

A photograph of a stone-lined trench or bunker. The walls are made of stacked, rounded stones. In the center of the trench, there are two metal grates on the ground, one above the other. The lighting is somewhat dim, suggesting an underground or enclosed space.

Marketing IN THE Trenches

CHRIS CIUNCI

25 Real-World Marketing Tips
FOR ACHIEVING DRAMATIC BUSINESS GROWTH

Marketing **IN** **THE Trenches**

**25 Real-World Marketing Tips To
Achieve Dramatic Business Growth**

CHRIS CIUNCI

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ISBN: 978-1-4834-5080-3 (sc)

ISBN: 978-1-4834-5079-7 (hc)

ISBN: 978-1-4834-5078-0 (e)

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Lulu Publishing Services rev. date: 08/23/2016

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THINK OUTSIDE THE TACTIC

Over the past decade, I have had the honor of helping countless small to midsize companies grow by revamping their marketing efforts. I have worked arm-in-arm with business owners to get to the heart of their problems, and I have been in the trenches as their organizations have transformed. This has given me an intimate view of the obstacles and opportunities present in today's marketing landscape—obstacles and opportunities that I intend to share with you.

In my experience, I've found that the growth of a company typically has less to do with traditional marketing tactics and more to do with initiatives outside of the standard definition of marketing. It used to be that business owners would think to themselves, "Since I need to grow, let me hire a couple of people and they can take care of that for me. My marketing department will recommend such-and-such tactics, which will help us achieve such-and-such results if we employ them."

Marketing has evolved, however, and organizations need to change their mindsets. From my perspective, marketing is no longer something done by one department. Rather, it now includes every department and every customer interaction. Your company itself is a marketing engine, and breaking down the walls inside an organization can ensure that everyone plays a role. This approach optimizes your team, your technology, and your culture so that everyone is fully focused on the needs of your customers and on structuring the right processes to address your customers' pain points.

I want to redefine for you what marketing is and frame it in an original way that you may not read about elsewhere. Successful marketing is more than finding new business - it is the result of the aggregated decisions and actions made each day to strengthen your client relationships and your internal culture. Quite simply, you can no longer rely on a single department or on traditional tactics to carry the growth of your company. This is the perspective from which I've written this book, so you can expect to learn far more than how to deploy email campaigns, write taglines, or perform traditional tactics such as search engine optimization, paid media, or display advertising. We'll leave that to all of the other books about marketing.

You may read certain portions of this book and say to yourself, "That's not marketing. That tip is about time management," or "That tip describes the role of HR." But if marketing at its core is about growth, many of these tips address how to remove any impediments to that growth. So many times a perfect marketing plan is in place, but frictions along the way prevent the desired results from being realized.

Marketing in the Trenches will show you how to get to the heart of your business so that you can achieve your growth potential. This book is not an academic exercise. Instead, it is a collection of real-world examples of the problems that today's business owners face, along with examples of actionable marketing solutions that TribalVision has implemented. The tips from the trenches contain actual cases, tangible statistics, and specific takeaways that you can implement for your own business starting tomorrow.

I know how busy the schedule of a business owner can be, so I don't recommend that you read all of the tips in this book at once. If you read one tip each day for the next month—just ten minutes per day—you'll be able to digest each topic and potentially implement one or two recommendations before moving on to the next tip. However you choose to read this book, I think you will find that it is packed with

actionable suggestions that will help you to develop and implement a holistic strategy to unlock your organization's growth.

I hope that you find this book helpful in navigating and shaping your company's trajectory. Please don't hesitate to contact me with your thoughts or questions along the way.

Sincerely,

Chris Ciunci

CUSTOMER

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER

Know exactly when, where, and how your customer buys in order to focus your marketing with that moment in mind.

In marketing, your first question should always be the same: Who is your customer?

A shocking proportion of companies don't have an answer to this question, despite the fact that understanding your customer is one of the most fundamental principles in business.

A recent McKinsey & Company study of almost 700 senior executives came to the following conclusions:¹

- Only 6% of companies understand the needs of their customers extremely well.
- A whopping 45% of companies admitted to having limited or no understanding of how their customers interact with them online, a frightening statistic in our increasingly digital world.
- 72% of the executives considered their company's budget for customer insights inadequate (at least they understood their dilemma).

By their own admission, companies today don't know their customers well enough. These companies would be more efficient and effective if they did.

Without customers, your business would not exist. Customers are the lifeblood of any business and must be treated as such. In order to cater to and grow your customer base, you must first know who your customers are - but basic demographic information is often too broad to rely on when building detailed marketing strategies.

VAGUE DEMOGRAPHICS ARE NO LONGER ENOUGH

Successful organizations must know more than the size of the market and the general industries or occupations to which its products may appeal. They need to know customers' buying behavior, Internet habits, and expectations. What pain points do potential customers have? How do they shop? What is their journey with your brand, and what does their decision-making process look like? Does your message resonate with them? Why do they buy from you? Why do they buy from your competitors? How price sensitive are they?

As a business owner, you need to answer these questions before even beginning to think about a tactical plan. If you know when, where, and how the customer buys, your marketing can be focused with that moment in mind. This simultaneously improves both your sales results and the customer experience.

Knowing what customers are seeking automatically makes it easier for you to develop appropriate tactics and outreach. If you approach customers at the right moment in the right way using the right marketing channels, they are more likely to buy from you.

DEVELOPING CUSTOMER “PERSONAS”

Understanding your customer is the foundational set of information from which all strategy flows. Spending money on one-off marketing tactics before you understand your customer is likely reckless. The challenge in knowing your customer, however, is that you actually have several types of customers, which we call “*personas*.”

In fact, four or five major types of customers may utilize your product or service. Practical, actionable marketing will meet each of these personas with a slightly different message and a different outreach strategy, both based on the segmentation and stratification of your customer base and target audience.

Rigorous market research is needed in order to develop core customer personas to which you can market. (See our website for an example of how to get started thinking about these personas.)

HOW EXACTLY CAN YOU GET TO KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS BETTER?

Customer insight begins with face-to-face meetings and other conversations with customers. *Customer advisory boards*, annual client appreciation events, company open houses, one-on-one client dinners, and Net Promoter Score surveys are excellent ways to obtain customer viewpoints to incorporate into the development of your marketing strategy. These types of grassroots initiatives bring together your team and your customers, enabling you to truly get in the heads of your customers.

Here at TribalVision, for example, we assemble customer advisory boards of five to ten clients to gather customer perspectives on our offering and to learn more about the buying journey. Consider inviting key customers to a customer summit where they can discuss thought

leadership topics, along with your company's offerings, in a comfortable environment. In exchange for their time and insight, you may want to offer participants incentives, such as product samples. Often, your customers' greatest satisfaction comes from watching their input shape your next product or service, as their opinions come to life via your responsive development.

By involving customers in both product development and business development, you will ensure that you deliver the right product in the right way. Customers may attend a thought leadership event believing that they are the sole beneficiaries, but you will also learn how to improve your company.

Besides a company summit, there are other ways to learn from your customers about what you are doing right, how you can improve, and what your customers want in the long run. To better understand the decision-making process of your customers, consider partnering with a survey company, tracking online behavior, using online crowdsourcing platforms such as GutCheck, engaging on social media, and leveraging a database marketing firm that can provide key insights into your current customers.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Form a customer-centered committee comprised of people from the marketing, sales, business development, and operations areas of your company. This team should research and discuss tactics, such as advisory boards, Net Promoter Score surveys, customer summits, and *data management platforms*, in order to determine the best first steps for your company to get closer to its target audience. This market research can also help you to develop the company's core buyer persona - keeping in mind these personas will help you to message and perform outreach far more effectively than you otherwise could. By having a specifically customer-focused team in place, you will ensure that obtaining and

incorporating customer insights becomes a part of your company's daily routine. You can place the responsibility for that team under a chief customer officer (CCO) who, as the customer champion of your company, can ensure follow-through on everything that this team discovers.

MAP THE CUSTOMER DECISION JOURNEY FOR YOUR COMPANY

The traditional “sales funnel” is officially dead. You need to identify, strengthen, and grow your customer touch points in order to be on top at the moment of purchase.

Companies used to view their marketing efforts as a sales funnel. In this traditional model, the company would first try to get as many prospective customers (prospects) as possible into the funnel. The company would then push its prospects through stages of awareness, familiarity, consideration, and ultimately purchase. If ten prospects were needed in order to close just one sale, then the way to reach a sales target was simply to get ten times that number of new prospects into the top of the funnel.

This inefficient sales model worked well until the rise of the Internet and social media empowered customers and revolutionized customer decision making around the globe. Nowadays, the customer—not the company—is in control. A recent study by McKinsey & Company² identified that two-thirds of the *touch points* during an active evaluation of a product or service involve consumer-driven marketing activities, such as asking social media contacts and reading online reviews. Only one-third of the touch points result from company-driven marketing, such as email campaigns and paid media advertising. According to this

study, then, the traditional sales funnel model entirely ignores two-thirds of the average consumer's interactions with a brand.

THE CONSUMER IS NOW IN CONTROL

Widespread Internet access and use of social media provide a wider variety of research tools for prospects to use in exploring brands more comparatively and determining which companies they want to engage with and how. As a result, consumers have become as invested in ongoing engagement with a company as they are in the purchase itself.

Therefore, the traditional sales funnel of interruption and promotion is dead. But instead of viewing this as a loss, turn this into an opportunity. It's a matter of turning the old funnel on its side and viewing the entire process as the customer's constant journey with your brand. This will allow you to target your marketing to this new decision-making process—to be in the right place at the right time and to interact in ways that aid your customers in their evaluation processes.

IMPROVING THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

To successfully inject your company into a customer's evaluation process, begin by mapping the *customer decision journey*. At TribalVision, we map out every single touch point, with initial consideration of an offering at one end and the moment of purchase and beyond at the other end. When the map is completed, we then think about what we can do to strengthen each of the touch points.

At any point in the journey, an interaction with your brand will affect a customer's decision. This means that you need to look at every touch point that a prospect could have with your brand: before, during, and after purchase.

By aligning your marketing with the consumer decision journey, you will gain influence over consumer-driven marketing activities, such as online reviews and word-of-mouth recommendations. This alignment will also enable you to focus your marketing initiatives on the most influential touch points, spending your money efficiently and making your customers feel that you're in touch with their acute wants and needs.

STRENGTHEN YOUR KEY TOUCH POINTS

By mapping out the customer decision journey, you can identify, strengthen, and grow your available customer touch points to maximize your chances of being top of mind at the moment of purchase.

The following are some primary touch points to strengthen or introduce:

- A prospect's identification of a problem or need
- A prospect's searches (often via the Internet) for vendors or consultants
- A prospect's request on your website for additional information or for a quote
- A customer's call to customer service
- A customer's feedback (often public) about your products and the buying experience
- A prospect's or customer's social media engagement on your company's community and influencer properties
- A prospect's or customer's email engagement with your company

Each of these touch points most likely can be strengthened when considered carefully. Examples of improving the lowest-hanging fruit of touch points may include developing personalized landing pages specific to a searched keyword, sending a relevant automated email campaign to someone who clicks on a specific topic in an email you sent, developing customer service scripts to answer the most common questions from customers and to address the most common issues, or writing differentiated, compelling copy that clearly speaks to prospects' pain points during the "identification-of-problem" stage of decision making.

While you are strengthening key touch points, remember that you must create opportunities for engagement both before and after purchase. Although the initial purchase is key, the real work comes afterward, as you determine how to engage that customer for many years and maximize *customer lifetime value*.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Bring your team together to ensure that everyone knows his or her role in creating a wow experience for the customer during the journey with your brand. Begin by mapping out the customer decision journey. Focus on all of the major and minor touch points that someone most likely will have during the many stages of decision making. Think about where those touch points will take place; channels may include your company's website, mobile application, call center, and storefront, to name a few. You can then identify the missing touch points and brainstorm ways to strengthen your company's presence. Finally, designate a person whose role is to ensure that each touch point is owned by someone in your company.

WOW YOUR CUSTOMERS

Your customers have a wealth of information and choices. Retaining them is more crucial than ever—and more profitable.

Many organizations focus primarily on finding new customers. However, a strict emphasis on prospecting will actually underrepresent the majority of your sales. By neglecting customer retention, businesses fail to maximize the profits they could earn from loyal customers. This is a large loss, because customer retention efforts are often far more profitable than are new business efforts.

Data consistently shows that organizations that spend even 5% of their marketing dollars on loyalty marketing are 20% to 25% more profitable than organizations that spend nothing on loyalty marketing. Because retaining a customer costs ten times less than does recruiting a new customer, the return on investment (ROI) for retention programs is generally very high. In addition to increasing revenue from existing customers at a low cost, a focus on retention often also transforms your customers into evangelists for your brand—giving you the most profitable marketing channel at your fingertips.

OBSESS OVER THE POST-PURCHASE STAGE OF THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

With the wealth of choices and information available to consumers in the digital age, companies must go above and beyond to earn customers' trust and loyalty. Companies can no longer retain customers simply by providing a quality product and then sitting back. In tip #2, we talked about the journey that customers are on with your brand. What many business owners and executives often overlook is that most of this journey takes place after the purchase, which presents a wonderful opportunity for you to truly create a 'wow' for your customer base.

The benefit to your company of wowing its customers is the customer lifetime value (LTV). The best companies obsess about every post-purchase touch point of the customer experience in order to guarantee repeat business and to increase opportunities for cross-selling and upselling.

You can start by diving into your customers' purchase history with your company to find ways to save them money or bundled offerings and complementary products in which they may be interested. Customers are wowed when a company's representative says, "I know your business. I'm not just a manufacturer who takes purchase orders and gives you what you want. I'm going to be a solutions provider who uncovers ways to help you grow your business."

ADD NEW TOUCH POINTS TO WOW YOUR CUSTOMER POST-PURCHASE

As part of your mapping of the customer decision journey, perform an extensive analysis of the post-purchase experience that your customers currently have. Then, brainstorm specific strategies and initiatives that can improve this continued brand journey.

At TribalVision, we have found that many companies have very few post-purchase touch points with their customers. In our years in the trenches, we have helped businesses to pursue diverse strategies to keep their customers engaged and impressed. Consider the follow examples as inspiration:

- Add a post-purchase follow-up call to see if the customer is happy or has any issues with the product or service
- If you are providing a major service or product to another business, perform a thorough immersion into your client's business with a one-day brainstorming session between senior leaders of both firms
- Craft social media posts that promote your customers' successes (with their permission)
- Deploy an annual Net Promoter Score survey, asking about ways in which your offering and service can be improved

As valuable as these types of demonstrative tactics may be, they also must be incorporated into a larger marketing strategy.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Remember that map of your customer decision journey? Make sure that you strengthen all of the existing touch points and add new touch points—all in the spirit of creating a wow experience for your customers. This should be a company-wide effort in which people from all levels of the organization participate. The CCO we discussed in tip #1 should lead this effort and ensure that all of the team's brainstorming efforts are monitored and acted on as appropriate. Soon enough, your organization will be the talk of the marketplace!

FIRE YOUR LEAST PROFITABLE CUSTOMERS

By transitioning away from low-value customers, you can devote the right amount of time, money, and resources to acquiring and retaining high-value customers.

“The customer is king.” We all have heard this common marketing truism, but allow me to update it for the modern era:

“THE RIGHT CUSTOMER IS KING”

The reality is that not all customers are created equal, and organizations should not waste time or money by trying to please unprofitable customers. Instead, businesses should segment their customer accounts based on profitability and lifetime value and allocate marketing resources proportionally to this lifetime value.

To put it another way, and in reference to tip #3—you don’t want to wow all customers, just the right customers. You only have so much time and energy. Instead, identify your profitable customers, and spend the time to service them in ways that will build relationships that extend beyond the traditional business arena.

In the case of unprofitable customers, on the other hand, you may want to spend very little time and effort servicing them. Oftentimes, these customers should be gracefully removed from your roster because they are costing you time and money that you instead could devote to profitable customers.

Consider the example of a salesperson for a manufacturing company who is fielding a \$500 order. Over the next few weeks, he will dedicate time to speaking on the phone with that customer, placing the order, and ensuring that the order is produced, packaged, and shipped correctly. In this scenario, it is entirely possible that the salesperson will invest more time in this \$500 customer than in a six-figure customer who is considering increasing his or her future order volume. Clearly, this salesperson's time would be better spent by, for example, developing a custom presentation for an in-person meeting with the six-figure customer in order to convince him or her to increase order volume.

REVENUE AND PROFIT ARE NOT THE SAME

It is easy to assume that the \$500 dollar client is profitable. Because the \$500 is revenue rather than profit, however, that assumption ignores the investment of time, expense, and opportunity cost of not working on other, more profitable projects. By eliminating the time suck associated with unprofitable customers, you will free up more of your team's ability to focus on profitable accounts that have the greatest potential for growth. And, by investing more time in these high-value customers, you will not only be maximizing your company's profits but also increasing those customers' loyalty to your company, leading to higher returns in the long term as those key accounts continue to grow.

REASONS THAT CUSTOMERS BECOME UNPROFITABLE

Before cutting loose any customer, you should consider the overall quality of the customer relationship, along with what is making the account unprofitable for your company. Here are a couple of simple examples:

- A once profitable, low-maintenance customer has cut spending with your company due to a customer service error. In this case, it may be preferable for you to invest in rebuilding the relationship rather than cutting loose the customer.
- A low-margin customer continues to call your sales representatives daily, even after having received special training about the product. This account is unlikely to ever become profitable and is not worth taking the time to renegotiate a new contract.

There is no exact formula, but typically you should let go of those customers who are unprofitable due to their small order size, the small amount of annual revenue they provide, the excessive amount of handholding they need, or their poor prospects for future growth.

BEFORE YOU SAY GOODBYE

I want to be clear that the decision to fire an unprofitable customer is not a black-and-white decision. What if a customer has potential? Perhaps the margins aren't that great right now, but they could be. What is the growth potential?

Likewise, what if the customer is a key influencer in the marketplace? The hit to your reputation may not be worth the backlash that firing the customer could cause. A business owner needs to think about these variables and others. You may want to consult the salespeople who work with the account and seek nuanced answers to these questions before making a final decision.

THE ART OF DIVESTING CUSTOMERS WITH DIGNITY

When the time comes to divest your organization of unprofitable customers, you must have both the courage and the skill to do so without tarnishing your standing in the business community. Instead of sending a form letter or a brief email, discuss the divestment with them in person or over the phone, and work with them to transition to another service provider.

A study published in the *Harvard Business Review* found that 80% of B2C divested customers felt angry, frustrated, or embarrassed about the process, while comparatively few B2B companies felt the same way.³

The key difference was in how the divestment was handled. Of B2B customers, 90% had the decision communicated to them via direct, interpersonal methods, while 70% of the B2C customers were given no advance notice of the termination.

An overwhelming number of the customers surveyed also stated they would have preferred being notified by phone or in person rather than by mail. By personally reaching out to customers well in advance of a contract's end, you can start an honest conversation about the value and equity of the relationship—which may even lead to them being on board with the divestment.

ENSURING A SMOOTH, AMICABLE TRANSITION

After the decision has been communicated, work with the customer to establish mutually agreed upon schedules and benchmarks for the divestment. You should help to make the transition as smooth as possible in order to minimize or even prevent bad feelings.

One way to do this is to negotiate with a partner or competitor who may be able to take on the client. Whether or not you facilitate the

move in its entirety, you should at least provide divested clients with a list of alternative service providers. By making the client feel informed and involved in the transition, you will maximize the success of the divestment and minimize any backlash.

USE YOUR DIVESTMENT DATA TO IMPROVE PROSPECTING

By divesting low-value customers, you will be able to spend the right amount of time, money, and resources on acquiring and retaining high-value customers.

The data amassed about your high-value clients should also be used by your marketing and sales staff to target the right new customers. By using this data to redefine the demographics and purchase preferences of your ideal customers, you will be able to concentrate your customer acquisition efforts on high-value prospects and minimize the need for customer divestments in the future. In the long run, the customer divestment process will result in higher returns from all marketing investments.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Review your customer database. Calculate the profit and profit margin of each account in order to determine which clients are losing you money. Your margin will be low on small accounts in which you invest substantial time. However, it could also be low on large accounts if price discounts or time invested outweighs revenue. The next step is to call a meeting with your salespeople in order to leverage their knowledge of which customers may be worth saving and which customers are unlikely to change. Finally, it is time to make those final decisions and go forward with what may be some difficult conversations. Remember that each of those customer conversations should be followed by a

Chris Ciunci

well-thought-out transition plan to ensure that the customer is not left out in the cold. By expressing the company's goals internally and unifying the communications strategy, you can ensure relatively smooth customer transitions.

STORYTELLING

TELL A COMPELLING STORY

*The human brain thrives on good stories.
This is very good news for your marketing effort.*

Today, this one day, the average U.S. citizen will read thousands of digital words and see hundreds of marketing messages. In just the past 60 seconds, the following happened:

- 700,000 Google searches were performed
- 168 million emails were sent
- 60 hours of video were uploaded to YouTube⁴

Not surprisingly, this information overload makes it difficult to get the attention of consumers. Fortunately, differentiating your business from the competition is easier than you might think.

WHAT PROSPECTS REALLY WANT TO KNOW

In his seminal TED Talk, Simon Sinek illuminated the most effective ways for organizations and leaders to inspire. Sinek laid out a useful framework of “*what*,” “*how*,” and “*why*” questions to which every business owner should always know the answers:

- What does your company do?
Chances are that you could answer that one in your sleep.
- How does your company accomplish that?
Most business owners have that one down too.
- Why do you do it?
The answer to this key question is typically never given or, at best, is quickly touched on, yet it is by far the most important of these three questions if you want to stand out, elevate your company above commoditization, and ultimately earn higher margins.

The “why” question is what businesses really need to ask themselves. Consumers want to know the answers to these questions, and yet businesses tend not to lead with or even tell the “why” part of their stories.

COMMUNICATING THE REASONS BEHIND WHAT YOU DO

A compelling marketing story truly captures the attention of consumers. Begin with the “*why*” to draw consumers in, and then use the “*how*” and “*what*” to complete the picture.

Your marketing should emphasize what makes your *company* different rather than simply what makes your *product* different. A list of specifications may tell people how your product compares to other products, but your company story tells them why they should love your company.

Today’s consumer wants to have a personal connection with a company before making a purchase. A compelling company story will foster that connection.

THE PERVASIVE POWER OF A STORY

The human desire to hear stories is rooted in the brain. Our brains are more engaged by and more likely to retain stories than facts. Because a good brand story can be readily assimilated by your prospects and existing customers, it is a powerful tool for building brand trust, engagement, and loyalty.

Better yet, stories are shareable. If your story is engaging enough, customers will pass it on naturally and enthusiastically. Studies have shown that 92% of consumers trust earned media, such as recommendations from friends and family, above other forms of advertising.⁵ This is further proof that your company or brand story is an extremely powerful asset.

RELATE YOUR STORY TO THE LIVES OF YOUR CUSTOMERS

As you develop your brand, consider both yourself and your customer. Your story begins with your why, but it should also relate the role of your company to the lives of your customers. Specific questions to ask yourself include the following:

- What are your company's values?
- What does your company stand for?
- How does your company improve the lives of its customers?
- Why should your customers care?

Furthermore, although it may seem cliché, you should consider how your company improves the world.

TELL A COHESIVE STORY ACROSS YOUR COMPANY

When you have developed your brand story, apply it to every facet of your company. Tell that story in your pitch presentations, website videos, Facebook posts, email newsletters, and thought leadership content. Everything that you develop and build, from your products to your HR policies, should be crafted with your unique brand story in mind.

As people see your story adding up to a cohesive whole and carrying through all of your engagements with them, they will be motivated to engage with your company. Develop content that can be easily shared and give people tools that enable them to play a role via social media. Your story will spread.

YOUR “WHY” MUST EVOLVE

Storytelling doesn't end with telling why your company was founded—that's just the beginning. The why can evolve. Let me give you an example close to my heart.

Why did I start TribalVision? I started TribalVision because I saw there was a huge need in the marketplace. Owners of small and midsize businesses were being taken advantage of by large, entrenched marketing firms that charged them too much money and didn't provide enough value. The only marketing solutions for these business were to hire one of these high-end ad agencies or to hire an internal Chief Marketing Office (CMO) at an annual salary of \$150,000. There was nothing in between those two options. TribalVision was founded to provide an outsourced solution that would fill that gap.

That was the why in the beginning. But that why evolved. If you ask me the why question now, I may talk about helping business owners survive a down economy—that's part of our why. We help business owners who've had a tough time, and we legitimately want their companies to

do well—and that’s another part of our why. The business has gotten much more personal over time. TribalVision has helped organizations to hire three or four more people in their community or to help a company endure so that the founder’s son or daughter can take it over—and that’s now part of our why. Not to mention the real community that we’ve been able to build here at TribalVision, which creates an even deeper sense of connection with our work—and that’s part of our why. As you can see, our why has evolved and will continue to evolve as our company continues to mature.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Put yourself in your customers’ shoes, and look at your current website and read your sales literature. Do you leave with a sense of your company’s “why,” its reason for being? If not, develop a guide that outlines the key components of your company’s story. This deliverable will be your bible for *content marketing*, influencing all of the communications that your company produces. It should include answers to the key questions we have posed and should outline your organization’s “raison d’etre” both internally to your team and externally to your customers and partners. By creating such a deliverable, you will also ensure that your team can answer questions about why your organization was founded and why it continues to be relevant in the marketplace. Each of your employees has the chance to share your story every day, so make sure to communicate your why to your team as much as to an external audience.

CONTENT IS KING

*Content marketing is the way to build
a foundation of helpful
knowledge that will separate your brand
from the crowd.*

The mantra “content is king” has recently become a favorite of marketers—and for good reason. In today’s rapidly changing marketing landscape, content marketing is one of the most important investments that you can make.

A strategic investment in the development of meaningful content has become a “must” rather than just a “nice to have.” Strong content develops a base of highly engaged followers who are more inclined to make repeated purchases in the long term. And in the customer decision journey, relevant content at each touch point is often the tipping point to a “yes” decision. That’s why businesses everywhere are dedicating more time, energy, and marketing spend to content marketing than they ever have before. Consider the following statistics:

- Content marketing is excellent at conversion, yet it costs 62% less than traditional marketing.⁶

- 70% of customers prefer to get information about a company from online content rather than traditional ads.⁷
- 78% of CMOs believe that customized content is the future of marketing.⁸

STRENGTHENING ENGAGEMENT WITH A CONTENT STRATEGY

Now is the time to start to build a foundation of content that will separate your brand from the crowd over the long term. By providing valuable information to current and potential customers, your company will establish itself as an expert in the field and create brand awareness.

Content marketing campaigns won't necessarily convert directly or immediately to sales. That can be a challenge. Business owners may wonder: Where is the ROI? However, the sum total of your content marketing efforts will strengthen your brand and lead to more fruitful interactions with prospects and customers in the future. Today's landscape is all about engagement, and high-quality content equals engagement. How can a customer or prospect engage with your brand and make informed decisions without really getting to know your product or service or organization? Content is the bridge that enables him or her to do so.

QUALITY AS WELL AS QUANTITY

Content marketing goes beyond putting words on a page or posting a quick note to Facebook. In order to truly excel at content marketing, you need to focus on creating *quality content*.

Whether your content is in the form of a quarterly email newsletter or weekly blog post, its substance is the key to success. In order to establish your company as a reputable thought leader, your content must be both accurate and well presented. Incorporating images into your content

also can be helpful. In fact, 94% of content that includes visuals gets more total views than does purely textual content.⁹

Here at TribalVision, we often craft a content marketing strategy and content calendar to ensure that a company produces sufficient content consistently. A content calendar indicates when content should be written and when it should be published, with enough time in between for fine-tuning, and includes diverse content types, such as blog posts, SlideShare updates, Facebook posts, Tweets, white papers, case studies, videos, new website copy, and webinars. (See our website for an example of a built out content calendar for you to use as a starting point.)

COMMIT TO BEING A CONTENT-DRIVEN ORGANIZATION

When it comes to producing content, it is most efficient to produce content that can be repurposed for multiple platforms. Writing a 140-character summary of a blog post and including a link to that post in a Tweet will offer additional value to your follower base—with minimal extra work on your part.

Given executives' busy work schedules, short summaries can also be useful. Incorporating them throughout your content will enable busy readers to skim headlines and still determine the crux of your content.

The increasing popularity of on-the-go reading also makes it wise for you to provide brief, engaging content and a mobile-friendly interface. The increasing use of mobile technology also offers opportunities for location-based content marketing, such as offering flash deals based on a consumer's current GPS coordinates.

If you embrace these strategies and recognize the overall value of content marketing, your business will take a huge step toward standing out from the competition. But to do this, you must not only start strong—you must follow through on your commitment to content.

MARKETING IN THE TRENCHES: AN EXAMPLE

TribalVision was approached by a liquid waste management company that was seeking to improve its content marketing efforts. Although it was one of the largest regional players in its industry, its website search traffic was underperforming. Producing relevant content was the best way to remedy this issue.

Good content comes as the result of good content planning, so we began working toward the objective by creating an eight-week content marketing strategy.

The first phase in the strategy was to learn everything that we needed to know in order to develop an actionable approach to content for this company, our client. Doing so involved thorough research about the target audience and their needs, as well as an in-depth audit of our client's existing content. We analyzed the frequency of the company's blog posts, which audiences or customer personas the posts were directed toward, and the blog's traffic. This analysis helped us to understand how the audience engaged with the client's existing content, which helped to shape our recommendations for new content.

We then developed nearly two dozen recommendations, including the following:

- A blog editorial calendar to ensure consistent, frequent blog posts to engage the core target audiences
- A Resources page on the website, for housing content in a convenient, accessible fashion
- Interactive content with which prospects can engage on an individual basis
- Case studies that tell compelling stories to prospects

- A three-minute video that explains the company's why
- Monthly email newsletters to incubate leads and distribute content
- Video testimonials from clients

We also never forgot the original objective that we had set: increase website traffic. That was the end goal—content was just the means to achieve it. Thanks largely to the revamped content and other marketing efforts, the company's website traffic has increased by more than 25% and the company has nearly doubled in size in the three years since they worked with TribalVision.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Begin by designating a specialized content marketer within your staff. Assigning responsibility for content marketing will ensure that your company's content is consistent, robust, efficient, and continuous. Crowdsourcing can also help you to create more content with less work. Here at TribalVision, for example, we rotate blog authorship on a weekly basis in order to spread the work among multiple team members. Blogging allows us to provide valuable content while demonstrating our marketing expertise. You should develop a comprehensive content calendar that details all of the content to be crafted during the upcoming year (such as blog posts), along with the strategy to communicate and push out that content via multiple avenues (company website, email newsletter, social media, video library, sales literature, webinars, etc.).

HAMMER HOME YOUR UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION

*First, determine how your organization stands
out from competitors.*

*Then, communicate and support this difference
in every possible way.*

Today's customers are faced with nearly infinite options. Marketing's job is to cut through the clutter and convince your target audience that your product or service is just what they need.

In the business world, there is a tendency to try to be everything to everyone. However, a focused message will help you to reach today's overstimulated and overwhelmed customers far more effectively. This message should communicate exactly what your company stands for and show your target audience why they should buy from your company. You need to express to the market how what you represent differs from your competitors.

Many organizations talk about being "great" in a generic way. But the fact is that your brand promise will be far more memorable—and much more believable—if you discover how your company's DNA is unique.

This is your company's *unique selling proposition* (USP). Your USP is the unique reason that your product or service is superior to that of the

competition, and it falls into one of three categories: price, experience, and innovation.

Sometimes business owners tell me, “Well, we do all three of those things—I guess we’re the best!” That misses the point. To fully occupy a space in the minds of your audience, you must focus on one differentiator and own it.

THREE WAYS TO CORNER A CUSTOMER’S MIND

When you look deeply into your company’s core experience, you can find the area in which you have the greatest opportunity for a competitive advantage. To truly develop this advantage, one dimension should be focused on with an “all hands on deck” mindset. Is your company known for its price, experience, or innovation?

- **Price.** If you want to compete on price, you must make sure that everything you do is targeted toward lowering the price of your good or service and that you’re better at doing that than are any of your competitors. Take Walmart, for example. This company has reinforced its “low-price leader” message so effectively that most people would be able to quote Walmart’s “Everyday Low Prices” USP if you stopped them on the street. However, it is a rare company that can compete successfully on price, and the other two dimensions are often far more valuable and realistic in terms of long-term sustainable profitability.
- **Experience.** This is the experience that your consumers have in the realm of customer service. Can you provide a better experience than any of your competitors, and can you do it profitably? Can you create an experience that’s truly unique and memorable? Online retailer Zappos.com has outdone itself in the customer service realm. Boasting unlimited free returns

and an exemplary call center, Zappos garners excellent customer service reviews.

- **Innovation.** If you want to compete based on innovation, ask yourself these questions: Do you have the process, the people, and the technology to consistently come up with new products and services that will win in your space? Do you have the expertise, the budget, and the talent? With a tagline of “Innovative Technology for a Changing World,” 3M set a precedent for valuing innovation. Today, the company boasts 22,800 patents and a constantly growing line of 50,000 products. In fact, employees are encouraged to dedicate 15% of their time to brainstorming the next great product.

By focusing, in large part, on a USP, these companies have become household names and created brands that are the envy of their respective markets.

FINDING THE MOST EFFECTIVE USP FOR YOUR COMPANY

The value of developing the right USP is illustrated by an example given by Bryan Eisenberg, noted author and experienced marketer. In an effort to improve its conversion rate, one of his clients—a test company—hired a writer to draft several USPs. These were then tested with customers in order to determine the most appropriate and effective option.

After implementing the chosen USP, the client saw a whopping 33.8% increase in its conversion rate. This new USP, which was refined based on feedback from actual customers, has opened new doors for the company. The right USP can do the same for your company.

START BY GOING BACK TO THE BASICS

In order to find your company's most effective USP, ask yourself these basic exploratory questions:

- How do your clients benefit, specifically, from the services or products that you provide?
- What intrinsic quality or attribute makes your company stand out the most from its competition?
- Where does your company's core expertise lie?

Using your answers to these questions, formulate a USP that will truly resonate with your target audience. You can then distill the USP into a short mantra that will form the basis for a successful new marketing campaign.

When looking for inspiration, consider the following examples of successful USPs:

- Avis Car Rental: "We're number two. We try harder." As the second-largest car rental company in the United States, Avis recognized that its USP lay in its greater effort and dedication to delivering an excellent *experience*.
- FedEx: "When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight." This FedEx slogan, although since replaced, communicates the company's reliability and ability to ship items quickly, which were rooted in *innovation*.

- De Beers: “A diamond is forever.” In use since 1948, this famous slogan communicates the durability of De Beers’ jewelry and the lifelong *experience* of owning a De Beers diamond.
- Domino’s Pizza: “You get fresh, hot pizza delivered to your door in 30 minutes or less—or it’s free.” Domino’s former slogan tells it like it is. Customers know what to expect in a practical way, and the slogan is highly appealing in terms of its reference to *price*.

Once the the words are in place, however, you must extend the use of the USP to action. You must get your team on board and deliver on your company’s USP. Your company’s differentiator, the USP, should be reflected across all of your marketing messaging in order to best communicate the contrast between you and the competition. You must broadcast this USP both internally and externally.

TALKING THE TALK AND WALKING THE WALK

To truly hammer home your USP, you must support it and prove it in everyday practice. You must lead by action rather than just words. If you publicize that your organization provides exceptional service, you must then impress customers who contact your customer service staff. If your primary differentiator is price, your entire operation must be aligned with that mission—from standardizing competitive bidding processes for purchasing raw materials to achieving scale to negotiate more favorable pricing from vendors. If customers’ experiences with your company contradict your key message, your company will quickly lose credibility—and the value of having a USP will be wasted and actually hurt rather than help.

For your company to succeed, your entire organization must be aligned with the USP’s key message. Employees must be aware of and excited

about the USP and fully understand their roles in carrying it out. Major company decisions also must be made with that differentiator in mind.

UNLEASH YOUR COMPANY'S USP IN EVERY POSSIBLE WAY

When you've fully communicated your message internally, focus on hammering home your company's USP to prospects and customers. The USP should guide your every communication with clients, permeate your marketing and PR materials, and be emphasized across all marketing channels. Imagine if your company's USP were communicated in every single way, at every touch point, so that all of your potential customers understood what their experience with your company was going to be.

Executed correctly, this intense emphasis on USP will show potential customers exactly who you are, what you do, what you value, and what you can offer to help them to overcome their pain points. In return, they will appreciate your clarity and commitment and think of your distinct USP during their decision-making processes.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Gather your team to discuss how your organization differentiates itself in the market. You can ask them to rank your company on the three differentiators mentioned here: price, experience, and innovation. Then ask them, "What do we want to be known for?" Evaluate the answers against what your company is capable of offering. As a starting point for unique strengths, look to awards that your company has won or patents that your company holds. Pick the attribute that best defines your company, and outline exactly how your company excels in that area. Develop a USP from this brainstorming, and then define exactly how various departments will contribute to expressing the USP to the company's existing customers and the public.

NEW MEDIA

THINK “OWNED, EARNED, PAID”

For marketers who want to truly leverage today's new media, paid marketing is actually the least desirable route to travel.

A few years ago, an article published in the *McKinsey Quarterly* changed the way that we view marketing efforts.¹⁰ Now, instead of simply acknowledging *paid media*, such as newspaper ads and billboards, savvy business owners also consider two other areas: *owned media* and *earned media*.

Before the Internet and the era of the informed customer, marketers focused on producing effective paid media. But paid media doesn't always reach today's informed, impatient customers. In fact, the ROI of paid media continues to decline, as evidenced by the following statistics:

- In a recent BIA/Kelsey survey, only 25.7% of respondents were pleased with the ROI of newspaper campaigns.¹¹
- Recent research by Accenture showed that 82% of TV ads generate negative ROI.¹²
- Data from Nielsen and Kantar Media indicated that TV ads are typically seen by only 20% of their targeted audiences.¹³

Simply put, “interrupting” your customer through paid media just doesn’t cut it anymore. The time has come to diversify your marketing. To create an effective marketing plan in the age of new media, you need to consider and leverage three distinct categories to build and enhance your company’s brand:

- **Owned media.** These channels are the extensions of your brand that you control, including your company’s website, Twitter account, Facebook page, LinkedIn page, and so forth. By filling these channels with quality content, such as emails, blog posts, white papers, and eBooks, your company can gain credibility and foster long-term relationships with its audience. This makes owned media the best investment for achieving long-term results. In today’s climate, customers use the Internet and social media to perform their research and to interact with your brand well before you interrupt them with your message on paid media. As noted in prior tips, the customer is in control of when the conversation begins and where it takes place, but through the careful curation of owned media, you can at least control what that conversation is about.
- **Earned media.** This is the publicity and word-of-mouth attention that your company earns when its content is shared by customers, the press, and the public. If you produce quality content, you will earn the respect of your prospects and customers and turn them into brand advocates. This process can take on a viral life of its own, especially when the power of word of mouth kicks into gear. Earned media can become a viral marketing campaign, such as the recent Dove Men+Care videos that millions of people around the world shared on social media. But earned media also can be as simple as somebody liking one of your Facebook posts or retweeting one of your Tweets. These are all indications that your company has earned

people's trust and excitement so that they want to share with other people their enthusiasm about your brand.

- **Paid media.** These channels are the traditional third-party ones, such as television, radio, and print ads, as well as newer options, such as Google *pay per click* (PPC), *digital display ads*, and ads on social networks. Paid media channels still are important in marketing, but they should be used only in conjunction with owned media and earned media channels. In today's world, paid media not only is the most expensive channel (as evidenced by its name), but it also has the most short-term effect. One might even go so far as to say that paid media is the laziest option, especially when a company's marketing efforts begin and end there.

Make all three of these types of media a part of your marketing mix, and they will work together to deliver better-than-average results.

GO THE EXTRA MILE—IT WILL PAY OFF

Paid media often seems like the direct, easy fix. However, owned media and earned media have been shown to provide higher conversion rates, at lower cost, for a longer period of time.

Consider these statistics from an international survey by Nielsen:¹⁴

- Owned media channels also have high trust rankings: a 58% ranking for branded websites and a 50% ranking for permission-based emails.
- Paid media, by comparison, has much lower trust rankings: a 33% ranking for display ads for mobile phones and a 36% ranking for ads on social networks.

Clearly, organizations need to focus more on owned media and earned media than on paid media. The explosion of owned and earned channels provides new opportunities that are worth the extra effort of marketing departments that are willing and passionate enough to create relevant, interesting content and assets that strengthen brand connections rather than trying to ‘sell’ the customer, as was discussed in tip #6.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Think about your marketing team. What are they doing every day? Are they developing owned assets (including content) that are relevant and provide value to your company’s target audience? Are there systems in place to vet that content before it is released? Or is your team relying too much on paid media for lead generation? If so, come up with a plan to gradually wean your company away from paid media and toward owned media and earned media. Consider putting 20% of next year’s marketing budget toward owned media in which your company can demonstrate its knowledge and expertise and position itself as a thought leader worth following for the long term. Remember that to generate earned media, your company’s owned media must be worth sharing. And let’s not go to extremes by removing paid media from your vocabulary altogether. You can still use paid media, but make sure to review the performance of each media channel on a regular basis and make adjustments as necessary to make the most of your budget.

THINK INBOUND OVER OUTBOUND

As traditional outbound marketing strategies have become less effective, inbound marketing has become the most effective method of capturing new business.

Related to the differences among earned media, owned media, and paid media is the difference between inbound marketing and outbound marketing. **Inbound marketing** involves producing interesting content that people see as worth reading and sharing, which earns the attention of customers, makes your organization easily found, and draws customers to your website.

OUTBOUND MARKETING

Outbound marketing is the opposite of inbound marketing; in outbound marketing, customers find you mainly as a result of various traditional paid marketing efforts.

Outbound marketing is broken. Today's customers know their rights, and they don't like to be assaulted by outbound, or "push," marketing. Consider the following basic examples:

- A whopping 94% of the links clicked on by search users are found (organic) rather than promoted (paid).¹⁵
- 86% of people skip television commercials.¹⁶
- 84% of people between the ages of 25 and 34 have clicked away from a website because of an “irrelevant or intrusive ad.”¹⁷

Although outbound has long been the crux of marketing, those days are over.

THE RISE OF THE SELF-DIRECTED CUSTOMER

In the past, brand marketers could directly shape a prospect’s discovery experience from start to finish, because willing customers reacted to the stream of ads and sales literature that came at them.

However, today’s self-directed customers are firmly in control. The typical B2B buyer, for example, conducts between 57% and 70% of his or her online research process before making first contact with a potential supplier.¹⁸

These informed customers are more opinionated than ever. Armed with new blocking techniques, such as spam filters and TiVo, they can simply ignore outbound marketing. As a result, outbound marketing comes at an increasingly high cost with an increasingly low yield. Instead, you need a strong inbound marketing program to make your organization stand out.

THE ROI OF INBOUND MARKETING

Still not convinced? Consider the superior ROI of inbound marketing:

- Inbound marketing delivers 54% more leads into the sales funnel than does traditional outbound marketing.¹⁹
- Inbound marketing delivers leads at a *cost per lead* of 62% less than does traditional outbound marketing.²⁰

By emphasizing inbound strategies in your marketing plan, you can actually save money while reaching the right customers in the right way.

As famous marketing guru Guy Kawasaki says, “If you have more money than brains, you should focus on outbound marketing. If you have more brains than money, you should focus on inbound marketing.”²¹

THE POWER OF CONTENT

Once again, we are seeing just how important great content is. In order to have the greatest effect, your inbound marketing efforts must be reputable and relevant. Website content is far more likely to engage and convince someone who is doing a comparative analysis than is a flashy paid ad—but only if it’s clear and credible.

You want to pull in your target audience, and only relevant content that matters to them will accomplish this. No company can have prospects magically flock to it overnight, but you can gradually build up your company’s reputation so that it becomes a thought leader in your industry and thus attracts consumers organically.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Perform an audit of the marketing channels that your company currently uses, separating the outbound (paid) channels from the inbound (owned and earned) channels. Even if your tracking metrics are not perfect, you should be able to identify at least one outbound marketing tactic that

is a drain on your budget and generates a poor or questionable return. As a test, reallocate some of that budget to support your inbound marketing efforts. Those freed-up dollars could help you to hire a freelance copywriter or invest in new content, such as video, educational webinars, or designed infographics. Best of all, focusing more attention and resources on inbound marketing tactics will naturally, over time, improve your search engine rankings.

VIEW YOUR WEBSITE AS YOUR ONLINE STOREFRONT

As the first introduction of most prospective customers to your company, your website is the best place to communicate what your company does.

The Digital Era is in full swing. For example, 89% of B2B buyers research online before making a purchase.²² Imagine what could happen if a stronger website presence led to even 5% more conversions into website inquiries, or better yet, phone calls? And what if even one of those leads generated tens of thousands of dollars in sales? The financial outcome of a stronger website presence can be enormous, and it is never negligible.

A majority of customers today view a company's website as a virtual storefront through which they can browse products and make purchases. Consider these statistics:

- A 2013 study by RTi Research (formerly Rothstein-Tauber) found that 81% of consumers research products online before going to a store and that the percentage is still rising.²³
- A 2014 Marketo research report found that up to 95% of qualified prospects go to company websites to research before they are ready to talk with a sales rep, but that as many as

70% of them will eventually buy a product from you—or your competitors.²⁴

- A 2014 Forrester study found that consumers have high expectations about what they will find on a company website: 71% expect to view in-store inventory online, and 50% expect to be able to buy online and pick up in-store.²⁵

YOUR WEBSITE IS YOUR KEY OWNED MEDIA MARKETING ASSET

The concepts of “content is king,” owned media, and inbound marketing from tips #6 through #9 come together in the form of your website. As your company’s first introduction to most prospective customers, your website is the best way to communicate what you do. Investing in a credible, attractive, and easy-to-navigate website is imperative.

There are four basic tenets to developing a powerhouse website. Every organization should follow these. First, the site must have great content that communicates the benefits of the business’ product or service. Second, the site must be user-friendly: digestible, device-friendly, and fast-loading. Third, the site must be easy to find—no easy task given that global Internet traffic has increased 500% over the past 5 years and is expected to increase another 300% over the next 5 years. And finally, the site must have analytics installed in order to track the behavior of visitors.

Best of all, following these four tenets will improve your website at little cost. Many marketing companies may not want to tell you that, because they would rather sell you a bigger website instead!

DEVELOP BETTER CONTENT AND DESIGN TO INCREASE CONVERSION

Recent research from KISSmetrics indicated that 96% of website visitors are not ready to buy.²⁶ That means that your website is more than a vehicle for e-commerce. It is a continuous opportunity to convert more visitors into customers.

The first step in converting prospects who visit your website is to keep them engaged. Because they are visiting your website to solve a problem, your website must immediately explain that your company has the answer. Your company's website can do this by engaging the prospect in a dialogue that tackles pain points and needs.

Make sure that all of the pages of your company's website are clear, focused, and geared toward the visitors' needs. The content must be engaging yet concise, with clearly delineated headlines and meaningful information that addresses prospects' pain points. A list of your company's accomplishments and awards may make you feel important, but it will not speak to your audience in the same way that content centered on the visitor will.

Images, videos, and infographics can help to heighten the effectiveness of your website. According to Dr. James McQuivey of Forrester Research, one minute of video has as much marketing influence as do 1.8 million words.²⁷ Would you rather write 3,600 typical web pages or produce one minute of engaging video? Most marketers would say the latter, and your customers would certainly prefer to watch an engaging one-minute video than read almost two million words.

MAKE YOUR WEBSITE USER-FRIENDLY

One way to increase website engagement is to build your pages from short, active content. This type of content should comprise the majority

of your website and your social media posts. Longer content can be divided into sections with clear headlines and subheads that enable viewers to glean the main points without having to read the entire text.

Even better than expressing your content in readable chunks with clear calls to action, however, is ensuring that your company's website has *responsive web design* so that it can be enjoyed on all devices. In early 2014, Internet usage on mobile devices surpassed Internet usage on PCs, irreversibly transforming the marketing landscape.²⁸ Your content must be easily read and digested on any device. In fact, Google has recently begun to factor mobile optimization into its search rankings.

With more than 50% of searches now originating on mobile devices and 77% of executives using smartphones to research products and services for their businesses, having a mobile-friendly website is imperative.²⁹ A responsive website design enables your website to adjust its dimensions to fit the size of the device on which it is displayed. As a result, you avoid losing new-business opportunities generated by searches conducted on mobile devices.

According to a Google report, 40% of mobile consumers turn to a competitor's site after a bad mobile website experience, and 57% wouldn't recommend a business that has a bad mobile site.³⁰ A mobile-friendly interface will keep you from frustrating and losing prospects.

Because many conventional conversion points, such as a downloadable white paper or an email newsletter signup, are better suited to a PC, make sure that your website includes mobile-friendly conversion points, such as drop-down menus and simple forms with auto-populated fields.

Explore your website on various devices (e.g., Android smartphone, iPhone, iPad). If you don't already have responsive design, chances are that you will see the need for it. If you do have responsive design, look for any elements of each page of the site that still don't quite work, such as buttons that are too large or too small, and work with your website

developer to make sure they get fixed. Mimic your customers' actions on a mobile device, including making a test purchase and submitting a form. We guarantee that you can find something to improve about the experience that your customers have already been struggling with, such as the time your site takes to load. (Check out Media Temple at <https://mediatemple.net> for an inexpensive hosting provider that can help to boost your site's speed.)

ENSURE THAT YOUR COMPANY'S WEBSITE CAN BE FOUND

Although having an optimized online storefront is key, it will do little for you if it cannot be found. You have to think about how to drive traffic to your website, and this makes optimizing your search engine rankings mandatory. If your website does not effectively communicate to Google what its pages are about, you will be penalized with low search rankings that will prevent customers from discovering your site.

There are a number of tools that can help you to analyze how your site is ranked relative to other sites in your industry. One of these is offered by Alexa. Google also offers a free tool that will show you why your site isn't ranked higher: Does it contain broken links? Has the content not been updated in the past three months? Google's tool will help you to identify and fix issues that affect your ranking. To give you a starting point for *search engine optimization* (SEO), you can also perform an SEO audit using simple websites like Varvy.com and Moz.

When your website is optimized to be easily found by prospects and to convert them to customers, your online storefront will be ready to bring in increased traffic and sales.

TRACK YOUR WEBSITE VISITORS

When you have created engaging content for your site, ensured that the content is displayed cleanly on all devices, and optimized the site for easy discovery by prospects, begin to leverage the tools available for tracking the behavior of visitors to your site. Even visitors who choose not to engage when they first visit can become customers later if you keep the lines of communication open.

The best way to capture visitors' contact information is to offer something to them in return. Post longer articles, samples, or white papers that are likely to appeal to your target audience, but require visitors to provide their contact information in order to download those materials. This will enable you to respectfully continue to engage the prospect in hopes of making a sale in the future.

Even more importantly, implement Google Analytics for your website. The tool is free and requires only that a line of tracking code be added to each page of the site. It will then record various metrics about visitor behavior on your site, such as the number of visitors, the amount of time they spend on each page, and where prospects drop off as they move closer to a purchase decision. This information will enable you to further revise your website in order to optimize the visitor's journey on your website.

In order to systematically compare metrics, choose six to eight key metrics and assemble them into a *dashboard* that you can review each month—or more frequently—to see who is visiting your site and what aspect of it most engages them. You generally have an idea of how many people and what type of people step into your physical store (if you have one), and Google Analytics gives you that same information (and more) for your online storefront.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

A great website is no longer expensive, provided you know the four keys on which to focus. Is your company's *content* compelling and geared toward your prospects and customers? Examine every page of your company's website with a fresh eye. Is the design of your website *user-friendly*? Does it appear clean and modern, across all applicable devices? Is your company's website *easily found*? Don't just set your website and forget it. At TribalVision, we revisit our website constantly to ensure that we are providing the most relevant information and customer experiences based on our up-to-date knowledge, which positively affects our search rankings. And finally, *track your visitors*. Who visits your company's website every day? Is it the same B2B company that you have been courting? If so, now may be the best time for you to contact them again! Make sure that you are running Google Analytics with sophisticated tracking of form submissions, video clicks, and other key actions to get the real-time information that your company needs.

TECHNOLOGY

PUT THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY IN PLACE

A virtual gold mine of tools that can make your marketing instantaneously easier has been produced during the past decade.

Today's technology can help with just about anything: email marketing, product management, collaboration, social media marketing, insights and analytics, and visual content. Marketing-related technology is easiest thought of as usually falling into two major categories: *marketing automation* and *customer relationship management* (CRM). Together, the tailored tools of marketing automation and CRM platforms not only help you to stay on top of all leads and customer relationships but also help you to organize your data, optimize your website, and ensure that visitors to your website have an ideal experience from the moment they enter your site until long after they have closed their browsers.

DISCOVER THE UNIFYING POWER OF MARKETING AUTOMATION

Marketing automation tools include software platforms and other technologies that enable organizations to more effectively market on multiple online channels (e.g., email, social media, websites, and search engines) and to automate repetitive tasks.

In general, automation is anything you can do to avoid having to perform tasks manually. For marketing, these tasks can include updating your company's website, sending email newsletters and other email campaigns, and deploying your content on social media. For example, when someone visits your company's website and fills out a lead form, an automated tool can use the information in that form to create a drip marketing campaign (automated email campaign) that is targeted to that particular individual.

But automation doesn't help with only new leads. If you are trying to increase your sales from existing customers, for example, marketing automation can help to segment data from past customer purchases to be used in upselling, cross-selling, and making cycle-based sales to previous customers. If you are trying to increase your conversion rate, marketing automation can show you which activities typically precede the moment of purchase. You can then automatically offer those touch points to leads that may be near the purchase decision.

Marketing automation also makes it easier for you to manage, review, and evaluate your social media campaigns, enabling you to streamline posting activities across multiple channels. You can also automate previously repetitive, manual tasks, such as tracking of website visitors, SEO, and landing page integration with your website.

A marketing automation tool is an excellent first step for putting in place the right technology. Popular automation service providers include Marketo, Act-On, and HubSpot. Remember, you can also start small and free while you are becoming acclimated to the process—and those introductory solutions may even work just fine in the long run.

HOW MARKETING AUTOMATION AIDS YOUR BRAND AND BOTTOM LINE

Marketing automation provides your company with a more efficient, influential, and cost-effective marketing process. Your business will appear more credible, respond more quickly to inbound leads, and communicate with customers and prospects more frequently and in a more personalized manner. The resulting consolidation of data will also offer insights into which of your marketing processes are most effective, and the increased efficiency and decreased labor costs will reduce operating expenses.

The improved lead management and new insights provided by marketing automation will also generate significant new revenue. This is why most successful organizations today use a marketing automation platform. In fact, 63% of companies that are growing faster than their competitors use marketing automation software, while 78% of high-performing marketers say that marketing automation is responsible for improving their contribution to revenue.³¹ According to a study by ANNUITAS, businesses that start using marketing automation to nurture prospects experience a 451% increase in qualified leads.³² Nucleus Research has also found that the use of marketing automation platforms, on average, produces a 14.5% increase in sales and a 12.2% reduction in marketing overhead.³³

This is one bandwagon that it would be smart to jump on.

USE A CRM PLATFORM TO LEVERAGE YOUR CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

The second technology-based investment that you should make is in a CRM platform. At its core, CRM enables you to wow your customers at a scalable level. It's one thing to wow five customers, but what about when you have five hundred customers? A good CRM platform will

combine every interaction with a specific prospect or customer into a digestible profile of your company's relationship with that prospect or customer. A properly trained sales team then will be able to maintain a history of each lead, tracking every touch point and coordinating all of the team members.

Instead of struggling to keep track of long-term relationships, your sales team will know when and how to pull the trigger in order to convert a lead to a purchase based on all previous interactions detailed in a prospect's or customer's profile.

When you combine a powerful CRM platform with streamlined touch points and the implementation possibilities of your marketing automation tool, you will be maximizing every lead every time. Salesforce.com offers the best-known CRM, but you may not need or use all of its sophistication. A less expensive alternative, such as Zoho CRM, Sage CRM, SugarCRM, or Insightly, could be right for you.

TECHNOLOGY IS NEVER A SUBSTITUTE FOR THINKING

To get the most out of your chosen technology platforms, however, you must remember that marketing automation improves your existing efforts. It does not do your marketing and lead generation work for you.

Technology will not provide you with a strategy. It is a tool: It informs you so that you can make better choices about strategy, and it helps you to efficiently implement your chosen tactics. Therefore, technology investments should be made based on the tool's ability to execute on and improve your predetermined strategic priorities. You must then furnish your chosen platforms with the necessary data, leads, and content in order to generate your desired results.

PERMISSION-BASED LISTS AND ENGAGING CONTENT ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Take drip marketing campaigns, for instance. Through savvy marketing, these automated email campaigns can keep your company top of mind and thus generate impressive returns. But if these emails are sent to individuals who have not filled out a form on your company's website or who do not have a prior relationship with or awareness of your company, the campaign not only would fail to generate engagement but actually would hurt more than help.

If you provide an email automation tool with solid prospects and strong content, the platform will send messages at your preferred times, guarantee a professional-looking, glitch-free campaign, and begin to generate its own leads. If you artfully integrate the platform with your website, visitors to your landing page can sign up to receive automatic emails that are customized to their specific interests.

If you take the time to set up an automation tool properly, you will soon be strategically targeting customers without having to lift a finger.

INTEGRATE YOUR PLATFORMS TO MAXIMIZE RESULTS

Making sure that all of your technology platforms integrate with each other and can be used across departments is just as important as the choice of those platforms. This is particularly true for marketing automation and CRM platforms.

Begin by aligning your marketing and sales teams, both of which must be properly trained, since marketing automation and CRM platforms are intended to directly benefit both teams. Although your marketing automation vendor typically will be willing to perform the actual setup and integration of the platform, it is your task to get your team on board with the integration. When the two platforms have been integrated,

your sales and marketing teams will be able to align their interests to address the key touch points of the customer decision journey. They will be able to work together to maximize the benefits of your company's technology investments.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

If your company doesn't yet have marketing automation or CRM software in place, appoint some individuals at your company to start researching the ones we have mentioned in this tip and any others you may have been recommended. Next, create a spreadsheet of price, attributes, and benefits so you can figure out which marketing automation and CRM platforms are right for you based on your business objectives and level of sophistication. Set goals that within six months you will have a marketing automation system in place and that six months after that you will have a CRM in place, because implementing both initiatives simultaneously may be too much to tackle. Marketing automation and CRM are the two most important technological investments that you can make in today's marketing world. The time that your team spends learning and using these tools can help to grow your business while cutting or limiting costs—while making you look bigger in the eyes of your prospects and customers than you really are.

MEASURE EVERYTHING YOU MARKET

The benefits of embracing the data that you have about both your customers and your prospects are clear; the challenge is doing so in the most efficient way.

The marketing buzz phrase of the moment is Big Data, for good reason. Big Data offers valuable insights into customer behavior that can help companies of all sizes to refine their interactions with customers, improve the effectiveness of their marketing efforts, and increase their ROI. Consider the survey findings from a recent Forbes Insights paper titled “The Big Potential of Big Data: A Field Guide for CMOs”:³⁴

- Of the companies that felt that they always or frequently made sufficient use of data, 92% met or exceeded their profitability goals.
- 60% of companies that used Big Data at least 50% of the time felt that they exceeded their sales goals.

In addition, a collaborative research report on Big Data, sponsored by General Electric in 2015, found that 84% of those surveyed believed that Big Data analytics would “shift the competitive landscape for my for my industry” within a year.³⁵ The benefits of embracing your data

on customers and prospects are clear. The challenge is doing so in the most efficient way.

DON'T BE INTIMIDATED BY BIG DATA

First, let's start with a formal definition of Big Data. Big Data is a broad term for data sets that are so large or complex that traditional data processing applications are inadequate for analyzing them. If your company is small, this may sound overwhelming and seem unrealistic for you to embrace. Heck, you may not have captured the raw data needed to begin such an ambitious undertaking. The good news is that you are not alone and you are advised to start with baby steps.

Starting small not only is acceptable but most often is the smartest decision. Many companies attempt to launch a massive, holistic data analysis program. These initiatives often fail and are rarely efficient. If you start small, you'll know exactly what you need from your data when you eventually develop a more robust data analysis system.

As marketing pioneer John Wanamaker once famously said, "Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted. The trouble is, I don't know which half." Starting small can help you to figure out which "half" of your efforts is contributing the most to your business.

USE KPIS AS YOUR ENTRY POINT

Key performance indicators (KPIs) are the perfect way to start assessing and quantifying your marketing initiatives before tackling more sophisticated Big Data projects. These KPIs will serve as the barometer for the success or failure of all of your marketing efforts.

Standard KPIs that can form the core of your analysis and decision making include *return on ad spend* (ROAS), *media efficiency ratio* (MER), *Net Promoter Score* (NPS), paid search and email *click-through rate* (CTR), and paid media *cost per point* (CPP).

You also can use other KPIs, such as the number of meetings you get with business owners or key decision makers through your marketing efforts or your email and social media statistics. Not every piece of data is a new acronym to learn. Some KPIs can be found in the trenches. Just think, “How have my team’s efforts affected my company’s revenue?”

Many marketing firms don’t want to talk about sales, because they are afraid that if sales are poor they will be fired. They would rather talk about click-through rates and media efficiencies. Instead, you should choose a variety of KPIs, perhaps eight to ten, to track in a spreadsheet. Again, the idea is not to become overwhelmed but rather to commit to tracking these metrics over a period of time so that they can show how successful or unsuccessful your various marketing efforts have been. Business owners can get excited about KPIs, but without follow through the value of these tracking efforts is lost after three to six months.

KPIs add quantitative rigor to your company’s marketing efforts. This increased discipline is invaluable for guiding future decisions and taking the guesswork out of optimizing your hard-earned marketing dollars.

IDENTIFY KEY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Choose a few simple, specific analytics to explore first. Focus on metrics that directly affect your company’s bottom line, such as cost per lead, *customer acquisition cost*, customer lifetime value, and *revenue-to-marketing-cost ratio*. You also can look at customer trends. If you identify customers whose revenue has fallen off, you can then target those customers in order to maximize those revenue streams. Although

these types of metrics may seem simple, they are excellent ways of using data with minimal investment in new programming or technology.

LEVERAGE FREE OR LOW-COST TOOLS FOR ANALYTICS

Although marketing analytics has connotations of being difficult or expensive, today's tools can streamline and reduce the cost of data collection and data analysis. A marketing analytics dashboard, for example, uses data about financial performance and marketing initiatives to show where the two overlap. The patterns that emerge on the dashboard make clear which marketing initiatives have the highest ROI, enabling companies to reconsider their marketing tactics in order to maximize profitability.

ASSESS THE VALUE OF ANALYTICS BEFORE YOU REALLY DIVE IN

You may discover that the value of analytics isn't as high as you had expected. In that case, now may not be the right time to launch a large analytics project. This is something that is certainly better to know before your company has invested significant time and money in such a project.

When the time is right, your company's gradual ease into analytics will enable it to take that final step without fear. Eventually, your company can track all of its marketing campaigns, its customer relationships, industry trends and other relevant statistics, and even can use census data and industry trade data in performing demographic targeting.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Determine the most important KPIs for your business. Many of these, such as return on ad spend and click-through rate apply to almost any

company, but others may be specific to your industry or company. Before you invest in analyzing and using Big Data, make sure that you are capturing data in an effective, centralized way. Start small: Choose two or three KPIs—those that are most important for your company—and then expand that set to eight to ten KPIs. If possible, compare your data to industry data in order to obtain a better sense of where your company stands compared to its competitors. Finally, make sure that you have the resources in place for analyzing the data. Investing in Big Data is a waste unless you have data analysts on your staff or have hired a data analysis firm.

TEAM

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH THE RIGHT PEOPLE

To maximize your company's growth, you need people throughout the organization who have both the right skill sets and true passion and complete engagement with the tasks at hand

We're guessing this won't come as a surprise: Your staff is key to the success of your business. Without the right people in place throughout your organization, no marketing initiative will achieve its desired ROI.

According to a study performed by Will Felps, Terence R. Mitchell, and Eliza Byington, even one bad apple can reduce the performance of a business team by 30% to 40%.³⁶ New business efforts will die on the vine if the customer service infrastructure is subpar, the sales force is not a well-oiled machine, or the leadership team believes that “customer-centric” is just a buzzword not worth rigorously pursuing.

TAKE A HARD LOOK AT YOUR PERSONNEL

Jim Collins, noted author of *New York Times* bestsellers *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't* and *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, popularized the idea that leaders need to make sure that they have the right leadership team in place before they can move their companies in the right direction.

His *Twelve Questions tool*, a guide for leaders who want to build great, enduring companies, addresses the topic head-on: “Do we have the right people on the bus, and are 95% of our key seats filled with the right people?”

Asking this question is certainly a good place to start, but what can you do if the answer shows that your company has a problem? Although addressing such a problem is never easy, here are a few suggestions.

BUILD THE RIGHT TEAMS BY FOCUSING ON THE INTANGIBLES

Think about hiring your staff in the same way that a coach thinks about assembling a team. Each staff member will serve a specific role, but the joint actions of the team will lead to success. You need the right team members, rather than just the most qualified individuals.

In addition, each team within the organization has a distinct role, and the members of that team must have the right skill sets to perform that role exceptionally. To be a good hire, the individual first must have the expertise required for the role. After that box has been checked, the individual also must have a customer-centric mindset. Your company will never achieve its desired ROI if even a single member of the organization isn't dedicated to providing an exceptional customer experience. And finally, the individual must be a culture carrier with the right level of enthusiasm.

DEVELOP A RIGOROUS RECRUITING PROCESS

Of course, you can't build the perfect team if you can't attract the right talent. Your company's recruiting process determines the quality of talent from which you can choose, and time that is spent strengthening that process will pay off in long-term sales growth.

Organizations that have rigorous recruiting processes and track all of their communications with applicants are 40% more likely to be best in class.³⁷ Your company's process must be structured and its hiring diligent in order to achieve its potential. Candidates should undergo rigorous scrutiny, with interviewers trained to compare candidates on a consistent scale. Prioritize the qualities and values that are consistent with your company's strategy, and always aim to hire the highest-quality individuals available. Author and entrepreneur Guy Kawasaki is fond of quoting Steve Jobs as having said, "A players hire A players; B players hire C players; and C players hire D players. It doesn't take long to get to Z players."

You don't want your hiring managers to be consumed by insecurity that causes them to hire employees who are of lower quality than they are. However, the decision to make an offer to a candidate is only half of the hiring process. You must attract and impress these qualified A players. Part of this is dependent on the reputation of your business and brand. Companies that have strong employer branding have a cost per hire 50% lower and a turnover rate 28% lower when compared to other organizations.³⁸ Recruiting is certainly one more reason to invest in optimizing your business and brand.

The recruiting process also provides an opportunity for your company to make a good impression on candidates. In fact, 68% of job seekers will accept a lower salary from employers that make a great impression during the recruiting process.³⁹ Everything about your recruiting process, from job postings to interview scheduling, should be standardized to ensure high-quality interactions. Recruiting should be done in a timely, professional manner.

CONSTANTLY ASSESS AND STRENGTHEN YOUR TEAM

Consistent, constructive performance reviews will keep your team strong. Consider the example of Jack Welch, who developed a performance

appraisal system that he called differentiation. Welch proposed biannual evaluations of all employees based on how their results have advanced the company's goals and how well they have adhered to the company's values. This evaluation ensures that employees know where they stand and where they must make progress. The evaluation includes telling employees whether they fall in the top 20%, middle 70%, or bottom 10% and providing them with actionable feedback and coaching in order to help them to improve.

Although your company's performance criteria for its employees may not align exactly with Welch's, a consistent approach is a requirement of any performance evaluations system. Such transparency will improve team performance across the board. It also will guarantee that employees at risk of termination are given a fair chance to improve their contribution to the team. You cannot afford to keep the wrong people around simply to be kind, but you should ensure that the firing process is conducted with fairness and respect.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Take a hard look at your company's recruiting process. Is it consistent and rigorous or spotty and casual? What questions are you asking potential team members? How are you presenting your organization to applicants? Is the application process rigorous enough? Many large, successful organizations have each candidate do seven or eight interviews and ensure that the interviewers ask the candidate different questions. Although you may decide that your company doesn't need that many interviews, a certain level of rigor is crucial to putting the right people in the right seats. And the process of surrounding yourself with the right people should continue after the initial hire. Use performance reviews (at least annually) to evaluate your people in a structured way that ensures that all seats are still filled by the right people.

MARKET INTERNALLY

The motivation of your team via internal marketing builds a sense of partnership and purpose that is key to your organization's success.

At TribalVision, we consider any organization as being composed of three elements: a customer tribe, a partner tribe, and an internal tribe. Any business will operate below its optimum if it does not invest in all of these three elements. The truth is, business owners often focus a disproportionate amount of time on keeping customers happy while ignoring their own internal team.

The result of this can be internal friction, which literally slows down your company. On the Employee Engagement Group's website (employeeengagement.com), you can view a video that demonstrates this concept perfectly. In the front of a boat are two active rowers who are truly working hard to keep the boat moving forward. Behind them are six rowers who are rowing moderately, and behind them are two rowers who are actually rowing against the others, creating an opposing force that can serve as a major impediment to the boat's speed. The metaphor here, of course, is that the boat is a company and its speed is its growth.

When you market to the members of your internal team, you can prevent this type of impediment from existing. A study by the Human Capital Institute found that most organizations operate at a 30% rate of efficiency due to poor engagement among their staff.⁴⁰ If you consider how much more revenue a business could generate by increasing its employee engagement, the value of internal marketing becomes clear. Here are some empirical results:

- A Towers Watson study of 50 companies found that organizations with high employee engagement levels experienced a 19% increase in operating income and 28% growth in earnings per share.⁴¹
- A similar study found a spread of over 5% in operating margin and 3% in net profit margin in companies with high employee engagement versus low engagement.⁴²
- Research by Kenexa found that companies whose workers were engaged generated five times higher shareholder returns over a five-year period.⁴³
- Increased employee engagement and satisfaction correlate with meaningful business outcomes such as profitability and productivity.⁴⁴
- Increasing investment in employee engagement by 10% can increase annual profit by \$2,400 per employee.⁴⁵

In order to motivate your employees and increase their engagement, you must show them why they should be as passionate about your organization as you are. This will spur them to truly embrace and prioritize the customer experience and adopt an owner's mindset rather than simply performing their daily responsibilities.

BUILDING YOUR BRAND FROM THE INSIDE OUT

What exactly does internal marketing entail? It is your strongest motivational tool, and it goes beyond providing perks to employees or your employees being satisfied. Instead, you and your managers need to inspire your employees to make emotional commitments to the organization.

Remember our discussion of Simon Sinek's TED Talk? Your staff should know what your company does, how it does it, and, most importantly, why it does it. Only when every employee knows and cares about your company's message, brand, and leadership principles will your team be fully engaged. It's mandatory to make your business' story and selling points apparent to all of your employees in the same way that they are communicated to your customers and prospects.

PUTTING INTERNAL MARKETING INTO PRACTICE

There are a wide variety of internal marketing tactics that you can deploy:

- Send out a monthly internal company email newsletter or develop an intranet for posting company news and happenings. This type of internal communication helps to ensure that all employees are aware of the company's direction and feel connected to that direction and to each other.
- Coordinate company events, such as happy hours, internal team-building workshops, and off-site retreats. These events give your team opportunities to bond and provide an excellent forum for you and your managers to communicate your business' story, goals, selling points, and priorities.

- Revamp the new-hire orientation process to ensure that extensive learning about the company is an integral part of it.
- Develop a mentorship program. But a mentor isn't just a manager who makes sure that employees generate good work output. A mentor is someone who helps an employee with his or her career path, makes sure that the employee has the work-life balance that he or she needs, and makes sure that the employee's educational aspirations are met.

Both new and existing team members should be encouraged to consider how their daily work fits into the larger picture of the company. Also, make sure to provide employees with opportunities to offer active feedback to the company's management. Executed properly, internal marketing programs let employees know what a great company they work for and how their daily efforts contribute to the organization as a whole.

REALIZE THAT MONEY ISN'T THE ONLY MOTIVATOR

In addition to internal marketing, consider refining your motivational strategies to include nonfinancial incentives. A global study by McKinsey & Company found that nonfinancial incentives, such as praise and awards from an immediate manager, attention from leaders, and opportunities to lead projects or task forces, were all more effective motivators than financial incentives, such as stock options or performance-based cash bonuses.⁴⁶

Nonfinancial incentives may require more time and commitment from senior managers than do financial incentives. However, they are more effective, because they inspire passion tied to the company rather than to money in the bank. This passion results in engaged employees who are committed to your company's goals and values and motivated to

contribute to the company's success, which in turn results in higher profit margins.

As soon as the right team is in place, fully engaged, and working toward a common goal, your company's probability of achieving long-term success will dramatically increase.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Sign up your full team for an employee engagement workshop. These workshops can be tailored to your business and presented on-site. Most engagement workshops are geared toward developing and leading engaged teams, but some are more targeted. By teaching your leadership team how to increase employee engagement, you will be well on your way to building an engaged, enthusiastic workforce.

You can also undertake biannual surveys to gauge your company's *employee engagement level*. An employee satisfaction index can be calculated by asking your employees to answer, on a scale of 1-10, a set of sample questions, such as the following: How satisfied are you with your current workplace? How well does your current workplace meet your expectations? How close is your current workplace to the ideal? This continuous feedback loop will keep your finger on the pulse of your corporate culture and help you to identify potential problems before they become more serious cancers.

LEVERAGE YOUR INTERNAL TEAM

Word of mouth continues to have exceptional power. Tap into the valuable personal relationships that your employees bring to your company.

Consumers today are oversaturated with information, making it difficult to produce advertising that can successfully cut through the cluttered sea of modern media. Fortunately, one of the most successful tactics for reaching prospective customers with your company's message is also one of the easiest: word of mouth.

Referrals and recommendations are among the most crucial tools in your marketing arsenal, especially for small businesses. In fact, a global study conducted by Nielsen found that 92% of consumers trust word of mouth, or recommendations, from friends and family above all other forms of advertising.⁴⁷ It is hardly surprising, then, that organizations that experience dramatic growth often can attribute their success to word-of-mouth referrals.

What may be slightly more surprising is that these referrals often originate in equal proportions from employee connections and satisfied customers. Although providing an exemplary customer experience in order to convert customers to evangelists of your brand will always be key, you can also get prospective customers in the door through leveraging your employees' personal relationships.

WHY YOUR EMPLOYEES ARE A PROMISING SOURCE OF REFERRALS

Every employee has preexisting community and family connections and immense potential to use them to build awareness of your business. Think of each employee as a marketing channel, and visualize the huge web of contacts that your employees can bring to your brand.

If you have 100 employees who have each worked with 10 potential customers and have strong connections to 20 other figures in each potential customer's industry, that's already 3,000 prospects that you can reach with little or no additional marketing spend. You can't afford to waste an opportunity like that.

In addition, employee referrals are great sources of new hires. Employees hired based on referrals rank number one for quality, application-to-hire time, applicant-to-hire conversion rate, and retention. Applicants who are referred by current employees are, by definition, pre-vetted and better informed and therefore more likely to fit both the job requirements and the company culture. From the second a new employee who has been hired based on a referral from a current employee steps foot in your office, he or she is likely to be more engaged than other new employees.

The average employee has 150 contacts on social media networks. If you have 100 employees, you already have 15,000 potential candidates without posting even a single job.

ESTABLISH A NEW COMPANYWIDE MINDSET

In order to encourage your employees to give either type of referral (customer or employee), you must impress them. Fostering a positive work environment will encourage employees to be true evangelists of your company's brand. Even if you have a bonus structure in place, an unhappy employee will be unlikely to recommend your business.

You must take concrete steps to fully leverage your internal team. Train your entire staff to think like marketers via company meetings and handbooks. Everyone in your company should be asking questions such as “How can I strengthen my sphere of influence within companies to which I am already connected?” and “How can I generate more word-of-mouth referrals for our company?”

You should also take the additional step of devising a formalized strategy for leveraging your team’s connections. Ask your employees (on a rotating basis) to contact key influencers and other connections via LinkedIn. Set up a schedule for employees to contribute new ideas and testimonials to the company blog. Develop a team networking calendar, and send your employees to after-work events, industry conferences, and trade shows.

Because we are all marketers in our own ways, make sure that when your employees arrive at networking events they are able to speak about your company’s USP. At TribalVision, we go over typical questions that may come up or objections that may need to be overcome. If, for example, one of our employees answers the question “So, tell me about TribalVision?” with “Oh, well, we’re a marketing firm,” the questioner will stop there. But if the employee instead responds, “We’re a fully strategic, aligned outsourced marketing department for organizations that need marketing expertise but don’t have it in-house,” the conversation may lead somewhere. *Most of all, make the interaction fun!*

Remember, this networking shouldn’t feel like work to your team, so make it fun for everyone involved. Use friendly contests, awarding prizes to the employee or team that generates the most referrals and new business opportunities from networking. Institute a bonus for each new customer or new hire referred by a current employee. When you get everyone on board and fired up, your employees will become your strongest brand ambassadors and a key marketing channel.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

To begin, share the importance of employee referrals with your team in an email or company meeting. Many of your employees are likely unaware of the power that they hold and would be happy to be evangelists for your brand. Encourage your employees to think of any of their contacts for whom your product or service would be relevant, and give them the materials and training to influence that contact. Formalize a team networking calendar, and standardize the initiatives for referrals. Without a process in place, your referral program will most likely fizzle out over time. Next, ask your staff to share company happenings on social media. Shares and retweets of your company's content can be invaluable when they come from your company's own employees. You never know what potential customer or potential employee you may reach.

VIEW MARKETING AND SALES AS ONE

Companies that view marketing and sales as a symbiotic partnership outperform their competitors who view them as separate silos. You must align and integrate these functions as much as possible.

Did you know that 57% of top performing companies have highly aligned marketing and sales functions? In fact, these high performing companies are twice as likely to define workflows encompassing both sales and marketing.⁴⁸

Studies show that companies that view marketing and sales as a symbiotic partnership, with both working toward the same goal of revenue growth, far outpace their competitors that view these two functions as separate silos with separate objectives. To address this potential disconnect, business owners must integrate their marketing team into their sales efforts whenever and wherever possible.

Here are three tangible ways to ensure that this symbiosis occurs.

FIRST, DIVE INTO THE SALES PROCESS HEADFIRST

At TribalVision, when we begin a client's marketing campaign, we spend several days getting to know the company and interviewing its sales, marketing, and management teams. You also should consider having your in-house marketing team invest time in this type of intense interdepartmental discovery.

Your marketing team should know your company's sales process and sales efforts, because it is responsible for providing the tools, sales literature, and marketing tactics for optimizing lead conversion. As the members of the marketing team evaluate the current sales processes and learn the nuances of capturing new business, they should pay close attention to the path that a prospect takes from initial website inquiry to purchase.

They also should map out every potential touch point and uncover ways to strengthen your company's sales efforts. They should create simple, digestible marketing assets to be used in every key interaction with a customer. This will give your sales team everything that they need in order to provide exemplary support to customers and generate polished, credible quotes, proposals, presentations, and customized pitches for prospects. These assets will increase the sales team's chances of closing new business.

When your marketing team contributes to the sales efforts in this way, your sales team will be energized. Your salespeople will begin to view your marketing team as an indispensable ally rather than a peripheral department that is out of touch with their daily needs and stresses.

SECOND, ESTABLISH A STRUCTURE FOR CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION

Some structure should be established for the sales and marketing conversation in order to ensure consistent, open communication. Whenever TribalVision begins an engagement with a new client, one of the first questions we ask is “How often do your marketing and sales teams communicate with each other?” Although the most common answer is that they speak to one another every day, rarely does that mean that they’re meeting in a structured fashion to discuss clear, predetermined agendas.

Schedule a monthly meeting of the sales and marketing teams to discuss the previous month’s results, review the upcoming month’s marketing campaigns, and brainstorm innovative ways to generate new business. If these meetings are already taking place, make sure that each meeting’s action items are being translated into clear next steps with responsibility assigned. There is nothing worse than attending a meeting in which many great ideas are generated but the attendees leave the meeting without a clear game plan to follow afterward.

In addition, use these meetings as a forum for building and maintaining a unified sales and marketing calendar that leverages the assets of both teams to achieve the end goal of increasing sales. One example of this in practice would be someone on the marketing team noting that a salesperson has an upcoming meeting with an important prospect and taking the initiative to help to create a custom pitch presentation to be used in that meeting.

THIRD, INTEGRATE YOUR MARKETING AND SALES PLATFORMS

Just like communication between your sales and marketing teams, communication between your marketing and sales technology platforms is a must. Marketing automation platforms, such as HubSpot, can help your company to establish consistent touch points with prospects. CRM

platforms, such as Salesforce.com and Zoho CRM, can be incredibly helpful for your sales team to track and build meaningful relationships with customers. Although these two powerful platforms can exist independently of each other, that hinders the effectiveness of each. What good is a qualified lead from a company's marketing efforts if it doesn't flow into the sales team's funnel in a timely, prioritized manner?

If your marketing and sales teams aren't using these tools, they should start. If they are using them, make sure that both teams are feeding the data to each other, closing the feedback loop. This will ensure that your sales team is capitalizing on the fruits of your marketing campaigns, and vice versa.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

To begin, schedule a meeting with the heads of your company's marketing and sales departments. Encourage each to develop a presentation that illuminates the inner workings of his or her department. Adding structure in this way, rather than just chatting with them in the hallway, can enhance accountability. If possible, these presentations should be hands-on and eventually presented to your entire marketing and sales staff. These presentations will help the marketing and sales teams to begin to understand each other in the intimate manner necessary for successful integration of their efforts. Salespeople can explain what they are seeing in the field, and members of the marketing team can discover how the company's message may need to be adapted in order to provide solutions for certain types of customers. When the inner workings of each department are clear to both, follow the three-step process given in this tip to unlock your company's dramatic growth potential that may previously have been handcuffed.

TREAT YOUR SALES FORCE AS A MARKETING CHANNEL

Even a small sales force costs more than most small or midsize businesses spend annually on marketing. Optimize yours and make it a marketing channel that efficiently drives new business and grows revenue.

Business owners often squirm in their seats when having to decide whether to take the financial risk of hiring a full-time marketing manager or deploying paid media campaigns. Often, every dollar spent on marketing comes under intense scrutiny, whereas money spent on the salaries and commissions for the sales team is something of an afterthought. In fact, your sales force—not your advertising budget—should be thought of as your most expensive marketing channel for growing your business.

Even a small team of five salespeople easily accounts for at least \$500,000 in annual salaries, overhead, benefits, and bonuses. That's a good deal more than most small or midsize businesses spend annually on marketing. This money is often allocated inefficiently if the sales force is not optimized to sell in the same way that a marketing channel is.

Your company's marketing plan is its blueprint for increasing sales. Your sales force must become an extension of that plan in order to sell the right products or services to the right customers at the right time in the

right way. Even the most perfectly laid out marketing plan is worthless if the salespeople do not understand their role in bringing it to life.

TURN YOUR SALES FORCE INTO A ROBUST MARKETING CHANNEL

Like any other marketing channel, your company's sales force must be integrated into the customer experience. Customers today won't tolerate fragmented engagement across various channels. Sales and marketing must become one. Leads and customers will expect your sales force to know them by the time they make contact, and your sales force can benefit from marketing's data about prospects.

Your sales team must become an integrated, consistent player in the customer decision journey, but it can only do so if the salespeople understand your marketing strategy and know what is expected of them. There is no reason for them to spend their days putting together samples or dealing with low-priority customers. Management must demand more from salespeople and provide them with the planning and structure for them to succeed.

SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

You must demand that your company's sales force become a well-oiled machine in the same way that you would expect flawless execution of marketing campaigns in the other various channels.

This requires putting in place metrics. At least once per month, your sales team should review KPIs, such as the number of prospect meetings, the number of sales calls, the number of in-person appointments, and customer retention rates. Salespeople's time should then be allocated in order to achieve the desired levels of these KPIs.

As you optimize your sales team's time, ask the following questions:

- Does each salesperson have a clearly defined sales calendar in place for the upcoming quarter?
- Are my company's sales activities aligned with its marketing and its business objectives?
- In each salesperson's day, are there inefficiencies that need to be reviewed and corrected?
- Are there clearly defined metrics in place to judge and hold the salespeople accountable for their efforts?
- Is the sales force equipped with the right tools, such as CRM software, pitch presentations, and other marketing assets, to convert prospects into customers?
- Are we mining data about existing customers for cross-selling and upselling opportunities?

These questions will enable you to dig deeper into the nitty-gritty of your sales effort. In the process, you're sure to uncover some of the lowest-hanging fruit for driving new business and increasing revenue growth.

STANDARDIZE AND THEN CUSTOMIZE YOUR SALES PROCESS

Ultimately, you should develop a universal process for your company's salespeople. All salespeople should follow the same optimized process and be equipped with the necessary materials (e.g., sales literature) to do so.

They should also be held to metrics-based standards. These KPIs should be part of an overarching sales strategy that focuses on your company's business priorities. If your company's number one business priority is increasing orders from existing customers, your salespeople need

to know that so that they can focus on retention, cross-selling, and upselling.

Just like the marketing team targets certain types of people (customer personas) in certain ways, the sales force should focus on customizing the sales process. CRM and marketing automation give the marketing and sales teams a better idea of who your company's customers are. These insights can help salespeople to optimize each conversation with a customer or prospect.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Sit down with your sales team. Review the salespeople's schedules and the sales calendars. Are the salespeople using their time wisely? Are they focusing on the right priorities? Do they have a monthly customer and prospect calendar for which they are accountable? If such a structure isn't currently in place, develop one. Look at their metrics. Are their efforts being tracked and measured? Are they looking at the right KPIs? Are they using a CRM to improve their interactions with prospects and customers? Work with the sales team to ensure that they have quantitative goals for sales growth, new customers, and client happiness. If you give salespeople the structure, marketing assets, support, and guidance that they need and hold them accountable in regular meetings, your company will maximize its marketing dollars and will be better positioned for top-line growth.

YOUR STAFF ISN'T THE ANSWER FOR EVERYTHING

In today's complex and rapidly changing marketing environment, your company's internal team is unlikely to be the be-all and end-all. Outsourcing is a viable way of filling knowledge gaps and accessing specialized expertise.

In small businesses and start-ups, each team member often fills three or four roles. Business owners tend to assume that they and their small team can do it all, because they're hesitant to entrust the development of their business to outsiders. However, in this way they are ignoring the opportunity cost of the time their people spend researching and learning new skills. Considering how to address any areas in which you and your team lack specialized knowledge or expertise can go a long way toward preparing your business for rapid growth.

SPECIALIZED EXPERTISE IS DIFFICULT AND COSTLY TO DEVELOP

Time is finite, and a business will grow more rapidly if its team members focus on their core capabilities rather than spending time attempting to learn new functions that they may soon pass off to other people. In fact, this issue also affects larger businesses. The designated experts in each department wear many hats and tend to become generalists. When the

scope and sophistication of their initiatives require specialized expertise, these departments suddenly have knowledge gaps.

With today's proliferation of outsourcing options, your company shouldn't invest time and money in retraining the generalists in your departments. It's time to call in the specialists.

HOW OUTSOURCED PROS CAN FILL THE GAPS AND UP YOUR GAME

If you allow your staff to focus on their strengths and put in place the right outsourced partners to do the rest, your team will be able to perform at a higher level. In addition to freeing up internal resources to do what they do best, outsourcing can also save your business money.

A Booz Allen Hamilton review of more than 200 outsourcing studies found that respondents, on average, estimated that outsourcing provided a 15% reduction in costs.⁴⁹ Outsourced partners can oftentimes provide higher-quality service at a lower cost than can an in-house generalist. In addition to the monetary savings, your company gains access to a depth and breadth of expertise that is incredibly difficult to build internally.

WHY MARKETING IS AN IDEAL FUNCTION FOR OUTSOURCING

Because marketing is one of the functions most frequently delegated to a multitasking generalist, it is often deprived of the necessary time and expertise. This occurs despite the fact that more and more companies now view marketing as capable of and responsible for driving revenue.

By outsourcing the marketing function, small multifunctional teams whose members have little marketing expertise can focus on their members' core strengths, such as product development, customer service, or sales. Companies that already have an expert marketing

team in place can use outsourced partners to fill gaps and augment internal capabilities.

A SENSE OF WHAT YOUR INTERNAL TEAM IS UP AGAINST

Let's suppose that your business is growing and has a one-person or two-person marketing team that has done an excellent job in the past. The problem is that in just a few years the universe of marketing channels has grown from a handful to hundreds. It has become physically impossible for such a small team to stay abreast of this rapidly evolving revolution in marketing.

In this scenario, outsourcing will give your company access to a wide array of marketing specialists. This team of experts includes people who live and breathe marketing and are certified in tactics ranging from SEO to PPC, CRM, WordPress, and beyond. The sum total of these outsourced capabilities is far more effective than the capabilities of several in-house generalists. The expertise gained through outsourcing would be invaluable to your company, as would the savings from avoiding hiring more staff.

DETERMINING IF OUTSOURCING IS RIGHT FOR YOU

In order to determine if your company could benefit from outsourcing, consider the balance of expertise on your team and the strengths and weaknesses of your company. Doing so will help you determine in which areas you should explore outsource partner options.

If you identify a function that could be made more productive and profitable by outsourcing some aspect of it to a partner, consider analyzing it in more detail using Booz Allen Hamilton's strategic outsourcing framework, a decision-making framework that the firm developed based on its experiences with clients around the globe.⁵⁰

- First, evaluate the strategic importance of the activity, the risks of outsourcing it, and the options for outsourcing it. Will an in-house solution help your company to meet its short- and long-term growth objectives, or does your company lack the specialized expertise and internal resources that an outsourced partner can provide?
- Perform an analysis of your company's ability to perform the desired function in-house vs. hiring an outsourced partner to do it. Include a comparison of the long-term costs. The best place to find viable, pre-vetted partners is actually within your network, so contact your fellow business owners for recommendations of outsourced partners before you search the Internet.
- Finally, consider your ability to manage an outsourced partner. Determine who will be this partner's internal point person, dedicated to making sure that the members of the partner's team get what they need in a timely manner. In addition to the specialized expertise that an outsourced partner provides, one of the benefits of hiring such a partner is the speed with which it can make things happen, so make sure not to unintentionally slow down the process.

This framework will help you to make the right decision for your organization. If you determine that outsourcing is an appropriate solution for your company, this framework also will help you to pick partners with the wherewithal to outpace the competition.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Review the members of your team and how they are spending their time. Are employees wasting time performing new roles rather than focusing on their actual area of expertise? Are they stretched too thin to do their best work? Do they lack a specific marketing expertise

that is holding back your company? Identify problem areas, and begin to research outsourcing as a solution. We recommend looking into specialized partners for niche projects, such as marketing automation and SEO, as well as general partners that can support your marketing and sales teams if they are overburdened with work. Outsourcing may or may not be the best solution, depending on your company's situation, but you could be missing a great opportunity if you don't assess your options.

TIME IS MONEY

Have you ever left a meeting feeling equally or more confused than when it began? If so, you're not alone.

Consider the following statistics:

- According to a study by Epson and the Centre for Economics and Business Research, office workers spend an average of 4 hours per week in meetings, more than half of which they feel is wasted time.⁵¹
- 47% of businesspeople surveyed by Salary.com claimed that the number one waste of time at the office is “too many meetings.”⁵²
- The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that unnecessary meetings cost U.S. businesses a total of approximately \$37 billion each year.⁵³
- 45% of senior executives who responded to an OfficeTeam survey felt that employees would be more productive if meetings were banned one day each week.⁵⁴

Too often, meetings are managed poorly or held when unnecessary. What could have been accomplished in one hour instead stretches into three or four hours and leaves the attendees exhausted and confused. Instead,

a good meeting should follow a set agenda and lead each participant to detailed next steps. Unfortunately, meetings are only one of the many areas in which today's businesses manage employee time poorly.

TIME IS, QUITE LITERALLY, MONEY

When time is wasted or spent on the wrong tasks, crucial tasks are left undone and business is lost.

If you spend five hours obsessing over a small detail of a marketing campaign geared toward a minor portion of your company's customer base, those five hours are at the expense of five one-hour phone conversations with the CEOs of your company's major accounts. This is called opportunity cost. If even one of those phone conversations could have led to a 25% increase in sales from that customer, your five hours of time would have earned the company potentially far more.

DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR TIME MANAGEMENT

These issues of inefficient use of time pervade companies today, affecting everyone from executives to secretarial staff. By developing a companywide strategy for time management, you can dramatically improve productivity at your company and create new opportunities for marketing success and business growth.

Take Google as an example. One of the most valuable brands in the world, Google is often lauded as the leader in management innovation today. The company operates under the 70-20-10 rule, which suggests that employees devote 70% of their time to core projects, 20% to peripheral but related projects, and 10% to non-core innovation. Although the appropriate division of time in your company may differ, Google's approach is significant because of the militancy of its

implementation. Managers at Google set guidelines for their teams, and they hold employees to those guidelines.

You also can apply this strategy to meetings, such that 70% of the meeting is spent discussing core projects, 20% of the meeting is spent discussing growth initiatives, and the final 10% of the meeting is spent discussing “wild and crazy” ideas. If we use Apple as an example, the idea to build a car (which they are reportedly doing) probably emerged in that 10% and then gradually worked its way into the 20% as the vision became closer to reality.

START FROM THE TOP DOWN

In order to develop guidelines for your team, start from the top down. Chart and evaluate how you and your employees spend time, and compare the percentage of time spent on various activities to the strategic priorities of those activities. By identifying the disconnect between your company’s time-management practices and strategy, you can determine where changes must be made.

Moving forward, ask all of the leaders in your company and the members of their teams to do this same charting and evaluation. Make them aware of the productivity lost as a result of poor time management and incentivize them to take charge of their time. Offer them guidelines for time management that are consistent with your company’s strategic goals, and watch their productivity soar.

RUNNING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Being mindful of allocating the right amount of time to the right activities consistent with your company’s strategy can have a significant effect on the number and quality of meetings that you hold. Before you set up a meeting, ask yourself, “Is this meeting needed? Is this meeting

going to contribute to the company?” If it will, ask yourself whether the meeting needs to take place with all of the attendees physically in the same building. Or can the meeting take place via conference call or Skype?

Next, circulate the meeting agenda in advance so that attendees can review the items to be covered and arrive at the meeting prepared. Ensure that everyone—even the most senior people—arrives on time. If the meeting was important enough to be called, it is important enough that all attendees should respect one another’s time.

Start the meeting with an overall objective, and be clear about the time allotted for the entire meeting. Encourage all attendees to be fully present throughout the meeting, perhaps by asking them to turn off their cell phones, tablets, or laptops. Finally, wrap up the meeting promptly and properly, summarizing the next steps that have been agreed upon and who is responsible for each, so that the meeting generates momentum rather than kills it.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Review how the top managers of your company spend their days. Consider the following questions:

- How much time do they spend in meetings, and are those meetings productive?
- Do they leave each meeting with a list of detailed next steps and assigned responsibilities?
- Are they spending time on the right activities?
- Are they allocating time proportionally to your company’s strategic priorities?

- Are they managing their teams efficiently?
- Do they know how to run effective, efficient meetings?

Discuss your findings openly with the managers, and work together to develop strategies to improve efficiency and time management. Most importantly, make sure that you define expectations and standards so that your team doesn't fall into old habits.

STRATEGY

START WITH A DETAILED MARKETING PLAN

Studies show that marketers who have formalized plans achieve their goals more efficiently and more cost-effectively than those who do not. Evaluate and prioritize your needs, and then devise the best strategy and tactics to address them.

Overwhelmed by today's proliferation of communications channels, marketers often focus their attention on the project of the moment. Without a strategy-first approach, these businesses frequently spend their marketing dollars on isolated tactics that generate low ROI.

You may think that your company needs a Facebook page or needs to sponsor a local event. But what you really need to do is to take a step back, and look at exactly why you think that is necessary. Before you dive into strategy you first must establish a strong foundation built upon your company's unique selling proposition. Only then can you figure out which channels you should use to get your message across to prospects. A marketing plan will help answer the "why" questions and ensure not only that you select the optimal tactics but that you develop the right marketing assets to use in communicating with your target audiences.

Finally, getting clarity on the details can help you to efficiently allocate your marketing spend. In fact, a study by OnStrategy (formerly M3

Planning) found that businesses that use strategic plans in their marketing are 12% more profitable than business that do not.⁵⁵ In the study, firms whose top management were very committed to executing strategic planning saw an 80% increase in sales volume.

KEEP THE BIG PICTURE IN MIND

If your company's core goals are clearly defined, the leaders of the company will make better-informed decisions. After a set of big-picture ideas has been put on paper, it serves as the foundation for future short-term plans and guarantees a unified strategic vision.

In addition to helping everyone in your organization keep in mind the big picture, a strong marketing plan lays out a detailed path to meet the company's goals. The marketing plan makes it easier for members of the marketing team when they face both major and day-to-day decisions. It puts everyone on the same page, thus ensuring that they are able to work together efficiently—and more cost-effectively—toward achieving companywide goals.

FIGURE OUT WHAT YOUR COMPANY'S MARKETING PLAN SHOULD DO

To reap the benefits we've just outlined, begin by evaluating the current state of your business. We at TribalVision recommend that you conduct a full audit of your company's current marketing efforts, reviewing the competition, speaking with customers, and speaking with employees in order to gain a better understanding of the current state of your business.

Next, outline your company's priorities. What are you trying to get out of this plan? More leads? Higher customer retention rates? Brand

awareness? All of the above? These priorities should be the guiding principles of your company's strategic plan.

Because the marketing plan should address more than one pain point in the organization, the priorities and timelines for each initiative must be evaluated. This way, your team will know what to prioritize in order to reach the overarching goals. After defining your company's priorities, estimate the ROI of various tactics that can get you closer to those goals, in order to determine which tactics should be implemented first and in what manner.

THE GOAL: AN ANNUAL MARKETING BLUEPRINT

The result of this process should be an annual marketing blueprint in which the marketing tactics are chosen based on expected ROI and detailed marketing calendars are provided for each initiative. The plan should be meticulously detailed for the short term (the upcoming six months), and should outline big-picture initiatives for the long term.

Several areas are key to any strong marketing plan: a delineation of all marketing assets and how to strengthen them, an internal marketing strategy, initiatives for new business outreach, a strategy for customer retention, and concrete next steps for each of those. The combination of these initiatives will help to strengthen your company, prepare it for growth, ensure that everyone in your company is on the same page and understands their roles, and prepare all customer-facing touch points to deliver a consistent message.

As mentioned, the description of each project should include a detailed timeline. Staff assignments for each initiative should be determined based on the strengths of the individual employees. TribalVision uses *Gantt charts* for this; a Gantt chart is a type of bar chart that enables you to visualize all of the elements of a project schedule simultaneously - as well as expand any single initiative within it to see all of its moving

parts. However, a simpler document will work as well if you have only a few employees who are running your company's marketing strategy.

Always be ready to adapt your plans to address new opportunities or unexpected obstacles. Also be flexible enough to make major adjustments as you begin to see which initiatives are producing the highest ROI and which initiatives are falling flat.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

If your company doesn't have a clear marketing plan in place, now is the time to develop one. Make sure that it is actionable and practical, with clearly defined roles and accountability. Ask yourself, "Where do we want the company to be in a year?" After setting clear objectives, you can work backward to create a marketing plan that achieves those goals. Make sure to audit your current marketing efforts, review the competition, and speak with your customers and your employees. Don't be afraid to look beyond standard marketing tactics, such as email newsletters, paid search, and SEO; additional opportunities may come from properly equipping and training your salespeople, forming industry partnerships, or co-marketing with suppliers or distributors. Finally, consider new markets and new opportunities for growth.

EXECUTION, EXECUTION, EXECUTION

A combination of solid strategy and detailed execution is mandatory in order to achieve superior returns. Implementation is the key to reaping the full benefits of your company's strategic vision.

In tip #20, we talked about the importance of a well-formulated strategy. Equally important is sound implementation, or execution, of that strategy. If its execution is sloppy, the best vision and the best marketing plan in the world will fall flat and yield disappointing returns. In fact, a recent survey of more than 400 CEOs around the world found that executional excellence was their greatest challenge.⁵⁶

A recent article in the *Harvard Business Review*, which mentioned that survey, took the challenge of execution one step further, advocating that it is impossible for a good strategy to be executed poorly.⁵⁷ The reason is that execution itself is a key pillar of strategy and that trying to separate the two only leads to confusion. The same obsession with detail must be used in both the process of developing the strategy and the process of executing the strategy. Neither solid strategy nor effective execution can stand alone with regard to improving your company's marketing, but the combination of the two will generate excellent returns.

ALIGN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF YOUR STRATEGY BOTH HORIZONTALLY AND VERTICALLY

When you have a strategy in place, it must be translated down the typical vertical hierarchy. The strategy should be translated into specific objectives and projects for each team and then further broken down into responsibilities for each employee. The final execution should then be consistently evaluated and measured.

Equally important, however, is horizontal alignment of your organization. The various departments must work together to efficiently achieve shared goals. This interdepartmental collaboration should be built into your company's strategy, with any overlapping responsibilities clearly assigned to both departments. In the execution stage, your teams must develop their own strategies for working together on these shared goals and prioritizing teamwork.

USE A GANTT CHART TO FACILITATE IMPLEMENTATION

Improving implementation is often easier said than done, but tools such as Gantt charts, mentioned in tip #20, can facilitate the process. A Gantt chart marketing template enables you to visualize all of the elements of your strategy simultaneously and to expand any single initiative within it to see all of its moving parts.

A Gantt chart forces you to assign deadlines and responsibility for each stage of an initiative. This then holds team members accountable for their designated tasks and keeps the overarching plan on track. Such a structure ensures that all team members are on the same page, that all channels are working in symbiosis with one another, and that implementation dates for each initiative are set and adhered to.

In the final analysis, the time invested in creating a Gantt chart will pay back handsomely as initiatives are implemented more efficiently

and effectively. Our Gantt chart software of choice is Smartsheet, but you can research and utilize the dozens of other Gantt chart software programs that are available.

STAY FLEXIBLE

Every strategy inevitably unravels in some way during the execution phase. When an unexpected issue or surprising opportunity comes up, you should be ready to adjust in real time. Such adjustment will occasionally be an overarching strategic shift. In general, however, only minor shifting of resources or people is necessary.

Regardless, flexibility is key. A recent study by McKinsey & Company found that firms that constantly reallocated their capital expenditures among business units achieved an average shareholder return 30% higher than that of firms that were slower in shifting funds.⁵⁸ By being willing to adjust your company's distribution of resources and people at a moment's notice, you will be able to adjust to any wrench thrown in the path of your company's strategic plan.

GET TO THE ROOT OF THE ISSUE

Of course, the ability to quickly realign key resources should not be seen as a cure-all. Although moving resources may solve a temporary problem, it doesn't always get at the root of the issue. If one product suddenly begins to drastically outsell another product, shifting more capital and people to the successful product makes sense. In the long term, however, it is crucial to understand why one product failed and one product succeeded. The answer to that question will shed light on internal company processes and the overall market and may even help your company to turn around the unsuccessful product, making it successful again.

This is an example of an aspect of execution in which lower-level team members are particularly important. Because they are often more intimately involved with customers and products than are upper-level executives, support-level employees have a better understanding of issues on the ground. They are also the first ones to react to most crises and opportunities. If your strategy has been communicated and understood throughout the vertical hierarchy, lower-level staff will be able to troubleshoot and improve its execution.

IN-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Look at examples of Gantt chart software—both paid and free—in order to determine whether a paid tool is a wise investment for your business. If you do not find a template that suits your business, a simpler calendar can be designed in Microsoft Excel. Whichever method you choose, populate your Gantt chart with the projects and deadlines that comprise each strategic initiative.

SET THE RIGHT PRIORITIES

In terms of marketing tactics, doing a little bit of everything is almost as bad as doing the wrong things. Faced with hundreds of options, you must set priorities and objectives early in order to ensure focused, productive initiatives.

This is an exciting time to be a marketer. A new solution hits the market every day, and there are a multitude of solutions available for any problem or goal your company may have. Just ten years ago, companies had only a handful of marketing options. Today, they have hundreds.

However, you simply can't compete for every customer in every channel. Therefore, the wisest choice is to focus deeply on only a handful of initiatives rather than seeing how many initiatives you can roll out at once. A 2010 economic study aptly titled "Don't Spread Yourself Too Thin" found that spreading effort among many active projects decreased both workers' performance and the average speed of job completion.⁵⁹ Simply put, trying to do it all is dangerous and unsuccessful. A focused company, one that invests in its core business and most profitable customers and prospects, will almost always outperform an undisciplined company that attempts to be everything to everyone.

In a survey of 350 marketing executives in multiple industries, nearly all respondents agreed that they needed to invest more wisely in

capabilities.⁶⁰ They were all on the right track in terms of wanting to set the right priorities. However, when asked to rate eight marketing capabilities on a scale of least important to most important, 50% of the respondents rated five or more of the marketing capabilities as most important. The executives wanted to set priorities and have a plan, but they seemed to think that they could dive into several priorities at the same time. In effect, they were setting themselves up for failure.

DECIDING HOW TO INVEST YOUR COMPANY'S TIME AND MONEY

There will never be enough hours in the day to explore every marketing opportunity. Deciding how to invest your company's time and money can be overwhelming. However, consider that your time (and your team's time) is limited. The opportunity cost of working on the wrong tactics is high. In many companies, time is even more valuable than money, and wasting time is even more harmful to the company's prospects than is wasting money.

Businesses too often focus on the wrong priorities. Their leaders find themselves scratching their heads six months later, lamenting the waste of considerable time and money with no results or tangible assets to show for it. You must set priorities with your team, and those priorities must be the right ones.

HOW TO SET THE RIGHT PRIORITIES

First, determine your company's marketing objectives. Is your company's main objective to build existing customers' top-of-mind awareness of your company's new products or services? Or is it to find new prospective customers for your core product or service offering? Or is it to appear more credible as a provider in new markets?

As you can see, your company's possible objectives—and the corresponding marketing initiatives—are endless. Before jumping into tactics like most firms do, gather your leadership team at least once a year to talk through your company's short-term and long-term business objectives.

When those objectives have been set, figure out how marketing can help in achieving those goals. The role of marketing should be clearly defined, with a plan for the use of specific tactics during the upcoming months. By sitting down to determine the urgency, timing, and allocated budget of each marketing initiative, you'll ensure that your company has set the right priorities to maximize the ROI of its total marketing spend.

By following this structured approach, your company eliminates the chance of trying to do a little bit of everything, which is almost as bad as doing the wrong things. As a result, your team's energies will be much more focused and productive.

DIVE DEEPLY INTO A HANDFUL OF WORTHY INITIATIVES

Instead of working on ten marketing initiatives, for example, and giving none of them the time or money they deserve, focus on diving deeply into a handful of initiatives at a time. You must complete these initiatives fully, in meticulous detail, to achieve their full effect.

For example, if your company implements a CRM tool, such as Salesforce.com, the proper time must be spent to introduce it to your salespeople with the necessary rigorous training and to design the right reports for the VP of Sales or the CEO to review. If your marketing team writes content for an email campaign, it also must map out a detailed drip campaign to distribute the content, including custom landing pages and calls to action. Only in being exceptional will your company develop loyal brand evangelists and outperform the competition.

Instead of chasing your tail and boasting about how many initiatives are being rolled out simultaneously, take a step back, focus on just a few initiatives, and devote the proper time and money to them in order to achieve their full potential. Many times I have witnessed a client finish a round of strategic thinking and believe that the marketing mission was complete. In reality, it was just beginning. Rather than chase the new, shiny object, the best marketing strategies are executed in the details, with strenuous emphasis on follow through.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Evaluate which of your company's marketing initiatives are the most important, taking into account both ROI and your company's long-term goals. For each initiative, you should also consider the stage at which your company is currently. Even an initiative with slightly lower ROI may be worth continuing if its grunt work has already been done and it is no longer consuming substantial amounts of time or money. In general, you should choose three or four initiatives to prioritize, and put the rest of the initiatives on the back burner. If your company has a key objective for the current or upcoming quarter, every employee should be focused on that objective above all else, no matter the other demands on his or her time. Check in with your team on a regular basis to see what they are prioritizing and to ensure that they don't get sidetracked on less important tasks. Above all, when your company's marketing initiatives have been chosen, make sure that you and your team go the "extra mile" with them.

PLANT SHORT-TERM SEEDS WHILE BUILDING FOR THE LONG TERM

*Long-term thinking is crucial to building brand awareness and value:
So is the short-term thinking that drives profits and cash flow.*

Consider the following questions:

- Do you care more about a long-term relationship with a customer or a single sale from a customer?
- Would you rather have a \$1,000,000 in five years or \$100,000 right now?

Most marketers pick the long-term option in these cases, but regardless, their behavior often adheres to short-term principles. It's easy to focus only on short-term marketing initiatives, such as cold-calling and sending solicitation letters, that will bring immediate, tangible ROI. However, doing so ignores valuable activities such as content marketing. It is crucial to recognize that long-term marketing investments generate value, even though they may not drive revenue immediately.

LONG-TERM THINKING IS THE ROAD TO CUSTOMER LIFETIME VALUE

You probably won't see immediate results from a new blog post, thought leadership article, white paper, or online video. But those things will gradually build the credibility that your company needs in order to differentiate itself from the competition in the long term. All businesses aspire to long-term profitable growth. Focusing only on the short term precludes that. It is your company's long-term plan that will build brand awareness and credibility.

Your company needs immediate results—sales and revenue—to maintain its health day-to-day. But if you view marketing as a long-term investment, you'll find that marketing activities that provide a less tangible ROI are equally important as those that generate immediate revenue. These long-term investments, which can range from website design to salesforce training to marketing strategy, will drive value for the company long after they have been paid.

Increasingly, buyers are educating themselves behind closed doors. These buyers won't be influenced by an ad in the newspaper or on a billboard. They will, however, be influenced by assets such as great website design, compelling content, credible thought leadership, strong sales presentations, and creative initiatives such as a video library of happy customers.

You will never be able to accurately measure the ROI for these types of marketing investments, but they are certain to pay off in the long term. They will strengthen your credibility in the marketplace while building a moat around your brand to hold off the competition.

IT'S ALL ABOUT ACHIEVING A BALANCE

Ultimately, you must strike the right balance between generating profit and cash flow in the present and building a strong foundation for long-term growth. As former GE CEO Jack Welch (under whose tenure the company's revenue grew 4000%) said, "You can't grow long-term if you can't eat short-term. Anybody can manage short. Anybody can manage long. Balancing those two things is what management is."⁶¹

Your company's long-term strategies will establish brand awareness and value, while its short-term strategies will trigger the sales that are needed now.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

You must think both short term and long term: short term for lead generation and long term in order to build a moat around your brand. The right balance between short term and long term, between meeting payroll and fulfilling your company's vision, can be found in the phrase "long-term greedy," which was coined by Gus Levy of Goldman Sachs.⁶² Rather than simply searching for as many immediate sales opportunities as possible (being "short-term greedy"), you can plant seeds so that your company will continue to grow stronger and outpace its competition. In order to build long-term credibility, your company must maintain consistent, quality effort across all chosen initiatives. Focus your time on these initiatives intensely, and resist the temptation to allow your attention to be diverted by myopic projects that will not pay off for the company in the long term.

PARTING TIPS

UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BRANDING AND MARKETING

Branding creates a distinct and lasting image in the mind of the consumer whereas marketing is the delivery and promotion of that image.

Any business owner or executive will tell you that marketing is important, but many overlook the power of a strong brand. Because it is difficult to quantify and place an ROI on branding efforts, executives often focus solely on marketing activities with the hopes of driving short-term measurable returns. And when organizations do invest in branding, it is often around design-driven creative endeavors that an external ad agency they hire devises. While important, these creative efforts are merely symbols of your brand and only touch the surface of what branding really is.

Instead, remember that your brand is your company DNA and “raison d’être”. It is built from the belly of your organization and encompasses your values, your culture, your mission and your core principles. It is expressed every day in ways as simple as your company colors and as complex as the treatment of your employees, customers, and partners. A good brand is built daily over many years and requires strategic thought, genuine passion, and consistent, exceptional implementation.

BRANDING AND MARKETING A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

The organizations I've spoken with over the years that do focus on brand building usually go about it the wrong way by relying on outside ad agencies to create their external-facing brand. While a beautiful website and a sleek brochure are important, they are only symbols of your brand and they will only get you so far. And oftentimes so much time and money is spent on these creative endeavors that very little money remains to actually market the organization to drive new business.

Even more important is that business owners are going about the branding process all wrong. When companies start and end with public expressions of the brand such as the look, the logo, the website, or the tagline, they neglect the fact that a truly powerful brand is built by the daily actions of all of your employees and the interactions they have with your prospects, customers, and partners. A brand cannot be a campaign concocted overnight by a creative team that will then move onto the next project when completed. There is no completion date for a brand. Rather, every action and decision from the day that you open your doors is a part of your brand.

Marketing, on the other hand, is how you communicate your brand to the world in a concerted effort to grow. It is the campaigns, tools, tactics, and channels used to make sure that prospects and customers can see, understand, and value your brand. Ranging from paid media to email campaigns to SEO, it is what consumers see in the market and how they learn about you. Although these initiatives can be quantified in a way that branding cannot, they are no less or more important.

Marketing becomes much easier if what is actually being marketed is unique, genuine, and differentiated in the marketplace. On the other hand, marketing is next to impossible if your brand is average. As marketing guru Seth Godin espouses, average does not get spoken about nor shared. Nothing viral ever happened to an average brand.

In today's world of paid/owned/earned media, the rising influence of earned media makes the power of your brand more and more important.

Together, powerful marketing and branding can make a company the envy of an industry. No one will hear about your brand and purchase your offering without marketing, but your marketing will be more successful if you have a strong brand to push out. As soon as you have a brand that wows and a strategic marketing plan to communicate that brand, you will be well on your way to dramatic growth.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

Since the crux of your brand building happens inside your walls versus being concocted outside your walls by an ad agency, you need to make sure that everyone in your organization is educated to the difference between marketing and branding. Once this takes place and everyone understands their unique role as brand ambassadors, you will find that your marketing will become much more profitable. It will take fewer marketing dollars to compete because you will be putting dollars behind something more impactful and impressive than the offering of your competitors. Your marketing team will be thankful that they will have something truly special to outreach to the marketplace about – thus making their jobs much easier. Your sales team will also be thrilled to be able to sell an offering that is truly different in the marketplace versus an average offering that is far more difficult to sell and create a buzz about.

HUSTLE: YOUR SECRET WEAPON

Complacency is your worst enemy, and average effort seldom moves the needle. Work harder, set a faster pace, and run alongside your team as your business transforms.

I'll say it straight—none of the tips in this book will achieve their optimal growth potential if you and your leadership team don't hustle. Going to work every day and putting in an honest day's work is not enough. That most likely is what your competitors are doing, and it will seldom lead to dramatic growth. In fact, the average worker admits to wasting three hours per eight-hour workday, not including lunch and scheduled breaks. Your goal should be to pack eleven hours of work into an eight-hour day—and you need for this mindset to permeate your entire organization so that everyone is “rowing the boat” at the most rapid pace as possible. I have seen some organizations implement a marketing plan in three months while others have taken years to implement a similar plan. Can you guess which business achieved more dramatic growth?

Merriam-Webster's online thesaurus defines “hustle” in several ways: “to devote serious and sustained effort,” “to proceed or move quickly,” and “to rob by the use of trickery or threats.” The third definition is obviously not advisable and is far from what I am talking about here, but the first two definitions are spot on. Hustling is the act of

making every moment count and seizing every opportunity, and it is a key ingredient for organizations to achieve both rapid and sustained growth. Successful companies are those filled by people who are always finding solutions to problems and are always looking for the next steps for improvement.

It's also interesting to note that seldom is there a paragraph, let alone a chapter, in academic books on marketing about the importance of energy and hustle. Those books espouse Michael Porter's virtues of the five forces of competitive advantage and diagram the development of a killer strategic plan, but they overlook the intangible traits, such as hustle, that many successful entrepreneurs attribute as the key ingredient in their companies' short-term and long-term success. These business owners concentrate on operating details, shortening go-to-market lead times, and removing any impediments to growth. Hustle is their style, and although they may not get everything right, they fail quickly when they do fail - which is as important as growing quickly.

HUSTLE STARTS WITH YOU

Dramatic growth has a far greater likelihood of happening if all members of your organization are rowing at a faster pace than the other boats in the water are going, and senior leadership sets that pace. You have the power to set the pace of your business, and you must set that bar high.

This starts with you. Are your days optimized and your schedule full? Are you starting each day either on a business call or at breakfast with a potential prospect or existing client? By setting the right example, you lead those under you to do the same. Too often, I see business owners enjoying extended lunch breaks and leaving early to go to the gym—while wondering why their businesses are not growing as quickly as they would like. The answer is simple: They need to refocus on growing their business and spend those extra hours ensuring that the company is running well on all cylinders.

Speeding up a company culture may not happen overnight, but as long as you lead by example and help your fellow leaders to do the same you can expect above-average growth. Your team should squeeze every moment out of the day, focusing on work that creates tangible progress for the company. This means eliminating thirty-minute meetings that should take only ten minutes and planning your schedule for the upcoming week on Sunday night instead of Monday morning. I see many people who convince themselves that they are working hard when they really are not. Those business owners who hustle don't rely solely on traditional marketing tactics (e.g., email, paid search, and SEO) or a sales team to drive their companies' growth, but rather they are constantly innovating, thinking of new markets to enter, exploring partnership opportunities, and networking in the appropriate business circles.

Who you bring to your team matters as well. You need to ensure that your senior leaders hire managers and employees who share their same ambition and grit. Hustle can be taught by example, but it is much more difficult without a base of passion and drive. Ultimately, an employee with average intelligence and hustle will outperform one who is brilliant but complacent.

DON'T MISTAKE HUSTLE FOR SPEED ALONE

Of course, hustle must be paired with attention to detail and superior execution. Speed of execution is wasted if it is at the cost of quality. For example, writing a document ten minutes faster does not save time when it then requires twenty extra minutes of editing. Even worse, you may end up hustling in the wrong direction if you do not closely monitor your progress and results. The most successful people work fast whenever possible while keeping close to the details at all times.

The combination of superior execution and hustle is what truly fuels growth. Implement your marketing plans and initiatives both rapidly

and well. If you recall, hustling entails both sustained effort and quick movement—and each is equally important. If you let an obsessive dedication to growth fuel superior work, you will soon hustle your way to success.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

The hustle starts with you. In order for your company to achieve dramatic growth, you must be prepared to put in the hours and energy to make it happen. Make sure that your days are optimized and your schedule full. Set your goals high, and hold yourself accountable for meeting specific goals in various time frames in order to see and be motivated by your continuous progress. Know your one-year goal, quarterly goal, monthly goal, weekly goal, and daily goal, and then put in place an implementation plan and milestones so that you and your team can work to achieve each one of them with the vigor and passion that the plan demands.

VIEW MARKETING AS AN INVESTMENT—NOT AN EXPENSE

Marketing is a powerful engine for growth and success. Stay fully invested in your company's vision in order to achieve superior returns.

Peter Drucker, known as the father of business consulting, once said, “Because the purpose of business is to create a customer, the business enterprise has two—and only two—basic functions: marketing and innovation. Marketing and innovation produce results; all the rest are costs.”⁶³

Although modern business owners are often inclined to see marketing as an expense, Drucker’s view of marketing as an investment that drives results is far more accurate. Although many businesses cut their marketing when sales are low, in order to save money, they should instead increase their marketing in order to return sales to a healthy level.

FOCUS ON BUILDING A MOAT AROUND YOUR BUSINESS

When businesses treat marketing as a cost, they focus on short-term sales and ignore the long term. For these companies, most of their marketing dollars go toward tangible purchases, for example, an ad or a click on Google. These expenditures provide returns, but they have minimal ability to continue to drive value after the money has

been spent. A coupon placed in a newspaper may result in a sale, but it is unlikely to help to retain that customer or to continue to draw customers after it has gone out of print.

If you want your company to continue growing, your goal should be to build as much of a moat around your business as you can. This is achieved by continuous investment of marketing dollars into your company's owned assets. Such investments may include updating your message and website every year, producing customer video testimonials for use as sales tools, developing a series of educational webinars, and investing in the development of relevant content that can be used for thought leadership and for SEO. Although these efforts may not produce short-term returns, they will certainly aid in strengthening your business over time. The problem is that if you only look for marketing initiatives that guarantee an immediate ROI—consistent with a view of marketing as an expense—you will never plant any of these long-term marketing seeds and therefore never begin to build the moat that is necessary for a sustainable competitive advantage.

WALKING THE WALK IN MY OWN LIFE

Examining my own life as an entrepreneur, I know that I have “walked the walk” while growing TribalVision. The reason that TribalVision has achieved such success is that, from day one, I understood the importance of marketing in order to create something special and separate it from the dozens of other marketing firms in the local area. Before even opening the doors for business (and with little money), I wrote a book, spent months crafting my company's message and coming up with the name TribalVision, built a website that made TribalVision look like an established company worth talking about, developed an animated video to explain the why behind TribalVision, wrote six white papers, developed multiple marketing presentations, and crafted a thirty-page marketing plan to identify and capture new business. If I had viewed marketing as an expense rather than an investment, I never would

have done any of these activities. As a result, I would have started TribalVision with only a business card, an average-quality ten-page website, and nothing else, which is what most startups do.

Looking back five years later, although I cannot attribute a specific ROI (i.e., how much business was generated by a message that stands out rather than just being average) to each of those investments, I can state with confidence that those investments taken as a whole have provided a much larger payoff than I would have earned by saving that money in my bank account. TribalVision is now a multimillion-dollar firm, thirty employees strong and reinvesting in marketing efforts more and more each year.

IN-THE-TRENCHES TAKEAWAY

If we are to build something great, we must take a leap of faith—a calculated leap of faith but a leap of faith nonetheless. If Howard Schultz, Steve Jobs, Richard Branson, or Elon Musk invested only in efforts backed by guaranteed results, they never would have built the empires that they have. Hopefully, you too will view marketing as an investment. Of all the tips and takeaways in this book, this very simple message and mindset can make the difference between gradual growth and dramatic growth. Best of luck!

GLOSSARY

A

Act-On: a marketing automation software platform

Adobe Audience Manager: a data management software platform

Aggregate Knowledge: a data management software platform owned by Neustar

Alexa: a subsidiary of Amazon.com that provides commercial web traffic data and analytics

B

B2B: business-to-business

B2C: business-to-consumer

Big Data: the large volume of data that is generated by a business on a day-to-day basis and which is so large or complex that traditional approaches are inadequate to analyzing it

BlueKai: a data management software platform

C

CampaignerCRM (formerly Landslide): a customer relationship management (CRM) software platform

click-through rate (CTR): the number of people who clicked on an online ad divided by the number of people who saw the ad, expressed as a percentage

Constant Contact: a marketing automation software platform

content management system (CMS): a software platform that enables the collaborative publishing, editing, and organization of online content

content marketing: a marketing approach that uses relevant content (blogs, videos, and podcasts) to attract and retain customers

cost per click (CPC): the price that the advertiser pays for each click on a pay-per-click ad

cost per lead (CPL): the average cost of generating a lead; calculated as total sales and marketing cost divided by the number of qualifying new leads generated

cost per point (CPP): the cost of reaching, via paid advertising, 1% of the households in a target demographic

customer acquisition cost: the average cost of acquiring a new customer; calculated as total sales and marketing cost divided by the number of new customers acquired

customer advisory board (CAB): a group of five to ten clients who provide in-depth information and perspectives on your business and products

customer decision journey: the set of touch points experienced by a customer on his or her way to the decision to purchase, beginning with initial consideration

customer lifetime value (CLV): the total of actual value and potential value provided to a company by a customer during his or her entire

relationship with the company; calculated as profit margin (\$) x [retention rate (%) / (1 + discount rate (%) – retention rate (%))]

customer relationship management (CRM): a marketing approach that combines a database with customer service and marketing communications; also, a software platform that organizes and tracks all touch points with each prospect and customer, for use in this marketing approach

D

dashboard: a monitoring software tool, sometimes in spreadsheet form, that tracks key metrics and their status and progress over time

data management platform (DMP): a software platform that consolidates customer data to identify trends and patterns and provide insight into a company's customer base

digital display ad: an online ad

E

earned media: publicity and word-of-mouth attention that a company receives when its content is shared by customers, the press, and the public; note that this is in contrast to publicity gained via paid advertising

Eloqua: a marketing automation software platform owned by Oracle

employee engagement level: a measure of employee commitment and motivation

employee satisfaction index (ESI): a measure of employee satisfaction in an organization

ExactTarget: a marketing automation software platform

G

Gantt chart: a type of bar chart that enables one to visualize all of the elements of a strategy or project schedule simultaneously and to expand any single initiative within it to see all of its moving parts

Google Analytics: a free service provided by Google and which enables the tracking of visitors' behavior on a website

GutCheck: an online crowdsourcing platform

H

Hootsuite: a social media management and analytics tool

HubSpot: a marketing automation and content management software platform

I

inbound marketing: a type of marketing that builds a company's reputation via email newsletters, white papers, social media posts, and content marketing and then relies on potential customers own initiative to decide to purchase from the company

Insightly: a customer relationship management (CRM) and project management software platform

K

key performance indicator (KPI): a metric used to quantify objectives and gauge performance of a marketing initiative

Klout: a social media analytics tool

Knotice: a data management software platform and email service owned by IgnitionOne

M

marketing automation: the use of software to automate marketing tasks, such as drip email campaigns and tracking of website visitors, and to connect and coordinate various parts of the sales funnel

Marketo: a marketing automation software platform

media efficiency ratio (MER): a measure of a marketing campaign's overall success or failure; calculated as the total sales revenue generated by the campaign divided by the media cost

Media Temple: a web hosting company

Microsoft Dynamics: a customer relationship management (CRM) software platform

N

Net Promoter Score (NPS): a customer loyalty metric, developed by (and a registered trademark of) Fred Reichheld, Bain & Company, and Satmetrix; because it measures the loyalty that exists between a provider and a customer, it can be used in order to categorize customers based on their opinions about a company

NetSuite: an integrated cloud business software suite, including business accounting, enterprise resource planning (ERP), customer relationship management (CRM), and ecommerce software

Nimble: a customer relationship management (CRM) software platform

O

Oracle CRM: a customer relationship management (CRM) software platform

organic traffic: visits to a website that result from Internet search results derived based on the relevance of the website's contents to a keyword rather than based on paid-search advertising

outbound marketing: a type of marketing in which a company pushes out advertising (telemarketing, radio or TV ads, direct mail, etc.) to potential customers

owned media: extensions of a brand that are within the company's control, such as its websites and social media pages

P

paid media: traditional third-party advertising, such as TV, radio, and print, as well as newer options, such as Google pay per click and paid advertising on social networks

Pardot: a B2B marketing automation software platform owned by Salesforce

pay per click (PPC): online advertising for which the advertiser pays each time the ad is clicked

R

responsive web design: an approach to website design that enables the website to adjust its dimensions to fit the size of the device displaying it

return on ad spend (ROAS): the sales revenue that a company receives for every dollar spent on advertising; calculated as sales revenue earned from advertising (%) divided by the cost of advertising (%), expressed

as a percentage; can be calculated for total advertising or for individual types of advertising

return on investment (ROI): a measure of profit relative to the capital invested; calculated as profit earned (\$) divided by investment (\$), expressed as a percentage

revenue-to-marketing-cost ratio: a measure of the success of a company's marketing; calculated as sales revenue divided by marketing costs

Rocket Fuel's Origin Platform: an advertising data management, media-buying, and interactive marketing software platform

S

Sage CRM: a customer relationship management (CRM) software platform

Salesforce.com: a customer relationship management (CRM) software platform

search engine optimization (SEO): the process of choosing targeted keyword phrases in order to increase a website's ranking in Internet search results and thereby maximize the number of visitors to the website

SlideShare: an online platform for publicly sharing content such as presentations and documents

Smartsheet: an online project management software used for facilitating collaboration, it includes the ability to create Gantt charts

Stitch Labs Stitch CRM: a customer relationship management (CRM) software platform

SugarCRM: a customer relationship management (CRM) software platform

T

touch point: any interaction between a customer and a seller (speaking with the company's receptionist, visiting the company's website visit, watching a demonstration, making a purchase, etc.)

TweetDeck: a social media analytics tool

TweetReach: a social media analytics tool

U

unique selling proposition (USP): the unique reason that a company's product or service is better than those of its competitors

V

Veeva CRM: a customer relationship management (CRM) platform specifically for life sciences, including human, consumer, and animal health

W

WordPress: an online platform that provides a user-friendly interface for developing a website

Workbooks CRM: a customer relationship management (CRM) software platform specifically for small and midsize organizations

Z

Zoho CRM: a customer relationship management (CRM) software platform

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Ciunci is the Founder and Managing Partner of TribalVision, an outsourced marketing department for hire with offices in Boston and Providence. Motivated by his frustration with the conflict of interest inherent in the traditional marketing model, in 2010 Chris founded TribalVision - a forward thinking alternative to the traditional advertising agency model. Chris oversees TribalVision's strategy, marketing and thought leadership initiatives.

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The logo for Lulu, featuring the word "Lulu" in a stylized, cursive script font with a thick black outline.