

Marketing for the Little Guy

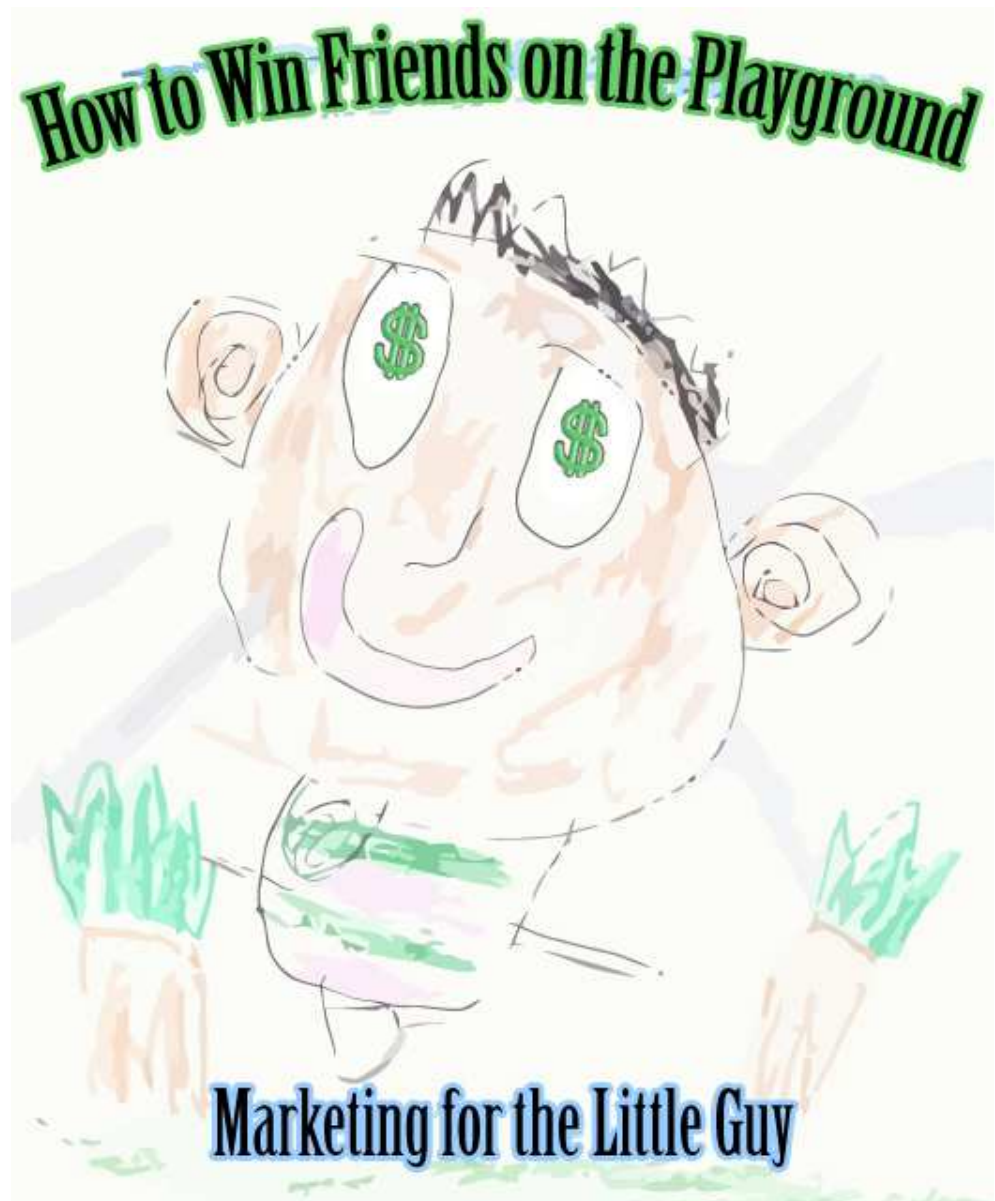
How to Win Friends on the Playground

Introduction

As a small business you have fewer resources to throw around so you have to wear many different hats. You probably don't have a lot of time to wear your marketing hat. So when you do wear it, your marketing effort has to be straightforward and, more importantly, it has to create immediate results. The problem with most marketing instruction you can pick up in bookstores is that it's written for and by corporate consultants who work with million dollar budgets and have years to produce results. If you've got sacks of money sitting around and lots of time to wait, stop reading now. Most of us "little guys" need results, need them yesterday, and need them to be cost effective.

This booklet identifies what I believe to be the core principles of marketing for a small business. The ideas are simple; simple enough for my seven-year old son to understand. I begin each principle with an analogy of how he could make better friends on the playground. Making new friends and new customers are similar processes. I end each one with the no-nonsense principle.

A quick warning: these tips don't include details for implementing a marketing plan. Everyone's going to have different details they have to explore for themselves. It's the guide for building a successful playground, not specifics on which playground accessories will work best for your friends.





Marketing for the Little Guy

How to Win Friends on the Playground

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How to Win Friends on the Playground

“Why do you want new friends?”

The first step in any endeavor should be in knowing why you are expending the effort.

Why would you, as a kid, want new friends? After all, it's hard making new friends? So why go to the trouble? To have more fun, of course. But what if you already have enough friends to have fun? What about when one of your best friends is out sick? You'll need a fill-in best friend right? So you promote up a sidekick friend. Now you need to fill-in the sidekick's position.

Remind yourself that your goal in marketing is to make more money. It's not to get new customers, although that might be one way to make more money. It's not so that your competitors hear how well you're doing from a radio, although that might feel really good. It's not just so more people hear about your organization. Everyone in town might know what you do, but if no one is coming to use you, what's the point? Everyone in town might be your customer, but if you're not profitable, what's the point?

There's nothing wrong with having several personal goals. Money isn't everything, right? Personally, I want my business to be profitable but I also want to enjoy my days. But personal fulfillment has no business being a goal in my marketing. If I want everyone to know how happy I am, then I need to do things to demonstrate it. A billboard on Interstate 85 probably isn't the right route to take.

Marketing is the act of selling a product or service to the public. And we're not going to be able to keep doing that unless we're profitable. So let's keep that forefront in our mind.

You must have a clear marketing goal.

... and it's probably to be **more profitable**.

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“Fingers are for counting, not picking noses.”

You put a new marketing advertisement in a magazine. Everyone is telling you or your marketing firm how cool and memorable the ad is. But you’re not getting new customers from it. What was your marketing goal?

1. To have a memorable ad? OR
2. To be more profitable?

How many new customers would it take to pay for the advertisement? How many to make the effort profitable?

Here are some examples of non-marketing scenarios in which you intuitively know your goals are measurable and not abstract conditions:

- If you play golf a lot, how do you determine whether or not you’re getting better from round to round / day to day?
- What’s the first step in losing weight? Do you spontaneously start exercising and eating less? Do you say to yourself something generic like, “I want to weigh less”? Or do you say something specific like, “I want to get down to X pounds.”
- Do you have children? Think back to before you had them. Did you think in terms of how many kids you wanted or was it only that you wanted “some” kids?
- Suppose you had a teenager who got home at 6am on a Saturday morning and claimed they were on time all because you said, “Don’t stay out too late.” Apparently 6am wasn’t too late for them. Would you let them slide? Wouldn’t you be more specific the next time?

Ok, back to marketing. Here’s a measurable marketing goal:

- I want to take off an extra paid week of vacation next year.

How many new customers would it take to allow you to take off an extra week of vacation next year? Just “some” more? You know how much your weekly bills are and how much your last vacation cost. Calculate how many new customers you’ll need in order to make that extra money.

If you want to make incremental advances towards a goal, you must measure your distance from it. Otherwise, how do you know if you are getting any closer when you make a change?

Goals must be measurable.

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“You can’t play with everyone so choose your friends wisely.”

Time (and space) is a limited resource.

What if you already have all the friends you can deal with? What if you have a ton of friends but you’re not having very much fun with them? Maybe they’re the playground bullies or maybe they like playing with dolls and you don’t have fun playing with dolls. You need a different kind of friend. You need a friend who will allow you to have more fun.

Think of all the people who have referred customers to you in the past. Somewhere in that list is the person who makes you cringe every time they say, “I’ve got someone you should call.” From previous experiences you know that the types of referrals they send you are not your ideal customer. The referrals either dicker on price, they want to consume a lot of your time for free, or there’s something that makes it not quite worth it to you. It’s not your fault. It’s not the referral’s fault, after all, they’re just looking out for themselves. It’s just that not everyone is your ideal customer. Some relationships aren’t reciprocally profitable. And some referral generators aren’t good at handing you the kinds of leads you want.

"The most important single central fact about a free market is that
no exchange takes place unless both parties benefit."

~ Milton Friedman

You have to get into specifics. This isn’t the time to be an equal opportunity selector. You should have an idea of the demographics as well as personality type and purchasing power / decision making authority.

Your time is critically important. Filtering is a must. Firing existing customers can sometimes be beneficial by freeing up your time to take on more profitable customers. Selective hiring of new customers can drastically improve your bottom line.

If you sell products, your shelf space is probably limited. Select the products that will allow you to be the most profitable and discontinue the rest you don’t have space for. This may reduce your customer base but it will also improve your bottom line.

Identify and seek your ideal customers.

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“I’m not the bullseye; You’re the bullseye.”

It’s all about YOU.

I have a seven and five year old. As with most siblings, the seven year old likes to pick on the five year old. It usually involves something like “You’re a baby!” So the little one starts arguing and eventually runs to me crying. Being the mature parent that I am, I teach her the Rubber-Glue technique.

“When he calls you a baby, you turn it around:

(Point to yourself.) I’m not a baby...

(Point to him.) You’re a baby!”

The technique was a instant success, sort of. Now instead of immediately running to me, whoever gets picked on first turns the tease around:

(Points to themselves.) I’m not the _____...

(Points to others.) You’re the _____!”

This lesson is relevant to your marketing target. This may hurt your feelings a little but the truth is, when it comes to advertising, no one really cares about you. People don’t have time. They’ve got appointments to make, plans to complete, kids to pick up, groceries to buy, dogs to take out, voicemail to check, friends to call and emails to read. To get your target’s attention, your message has to reach to them on a personal identifiable level.

"Don't underestimate the value of beginning a headline by naming the people you want to reach."

~ John Caples

Marketing Target Scenarios:

- Investments: If you were considering opening a personal 401K account, would you want to hear about how much money an investment company was making for themselves or how much money they are making their clients?
- Health care: Do you want to hear how healthy your doctor is? Or how many patients he has saved?
- Personal Trainer: Would it matter how much your personal trainer can bench press or how slim they are? Or is it how much they will help you transform your body?

Your message must be about your target, not you.

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“You can’t tell them you’re nice, you have to act nice.”

My son once came home rather upset so I asked him what was wrong. After some careful prodding he said, “So-and-so says they’re not my friend anymore.”

“Why is that?” I asked.

“He sad I was being bossy.”

“Were you being bossy?” I asked.

“No. I kept telling him I wasn’t but he kept playing the game the wrong way.”

“What game were you playing?” I asked.

“One I made up.”

“How was he supposed to know how to play a game you made up?” I asked.

“Well I was trying to tell him how to play it but he kept calling me bossy.”

This next idea is controversial. It goes against “big guy” marketing. You know, the ones with millions of dollars to spend and years to produce results. It’s about Branding.

Webster defines Branding as:

In marketing, the use of logos, symbols, or product design to promote consumer **awareness** of goods and services

Is awareness one of your marketing goals? I’m just like everyone else. I want to be respected for my business savvy. I want to be popular. But when it comes to the “need results, need them yesterday, and need them to be cost effective”, **awareness** just doesn’t cut it. Marketing for the sake of increasing awareness is the equivalent of standing on a box in a busy public square and yelling:

“Hey look at us! Our business is doing so well we can afford to spend a lot of money on advertising! Whoo hoo!”

We are bombarded with advertising messages every minute of every day. From the billboards we pass on our way into work, to the corporate logos on our coffee mugs. It’s information overload and there’s so much being said, it’s difficult to be heard at all. If you repeat a message enough times, sometimes it is assumed true. Perception is reality. But it takes a lot of money to create a barrage of advertising to accomplish it. And it’s not always successful.

Financial investments demand measurable financial returns. Branding is ok as a by-product but not as a goal.

Advertising is an investment; confirm your return.

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“It’s hard to be seen when you’re invisible.”

Think back to grade school. Which kids can you remember the most? Most likely they are from one of three groups: the cool kids, the social outcasts, or your personal friends. Everyone remembers their close friends. But why do you remember those that were on the edges of the social barometer? It’s because they stand out. It’s hard to forget the early budding cool kids who had their choice of boyfriends or girlfriends. And it’s equally hard to forget the outspoken weird kid who couldn’t get a boyfriend or girlfriend even if they were willing to pay for it.

In the last section we identified that awareness advertising isn’t a means unto itself. We’re really interested in the sale. However, to get to that sale your target audience, obviously, has to be aware of you. So you will have to differentiate your business from all the others competing for your target audience.

“In American business today,
with so many good companies offering bewilderingly similar products,
Advertising has become perhaps the critical factor
in the consumer’s decision of which one of those products to buy.”
~ Skip Hollandsworth

Our brains are hard wired to identify patterns. When we encounter something that (or someone who) doesn’t fit a pattern, it creates a conflict in our brain. Our brain wants to fit it into one of the patterns but it can’t find one. So what does it do? It has to create a new pattern. This process of creating the new pattern is ideal in memory making.

What does the name “Weird Al” Yankovic bring to mind? I’m betting a lot of weird (and possibly funny) images and sounds. Weird Al doesn’t have a lot of singing talent but that didn’t stop him from getting really rich as a professional singer.

You might not have to be weird, but you will have to be different. This isn’t the time to start making stuff up just because it sounds good. What makes you different from your competitors? What extra value do you bring to your customers. Takes those qualities and highlight them with a giant spotlight.

To be remembered, be different.

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“Your playground isn’t the only place the other kids play.”

There may be no worse disappointment for a kid than when he finds out on Monday morning on the school playground about the awesome weekend birthday party he wasn’t invited.

Merriam-Webster defines **competition** as:

“active demand by two or more organisms or kinds of organisms for some environmental resource in short supply”

Translated into blunt business terms, it would read something like:

“when two businesses seek after your money”

Once after receiving an unexpected and generous work bonus, my wife and I decided it was time to make a major entertainment purchase. We narrowed it down to two choices:

1. a small pop-up camper
2. a 65” high-definition TV and surround sound

The former would allow us to have higher quality and more frequent weekend vacations. The latter would allow us to have higher quality and more frequent movie experiences (we’re both movie buffs.) When visiting a local pop-up camper dealer, I accidentally mentioned our dilemma to the RV salesman. His face instantly displayed confusion and annoyance. As a recreational vehicle seller, he had probably never before considered Best Buy to be his competitor. But it was.

When it comes to spending our money, we are constantly making choices between need and want. Knowing we could practically survive in caves eating mud, I believe most of our choices (at least in our over abundant society) are for want not need. So when the RV salesman plans his advertising, instead of thinking “who are the other RV dealers and how do I compete against their sales message” he should probably be thinking “who else offers entertainment or lifestyle products and who do I compete against their sales message.”

Your “real” competition is never your only competition.

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“If you want to run faster, find a race with faster kids.”

In kindergarten my son use to be the fastest kid on the playground. However, by second grade, there were a handful of boys who could out run him at any distance. It was disappointing to him, and he confided it to me. That’s when I told him the good news.

“When you use to be the fastest kid on the playground, how could you get better? How could you run faster?”

“Just run faster,” he replied as if I were stupid.

“So how do you know if you’re running faster?” I asked.

After a little deliberation, he replied, “I don’t know.”

“The only way to know if you’re running even faster is if you have someone running in front of you. Say you’re both running really fast but you can’t catch up. You’re both running the same speed but he’s a little bit ahead. Now, what if you push your legs really, really hard and all of a sudden, you’re catching up to him and then your passing him. You started running faster. But the only way you knew you were running faster was because he was in front of you. If there’s no one in front of you, you’ll never know how fast you can really get.

The trick isn’t running the fastest once. The trick is in finding someone who’s even faster so you can run faster today than you did the day before. Keep doing that, and it will get harder and harder to find someone who is faster.”

Many marketing attempts are cookie-cutter designed. We look around to see how other people advertise and we copy. That’s not going to get us noticed though because your customers have already seen or heard those ads. They’re use to them and probably filtered them out.

When I think of great advertising, I think of Geico. I think their TV commercials are the best: the modern day cavemen, the intellectual gecko, and all the other strikingly funny ads they run. They sell insurance. I don’t but if I made a TV commercial, I would want it to be like a Geico commercial.

Look in your local Yellow Pages. Most of the business ads are very similar. Different name, different tag line, but same structure and sales pitch.

Find someone who’s more successful at advertising and try to keep up with their energy. Run a faster race.

Don’t limit yourself by the ones around you.

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“How much candy does it take to make new friends?”

In completing the thought for this little guy marketing idea I came to the comparison of money and candy. Isn't money to adults a lot like candy to children? How much candy does it take to make new friends? How much money does it take to make new customers? If we, the adults, could figure that part out, life as the entrepreneur would be a whole lot easier.

I asked my son, “How much candy does it take to make new friends?”

He wisely replied, “You don't have to give candy to make friends.”

“How do you make friends?” I asked.

He thought for a few moments and then said, “Hmm. That's hard.”

“Why's it hard?” I asked.

“Because... I don't know. It just is.”

While you should apply scientific principles to measuring your marketing results, the marketing pitch itself is an art form. Contrary to the marketing section of the bookstore, there is no silver bullet for spending money (an investment) to get new customers. If there were, 66% of small businesses wouldn't be failing in the first four years [2006 SBA Statistics]. So what does work?

That's the hard part, and it's going to be different in every industry and in every market. There are many reasons why but the fact remains, it takes a lot of work just to get work. We all know the basic advertising venues: newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, Internet banners, etc. If it were as simple as just picking a few and running ads, you wouldn't be reading this and there wouldn't be a gazillion books in the bookstore on marketing.

Use trial and error on small efforts until something works. Then slowly accelerate your involvement to reach your maximum return on investment. Don't forget the Law of Diminishing Returns. Even a cash cow is going to have its limits.

Adding more money to your advertising budget doesn't mean results will be better.

Never spend a lot on unproven methods.



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Summary

Here is the summary of lessons for the little guy when planning a marketing campaign.

1. You must have a clear marketing goal.
2. Goals must be measurable.
3. Identify and seek your ideal customers.
4. Your message must be about your target, not you.
5. Advertising is an investment; confirm your return.
6. To be remembered, be different.
7. Your “real” competition is never your only competition.
8. Don’t limit yourself by the ones around you.
9. Never spend a lot on unproven methods.

Good luck and play nice out there. I hope you make lots of friends! Let us know if this helps you.

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Sample Marketing Plan Worksheet

Goal Statement (WHY DO YOU NEED MORE BUSINESS?):

One more week of vacation.

Total Marketing Goal (WHAT DO YOU NEED, SPECIFICALLY?):

Estimated Vacation Expenses = \$_____.

Estimated Lost Revenue for Time period = \$_____.

Total Cost of Vacation = Expenses + Lost Revenue = \$_____.

Total Cost of Vacation / Average Profit from New Customer = ___ more new customers needed

___ new customers last year + ___ more needed = ___ new customers needed this year

___ new customers this year.



WARNING

Your calculations should be based on your needs, not ours.

Target Customers (WHO DO YOU WANT TO SELL TO?):

Small business owners or Church staff.

Male. 30 to 55 years old.

Involved in day-to-day details of their business / church.

Marketing Medium (WHERE ARE YOU GOING TO FIND THEM?):

Coffee News

Google, Yahoo, MSN search terms

Bill board on 316

Radio Ad on Conservative Station

Marketing Message (HOW ARE YOU GOING TO SELL TO THEM?):

"Website Experts for business leaders who know where they want to go."

Schedule for Return Confirmation Accountability (WHEN WILL YOU VERIFY?):

Ask every prospect how they found us and record.

Within 6 months, each advertising type should at least pay for itself.

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Marketing Plan Worksheet

Goal Statement (WHY DO YOU NEED MORE BUSINESS?):

Total Marketing Goal (WHAT DO YOU NEED, SPECIFICALLY?):

Target Customers (WHO DO YOU WANT TO SELL TO?):

Marketing Medium (WHERE ARE YOU GOING TO FIND THEM?):

Marketing Message (HOW ARE YOU GOING TO SELL TO THEM?):



WARNING

This is the hard part!
It will require a lot of
thought and strategy.

Schedule for Return Confirmation Accountability (WHEN WILL YOU VERIFY?):