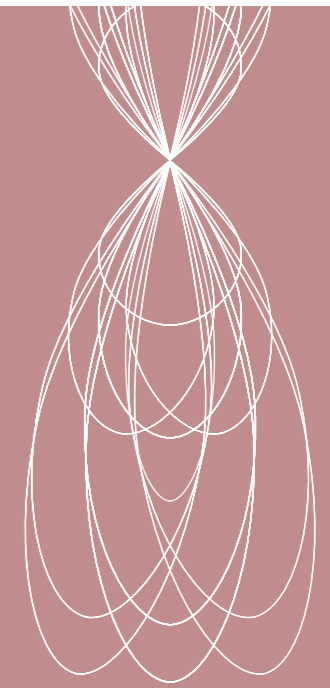
Reuben contacted Nubian Concepts, who specialise in small and medium-sized ethnic businesses. Their Marketing Director, Noella Lynch-Edghill, takes up the story: "When Reuben came to us we analysed his business and decided to focus on his unique selling point as Britain's first professional black toastmaster. We used that as a hook for a range of activities designed to let a wider audience know about him." These included developing a new business card and brochure, alongside market research to identify new opportunities.

As a result of the research, Nubian Concepts booked work for Reuben to present fashion shows at regional wedding fairs and helped him develop new flyers aimed specifically at this target audience. This work led in turn to extra bookings for weddings and other functions. Next came a press and advertising campaign, with Nubian Concepts helping to write copy. They also emphasised the importance of Reuben joining key business networks such as Chambers of Commerce and the Northern Guild of Toastmasters.

Reuben knew he offered a good service, including all aspects of organising a smooth-running banquet, wedding, corporate outing or other event – meeting, greeting and liaising, moving people from room to room and course to course, arranging photographs, announcing speakers and even saying grace. Getting word out was, in his view, about tapping into the right networks. "The good thing about using marketing professionals – any professionals, really – is that they have their ear to the ground, and so they help keep you up to date, because things are moving so fast."

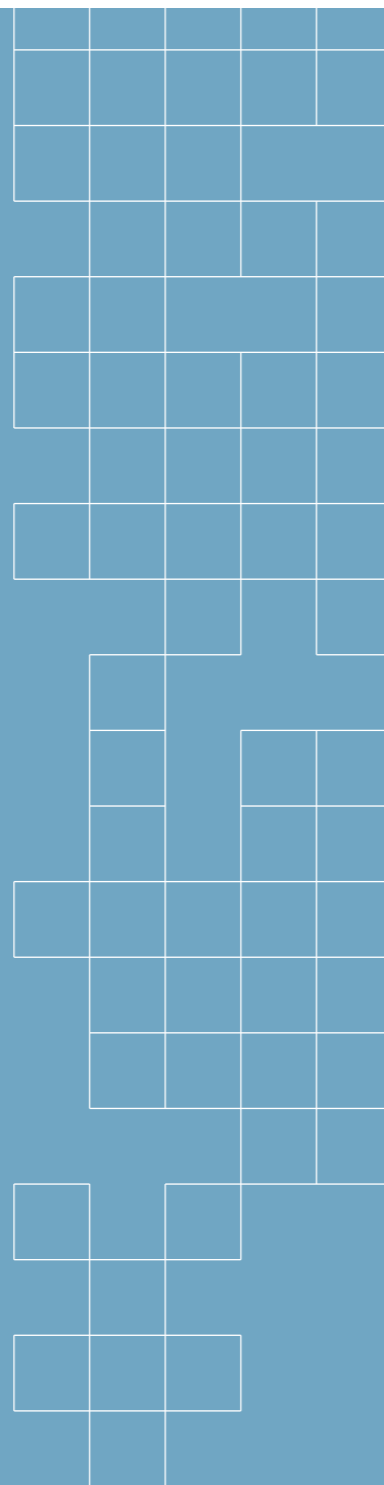
Since the campaign started, Reuben has started getting prestigious engagements beyond his local core market in the West Midlands, including work at London's Dorchester, Hilton and Café Royal hotels. "Quite simply", explains Reuben, "professional marketing has been invaluable to my business".

Case Study Going National | The Toastmaster's Tale





6 Turn It On | 9 Step Techno-Revolution



In this chapter
technology
internet
email
spam
viruses
domains
websites
ASPs
fast connections
wireless
WAP
bluetooth
intranets
extranets
technotherapy
website wealth:
the cheese shop sketch

Once a new technology rolls over you, if you're
not part of the steamroller, you're part of the road...
Stuart Brand, futurologist

The Revolution Has Begun

Small businesses are now joining the e-economy at an astonishing rate: in 2000, nine in ten UK small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) were online – probably the fastest ever uptake of any business technology.

Businesses throughout Great Britain are using the Internet to steal a lead on rivals. Teddington Cheese (see page 79), turned an £8K investment in their website into an *immediate* 10% increase in turnover, while Land Rover parts specialists Mansfield Motors doubled turnover and now sell 20% of their spare parts on line. As Duncan 'Mansfield Motors' Mansfield puts it: "The internet levels off the playing field with larger competitors. It has made this business really exciting."

But there can be downsides, too. Online customers are at least as demanding as offline ones – and a lot more fickle. This means your website has to really make an impression. And if you're taking orders, delivery performance and customer service need to be outstanding.

Then, of course, there's the technology. We can't promise you years of trouble-free technology, but we can help you get with the revolution. Sit back for our nine steps to technology heaven – and for the really nervous, don't worry: step 9 is technotherapy.

Step 1 | Surf's Up – The Net Result

Start online.

If you don't know how, learn now. Then you can keep an eye on the very latest developments and research in your sector and see what the competition's getting up to.

Follow a tutorial or get face-to-face training. Easier still, get a friend to teach you – surfing the net is so amazing that people are keen to share the buzz.

To get going, use a good search engine, or check our links on the Everything Communicates site to some of the best small business websites. Survey after survey shows Google is *the* search engine to use. According to *Time*, Google has "uncanny speed and accuracy".

Step 2 | Where it's @ – Don't Fail Email

Use the power of email. Like the internet, it's radically changing how we do business. Some email tips:

- Use it every time you can. It's cheaper, quicker and more flexible than a letter or a fax. Emails get straight to people's desks. They can be printed, copied, stored and forwarded.

- Responding is easy too – so you're more likely to hear back quickly. Remember, though, people also expect *you* to reply to *their* emails quickly, too.
- Learn the email rules. Like any form of communication, email has its own etiquette. So *do* be more informal, *do* spell check every email before you send it, and *do* add a 'signature' with your name, number and web address to each mail. But *don't* send people large unsolicited files, *don't* forward every joke you receive to your whole address book, and *DON'T* WRITE EVERYTHING IN CAPITALS (this is viewed as a kind of electronic shouting).
- High emotions and email generally make for a poor mix. Think carefully if there's likely to be serious emotional content involved in a communication – it might be better to pick up the phone or do it face-to-face.

A word about spam.

Sending spam (electronic junk mail) is a definite no-no: almost everyone hates it, and your mailbox may well be overwhelmed by abusive replies. You'll also be breaking your Internet Service Provider's Terms of Service – and could find yourself cut off.

On the net, you need to practise *permission marketing*, which means sending promotional emails *only* to people who ask for them – and making it very clear on *every* mailing how people can remove themselves from your list. And if you're collecting information about people, remember to check with the Data Protection Registrar, too.

Having said all that, as you gather email addresses, *do* ask contacts if they'd like to see the occasional newsletter. By providing useful content, you could soon build up a powerful and inexpensive marketing tool. You can also quickly identify how people prefer to communicate with you – whether by email, by post, text messages and so on. Getting it right will help you keep the communication channels open.

Perhaps the most important email lesson is *security*. Most viruses are now spread by email, often sending themselves automatically to everyone in your address book (not a good communication). So:

- Install a virus checker on every machine you own.
- Regularly update – at least weekly, preferably daily – the virus checker's 'signature' file (which detects new virus 'fingerprints').
- Make sure your virus checker scans *all* emails as they arrive *and* leave your office.
- Be extremely suspicious about opening *any* files attached to emails unless you know *exactly* why they have been sent to you. If in any doubt (and bear in mind a lot of viruses are sent



on by people unaware that their files are infected), just delete it before it deletes you.

Step 3 | Domain Game – Invest in Cyberproperty

If you haven't already got one – you *must* try to get a memorable domain. A domain is your very own internet address, like www.thisismybusiness.com for an international business, or www.thisismybusiness.co.uk for one in the UK.

Problem: if you haven't already registered your name, you'll find almost every name you can imagine (and a lot you couldn't) has already gone.

Solution:

- If you're a new business, choose your domain first and make it your business name – not the other way round. These days a domain name is a vital piece of business real estate.
- If you're an existing business and your name is already taken, then you're just going to have to get creative. Can't get www.laundrette.co.uk? What about www.mybeautiful-laundrette.co.uk instead? (You're allowed up to 67 characters for .com, .net and .org, and up to 22 for all other domains such as .co.uk.)
- Try to make sure it's easy to spell, too.

When you *do* find a name, register it quickly, whether you're going to use it immediately or not (there are lots of services where you can park it temporarily). Also consider registering other suffixes, so you don't find another business using a similar-sounding website. (If possible get hold of .com, .co.uk and .net).

Some good news – for the first time in several years, a whole new set of 'top level' domain names are coming on to the market. These include .biz (for businesses), .pro (for professionals), .coop (for co-operatives) and .name (for personal names). Move quickly and you might be lucky...

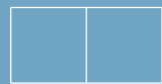
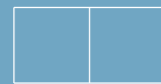
Step 4 | Site Investigation – Does Your Website Work?

You're online, use email and have your very own domain. Now it's time to get your business on the web. Most business websites go through three stages:

- 1 The 'I'm here website'. This can be as little as a page with your elevator pitch and contact details. Its main function – to make sure that when people go straight to the web to look for (or assess) a business, they can find you, get in touch and see you've at least made some effort to join the revolution. Simple,

Compute Connect

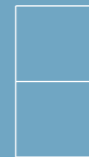
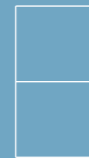
IT computes and IT connects.



Computations for...
Book-keeping
Payroll
VAT return
Profit and loss
Cash flow
Expenses



Connections to...
Make new contacts
Relate to your customers
Find things out
Get supplies
Sell globally



easy, fast. You can even do it yourself on several sites where you register your domain.

2 The 'online brochure'. This is where you really start to sell yourself on the web. It's also where things can go horribly wrong. Simply spraying your offline brochure across a few web pages will not work. You need to think from first principles. *Who* is your website for? *What* do they want? *Why*? Don't expect perfection: a website is a work in progress, so think *little and often*. Don't put all your resources (time, money and patience) into one hit: expect to make a few return passes. Stick to the Five Cs, too: consistency, clarity, clout, creativity and content. Finally, you'll probably be using a web designer: be sure to browse through their previous work.

3 The 'website that works'. A grown-up website with active content, trying to grab some of a global e-commerce market analysts think will be worth nearly \$1234 billion by 2002. This means a fast and sophisticated site with flawless navigation, excellent copy, shopping carts, merchant accounts and all the rest. With the experience gained from your *online brochure* website, you should be ready to make a significant investment – perhaps anywhere from £5–15K – and reap significant rewards.

Some basic website rules:

- **Functionality.** Do some research to find out what your customers want – and what competitors offer. Try to build in as many useful and informative elements as possible, helping your customers to easily do (or know) new things.
- **User-friendliness.** Do some live testing to watch how a few new users get around your site. Do they struggle? What do they like? What comes naturally? Analyse how to make every part of the site as easy as possible. According to Jakob Nielsen, the leading expert on web-friendliness, if you don't do this "you're wasting your entire design budget, because you have no idea whether the design is working or not." Make sure sites are designed to be read on different computer browsers – if necessary, check by using a range of different computers (your own, the library's, a cyber-café).
- **Speed.** Make sure your site is fast-loading – no one has time to hang around waiting for your site to do something. Go for minimalist chic, not acres of visual junk.
- **Freshness.** Make sure you update it at least every month otherwise you'll end up with what is sometimes called a *cobweb*.
- **Easy reading.** According to research for computer giant Sun Microsystems, people don't really read on the web. Instead, they sample, scan and flick their eyes over bits of information. So think: highlighted keywords, bulleted lists, frequent sub-headings and one-idea paragraphs.

- **No broken hotlinks** (i.e. links from one page to another). The web moves fast, so you need to keep checking your site is in ship-shape condition.
- **Avoid excessive design.** Flashing words and lots of clip art don't impress, nor do meaningless photos or animation. (And if it's slow, people go).

Finally, bear in mind that the future of the web is as likely to be local as it is global. Towns, villages, neighbourhoods and even blocks of flats are getting together around highly localised websites. This is likely to be bad news for dodgy builders or careless local officials – because people will share experiences more easily. It will be good news for bright, effective organisations that deliver the goods, though, as they'll get more word of mouth (or website) business. Attract traffic to your site by sharing your local contacts and insider knowledge.

Step 5 | Killer ASPs – New Tools, New Trades

Now for a touch of jargon: the application service provider (ASP). Not only are ASPs the internet's *next big thing*, they could turn out to be the stuff of small business dreams.

An ASP is basically a piece of clever, low-cost software designed to fulfil a business task, hosted on the internet instead of your computer (so you upload and download your data, while they do all the hard work). In effect, ASPs are a good way to access services that once needed the kind of bespoke software only big companies could afford. Currently ASPs tend to be cheap (sometimes free) and highly specialised. But beware: some are still a little rough around the edges, as this way of doing business is only just getting off the ground.

Consider using ASPs to: organise your calendar, manage your time, create an intranet or extranet (see Step 8), host your e-commerce site, evaluate your website, organise your meetings, do your research, store your files, back up your data, run an e-conference, manage your products, even send out all-singing, all-dancing interactive questionnaires.

Basically, if you've ever wanted to do it, there's likely to be an ASP either offering the service – or about to. One ASP is the *Zaplet*, a fast and fun way to collect, analyse and present data. Sounds dull? Well it's not – as Zaplet puts it: "Discuss big issues. Gather opinions. Make group decisions." It's good for arranging meetings, agreeing restaurants or films, approving projects. You name it, basically.

Step 6 | Fat Pipes – Fast Connections

Speed kills. From ASPs to email, brochures to websites, the rate at which you can work in the new world is crucially dependent on the size of your 'pipe'. So – deep breath – let's just face it: if you're serious about this internet business, sooner or later you're likely to need a *faster connection* than that puny modem you were sold as 'fast' a year or so ago. This will not only increase the range of what you can do, it will also save you time.

Now, after years of waiting, it's finally possible to get *broadband* – a 'fat pipe' for data to flow through – at a reasonable price. Try one – and see how long it is before you say: "I don't know how I ever lived without it!"

Until recently ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) was your only realistic chance at a faster connection, but it now looks old-fashioned as several new technologies hit the street:

- **Cable modem.** Transmits around 500 kilobytes (half a megabyte) or so of data each second. (A byte, incidentally, is the abbreviation for *binary term*, and represents a unit corresponding to a single character). Some providers estimate they can equip 90% of cabled homes.
- **ADSL or Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line.** Sends between 500 and 2000 kilobytes (2 megabytes). The downside is that it's limited to just a third of the population.
- **Satellite.** Two megabytes – you'll need a dish and special card.
- **Leased line.** Up to an awesome 155 megabytes per second, but prices can be equally awesome, too.

If you use the web regularly, you should probably 'just do it' and blow the expense. After all, according to the magazine *Business 2.0*, number one out of '10 Risks Business Must Take To Succeed', is *invest in technology* (hotly followed by *invest in people*).

Step 7 | Wireless World – Get Going, Think Mobile

In a world where next big things come thick and fast, the *next* next big thing is the chance for small businesses to go wireless.

Small businesses are, by their nature, pretty mobile. From a high-powered consultant to a jobbing plumber, they tend to get around. And just as the mobile phone helped them break free of the office, so wireless data will tear down those office walls once again.

Here's the heads-up on some wireless trends:

- **WAP or wireless application protocol.** A new way to deliver data to your mobile phone. Massively hyped – and so far massively disappointing. But don't give up: the next

generation of WAP services will offer personalised information services, and if it's not already, your next phone is likely to be WAP-enabled. (By 2003, 85% of mobile users will have a WAP phone.) Look out for ways to put this new technology to use, from personalised content to customers and up-to-date information on roadblocks or hotels to detailed specifications for sales people on the road.

- GPRS or general packet radio service. This is where it starts to get more interesting. GPRS squeezes faster data speeds out of today's mobile phones. The first services are now hitting the streets and offer mobile data connection about as fast as a standard modem, with even faster services to come. It's a *permanently* open connection – no waiting for dial-in access. GPRS should make a huge difference to the way people do business – freeing many users from the need to be plugged into their office network. Expect to be able to use GPRS to plug your laptop, personal organiser – even your car – into the World Wide Web. And stay connected, wherever you are.
- Bluetooth™ – Bluetooth™ aims to give *short-range*, high-speed *wireless* data connection. Does your office look like spaghetti junction? Are you afraid to move offices because of rewiring costs? Bluetooth™ intends to help you plug in *without the plug* by transmitting and receiving data through a short-range radio link. The hope is that when it comes to getting your mobile to 'talk' to your handheld computer, the "tyranny of the cable" will soon be over. Bluetooth, by the way, was the Viking king who unified Denmark. The idea? The modern day Bluetooth™ will unify the wireless world. Much more catchy than yet another hideous acronym. Talking of which...
- UMTS or universal mobile telecommunications system. The big one, the 'third generation' (3G) of mobile phones, licences for which recently fetched a massive £22.5 billion from five mobile telecom operators. 3G is still a way from being launched, but when it is, the promise is incredible data speeds and a truly wireless world.

Don't forget that some of the most powerful wireless technology is already with us. Take text messages – on mobile phones – over half a billion are now sent every month. Businesses increasingly use them to send short, unobtrusive messages to customers. Confirming a delivery? Send a text message. Special offer? Send a text message. It's easy – especially now you can send them from the web. (But don't forget the idea of 'permission marketing' at Step 2.)

Meanwhile, to help make your business and personal life easier, take a look at the growing range of PDAs or 'personal digital assistants' – serious pocket-sized computers that fit into the palm of your hand. And finally, watch out as mobile phones and computers start to *converge*.

Step 8 | In, Out, Shake It All About – Intranets and Extranets

You should be cooking by now and ready to step out and do something even more amazing. Could we interest you in an intranet or extranet?

Building an *intranet* is a lot less expensive (and a lot more personal) than building the internet. Basically it's your own internal 'mini-internet'. It links web pages – any file you can think of – in an internally accessible circuit.

This makes sharing internal information easy. Individuals or teams can have their own areas that are as distinctive, informative (and productively competitive) electronically as their 'real-world' counterparts.

An *extranet* is much the same, only it's accessible *externally* via a password on your website. Develop collections of relevant files and links for major customers. It looks sophisticated (but is fairly simple), makes a lot of sense, and it's flattering for clients to be given their own space, accessible 24/7, 365 days a year.

It's also a tidy way to keep your business relationships alive and in order.

Almost done. You might be feeling a little technoblashed by now. So here's a soothing balm, designed to act as technotherapy when it all gets a bit much. It's a combination of tips, ideas and pointers to make all the tough technical stuff just that little bit less threatening.

1 No-one knows everything

Not even Bill Gates (who famously took a *long* time to wake up to the power of the internet). So if you find yourself feeling a bit baffled, relax – you're in good company.

2 Get with the techies

Today's techies rule the world. So employ one – or make friends with one. With a little care and attention they scrub up nicely and are worth their weight in gold.

3 People Power

There is an incredible amount of online help available, with a whole new generation of experts fighting to catch your attention and help you – for free. People are, quite simply, amazingly keen to share knowledge, ideas, tips, contacts, links, you name it. For once, amazing is the right word. There are now scores of on-line gurus who will email you tips and tricks *for free*.

Step 9 | Technotherapy



4 Talk to us

When you hit www.everythingcommunicates.net you can post suggestions and queries. The site offers dozens of practical tools to help you communicate more effectively. Something you need that isn't there? Tell us what you want and we'll see what we can do.

Clever businesses are technological revolutionaries.

They're looking around their offices, factories and showrooms, and asking: "How well is my technology communicating for me?"

They're asking hard questions. "How much will it cost?" "How much of my time does it take?" "What does it allow me to do?"

They're slowly inching up the ladder, from their first stumbling use of IT, through a network connecting their computers together, to the internet, intranets and extranets which make up a true e-business.

They're using technology to talk to customers and make lives easier.

They're building simple, effective systems to store and manage knowledge and expertise.

They're inventing new ways of doing business.

"They" are you.

Clever Business



When cheesemongers Doug Thring and Tony Parkes of The Teddington Cheese wanted to increase sales in their quiet mid-week period, they started a mail-order operation. Soon, a website on the internet seemed a natural extension. At first a local web design company ran the site, but The Teddington Cheese wanted something they could control and run, making sure www.teddingtoncheese.co.uk was updated and changed weekly. With little computing experience, they invested in training as well as an off-the-shelf software package for their site – 'a shopping basket' to take secure orders online.

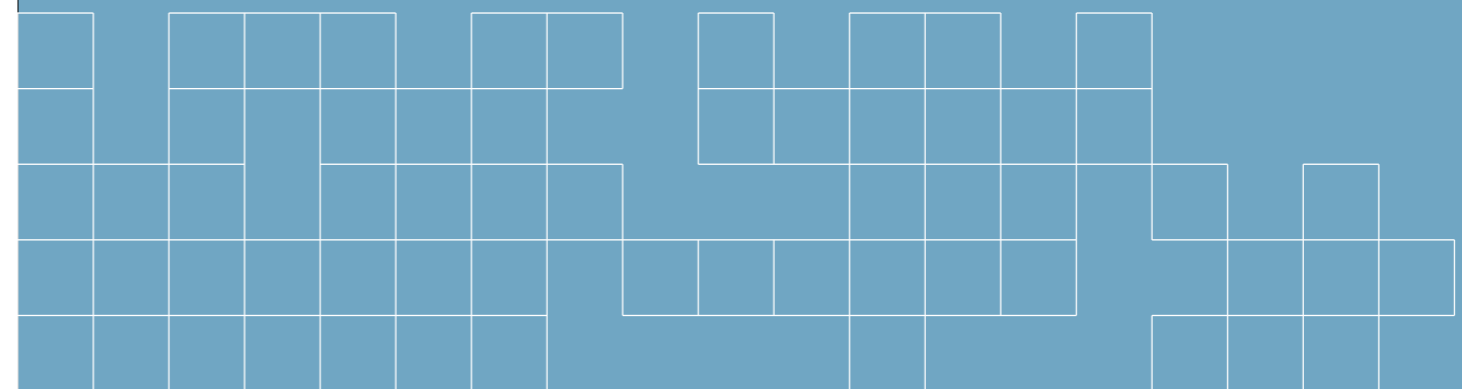
Doug Thring explains the approach: "when customers visit our shop they're able to see, smell and taste all these fabulous cheeses. We've been trying very hard to convey the excitement of the world of cheese to our mail order customers through colourful brochures and our internet site."

Surfers can now order a range of farmhouse cheeses from around the world – and read the story behind each cheese, related cheeses and any good recipes (all from a cheese-coloured home page). The Teddington Cheese has visited many of the farms making these cheeses, as well as spending time researching individual cheeses. All of this combines to give a sense of specialist expertise, rather than what webmaster Toby Gibson calls "a typical floggy website that ships it in and ships it out. We wanted to make sure everyone who visited saw something special and specialist, as this is our target market." As well as cheeses, there are pickles, cheeseboards, hampers, books, ciders and wines. The bi-monthly email newsletter *The Cheese Wire* has been a particular success, while the site also hosts The Cheese Club.

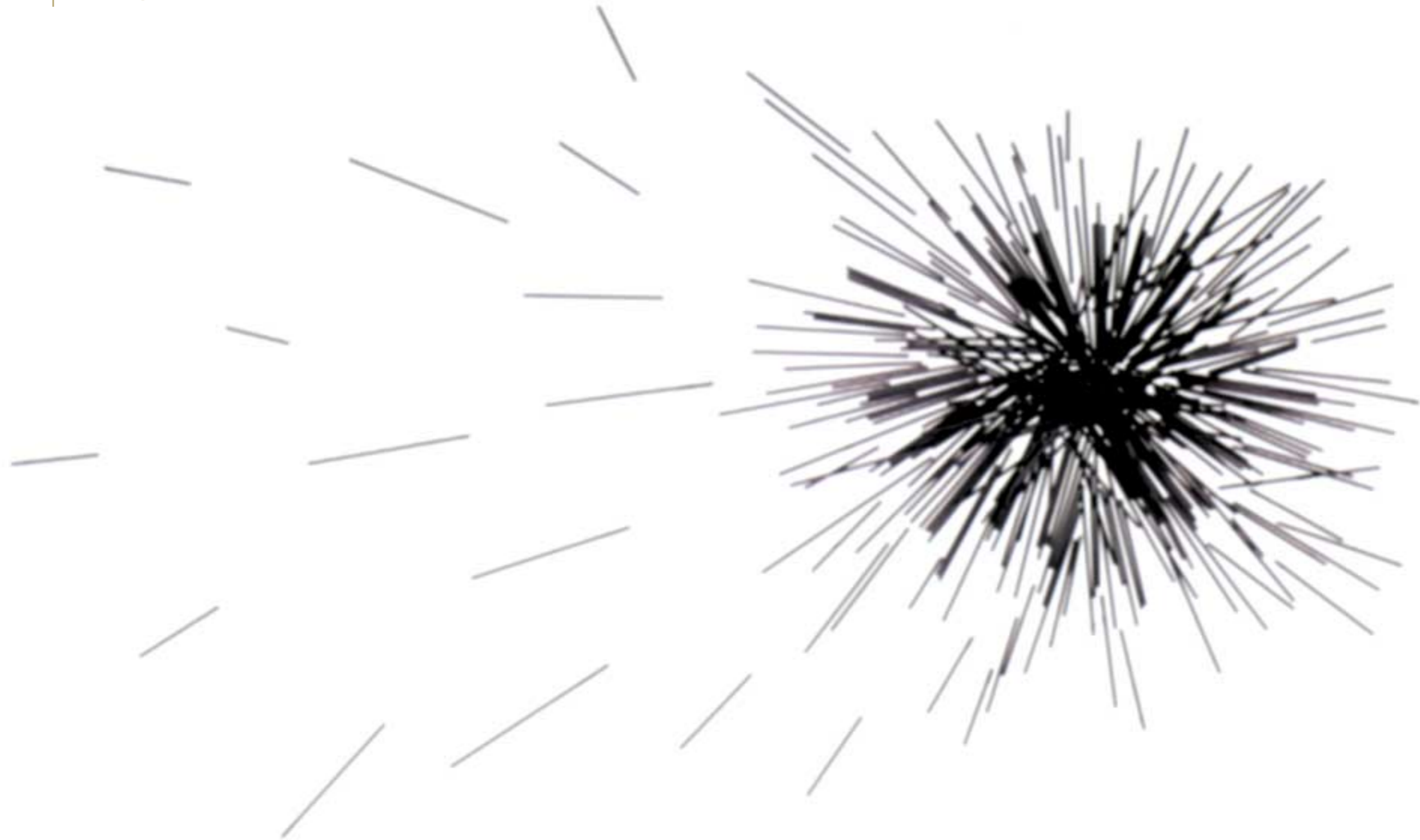
The site has grown steadily to over 20,000 hits a week. Toby puts this down to "current customers, word of mouth, winning competitions and being in guides – we've not done any advertising." They won the London Area ISI/InterForum E-Commerce Award 2000 (which rewards best practice in electronic trading amongst small businesses), and have been a Yell 'Choice of the Week'.

Doug reckons the website directly added 10% turnover, and points out that the cost of initially setting up the website – around £8000 – paid for itself within the year. Because they see the website as complementary to the shop (the 'clicks and mortar' business model), they've also been pleased to find that, as well as UK and overseas email orders, the site even stimulates walk-in custom to their shop.

Case Study Website Wealth | The Cheese Shop Sketch

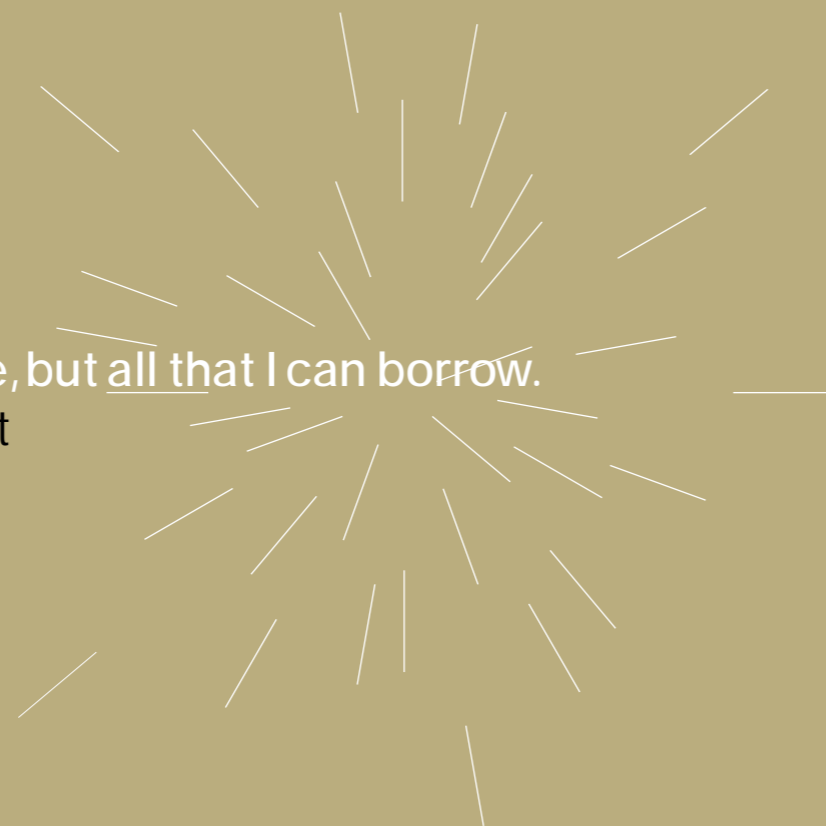


7 The Professionals | Making the most of communication suppliers



I use not only the brains I have, but all that I can borrow.
Woodrow Wilson, US President

In this chapter
attitude
planning
confidence
trust
research
shortlists
pitching
the brief
agreements
planning
boundaries
deliverables
sign-off
time
cost
quality
creativity
*PR as partnership:
the Brighton rock*



Technology is making communication faster, cheaper, easier – and better. Standards are rising relentlessly. Look at a typewritten letter from 10 years ago and put it alongside today's laser printed masterpiece – the leap in what people *expect* to see is remarkable.

In such a competitive world, sooner or later every business needs professional help to make their communications fizz.

From design to copy, proofreading to print, web companies to network specialists, advertising to PR, there's a plethora of agencies and consultants ready to sell you services.

But we've all heard the horror stories. Seen the leaflet mangled by the designers. Heard about websites that never got finished. The big campaign that flopped.

So here's a guide to getting big-spender service for the smaller budget business.

Pros, Not Cons

When commissioning communication professionals, the watchword is attitude. *Your* attitude.

Your attitude will affect *your* confidence, *their* attitude – and *their* confidence. Ultimately, the attitude you bring defines the kind of work you get.

The right attitude stands (or falls) on these three legs:

- **Planning.** Carefully planned work is conveyed by a good brief, a clear grasp of the management issues (who will communicate with whom, how sign-offs and payment are made, and so on), and an understanding of where a piece of work fits into your overall communications strategy.
- **Confidence.** You rate yourself, your business and the communication task at hand – and you convey this through a confident, engaged and *personal* interest in the job's progress.
- **Trust.** Once you've selected your pro, trust their judgement as you would a doctor or lawyer. When they disagree with you, listen. They'll often know more about the target audience and what to expect from, say, good design.

Attitude Solution

Do Your Homework

You want to invest in the best – so spend time and effort doing some background research.

Approach everyone in the Yellow Pages, Thomson's Local Area Guides and any online directories covering your area.

Build a 'long-list' and ask suppliers who catch your eye to send catalogues, brochures and examples of work. Visit their website and – especially if they're designers – take a close look at how they present *their* brand. Formally assess your first impressions.

Whittle down the list before phoning up to explore some key factors:

- How old/young, big/small, busy and stable (in terms of clients) is this agency?
- What is their main area of expertise?
- Do they have experience of your specific need?
- Do they work with small businesses or will you always be playing second fiddle to big business accounts?
- Can they show you a cross-section of relevant examples?
- Who will actually do the work on your account? The impressive senior partner or a junior hidden away in some back room?
- What procedures do they have in place to ensure your job goes smoothly?
- Who are their current, past and long-time clients?
- Any specific client endorsements or awards?
- Do they have real creative flair or does it all look a bit 'samey'?

Above all:

- *Do they (want to) understand you, your business and your needs for this project?*

Don't expect them to be experts in your field – but be sure they have the ability to learn. Rely on instinct – however impressive an agency may seem, if you're not comfortable, they shouldn't make it onto your shortlist. Finally, if you don't understand something, don't be afraid to ask!

The Brief – And To The Point

Once you have your shortlist, arrange a pitch. This means preparing a brief to obtain your selected suppliers' suggestions as to how they would approach getting your job done. Within the brief you can explain what the job is, why it's important to you and what you think needs doing, by when and possibly with what resources (finance, tools, people).

It's *incredible* how few projects do this properly. If you don't brief, you don't think it through. If you don't brief, you don't communicate what you want properly.

The (almost) inevitable result? Confusion, misunderstanding, rage, tears at teatime.

Or even worse, starting again because it really won't do. Every creative professional has their favourite nightmare (so do most clients).

As a rule, every brief should cover:

- **Your company.** Who you are, what brand you try to project and which audiences you focus on.
- **The project.** What's it called? What's it supposed to achieve? Who is it targeted at? Why is it important?
- **Deliverables.** What do you expect? When? What will success look like?
- **Boundaries.** What are the parameters within which they *must* stick (though try to keep these broad – you don't want to cramp creative energies), including a suggestion of what your budget is likely to be.

Once you've sent out the brief to your shortlist, give them a week or so to think about it. Then have them over to your office (or better, go and see them) to assess what ideas they've come up with. To help you sort the wheat from the chaff, judge each *pitch* against a checklist. Finally, if you already have a strong favourite, or the job's not that big, consider a 'non-competitive pitch' where you go through the same process but with one bidder (only moving on to the next if the first is not up to scratch).

The Lengthy (But Flexible)

Even when you've awarded the job – it's not time to relax. You need to refine the brief and the supplier's proposal into a firm agreement of what will be delivered, and when.

You must cover:

- **Cost.** What will the *exact* cost of the job be, when is payment due, and how will any increases in the budget be authorised if your requirements change?
- **Contact.** How you expect to be kept in touch with what's going on, and how often you want to hear from who?
- **Deliverables.** Really try to pin this down: if there are going to be three drafts, get this down in writing as 'three drafts'. Specify milestones that you wish to see completed as the project develops – define these in terms of timelines and resources.
- **Terms & Conditions.** Ideally make sure they're signed by both sides (before the job starts.)

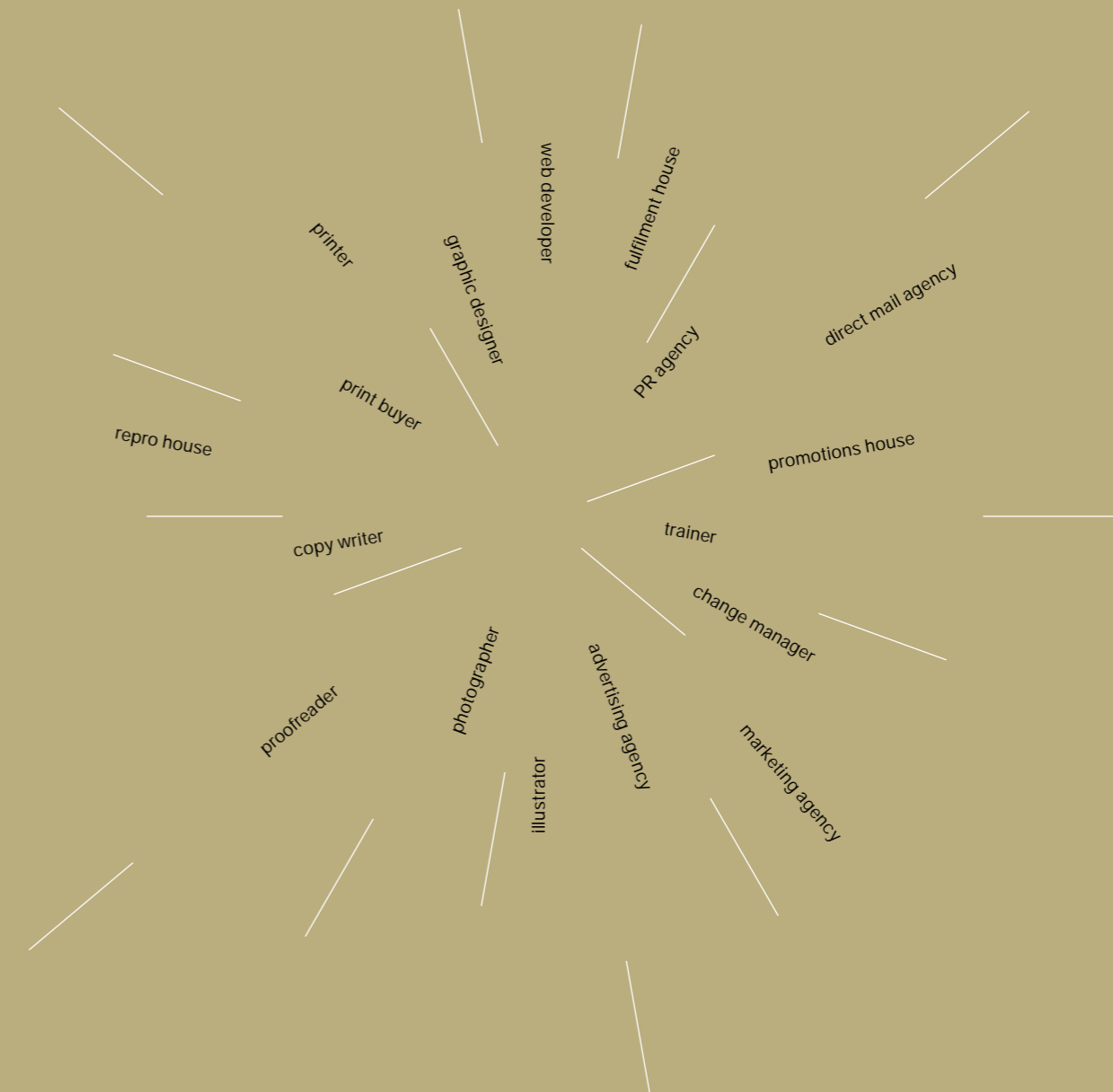
Bear in mind, though, that buying creative communication services isn't quite the same as buying 10 litres of white emulsion. Be sufficiently flexible to let fresh ideas and possibilities emerge as work progresses – but not so flexible that a project ends up tied in knots.



Suppliers

Need Help?

Try a...



The Big Trade-Off: Time x Cost x Quality

Time. Cost. Quality. Very few projects meet all three simultaneously. The low-cost, high-quality job – delivered to an impossible deadline – rarely happens. (The expensive, low-quality job that's late is somewhat less rare.) The smart small business uses judicious amounts of time, money and effort to squeeze extra value from suppliers.

Most suppliers want a chance to do something that really stands out. If you *can* plan ahead, get a project going early so they have plenty of time to experiment on your behalf. Every design, PR or ad firm has really radical creative ideas they've never succeeded in selling to a client because most clients are simply too conservative. Extra time can also help both sides find ways to shave costs and free up resources for that extra touch.

Tap into that strangely powerful – indeed, almost criminally subversive – creative energy, by being a radical, risk-taking client. The consultants will love you for your bravery and vision and for letting them play with some of their favourite ideas. You'll get oodles of extra (and uncharged for) time devoted to your project because excitement takes over, and people work on their own time deep into the night.

Above all, you get radical and high-profile communications that *really* get noticed.

Ruth Prosser turned to public relations (PR) when she launched James House Associates (JHA) to offer human resources and employment law consultancy to businesses in Sussex. "We were selling advice," she explains, "on everything from employing people to 'disemploying' them, so traditional advertising wasn't really a route for us. We wanted to be positioned as experts – and that meant public relations."

However, it took a while to find the right company for both her needs and budget. "To be honest, we were very frightened about the potential cost. We spoke to lots of people who said 'we'll deliver a miracle' and wanted large sums of money for it, but were vague about how the miracle would happen." When Ruth found the Brighton-based Priory Partnership, she was immediately impressed: "They were very professional – they had good ideas and clearly explained what they were going to do, and when they were going to do it."

She also felt "it was a budget we could live with. There are a lot of people out there who'll take your money, but with Priory we had everything in black and white. We always knew what they were going to do, and after every meeting we got a note setting out who had agreed to do what." The results came quickly. "Very early on, we had a company ring up in response to a newspaper article they'd seen and say 'we need you right now' – this led to a major contract." One other factor made a deep impression: "We were one of their smaller clients but didn't feel they made us feel that way. So, all in all, we felt we were getting value for money."

Ruth estimates that PR helped expand the business three-fold. How did they do it? Carol Nemeth, an Account Manager at Priory, explains: "Our whole approach is about added value, so we got Ruth to jot down a series of bullet points on key issues, and turned that into Factsheets, press releases and feature articles as appropriate. The Factsheets were sent to contacts on a business network database we sourced and added to, and were an immediate success. They struck just the right balance between being helpful and informative but without giving everything away."

Ruth found this "a very smooth process, requiring a small amount of information from us that they then turned into a set of different information aimed at lots of people." Being flexible and responsive strengthened the professional relationship. "We tied the outputs to emerging stories – like new legislation or a high profile maternity case," says Carol, "and identified and booked speaker opportunities at local business network events, like management lunches, for example." Ruth remembers that "they took the trouble to find out what we did and weren't afraid to be flexible if an opportunity came up. So if a major new piece of legislation came along, and they could see a chance for a radio interview – they'd go for it."

This sense of teamwork characterises most successful professional relationships. Carol: "We had an excellent client who we could rely on to deliver if we secured a speaker slot. It felt like a good team relationship." Ruth agrees: "We had to wade through a lot of people to find the right person, but when we did, there was a real synergy at work."

Throughout the campaign, there wasn't a month when Ruth wasn't in every Sussex business publication, as well as making regular appearances in the business sections of the local press. Ruth again: "PR is one of those things people think is only for big blue chips, but if it's right for you, and you can find the right person, then it can really work."

Case Study PR as Partnership | The Brighton Rock

8 Everything Communicates | Small is beautiful



In this chapter
the book
the website
communicate!

It ain't what you do it's the way that you do it
It ain't what you do it's the time that you do it
It ain't what you do it's the place that you do it
And that's what gets results
Fun Boy Three with Bananarama
Lyric by Sy Oliver & James "Trummy" Young, 1939

In 1973, E.F. Schumacher published a hugely influential book, *Small is Beautiful*, which asked how the global economy and the individual could possibly fit together. Back then, the internet was a bunch of problems and Microsoft hadn't been born.

Today, technology offers a chance for individuals and small outfits to really thrive in a global economy. This is particularly true of small business, for so long the poor cousin of the business world. They can look, sound and act professional at a fraction of what it once cost.

Not every small business wants to become a global megabusiness. But whatever you want to do, doing things well will make it easier. Especially communicating *well*. Because everything communicates.

Small Is Beautiful

A Local Business For Local People

Part of the beauty of being a small business is that you're close to the ground. Customers and suppliers are local (even if 'local' is a customer on the other side of the world who feels close, via personalised email and the internet). Local and personal implies that real people are involved. People with names, not roles. In a busy and seemingly impersonal world, this can be an incalculable advantage.

Just as business is changing, so are customers, suppliers, employees, even you. Keeping up with that change has never been easy (try listening to the Top 40 all the way through). But it's also never been more important. The lubricant to make it easier: communication. Because everything communicates.

Last Look At The 10 Communication Principles

This book sets out 10 communication principles, and then looks at several key areas – research, branding, culture, technology and so on – where they operate. But life is about more than principles. On the website, these principles come alive, with dozens of tools designed to help you *just do it*.

- **Everything Communicates.** Find out how what kind of communicator you are.
- **Know What You Want.** Set objectives and analyse how to reach them.
- **Look, Listen and Learn.** Research your audience using forms, templates and procedures. Learn from experts via our selection of great small business websites.
- **The Five Cs.** For consistency, clarity, clout, creativity and content, you need to plan. Use our marketing planner to get your priorities straight.
- **Tell Stories.** We can't tell your story, but you can follow up the case studies (and other examples we've used) online. There are also references to the websites, books and people we've mentioned (plus many we haven't).
- **Steal With Pride.** In fact, on the web people rarely steal, as it's mostly given away free. To start off, check out over a hundred specially selected small business links online.
- **People First.** We hope we've convinced you of the importance of personal communication. On the web there are tools to help you build a culture that really communicates.
- **Be Yourself, Have Fun.** Boring and communication don't go together, but the chances are you'll sometimes be stuck for a new idea. Browse our tools, books, websites – and even quotations – for inspiration.

Getting it wrong is one thing. Not being out there is far worse. Remember, above all, the principle without which the rest don't matter: *Just do it!* Silence *isn't* an option – because everything communicates.

Last Word

Communicate.



Tools on the Web

Planning Zone

- 1 How good is your communication?
- 2 Action audit
- 3 Setting communication objectives
- 4 Communication plan
- 5 Communication planning test

Brand Land

- 1 Master your party line
- 2 SWOT analysis
- 3 Brand building
- 4 Brand ripples

Research Lab

- 1 The research process
- 2 Research plan
- 3 Focus group checklist
- 4 Customer feedback form
- 5 How to research a company
- 6 Test your listening skills
- 7 Open and closed questions
- 8 Telephone interview checklist

Culture Corner

- 1 Employee satisfaction survey
- 2 Learning assessments & record
- 3 Job description tool
- 4 Pre-review checklist
- 5 Formal review tool

Publicity Drive

- 1 Audience profiler
- 2 Audience contact plan
- 3 Press release template
- 4 Press release checklist
- 5 Marketing plan

Techno Beat

- 1 Good website design
- 2 Getting a website
- 3 Brief for the website designer
- 4 Is e-commerce for you?

Getting Help

- 1 Finding suppliers
- 2 Sample PR brief
- 3 Supplier assessment
- 4 Sample terms and conditions

www.everythingcommunicates.net

Ever since River Path Associates started out in 1997, we've been a small business interested in how life is changing for small business. From two people working out of a spare bedroom (eating far too many takeaways), we've grown to employ nine people. We are experts on innovation and enterprise, act as consultants to several smaller businesses, and have won awards for our work on the communication revolution. More on River Path at www.riverpath.com

A full list of sources, references and materials used in this book can be found on the website www.everythingcommunicates.net

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