

The Strategic Marketer

Effective, Low-Cost, And Practical
Marketing Tactics from the
Agency Trenches



Patrick Schober
Founder of Poetica Marketing

The Strategic Marketer

*Effective, Low-Cost, And Practical Marketing Strategies from
the Agency Trenches*

To Regina, for cheering on Poetica Marketing at every stage.

*And special thanks to Julian Lopez and Eli Horowitz for
helping me polish my prose.*

Foreword

This book might not be for you.

And that's OK.

There are some businesses out there that can solve marketing problems by throwing money at them until they go away.

And that's OK, too.

The rest of us pinch and save and budget our every move because our businesses don't have bottomless stacks of cash to solve problems.

Many of us need results *now*.

And if that's the case, this book might not be for you either.

If you need results *right this second*, you have bigger issues to solve.

But if you have a week, a month, or even a year to get your business moving in the right direction, this book can help.

Here, you'll find realistic guidance and real-world stories on how to properly market your business.

No gimmicks.

No upsells.

No nonsense.

I wrote this book because I wish I could sit down with every anxious business owner and struggling marketing director to

tell them everything that swirls around in my head all day long.

These are truths I've discovered through years of hard work.

These are realistic strategies for solving your marketing problems.

These are proven ways to win without pouring money down the drain.

I hope you take them to heart.

More importantly, though, I hope you incorporate them into your own marketing strategy.

At the end of the day, the old saying is true: Business is a lot more fun when you're making money.

-Patrick Schober
Poetica Marketing, Founder
Monster Riff, Editor-in-Chief

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Allow Me to Introduce Myself...

Hi! I'm Pat, the founder of Poetica Marketing.

I started Poetica Marketing after an unexpected buyout at a Downtown Pittsburgh agency suddenly left me unemployed.

Left with a horrid taste in my mouth and an eye for what was broken in the agency world, I set out to create my own marketing agency that avoided one of the biggest failures I saw on a day-to-day basis:

Rigidity.

During my tenure with my previous employer, I watched as most clients were shoved into the same marketing “strategy”—regardless of the nuances behind their business, their people, or their customers.

Over time, I came to find this was common across the board.

Even internal marketing managers at established companies occasionally fall into the rut of the same old same old, and they resist change simply because change is hard.

And that's where the trouble starts.

Once marketers stop innovating based on the data they see, businesses fall. Revenue dries up, and suddenly it's all hands on deck trying to right the ship.

To hell with rigidity.

I designed Poetica Marketing to be more thoughtful in its approach.

More importantly, I made Poetica Marketing *nimble*, capable of

making new decisions and trying new ideas based on the data we receive and the unique characteristics of our clients.

In the following pages, I'll show you many of the ideas I've picked up along the way—those ideas that empower me to shift perspective and strategy in a way that makes sense.

I'll pull from many of my own experiences with past clients, research from other experts, and insights gleaned from another one of my brands: Monster Riff, a music blog that focuses on underground rock.

I started Monster Riff partially because I'm passionate about music, but primarily because I wanted a platform where I could test out ideas without client interference.

In its first two years, Monster Riff has grown to reach thousands of pageviews a day, and it regularly ranks first or second for its target keywords and keyphrases in Google searches.

When we're passionate about what we do and we understand the tools at our disposal, we can do amazing things.

Although some of these ideas may sound intimidating, this book isn't designed to be complicated. Instead, it's designed to be easy to read and even easier to understand.

Ultimately, this book is intended for business owners, solopreneurs, and marketers who've simply had enough, and for those professionals who are ready for significant and lasting change.

We'll start by taking a macro view of our marketing tool kit, and then we'll take a deeper look at some of the practices we can all leverage on a regular basis.

At the very least, you'll come away with a handful of ideas

you're able to use right away.

With all of that out of the way, let's dive in. There are businesses to grow!

Part 1: Key Marketing Theories, Concepts, and Truths

Chapter 1: Understanding Your Marketing Tool Kit

One of the best marketers I've ever met wasn't actually that great with the nuts and bolts of everyday marketing operations.

Sure, he was competent, but he wasn't exactly innovative.

Instead, the reason he's one of the best marketers in my mind is simple: He was consistently able to see the *entire* marketing strategy after a quick review of a company's materials.

Seeing it happen in real time was magical.

On numerous occasions, with only maybe 15 minutes of prep time, I watched him eagerly propose elegant marketing plans that seamlessly connected a company's social media profiles, website, SEO strategies, email campaigns, and other marketing channels.

Even more impressive: These marketing plans were *good*.

At first, it seemed like he had the ability to conjure up complex and comprehensive strategies with a simple wave of the hand.

But with a few years of building out these strategies myself, I've come to realize that this talent comes with the territory.

The more you do it, the better you can implement the plan.

There's an art form to assembling your marketing pieces together. And when it's done well, you prime your company for

massive growth.

In this first chapter, we'll take a look at some of the major marketing channels available to us in today's digital world. In doing so, we'll briefly introduce many of the topics we'll examine on a deeper level later in the book.

This is our primary goal: to understand that every single one of our marketing efforts can and should influence the rest of our marketing efforts!

The LEGO Analogy

When I was growing up, I would spend hours sorting through deconstructed LEGO sets in my basement. You remember LEGO—those fun little plastic toy blocks used for assembling everything from metropolitan police stations to Wild West outposts.

Over the years, my older brothers had accumulated multiple sets. Eventually, they'd all been assembled, then disassembled, then placed into big plastic tubs. And that's where you'd find me: kneeling over tubs of LEGO bricks, pulling out just the right pieces to create my next spaceship or moon base.

My specialty was building enormous space crafts that were nearly half the size of my slight 6-year-old frame. Somewhere, there's a photo of myself proudly holding a massive spaceship in the kitchen. After my mom brought the developed picture home, I carried it to school to show off to my friends.

I didn't have to create spaceships or moon bases or Mars landing pads. But that's what made me happy.

LEGO, the company, prides itself on giving every child the freedom to create whatever his or her mind can conjure up.

As long as they have enough LEGO pieces, children can build *anything*.

Similarly, I want you to think of your marketing plan like LEGO bricks.

Your marketing strategy can be assembled, disassembled, and rebuilt however many times it takes to get it right.

And you can always seek out new pieces to improve it.

Just as my LEGO spaceships were bustling, evolving communities for my little LEGO astronauts (and the occasional alien enemy), your marketing plan is capable of transforming over time until it reaches its full potential.

But before you can start building, you have to understand what's in your LEGO tub—or, in professional terms, your marketing tool kit. This can vary from company to company, but if you're like most small or medium businesses (SMBs), you probably have the following resources available to you:

- **Your website** - We could go on for pages and pages (and books and books) about web content. The important thing to note is this: What you decide to put on your website and blog directly influences how your visitors respond to you *and* how you rank on Google and other search engines.

Why it's valuable: Well-written, SEO-focused content (which we'll discuss in Chapter 5) can generate web traffic from highly qualified leads and existing customers who are actively searching for your products and services. When you approach content thoughtfully and consistently, you can pull in new leads and earn new business.

How it fits: Depending on what sort of business you run, your website is one of the primary hubs people will visit

to learn more about you. In today's world, if someone wants to learn more about your company, they're either going to Google you—where they'll end up reading your Google My Business profile or visiting your website—or check out your social media profiles.

- **Email Marketing** - Most companies use email tools like Mailchimp, Constant Contact, Campaign Monitor, HubSpot, or one of the many other platforms available on the market to remain in front of current clients, past customers, and new leads. With one of these platforms, companies can blast their marketing materials to thousands of people at once, all while closely monitoring individual subscriber behavior.

Why it's valuable: Email marketing is a relatively low-cost marketing strategy with great return on investment (ROI). Since your recipients should have opted-in to your campaigns, you'll likely find good engagement rates and juicy sales, especially if you have a bustling blog or online store.

How it fits: Email marketing is an information-sharing tool. It's a way to announce special deals, promote upcoming events, and inform readers of company updates. It's also a great place to promote new web content (like your blog) as well!

- **Social Media Marketing** - Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, TikTok, Pinterest, YouTube, Tumblr, Reddit, even Google My Business—there's no shortage of social media platforms (and those are just some of the platforms popular in the US)!

Why it's valuable: Social media is free to use (with some caveats), and it can still be a good place for advertising—regardless of how recent laws and platform updates have enhanced user privacy to the detriment of ad targeting (concepts we'll discuss

briefly later on).

How it fits: Social media is perfect for sharing internal images of your team (even pictures of people hard at work around the office can be useful!), but it's also great for sharing press coverage, blogs, updates on services, and customer reviews—just about anything that can help you connect with your fans on a deeper level! (See Chapter 6 for detailed social media strategies and ideas.)

- **Digital ads** - This is a broad umbrella, and it covers everything from Google search ads to Pinterest ads to Facebook ads to the banner ads you see while you're browsing online (Google Display ads).

Why they're valuable: Digital ads generally allow you to be relatively targeted in your approach, which means you can quickly reach the people who matter most to your business.

How they fit: Ads spur conversions. Whether you'd like people to buy something on your website, schedule phone calls with you, or come visit your store, ads can help—provided you're running them responsibly.

- **Your existing network.** If you've been in business for a little while, you likely already have a list of trusted industry contacts and a portfolio of existing and past clients who have been happy with your work.

Why they're valuable: Even if the majority of your clients are 100% satisfied with your business, they probably won't tell anyone. But their thoughts on your company can be incredibly influential when sourcing new customers, so you should request two things:

1. Referrals to other potential customers who may benefit from your products or services.

2. Reviews on platforms like Google, Facebook, and Yelp— or wherever your business is present.

How they fit: Referrals can provide a nice stream of new business, and glowing reviews do the heavy lifting when it comes to converting hesitant buyers. When your company boasts a wide collection of great reviews, your leads will begin to trust you before they even enter your sales pipeline.

- **Networking opportunities.** From the Chamber of Commerce to BNI (Business Network International) to traditional networking events, connecting with other professionals and people within your industry can become a valuable resource for your business.

Why they're valuable: Through industry conversations and regular communication, networking can lead to professional growth *and* an influx of referrals.

How they fit: When you make networking a routine part of your business, you can nurture high-value relationships and stay top of mind with important industry contacts—all while growing your email list.

- **Trade shows and industry conferences.** Trade shows put you and your business in the center of your industry's universe.

Why they're valuable: Most conferences and trade shows have pretty stiff entry costs, but the relationships you form from the face-to-face interactions can be a powerful long-term investment.

How they fit: Getting in front of competitors, partners, and your target audience gives you the opportunity to test the rest of your marketing concepts, and it gives you an up-to-the-minute idea of what the industry cares about.

Each of these is a LEGO brick, and they can be assembled together in multiple strategic ways. Ultimately, though, your goal should be to build a finely-tuned marketing *engine* from your LEGO pieces. Build anything else, and you might struggle across your entire marketing strategy.

The LEGO Analogy In Action: Piecing It All Together

Let's say it's early January, and your Pittsburgh-based lawn care and landscaping company wants to develop a new strategy for your spring and summer busy seasons. You just suffered through a lackluster year, and now you're aiming to increase revenue by a whopping 25%.

Thanks to the last few years you've been in business, you already have a handful of marketing pieces in place:

- A website with a few pictures of your work and a blog you updated once in 2018.
- Facebook and Instagram profiles you occasionally update with pictures of the company truck and a freshly mowed lawn.
- Paper flyers you distribute locally via the post office's EDDM (Every Door Direct Mail) service.
- A small budget for advertising. You've never dabbled in advertising before, but you're interested in pursuing your options in traditional and digital ads.
- A small network of repeat clients. Although these clients are dedicated to your brand, you'd like to grow this group substantially in the coming years.

With these pieces in front of us, let's think about some ways we can use them to our advantage and assemble them in a framework that actively generates new leads on our behalf.

To start, we'll address an important truth: As a relatively small lawn care and landscaping company, you have a limited

geographic area you can service. For our purposes, let's say your prime service area is within 25 miles of your office. Everything we do will be with this geographic limitation in mind.

Your Website

Before doing anything else, we want to evaluate your website's performance by looking into its backend metrics—those numbers that tell us who's visiting the website, how they're getting there, how long they're staying, and which pages they visit. If you don't know how to find this information or don't have the proper programs set up, that's OK! You can install Google Analytics and Google Search Console for free to see how your website is performing online.

From there, let's start making enhancements. Really, you could probably get away with only a few sections on your website:

- An About section that explains who you are and what you do
- A map or list of the regions or areas you service
- A list of your services
- A contact form and "Call Now" button
- A plugin to see your latest social media content (we'll talk about that in a moment)
- A blog that allows you to compete for local search traffic related to your business

From there, we should think about how your visitors use your website. If someone is on your site, they likely already know they need a lawn care or landscaping professional. Having a "Contact Us" or "Call Now" button right at the top is critical to your website performance and connecting with potential customers!

Next, we want to focus on those small but important

enhancements that optimize your site to appear when someone searches phrases like “Pittsburgh Lawn Care” or “Greenfield Landscaping Company” (since Greenfield is a neighborhood within Pittsburgh).

Paying close attention to your keywords, meta descriptions, page titles, and blog content can significantly influence your performance on Google, Bing, and other search engines. We should point out here that although Google is still the dominant search engine in 2021, Bing and other competitors *can* play an important role in an effective marketing campaign for some companies, especially those that service an older or less tech-savvy audience.

Similarly, a well-planned blog can have a *significant* impact on your site performance. Blogging is powerful because it allows us to capture valuable traffic through search engines while creating useful or informative content for consumers already in the buyer’s journey.

If this all feels complex and overwhelming, don’t worry. We’ll spend much more time talking about blogging in Chapter 5.

For now, let’s acknowledge that blogging can be a quick, effective way of getting in front of your target audience. To start, think about the unique problems your target audience (people you want to do business with) might be experiencing.

Different neighborhoods in Pittsburgh experience many different challenges when it comes to lawn care and landscaping. Millvale, for example, floods on a regular basis, and this can saturate a lawn or displace vegetation. Over in neighborhoods like Hazelwood or Greenfield, yards often have steep inclines, and this can lead to runoff that tears away grass and makes maintaining a beautiful lawn quite difficult.

With that in mind, you could consider creating content that responds directly to these concerns. Writing detailed blogs with titles like “How to Design a Lawn in a Pittsburgh Flood

Zone” or “How to Prevent Runoff in Your Yard” with an emphasis on the local communities could bring in plenty of traffic from high-quality leads (people who are ready to purchase your services *now*), and you could use these blog posts as a way to pitch your services to site visitors. These posts are also great content to share on social media!

And speaking of social media, you could also include plugins on your website that allow people to see your latest posts on Facebook and Instagram (and you could even consider platforms like TikTok if you’d like to make an even bigger commitment to social media and the younger generation of homeowners).

Your Social Media Strategy

As we’ll discuss in Chapter 6, social media can be a powerful source of new customers, as well as a way to nurture your current followers.

Before we get any further, though, make sure you have a Google My Business profile setup. I’ll dig into more reasons for maintaining an active Google My Business profile later on, but for now, ensure you have the following in this frequently overlooked social media profile updated:

- Your website
- Your address
- Your contact information
- Your logo
- A recent banner image

The two biggest reasons we want your Google My Business profile set up properly:

1. You can post to Google My Business like any other social media platform, and Google may reward you by giving you higher placement since you’re an

engaged brand.

2. You can get more reviews—which makes your company appear more popular and more trusted. This also helps you stand out in the search results when people are looking for related services or products in your area. We'll talk more about reviews in a moment when we get to networking.

After setting up Google My Business, we should think about your goals for social media. Do you want your social media to become a lead generation source? Do you want to become an “influencer” for social media and pop culture clout? Do you want your social media channels to keep your fans up to date with your business?

Understanding your goals helps you figure out much of your strategy. For example, if you want social media to become a serious source of leads, your content should be authoritative and polished so people understand exactly what sort of value they'll receive from working with you *and* so that they know they can trust you.

From there, we should review the platforms we're using and see if they're actually right for us. We'll explore this process in greater detail in Chapter 6, but for now we'll note that Facebook and Instagram allow us to be quite targeted in our outreach, and we can use them to reach affluent families, busy homeowners, and elderly folks who have trouble maintaining their property.

Now that we've determined Facebook and Instagram are the best fit for your company, we should ensure your profiles are properly set up as well. For example, we should be sure to list:

- Your service area
- Services available through your company
- Contact information (including website, email, and phone number)

- Updated logo
- Updated banner (for Facebook)

With your profiles polished, we also should review the profiles of your top competitors within your service area and surrounding regions. “Top” here means both *the most popular competing businesses* and *the competing businesses with the most popular social media accounts*. Pay attention to what resonates with their audiences.

From there, it’s useful to study a few other popular accounts in general—even those completely outside of your industry. How are they engaging with their followers? What sort of content are they creating?

With this data in hand, you should start gathering resources for your social media content. That includes:

- Pictures
- Videos
- Customer reviews
- Custom graphics
- Recommendations on lawn care and landscaping
- Solutions to common lawn care and landscaping issues

Once you have your content together, get organized with a scheduling app like Hootsuite or Buffer. We’ll want to be aggressive in our posting, so we’ll aim to post at least once or twice a day, and a scheduling app can remove much of the pressure and hassle involved.

Finally, we’ll want to relaunch your social media strategy with some sort of big promotion. In this case, you could offer one free month of lawn care service with a tool like Gleam, which empowers you to quickly organize giveaways.

To kick off your campaign, inform your social media followers and everyone on your email list that they can enter by

submitting their email address (with the understanding that you can then email them later on), following you on social media, and then *sharing* the giveaway post to their followers.

With the giveaway running, people are incentivized to start sharing your content on your behalf. And if your audience is built of fans and potential leads *and* the giveaway item/service is specific to that audience, you could win even more exposure.

Email Campaign

Thanks to that giveaway campaign on social media, you should soon see a long list of *new* email addresses for homeowners in your area—and that's in addition to the extensive list of email addresses you already have from existing customers!

The next question: What do you do with all of those email addresses?

The first thing you should do is get those new accounts acquainted with your brand.

That means you want to balance useful content (in order to build trust) with some of your best offers. Over the next few weeks, you should consider promoting content that includes:

- Local gardening advice
- Local lawn care tips
- Local landscaping best practices

From there, you can sprinkle in content focusing on your services and recommendations to follow you on social media.

You might even recommend encouraging them to suggest the giveaway competition to their friends and family—that way you can cast a wider net!

While you don't want to end up in spam folders, your

campaign should balance frequency (how frequently you send out emails) with charm (how you write email subject lines to get people to click on them). Email marketing consistently offers one of the best ROIs out of *all* marketing channels, but you don't want to lose any of your hard-earned email addresses to spam filters or grumpy recipients.

Pay close attention to how your subscribers respond to your content by tracking opens, clicks, and unsubscribes.

Pro tip: Write all of your content ahead of time and put your subscribers into an automated email chain so that you're not on the hook for writing fresh content every time you want to send something!

Paper Mail

Flyers in the mail aren't dead! And although you likely throw away tons of paper spam every day, carefully designing your own campaign can generate valuable new traffic! Getting only one or two customers out of a single blast often makes the entire investment worthwhile—especially if the average lifetime value of a customer for your lawn care company is in the high hundreds or thousands of dollars.

Fortunately, EDDM tactics allow you to be very targeted in your marketing, as you can send flyers to specific ZIP codes and track some of the basic demographic information for each neighborhood.

And since you work in lawn care, you could supplement that data by driving through specific neighborhoods and identifying those areas with strong income *and* houses that obviously need some help with their lawns. *That's* where you should market!

As we'll explore in the upcoming advertising section, the more specific you can be for each neighborhood, the better, so

customize your message as much as possible for each ZIP code before dropping off your mailers at the post office!

Advertising

So, let's say you've decided to set aside \$1,000 a month on advertising to regain some of the profits you've lost over the last year. You don't really care where that advertising budget goes, all you know is that you need quick results.

There are a ton of options out there, but there are no guarantees on advertising—especially with digital advertising becoming more and more difficult.

However, you could, in theory, run social media ads for your lawn care and landscaping business that target individuals who meet these criteria:

- They are homeowners
- They live in a zip code that is easily accessible by you and your team
- They live in an area that can generally afford your services
- (Optional) They live in an area your competition isn't already trying to reach

As an alternative, you could create a “lookalike” audience of your repeat customers based on their email addresses and limited to the geographic area you want to serve!

Finally, you can supplement all of this with *retargeting* ads. Retargeting ads are used to pull people back to your website after they visit and fail to make a transaction. If you've ever visited a website and saw ads for that same website a few minutes later while scrolling through Facebook or Instagram, you've experienced retargeting.

These ads are powerful for one reason: It's easier to convert

someone who's already demonstrated an interest in your product or service than it is to convert someone who's unfamiliar with your brand!

Your ad “creative”—the imagery, videos, and copy you use within the ad—are also highly influential when it comes to your success. In general, for a local company like your lawn care service, the more specific and localized your ad creative is, the more successful you'll be. After all, the ads will feel like they were made just for the people seeing them.

Note: This book isn't intended to be a thorough primer on advertising, but we will occasionally call out its importance and relevance in certain scenarios.

Your Network

Your existing network of repeat clients—those individuals who absolutely love your services each year—is going to be your best source of positive feedback across all channels.

Before the busy season fires up and folks start looking for landscaping services in their area, reach out to your biggest repeat clients and ask for a little help in the reviews department. Tell them exactly what you're looking for.

Example: “Hi Mark, I appreciate you choosing my landscaping company every year, especially when there are so many others you could choose from! This year, I'm trying to be more aggressive in getting Google Reviews. Would you mind taking two minutes to leave a review for my business profile? I'd love to hear what you think sets my company apart! Here's the link: **[link]**”

It doesn't need to be complicated.

And although it might feel a little awkward asking for reviews, your biggest repeat customers will be happy to help.

Once that first wave of reviews comes in, it'll help your company stand out from the competition, and you can begin weaving those quotes into your marketing materials.

But don't let your networking stop at connecting with old clients.

Your local Chamber of Commerce or BNI chapter can be an excellent source of new business, especially if you can find a group that doesn't already have someone in the landscaping industry.

This sort of referral-building strategy can take time, but it's a topic we'll explore in greater detail in Chapter 8. For now, though, the effort you put into establishing those close connections with other business owners and members of the community can become instrumental in finding new business opportunities!

Pressing Forward With the LEGO Strategy

In the following chapters, we'll explore many of the concepts we just discussed. In the meantime, it's important to remember that *all* of your marketing efforts work together.

And when you figure out exactly how one impacts the other, you can build powerful marketing strategies from top to bottom, regardless of your industry.

Chapter Takeaways

1. None of your marketing channels or efforts should stand alone. They're meant to fit together like LEGO pieces.
2. You can leverage contacts or audience members from one channel to influence your audience members in

another channel.

How to Tie It Into the Rest of Your Marketing

1. Make sure all of your marketing channels are connected! Doing so increases the overall effectiveness of your entire marketing efforts, and it ensures you stay in front of your target audience in more places!

Chapter 2:

All Marketing Is Human-to-Human Marketing (Regardless of Your Industry)

Most marketing is labeled B2B (business to business) or B2C (business to consumer). And most companies stick to one or the other depending on their business model.

Salesforce, the software company, is a major B2B company because they only sell to businesses.

McDonald's, the fast-food restaurant, is a major B2C company because they only sell to consumers.

Some companies, like Dell, straddle both arenas. The “Dude, you’re getting a Dell!” commercials were geared toward household consumers in the early 2000s, but I recently received a flyer in the mail from Dell Technologies, which focuses on marketing toward businesses and IT teams.

Depending on whether your company is primarily B2B or B2C, you probably rely on different marketing and sales techniques.

But here’s the thing: *All* business is human-to-human.

Humans, after all, make the final purchase decision.

If you’re not convinced, go to the store and walk down the pet food aisle. Take a close look at the dog food packaging. Depending on the brand, you’ll likely see succulent chunks of chicken, carefully sliced arrangements of bright orange yams, a scoop of wild rice, and maybe even a few vibrant green beans to balance out the rest of the colors.

They don't put those ingredients on the packaging so the bag stands out to your dog.

They do that for *you*.

Even though the product is meant for canine consumption, dog food companies spend significant amounts of money making their packaging more appealing to pet owners—*people*.

This is human-to-human marketing.

If you connect to your leads, prospects, and existing customers *as people*, you can make significant emotional connections that simplify your marketing strategies and improve outcomes. As we'll explore in this chapter, this is true regardless of whether your company identifies as B2B or B2C.

Hailey: A Mini Case Study On The Importance Of Being Human

One of my favorite contemporary examples of human-to-human marketing is a small little Slack plugin called Hailey. Slack is a workplace communications tool—imagine a platform that allows you to hop into multiple chat rooms at once, with some additional functionality built-in.

Slack is lauded for its ability to connect teams, but it's also a product of digital workspaces. As a result, it often fails to make those nice little human connections we so easily make during face-to-face interaction.

Enter Hailey.

Hailey was developed by a colleague I went to high school with, and the concept behind it is quite simple: Every day, the app asks your team a compelling question for everyone to answer *or* provides a clever mini-game for the team to jump

into together.

It's a simple idea, but it's an important step in developing fun, engaging ways to help teams build trust, communication, and interpersonal skills.

When done every day over an extended period, I can definitely see Hailey's long-term benefits—and early adopters have already praised its effectiveness.

But this section isn't just about Hailey.

This is about my old classmate.

He's done an excellent job updating his LinkedIn followers on Hailey from the beginning when it was an idea sparked inside a startup accelerator.

He'll chime in whenever the app is used in a new country, whenever a large number of users latch onto a new game, or whenever there's a new Hailey update.

It's been fascinating to watch him grow this small little app into a tool that's now embraced by teams all over the world, and he's done a phenomenal job discussing his product's progress as modestly as possible.

So far, the feedback among his peers has been incredible. I've personally found myself cheering for him, and I've noticed other people jumping in to support him as well.

Although my old classmate is pushing a B2B product, he's pushing it like a *person*. He openly talks about Hailey's growth. He openly talks about its metrics. He openly talks about his excitement.

This genuine enthusiasm is infectious, and it's infectious *on a platform filled with the exact clientele he's looking for*: busy

professionals who work on large teams and rely on digital communication. His followers (myself included) have jumped onto the Hailey bandwagon, and I'm excited to see where this adventure takes him.

As you read this chapter, I encourage you to think about my high school classmate tinkering away on his project to bring people together and then happily sharing his findings on social media.

When you approach your target audience as a genuine human being, people notice.

The Ongoing Resistance to Human-to-Human Marketing

Not all companies are open to the same approach as my old classmate. This is especially true for those companies with a history of formality in their marketing efforts or with a customer base that expects a certain level of stuffiness.

For example, if you manufacture life-saving surgical equipment for surgeons, your customers likely expect a serious, calculated voice with a hint of optimism in your copy. There's no space for jokes on your product packaging; a life-saving business is a *serious* business.

There's a similar level of gravity in the funeral industry. Sure, your marketing copy can have a tinge of hope for the afterlife of the deceased, but your tone should reflect the somber mood of the target audience.

Still, there are many opportunities to inject a *human element* into your marketing, even when you're tied to a very specific, traditional approach.

Mini Case Study: Balancing Human-to-Human with B2B Tendencies

One local company I work with is extremely resistant to change in their marketing. They serve a very mature clientele across sophisticated industries like Engineering and Oil & Gas, and they've historically relied heavily on brand reputation and traditional marketing techniques to generate new customers while retaining the ones they have.

In many cases, their marketing is pretty dry: "Here's a new product we developed. Here's how it benefits you. Here's how you can get it."

It's not really the type of strategy that works well on social media, but social media was something they were curious about—if not exactly excited for.

Their own internal team members, who are mostly 50+ years old and unfamiliar with platforms like Facebook and Twitter, didn't see how it could effectively impact their business.

To their credit, social media *wasn't* very impactful to their company—not at first, at least. They treated their social media much like the rest of their marketing materials: They continually focused on their own business instead of thinking about what their target audience cared about.

I recommended a fundamental shift in their marketing tactics, focusing largely on LinkedIn, where they were more likely to connect with decision-makers interested in their products and services.

Taking their limited time and budget into consideration, I proposed this small shift to start them off:

1. **Highlight their individual team members** in their

posts on a more frequent basis, and be sure to tag those individuals. This gets their *people* out in front, which emphasizes the humanity within their communications.

2. **Use quotes about their products and services** from their expert team members, and tag those individuals in company posts. Again, this mixes a human representative into a very dry topic, and it also highlights that individual's expertise while growing their professional audience.
3. **Write one article a month** from the perspective of one of their in-house subject matter experts, highlighting one of the business's most popular products or services. Here, we're again highlighting an individual's expertise, and we're essentially writing blog content on LinkedIn designed to be consumed on LinkedIn.
4. **Share all of this content** through the company's other social media channels.
5. **Encourage all of their other team members to share the articles** written by their peers. (While this proved to be a difficult task because few people were committed to the plan, the results were promising when people *did* engage—for reasons we'll explore in Chapter 6.)

The reasons behind all of this:

1. Instead of pushing content out from a faceless brand, we could push content from actual people with friends and family and thoughts and emotions. This helps followers connect with the brand on a human level.
2. The subject matter experts could boost their position within the professional community while being easier to connect with than a cold, emotionless brand.

Slowly but surely, the plan worked. Compared to the rest of their content, the posts and articles featuring their team members (especially their team member's friendly faces) worked *much* better—consistently earning more than triple the engagement and impressions their general content earned.

There's still much to do. Their accounts are generally small, and the communities surrounding their team members aren't enormous, but the company is benefiting from:

- Better insight into brands that are closely paying attention to their content and team members (thanks to LinkedIn's detailed reporting)—potentially beneficial to their salespeople.
- Increased engagement across all channels—which provides us with better insights when creating content in the future.
- Increased website traffic, which leads to more opportunities to create online conversions and sales.

By continuing to invest in more thoughtful strategies, this company can continue to evolve and make human connections with their target audience.

This case study is a valuable reminder: Even B2B companies have an opportunity to inject humanity into their brand. Doing so can quickly make them more relatable, and that relatability makes them more approachable and easier to trust.

Creating Human Connections

If you're not accustomed to approaching your marketing from a human-to-human perspective, this can feel like a jarring change.

That's OK. All change feels weird at first.

But if you can commit to approaching your target audience right where they are to solve the problems they're facing, you'll experience better results.

Here are some ways to help you get started:

1. Emphasize *people* to create value. Begin by putting faces

ahead of your logo in much of your marketing (a topic we'll dive into momentarily). Yes, your logo matters, but it's worthless if people don't have an emotional connection to your brand. If you're a solopreneur, this likely means you need to show your own face more often!

In addition to your marketing, you can forge these human connections through multiple strategies:

- Provide outstanding product/service experience
- Provide outstanding customer support
- Provide the human side of your brand story through your marketing materials

2. Give a face to your products and services. In today's digital world, it's never been easier to be *human* in multiple ways. A few examples:

- **Use video.** Create videos on YouTube and other social media channels explaining your products and services. These don't have to be high-quality productions with Hollywood budgets. Instead, many of today's biggest gurus rely on a smartphone camera and microphone they hold in front of their face!

Anecdotally, I can tell you that my engagement on Monster Riff increased significantly when I started posting videos to IGTV every Saturday in a series I call Saturday Music Suggestions.

The videos are simple—about 5-10 minutes long. All I do is set my phone on my desk with myself in the frame, and then I list off three albums I listened to and was excited about in the previous week. Then, in my post copy, I tag the bands and the albums I just mentioned.

Before posting, I create a simple thumbnail image for the video—a text overlay that says “Saturday Music

Suggestions,” the Monster Riff logo, and the covers of the three albums I discuss.

The process is pretty simple, but the end product is engaging enough to get people to watch and get involved. Better yet, they specifically mention these videos when they reach out for album feedback or Monster Riff services.

If you’ve ever come across an influencer whose profile is packed with “reels,” there’s a good reason: The approach works.

- **Start a podcast.** Yes, I know, this isn’t 2006 anymore. Once upon a time, podcasts were the hot new thing, and everyone asked, “Should I have a podcast?”

The same thing happened during the app craze: “Should my company have an app?”

Now, I’m not telling you to start a podcast willy-nilly. If you start one and it’s terrible, it’ll reflect poorly on your brand—and that’s not necessarily something you can risk.

I do have one for Monster Riff (it’s called Monster Riff Presents), and although I only have a few episodes under my belt and the audio quality is something I’m constantly working to improve, the results have been interesting. I’ve noticed that some of the people who’ve reached out to me for the first time after listening to the podcast have a *very* casual tone—as if they already know me.

On a certain level, they do. I give my own thoughts and opinions and even some of my personal backstory during the podcast, so they know more about me than I do about them.

And since they already know, like, and trust me, that makes the first conversation go much more smoothly, especially if I have to end up trying to sell them on something.

- **Become the face of the brand.** I know many business owners who are reluctant to publicly promote their brand with themselves as the face of the company. On one hand, I get it. It's an understandable response for those individuals who are uncomfortable with the spotlight.

Taking the spotlight is necessary, however, especially if you're running your business as a solopreneur. After all, *you* are the brand. If you feel uncomfortable as the face of your brand, remember: People like you more than you think. Those who care will become your cheerleaders, and they'll help promote you as well.

My old high school classmate could probably afford to be more aggressive in marketing Hailey, but his sentiment is correct: As the founder of his product, it's his voice that matters the most in promoting it—and his LinkedIn network is a good place to start.

3. Leverage reviews. Testimonials from living, breathing people are powerful forms of “social proof”—public indicators of your company's reliability and responsibility. Your testimonials can fit *everywhere*: your website, your marketing materials, even on your products.

If you haven't been actively asking for reviews on Google, Facebook, Yelp, or anywhere else your company has a presence, now is the time to do so. And don't worry so much about the ratings; it's OK if you occasionally receive a one- or two-star review.

Research from Northwestern University's Spiegel Research Center and PowerReviews found the sweet spot for reviews is

somewhere between 4.2 to 4.5 stars because it indicates that you and your brand are *human*. You might not be perfect 100% of the time, and you might not provide the perfect product or service for everyone, but the knowledge of where your brand might come up short strangely compels people to trust you *more*.

In other words: Seeing a slew of 5-star reviews may feel too good to be true. And if you have detailed reviews, both negative and positive, those can be extremely helpful for potential customers who are doing their research ahead of time, as savvy customers can filter through consumer opinions to see how they align with their own priorities.

All of this can be used in your favor, like on a sales page where your customers might need a testimonial or review to help push them over the edge to finally become a customer. Take note: If you're using reviews somewhere to influence someone's decision (like on a sales page or in an email newsletter about a new product), you're better off using *three* reviews over one.

Always use your reviews to your advantage. And if you don't have any or many reviews yet (and many small businesses don't), it's time to get moving. Your reviews on Google, Facebook, Yelp, TripAdvisor, and other platforms can be extremely influential in your discoverability and in consumer decisions.

If you don't know where to start when it comes to procuring reviews, ask your closest clients and regular customers for help first. Even a small handful of reviews can give your company a boost—and you can use their words in your own marketing!

4. Use case studies as examples. As you've already seen, I've included as many case studies as possible within this book.

I have a few reasons for embracing case studies:

- Case studies are stories, and stories are fun and easy to remember.
- Case studies are teaching tools.
- Case studies are relatable.

Most importantly, though, case studies demonstrate how an idea can work in practice—instead of in *theory*.

When you leverage your case studies, you immediately demonstrate that you're capable of generating the desired results your customers are after.

The Subtle Art of Persuasion In Marketing

As you pursue deeper human connections with your target audience, remember that marketing best practices are deeply steeped in human psychology. And while I don't want this chapter to turn into a dissertation on the human mind and the way we make decisions as consumers, there's value in spending a brief amount of time discussing the subtle art of *persuasion*. (If you read this section and find you're really passionate about persuasion, check out Robert Cialdini's *Influence*, which is often recognized as the golden standard in persuasion best practices.)

The concept of persuasion and influence in marketing is essential to our overall marketing strategies. As marketers, we're ultimately trying to compel people to buy a product or service.

But we can't always jump to that step right away.

Instead, we first have to establish trust and awareness with our target audience. Sometimes that means persuading someone to watch a compelling video. Sometimes that means

persuading them to read a compelling email. Sometimes that means persuading someone to sign up for a compelling free trial.

Simply put: Persuasion is one of the most powerful skills you can develop as a leader and marketer!

With that in mind, let's review some of the most common persuasion tactics you'll come across in marketing:

1. Reciprocity - Reciprocity is simply making someone feel compelled to do something for you because you did something for them:

- A snack food company sends a micro-influencer (generally, someone with more followers than your average person but fewer than a celebrity—roughly 10,000-100,000 followers) a bag of their new cheese curls so they'll share them on social media.
- A company that publicly volunteers time and resources to a popular nonprofit and broadcasts news of its service to the rest of the community.

2. Scarcity - One of the most common marketing tactics out there, scarcity digs into our fear of missing out on an opportunity, whether it be purchasing a product, service, or experience. Here are some of the most common examples:

- Airplane or hotel websites listing how many seats/rooms are still available while someone is actively shopping.
- Online coaches running advertisements saying they're only taking four more clients before closing their course to the public.

3. Urgency - Closely related to scarcity, urgency focuses largely on the limitation of time:

- "Limited-Time Offer!" written at the top of a

- newspaper spread.
- Offering 50% off for the next 24 hours.

4. Social proof - Social proof is when a company relies on customer reviews, industry awards, or similar trophies to demonstrate they're a trustworthy, reliable company. You've probably seen these examples of social proof:

- Using a review from a customer in your marketing materials (which we just discussed in the last section).
- Hiring a local, national, or international spokesperson to represent your brand. (We'll discuss influencer marketing in our next section.)

5. Authority - Closely related to social proof, authority is about demonstrating *you're* the go-to vendor in your industry.

Examples:

- A quote from a subject matter expert or critic on the front of a book.
- Wedding photographers listing their awards from wedding industry websites to showcase their reliability.

Weaving these concepts into the rest of your marketing tactics can be incredibly powerful for your long-term success, so look for opportunities to use them wherever you can!

Leveraging the Power of 'You'

A major piece of the persuasion puzzle is speaking directly to your target audience. Unfortunately, that's an area where *many* small brands struggle.

In fact, one of the most common problems I see on company websites and marketing materials is the innate obsession with companies talking about themselves.

"We offer the best prices!"

“We have the best selection!”

“We won the people’s choice award!”

Early in the sales process, people don’t really care about you or your company. They care about what you or your company can do for them.

That’s why it’s so important to keep the focus on your audience throughout your marketing copy. The easiest way: Use more *you*-focused language.

Let’s look at those phrases above and revise them ever so slightly:

“Me/We” Language	“You” Language
“We offer the best prices!”	“You’ll find the best prices!”
“We have the best selection”	“You’ll find everything you’re looking for!”
“We won the people’s choice award!”	“Thank you for making us the winners of the people’s choice award!”

Now, each of those sentences in the right column could be workshoped and improved even further, but you can already see the improvement. When you speak directly to your audience and talk about the *value you bring them*—the way you can meet their needs, concerns, and desires—you’ll perform better in your marketing.

A Useful Exercise

Try this exercise to audit your marketing materials: Look through your website, social media, and all other materials and note everywhere you use “we,” “me,” or “I” language. In each instance, ask yourself: *Does this sentence need to be about me/my company?*

If not, see how you can rewrite it to focus on your

target audience.

The results will be *much* better.

As a more immediate example, take a look at how this book is written. I've frequently tried to address *you* (and most good business books will do the same), and that makes it a more compelling and educational read than starting every sentence by talking about myself.

Understanding Influencer Marketing: Enlisting Humans to Sell to Humans

One concept that's closely related to persuasion is influencer marketing. Influencer marketing has been around for hundreds of years, and it has endured for one simple reason: It works.

In fact, the ROI on influencer marketing can be *outstanding*. Influencer Marketing Hub is a Denmark-based media focused on generating the latest research in social media and influencer marketing. In their 2020 report, Influencer Marketing Hub found the average ROI on influencer marketing is \$6 per dollar invested (a respectable ROI for any campaign), but the best marketers saw a whopping \$18 for every dollar spent on influencers!

Influencer marketing is especially important for capturing members of the Gen Z crowd. Research shows they've grown up seeing advertisements everywhere they look in the digital world, and they want to know they can trust a brand to solve their problems before making a purchase. In many cases, these young consumers would prefer to hear about a new product or service from someone they trust over an unsolicited advertisement.

What Counts As Influencer Marketing?

One of the most common forms of influencer marketing occurs through social media with prominent celebrities. A lipstick manufacturer might pay Kim Kardashian West to push their product to her 230 million+ followers on Instagram—allowing them to get in front of *millions* of people who look to Kim Kardashian West for fashion advice and recommendations.

But influencer marketing comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. A few examples:

- Shaquille O'Neal (the former NBA star) representing the Epson printer brand through social media ads.
- A small town partnering with a beloved former mayor on radio spots and TV commercials to encourage people to attend an upcoming car show.
- A snackfood company distributing their custom cheese puffs to a variety of Instagram micro-influencers who have between 10,000 and 100,000 followers.

In its simplest terms, influencer marketing is whenever a company relies on someone with *influence* over a certain group of people to promote a product, service, or brand. Remember: Being famous doesn't necessarily make you an influencer!

Identifying the Right Influencer For Your Brand

Identifying a great influencer for your brand is harder than it seems. Instinct would tell you anyone with a sizable following would be a good fit, but that's hardly ever the case.

As proof, let's think about the Shaquille O'Neal and Epson example I mentioned before.

As a basketball fan, I like Shaq. But as a marketer, I didn't understand this play from Epson, the printer manufacturer. In an influencer marketing campaign, Epson should look for someone who has a sizable and engaged following *that appreciates office products and would care about Epson*. Sure, Shaq is a recognizable celebrity, but I'm nearly positive the cross-section of office supply purchasers and Shaq fans is fairly limited.

Instead, Epson would likely have seen better success trying to connect with a household name that's better known for their business world prowess. A few potential examples:

- Gary Vaynerchuk (author, speaker, and CEO of VaynerX)
- Daymond John (TV personality on *Shark Tank* and CEO of FUBU)
- Arianna Huffington (author and co-founder of *The Huffington Post*)

Any of these individuals would have been a better fit because they're all known for their business acumen and office experience. Promoting a printer wouldn't feel totally out of place for any of them.

As we move through the next few sections, remember that a good influencer for your brand is anyone who has *influence* over a portion of your target audience, not necessarily someone famous.

Finding the Right Fit

The ideal influencer for your business will have two major selling points:

1. An engaged following that aligns closely with your target audience.
2. A "sizable" overall follower base. "Sizable" in this

context means any number of followers that aligns with your overall goals. If you're aiming to sell 10,000 widgets in a single campaign, you probably don't want to work with a micro-influencer of only 10,000 total followers.

Multiple tools are available on the market to help you identify potential influencer partners. As of this writing, products like Upfluence, BuzzSumo, and Awario can help you identify numerous starting points—but you'll still have plenty of research left to conduct which we'll discuss in the next section.

Although it's critical to choose influencers who can help you achieve your goals, don't overlook the power of micro-influencers—those individuals with a relatively small but engaged follower base. Under the right circumstances, micro-influencers can be incredibly impactful to your bottom line, and they're often less expensive than bigger influencers.

In an ideal world, you should also seek influencers who have built up their following through their own original, industry-related content on your target platform.

To illustrate, let's revisit the Epson-Shaq example. Shaq has nearly 20 million Instagram followers, but most of those individuals follow him because of the celebrity status he's earned through his sports career—not necessarily because the content he posts is especially funny or creative.

Returning to our previous point, Epson might have seen better results from that campaign by partnering with someone who:

- Is recognizable in your average office or household.
- Is known for their business experience and leadership.
- Has a large, established presence on social media.

Now, it *is* true that Shaq is an academic *and* a business owner. Most people don't realize Shaq holds a doctorate in Human

Resource Development, and he has invested in a variety of fast food restaurants and start-ups.

But that was never the focus of Epson commercials. Instead of digging into Shaq's professional background, they simply relied on his personality and stardom to push printers—and this seems like a major missed opportunity!

Vetting An Influencer Before Working Together

When you're vetting an influencer for a potential campaign, you should ensure that they have an engaged audience that's likely to buy your products or services. Before passing along a contract, consider asking influencers these questions:

- What does your creative process look like when you create content on behalf of other brands?
- How many times have you worked with a brand like mine before?
- What sort of results did you generate while working with brands like mine or in my industry?
- What sort of measurable results from past campaigns can you show me?

If the influencer is relatively small or inexperienced, they may not be capable of providing these numbers, but that's not necessarily a deal-breaker. If their fans are genuinely engaged and they've created high-quality content in the past, they may be capable of generating results for your company.

Instead of using your entire influencer budget on them, you might consider using a smaller portion of it to test them out on a trial basis.

Tracking Success

As with all of your other marketing efforts, track your success when working with influencers. Some strategies you can use:

1. Add UTM codes to the end of any URL you provide to the influencer so you can track any website traffic they generate. If you've never heard of UTM codes before, that's OK! A UTM code is a little snippet of text you add to the end of a URL so you can track where the link was published, like a social media post or an email. When someone clicks one of your links with a unique UTM code for one of your influencers, that click will be recorded in Google Analytics, a free tool from Google that helps you understand who visits your website and how they behave once they get there. To learn more about UTM codes and Google Analytics, visit <https://ga-dev-tools.web.app/>.
2. Provide them with a special promo code to give to their followers. You should then be able to track this promo code in your sales platform.
3. Pay close attention to your metrics across *all* of your social media channels before, during, and after your campaign together.

Influencer marketing can feel scary because it requires giving up a certain level of control over how your brand is presented in the real world. But the results speak for themselves. When you choose the right influencer partners, you can see a massive ROI on your marketing.

Leveraging the Lock-In Effect (And How to Overcome It)

While influencer marketing is a worthy marketing tactic, it *can* require a significant financial investment to launch your

campaign. When exploring new ways to leverage human psychology in your marketing efforts, leverage the lock-in effect.

“Pat,” I hear you saying, “what’s the lock-in effect?”

The lock-in effect is essentially that small tug that forces us to stick with the companies we know instead of trying something different.

As a business owner, marketer, and consumer, you’ve undoubtedly created and fallen to the lock-in effect in some capacity.

Think about your repeat customers who come back time and time again. It’s not just your friendly smile and outstanding service that keeps people around. It’s the lock-in effect.

You’ve likely experienced the lock-in effect in your own life as a consumer:

- Houses of worship. People have every right to shop around when it comes to churches, but the community aspect (both the friendships developed within the congregation and the power of sharing a common belief) of religion prevents most people from ever leaving. If a religious person lives in the same community their whole life, there’s a good chance they’ll attend the same place of worship for their entire life as well.
- Grocery stores. Once you’ve found a store that is conveniently located and you’ve learned the basic layout, you’ll likely continue shopping there for the majority of your shopping adventures—even when they raise the prices on your favorite goods.
- Windows/Apple Products. If you used a Windows computer last year, you’re probably using one this year.

If you had an iPhone last year, you probably have an iPhone this year. We, as people, don't like learning new operating systems or technology. We prefer the one we're more familiar with—even if the alternative accomplishes the same basic tasks in the same amount of time at a lower price point.

Strategies For Creating the Lock-In Effect

So, how do we create the lock-in effect? *Any* business can create a lock-in effect, and you've likely already done so to a certain extent.

And while there are more nefarious means of locking people into a contract or service (some gyms, for example, require you to cancel your membership in person, which may be *just* annoying enough to shrug off \$30 for another month), we want to take a more respectable approach.

Some strategies you can employ:

- **Be consistent in your quality and performance.** In many ways, being consistent is more important than being the best in the industry, though you should generally strive to be better than your competition. If people know they'll get good service/products *every* time they visit you, they're more likely to stick with you.
- **Be convenient—in all aspects.** There are many ways to unpack the word "convenient." You can be convenient in terms of location, price structure, type of product or service—the list goes on and on. Consider a few common examples that *aren't* reliant on location:
 - A hotel that has an in-house bar and car rental/shuttle service.
 - A bank that offers robust online banking options and mobile services.
 - Amazon's ability to offer 2-day delivery on many

of its products.

- **Share your awards and accolades.** People want to take pride in their choices, and they're more willing to stick around if they have a reminder that you're an award-winning company. We discussed the idea of social proof earlier in this chapter, and it's important to the lock-in effect.

This is not an exhaustive list, but it should be enough to help you get started. To generate even more ideas, pay close attention to your customers and target audience. What do they want or need that no one else is already providing?

Strategies For Overcoming Your Competitor's Lock-In Effect

Your competitors have their own lock-in effects working on their behalf, and that means their customers are unlikely to come to you *unless you can overcome the competing lock-in effects*.

I don't want you to stoop to smear campaigns against your competition. Instead, there are many other strategies you can use to pull consumers away from your competitors and into your own business.

If your company provides any sort of service (investing, insurance, law firm, real estate, etc.), much of this can be addressed during the sales process. Some common protests you'll hear from prospects—and potential responses you can use:

- **Protest:** "I've been with [competitor] for 10 years."
Potential response: "That's great! I value and respect loyalty as well. When was the last time they sat down with you to address your individual needs?"

- **Protest:** “[Competitor] just makes it easy.” **Potential response:** “I can respect that, but is that all you’re really paying them for? You should be getting additional value, right?”
- **Protest:** “[Competitor] always does a good job.” **Potential response:** “[Competitor] is a strong company with a strong reputation. We actually share many of the same clients, as my company is able to do [assorted capabilities], while [competitor] doesn’t offer those services.”

For retailers and online stores, where foot traffic and web traffic are critical, overcoming the lock-in effect *can* be easier—but you have to be strategic in your approach. Some examples of strategies that can help you overcome the lock-in effect include:

- Use a persistent, targeted ad campaign. We don’t discuss advertising much in this book, but it can be the trick needed to pull your target audience away from their typical vendor. This is especially true in cases where the lifetime value of a single customer far outweighs the acquisition costs!
- Rely on the persuasion tactics we just discussed, and wrap those tactics into your overall marketing.
- Make it as easy (and exciting) as possible to switch. There are options to get creative here. Email discount code for first-time shoppers. Use EDDM (commonly used by restaurants, for example) to get your offerings in front of local clientele. Offer a buy-one-get-one offer for a limited time to new shoppers.

Remember: Getting people through your sales process is one thing, but getting them to *come back* is much different—and much more important. Continue to focus on building the lock-in effect, and you can ensure your customers continue returning

to your company for years to come.

A Brief Primer On Design and Color Theory

One of the most overlooked opportunities to influence others in your marketing is *color*. Color has a profound influence on our emotions, and learning how color interacts with the human mind can help in all of our marketing efforts.

Now, it is true that color theory is better left to the web developers and graphic designers of the world, but I've seen many small business owners and solopreneurs forgo hiring a freelance designer for programs like Canva to create their own imagery for marketing campaigns.

Unfortunately, many of these graphics leave a lot to be desired, and that's partially because of a lack of understanding when it comes to colors and human psychology.

In general, I recommend hiring a graphic designer when you need a graphic designer—the same way you hire a mechanic when you need a mechanic or a plumber when you need a plumber. Yes, prices *can* be prohibitive, but you can find plenty of talented individuals at affordable rates.

For those instances when you decide to quickly create something in-house, however, you should understand how colors interact with the human mind.

Here's a quick breakdown of how colors generally make us feel:

- **Red** - A great and powerful accent color, red is passionate and energizing. It can also demonstrate a wide range of emotions, including both love and rage. You'll often see red in logos for restaurants (Wendy's, Burger King, McDonald's) and those that aim to be

exciting or thrilling (Marvel, LEGO, Netflix).

- **Orange** - Like red, orange can be energetic and passionate, but it's also a happier color. Friendly and positive, orange is great for reaching younger demographics (Nickelodeon, Rockstar, Fanta) and those who are interested in thrills or excitement (Harley-Davidson, Mastercard, Amazon).
- **Yellow** - Think of yellow like a muted orange. It's happy, spontaneous, and optimistic. Although yellow can be overwhelming in large doses, it can also be comforting and a great attention-grabber. Like red, you'll find yellow in plenty of restaurant logos (Denny's, Sonic, McDonald's), travel-related business logos (Hertz, Shell, Pennzoil), and communications-related logos (Snapchat, AIM, Yellowbook).
- **Green** - Green can offer feelings of success and hope, but it also gives off earthy, natural vibes—which can make it relaxing. In the U.S., we also relate green with success and security. You'll find green in a slew of logos related to food (Tropicana, Whole Foods, Starbucks), nature (Animal Planet), outdoor vehicles (John Deere, Land Rover), and finance (Fidelity, TD Ameritrade, Robinhood).
- **Blue** - Safe and relaxing, blue gives off feelings of trust, reliability, and even peace—especially with softer blues. You'll often find blues in products and companies that want to be relaxing (Facebook, Twitter, Skype) and those that want to inspire confidence and reliability (GM, Ford, IBM, American Express, PayPal).
- **Purple** - Luxurious and wealthy, purple can make people feel more creative or relaxed. Not surprisingly, you'll find purple in logos that aim to be exciting (Yahoo!, Wonka), unpredictable (SyFy), or inviting (Curves, Monster, Hallmark).

- **Pink** - Although pink is often associated with femininity, it has a much wider emotional range. Pink can also be romantic, flirty, or even playful. And although you'll see pink in brands that target a mostly female demographic (Barbie, Victoria's Secret, Hello Kitty), you'll also see it in lighthearted food brands (Taco Bell, Dunkin' Donuts), communications (LG, T-Mobile), and brands that try to take a lighter approach to more serious topics (Susan G. Komen, Pepto-Bismol).
- **Brown** - Like green, brown can give off earthy vibes. And while the ties back to nature make the color calming and friendly, you can also use it when you want to appear dependable. You'll find brown in logos that want to present reliability (UPS) or relate back to food (A&W, Hershey's, Dreyer's, Cracker Barrel).
- **Gray** - Neutral and quieter than most colors, gray often comes across as serious. Still, it's a common go-to color when a brand or designer wants to emphasize professionalism or reliability. Because of that, you'll often find grays in brands that aim to be trailblazers (Apple, WordPress) or that are involved in transportation (Mercedes-Benz, Nissan, Toyota).
- **White** - Often used to show purity, white is also useful in giving a sense of simplicity. White is *not* overwhelming, which makes it incredibly neutral. Many brands and designers use white as an accent or for its value in negative space (areas of the page that don't have any coloring or objects).
- **Black** - Serious, authoritative, and mature, black is especially useful when you want to be professional, elegant, or mysterious. These qualities make black a popular choice among brands that need to present themselves as trustworthy (The New York Times, The Washington Post) or bold (Nike, Adidas).

You don't need to commit these qualities to memory, but this can serve as a useful guide as you think about your own branding!

Chapter Takeaways

1. All marketing *should* be human-to-human marketing, regardless of whether you're a B2B or B2C company. Engineer your marketing to address the humanity of the person you're trying to reach.
2. Using recognizable people (like the company founder or a spokesperson) in your marketing efforts can kickstart your overall marketing efforts—and it gives viewers someone to connect with.
3. Influencer marketing can build trust with consumers (especially young consumers) while generating a powerful ROI.
4. Leverage human psychology to weave persuasion and lock-in effects into your marketing and brand experience.

How to Tie It Into the Rest of Your Marketing

1. Look through your marketing materials and ask these questions:
 - Am I writing my copy like I'm trying to communicate with a real person?
 - Is my imagery personal enough? Could I include a leader from the company in our imagery?
2. Are you using “you” language? Review your marketing copy to ensure you're addressing the reader specifically and discussing the benefits (both emotional and practical) to

them—instead of simply discussing your product benefits in a vacuum.

3. If you haven't refreshed your website, social media approach, and marketing collateral in some time, it may be worth revisiting these marketing assets with fresh eyes.

4. Revisit your marketing materials for persuasion and color. Both of these subtle psychological tools can have significant long-term impacts on your company's success.

Chapter 3:

Great Marketing Takes Time and Creativity (And Great Content Takes Even Longer)

I've been around long enough to witness marketing disasters. In my past life, I've seen companies eagerly fork fistfuls of cash over to digital agencies for social media campaigns that eventually flopped.

In every single case, the “campaign” flops for one reason: bad design.

Most social media service orders (and many other campaigns, for that matter) are viewed as *products* by the marketing sales team. A client gets 12 posts a month, so the team delivers 12 posts a month without much forethought or connected goals.

Here's the truth: Selling a service order structured around “12 posts a month” is criminal. To be perfectly honest, I'd rather pay someone to spend four hours on one great post every month instead of spending four hours on 12 lackluster posts each month.

12 lackluster posts won't get results.

But if you can create quality content that resonates with your audience and gets them excited to see what you produce next, you'll find great success.

That's true across *all* of your marketing channels—from social media to digital ads to traditional billboards.

In this section, we'll explore what great content really is, and we'll examine some of the ways a few household brands

present their content in a way that resonates with their target audience *without* costing a small fortune.

Defining ‘Great Content’

Marketing sometimes feels like an unpredictable science.

I’ll be the first to admit that not every single one of my ideas has been perfect. I’ve sunk significant amounts of time in Photoshop drumming up a funny image for a client, certain it was going to have their audience rolling on the floor. But then after posting, the whole thing flopped.

Sometimes what seems great to you *isn’t* great to your audience.

So, how should we define “great content”?

We can define great content as content that:

- Remains with our target audience after they see it (i.e., they remember it for weeks, months, or even years after seeing it).
- Drives our target audience to take one of our desired actions (visit a webpage, purchase an item, book a meeting, visit a location, etc.).
- Compels members of the press (including bloggers and industry influencers) to write positive articles or create their own content about *our* content.
- Members of our target audience actively share and talk about our content (e.g., they share the content on social media—actively making it go viral).

With these criteria in place, it’s easy to see how difficult it is to create *really* compelling content.

The good news: The response you get from your target audience can be consistently measured and weaponized for

future content creation. Pay attention to your metrics at every single turn. You won't regret it.

Great Content In Action: The Famous Wendy's Twitter Account

Wendy's, the family-friendly fast food restaurant, has earned a reputation for holding one of the best accounts on Twitter. The Wendy's Twitter account is loaded with snark, quick comebacks, and tons of humor.

It's like the online alter ego of the brick-and-mortar store, and it's earned them nearly 4 million followers on Twitter.

According to the Wendy's Twitter bio, their behavior on the platform is by design. As of August 2021, their Twitter bio reads: "We like our tweets the way we like our cheeseburgers: better than anyone expects from a fast-food restaurant."

To that end, take a look at some of these past tweets from Wendy's:

Tweet 1

Tweet:

Wait, we weren't even nominated for album of the year?

Wack.

Performance:

Replies: 1,300

Retweets: 5,400

Likes: 61,000

Context: This was posted during the 61st annual Grammy Awards ceremony in 2019. Obviously, Wendy's is taking a sarcastically incredulous approach to the entire event.

Tweet 2

Tweet (With Voting): *Wendy's Frosty-ccino is cold brew with*

*Vanilla Frosty creamer (16.3%)
Chocolate Frosty creamer (12.3%)
C, all of the above (32.7%)
Test related anxiety (38.8%)*

Performance:

Votes: 9,809
Replies: 159
Retweets: 43
Likes: 766

Context: After adding the restaurant's new Frosty-ccino on the breakfast menu, Wendy's took to Twitter to educate their fans about it—in the form of a fun, humor-infused quiz.

Tweet 3

Tweet (With Voting): *Should I ban george again?*

*Yea (71.6%)
Nah (28.4%)*

Performance:

Replies: 9,900
Retweets: 5,600
Likes: 77,600

Context: Wendy's actually got into some hot water for this tweet, and their actions even sparked a #banwendys hashtag. The backstory: Wendy's jokingly asked if it should ban a streamer while livestreaming a game, then took to Twitter to take it a step further.

Why the Wendy's Twitter Account Matters

For a moment, I want you to forget about results. I want you to forget about sales and profits and revenue and employee salaries and how many widgets you have sitting in the warehouse.

I want you to focus on creativity.

Wendy's has earned an enormous Twitter following largely because their tweets are *creative*. Wendy's team members tweet with the confident abandon of high school class clowns, and it *works*.

Is it the perfect fit for Wendy's overall brand?

No. In fact, it's difficult to imagine Dave Thomas, the Wendy's founder and philanthropist who passed away four years before Twitter was even founded, saying *anything* Wendy's tweets out on a regular basis.

Because of that, I don't think the Wendy's social media strategy is perfect.

But I do think that the willingness to ignore the norms and embrace a little creativity is freeing. The Wendy's Twitter account can continue to be bombastic because of the persona it has cultivated—and that cultivated persona continues to draw attention and earn the company free press pickup.

Bottom line: Get outside of your comfort zone. Be willing to try something new.

It's the only way to start creating great content!

Creating Great Content On A Limited Budget: Channeling Creativity Through Need

What I love about the Wendy's Twitter account is that they've had a monumental influence on the way companies (especially other restaurants) handle their social media presence—and they use that Twitter account for free.

All they're really paying for through that marketing channel is the salaries of the employees who manage the Twitter handle.

Instead of devoting themselves entirely to costly advertising campaigns on Twitter (which they may do from time to time), Wendy's relies heavily on *creativity* to get noticed.

And that's good news. Creativity is free, and you can do a lot with a limited budget.

In fact, the Harmon Brothers, an incredibly influential advertising agency behind brands like the Squatty Potty and Purple (the mattress company), have built their clients' reputations on commercials that prioritize simple creativity over Hollywood effects.

As an example, you might recall the famous Goldilocks commercial for Purple. In that commercial, Goldilocks uses the "raw egg test" to determine whether or not a mattress is comfortable. She drops a number of eggs onto a variety of mattresses, only to have them smash and break open. But when she comes to the Purple mattress, the eggs drop right into the mattress unharmed! It's simple and silly and *memorable*—all while demonstrating the mattress's durability and comfortability.

Not bad at all. The Harmon Brothers are playing into the old Goldilocks and the three bears story we all heard growing up,

and they're using the "too soft," "too hard," "just right" portion of the story to discuss the merits of the Purple mattress.

But based on how they shot this commercial, it was also extremely *affordable*.

If you conduct a shot-by-shot analysis of this commercial, it wouldn't be that hard to replicate in a studio that you could potentially build by hand inside your own office.

No one knows this better than the music industry, where bands have long produced exciting music videos on tiny budgets.

To show how far you can get on limited budgets, I want to pull apart two examples from the music industry.

Example One: 'Tourniquet' By Baroness - A Study In Lighting and Smoke Machines

I frequently talk to bands about their marketing strategies, and our conversations regularly turn to music videos.

"Pat," they say, "we want to do a music video, but we don't have the money for it!"

That's probably not quite true.

I've seen wildly entertaining music videos produced on shoestring budgets.

As a case study, I often point these bands to a song called "Tourniquet" by Baroness. Baroness is a metal band based in Savannah, Georgia, and they're notable for their progressive metal tendencies mixed with a surprising amount of emotion.

The "Tourniquet" music video is a passionate companion piece

to the song itself, and it's marked by dramatic shots of the band members singing and playing their instruments.

If you look closely, though, you'll see just how *simple* this music video is.

Most of the video is a series of compelling shots with colored lighting and a smoke machine.

That's it.

Baroness is a pretty big band in the metal genre, so they could have chosen to do something much more complex.

Instead, they picked an artsy route that was likely much less expensive. (If you'd like to see Baroness tackle something more complicated, you could view their music video for "Shock Me.")

All told, a band could probably recreate the "Tourniquet" music video for a few hundred dollars—even less if they knew the right people to borrow a camera, a stage light, and a smoke machine from.

Here's a quick estimate, assuming they had to source all of their own equipment:

- Two smoke machines: \$80
- Three stage lights with color filters: \$60
- Venue costs: Potentially free (depending on where they filmed)
- Video camera (3-day rental): \$200

Assuming they were able to find a free venue, they could have gotten away with shooting the video for \$340 on supplies.

In addition, you could also add in the time necessary for the band to hang out for the day and the time in post-production to

make the video perfect.

All told, however, I wouldn't be surprised if Baroness spent less than \$1,000 on the "Tourniquet" music video.

As of this writing in August 2021, the "Tourniquet" music video has more than 455,000 views on the Baroness YouTube channel—money well invested for their brand!

The Lesson: Don't let assumed costs deter you from going after major projects. The right vendors can help you source marketing materials cost-effectively, and the long-term impact can be outstanding when you inject some creative problem-solving.

Example Two: 'Black Box' By Puta Volcano - The Story of a Treadmill and a Black Backdrop

Editorial Note: I realize the word "puta" has negative connotations in multiple languages, but I've decided to include this mini case study here because there's great value in what we can learn from the band's music video. My apologies to anyone who's offended by the vulgarity of the band's name.

Another great and low-cost music video is "Black Box" by Puta Volcano. Puta Volcano is a band on the rise in Greece, relying heavily on their deep, fuzzy guitars and impressive female vocalist to set themselves apart.

In the "Black Box" music video (which you can watch on Puta Volcano's YouTube channel), a woman runs in a dark void while everything from sun hats to books fly through the air—often striking her in the face.

It's a stunning video, but the creative process was actually pretty simple.

The actress was placed on a treadmill so she could run in place. That's why her running looks so realistic.

The crew placed her and the treadmill in front of a black backdrop. That's why it looks like she's running in a void.

The crew continuously threw items at her. That's how they consistently got so much stuff on her face.

The "Black Box" music video is well crafted, and it's an inspiring metaphor about humanity's ability to continue running forward even when it feels like we're getting slapped in the face.

The Lesson: High-quality videos can be produced with a little bit of ingenuity. When you're willing to put your ego aside, you can take incredibly creative strides, and even small-budget projects can strike an impressive emotional range.

More Lessons From These Examples

Both of these videos create dramatic scenes that are compelling in their own ways. Depending on how the materials for each video were sourced, each one could have likely been shot for a few hundred dollars. The biggest expenses were likely the videographer, room rental, and supplies, and most crafty musicians (and clever marketers) can find ways to source these line items for cheap or free.

Creativity From Household Names

The music scene isn't the only source of creativity, however, and that's good news if you have trouble channeling the activities of Baroness and Puta Volcano.

There are plenty of creative case studies from household names. Two of my favorite examples in recent years

showcase brands tackling brilliant and (potentially) low-budget ideas that generate great, intriguing content.

Next, we'll examine some of the bizarre and enthralling strategies recently employed by Miller Lite, the beer company, and Cards Against Humanity, the card game company.

Miller Lite's Unique Marketing Strategy For Super Bowl LV

I loved Miller Lite's marketing play during Super Bowl LV. In fact, it's one of my favorite marketing campaigns of all time—simply because it was bold, memorable, and easy to execute.

Here's how it worked in simple terms: Miller Lite promised fans free beer by typing in a ridiculously long URL during Michelob Ultra's Super Bowl Commercial.

That's it, in a nutshell.

The URL they had to type in was massive:

<http://www.thismillerlitemarketingstuntwilldistractyoufromultrasbiggamead.com/JustTypeInThisURLWhenTheMichelobUltraCommercialAirsOnThatSacredSundayInFebruaryWhenEveryonesWatchingFootballAndWeWillGiveYouFreeMillerLiteWhichNotOnlyHasMoreTasteThanMichelobUltraButAlsoHasOnlyOneMoreCalorieAndYouWillActuallyBurnThatCalorieByTypingInThisRidiculouslyLongURLButYouWillHaveToTypeItForRealNoCheatingByCopyingAndPastingWhichIsWhyWeArePrintingThisURLInAGoodOldFashionedNewspaperOfTheHighestIntegrityAndYesWeAreAwareThatTheresBoundToBeSomeTechnologyThatExistsThatCouldTranscribeAPhotoBackIntoHighlightableTextInWhichCaseYouCouldCheatAndCopyAndPasteThisURLButWeAreGoingToTrustYouBecauseGoodRelationshipsAreBuiltOnTrustSoOnceAg>

ainPleaseTypeThisURLOnFebruary7thBecauseThisIsA
StuntDesignedToMakeYouMissOurCompetitorsAdBurn
ACalorieAndGetFreeBeerItsMillerTime

And if you're having trouble reading that, it says:

This Miller Lite marketing stunt will distract you from [Michelob] Ultra's big game ad. Just type in this URL when the Michelob Ultra commercial airs on that sacred Sunday in February when everyone is watching football and we will give you free Miller Lite, which not only has more taste than Michelob Ultra but also has only one more calorie, and you will actually burn that calorie by typing in this ridiculously long URL, but you will have to type it for real, no cheating by copying and pasting, which is why we are printing this URL in a good, old-fashioned newspaper of the highest integrity, and, yes, we are aware that there's bound to be some technology that exists that could transcribe a photo back into highlightable text, in which case you could cheat and copy and paste this URL, but we are going to trust you because good relationships are built on trust. So, once again, please type this URL on February 7th because this is a stunt designed to make you miss our competitor's ad. Burn a calorie and get free beer. It's Miller Time.

There's a lot to love about this campaign:

1. It's playful and funny... The entire campaign is goofy by being over the top. The long URL meanders from topic to topic, even going as far as to discuss how great relationships are built on trust—totally unexpected from a beer company. To be fair, though, this isn't completely out of line. Major beer companies have gotten more and more creative with their marketing over the years, often using silly jokes to attract the young male demographic. Remember Budweiser's "Wassup?" commercial that was so popular in 1999?

2. ...but it's also aggressive. With this campaign, Miller Lite actively pulls attention away from Michelob Ultra during one of the biggest TV spots of the year. The URL is intimidating in length, but it likely had more than a few people diving for their phones when they realized the Michelob Ultra ad was airing. Targeting Michelob Ultra was also timely: Michelob Ultra recently exploded in popularity, even while most lagers suffered from slipping sales.

3. It's crazy enough to work. This campaign had viral potential written all over it. Super Bowl Sunday is known for its clever marketing stunts, and this one was whacky enough to receive wide press coverage leading up to the Super Bowl.

The timing here is also important. While it's unclear whether the marketing stunt increased sales in the days leading up to the game, it's likely that the extra exposure helped to boost sales right before the game as people stocked up on beer. The Super Bowl is, after all, a good excuse to party.

One thing we do know is that the small marketing stunt helped the company get above-average engagement on social media. On February 1, @MillerLite tweeted a picture of its New York Times placement with this caption: "This Sunday, you can watch Michelob Ultra's expensive beer ad or you can get some Miller Lite on us. Your choice."

The tweet recorded 50 replies, 211 retweets, and 741 likes. Now compare that to the account's previous post (18 replies, 30 retweets, and 271 likes) or following post (12 replies, 67 retweets, and 362 likes). That's a massive improvement!

4. It engages their super fans. While engaging, this campaign wasn't for everyone. Your average beer drinker didn't scurry to type the URL, but people who love beer or Miller Lite were bound to complete it.

And since the Super Bowl is often a social event, this sort of action was sure to stir up some additional conversation about

Miller Lite among people who watched the game together and noticed the Michelob Ultra commercial.

5. The bones are incredibly simple—which means this could have been incredibly affordable. A campaign like this has a true grassroots feel. Build a silly website. Tell people how it works. Promote it.

There's nothing really complicated about it.

Sure, Miller Lite placed ads in major newspapers like The New York Times, and it also published a press release.

But all of that can be done for significantly less than paying for a Super Bowl ad (which went for \$5,500,000 in 2021—the year of Miller Lite's campaign).

If we reverse engineer the major bones of this campaign, we find the whole thing could have been conducted relatively inexpensively.

Here's a quick breakdown (with some assumptions built-in):

- **The website: <\$1,000**
Really, the website they built could have been built and launched for a few hundred dollars, though their designer might be a little more expensive (Miller Lite does have deep pockets, after all).
- **Advertising: Variable (\$500-\$200,000)**
You would *not* need to spend \$200,000 on such a stunt. The big chunk of change for Miller Lite would have been the New York Times ad, which could easily run more than \$150,000 (a full-page ad is \$150,000 for nationwide distribution—and that's before you add in color).

I originally came across the campaign on Reddit, and

Reddit advertising can be a relatively affordable place for marketing. As an example, impressions are often pennies (or less), and clicks often start around 10 cents. When you consider that The New York Times only has about 5 million readers, Reddit is an extremely affordable platform for targeting very specific audiences (and it has about 52 million daily users).

While there are *many* factors involved, you could get your ad viewed 5 million times on Reddit for a few hundred dollars in 2021—hence starting our variable advertising budget at \$500.

- **Publish a press release: \$600**
This is another area where the costs could vary wildly. It really only costs a few hundred dollars to publish a press release, and Miller Lite probably had someone on staff in their Marketing or PR department who could manage writing a simple release. The cost there would be whatever a few hours of their salary adds up to.

Grand Total

In theory, you could recreate the bones of the Miller Lite campaign for less than \$2,100. Sure, you could spend more by advertising in the New York Times, but building a website and advertising is relatively simple for your average agency.

In fact, if you were to bootstrap a project like this on your own, you might spend:

- Basic Squarespace Account (or similar product/platform): \$16/month+
- Advertising: \$500+ (This is a variable cost that hinges entirely on your goals and your target audience)
- Press Release: \$250 (This assumes you find a cheap means of publishing and have the skills to write a press release on your own)

That comes out to \$766—significantly less than our

\$2,100 estimate!

Now, I should point out that Miller Lite also had to foot the bill on the free beers it gave away, but this campaign still gets me excited because *anyone* could copy it.

Bottom line: If you can be clever and resourceful in *how* you manage your marketing campaign, you can be extremely productive without spending a fortune.

The Anti-Marketing Campaigns of Cards Against Humanity

Next, let's shift our focus and move on to a few lessons from Cards Against Humanity.

If you're unfamiliar with Cards Against Humanity, it's a popular card game known for its dark, twisted humor and outrageous marketing stunts.

In fact, the tagline for the game is "A game for horrible people."

Cards Against Humanity has made a name for itself by building a persona that perfectly matches its product. Wherever you look, Cards Against Humanity (the company) projects the same sarcastic, brutally honest humor.

Just look at the Weed Pack, an expansion pack to the original game that focused entirely on weed. When Cards Against Humanity released it, they (very cleverly) encouraged people not to buy it: "The Weed Pack. 30 new cards about weed. We were high when we wrote it and honestly, it's not that good. Maybe skip this one."

How many companies can you name that would ever tell a customer one of their products isn't very good?

Here's another example: Cards Against Humanity has "Cards Against Humanity For Her." It's exactly the same as the original, but it costs \$5 more and it comes in a bright pink box. When the For Her edition is sold out, their website points buyers to their "Period Pack," an expansion pack that their team allegedly wrote while on their periods.

These strategies work well for Cards Against Humanity because of the brand persona they've worked so hard to develop, and their flippant honesty feeds right back into the overall experience of the game.

Pretty neat, right?

And although their product descriptions are great, I love their marketing campaigns even more. In most cases, Cards Against Humanity's marketing campaigns are brilliant because they don't actually *feel* like marketing campaigns.

A History of Marketing Without Marketing

One of my favorite Cards Against Humanity campaigns was their Pulse of the Nation Poll, which was released in early 2019. Meant as a commentary on the United States' volatile political climate, the Pulse of the Nation Poll uncovered many of the rampant inconsistencies in American politics from both sides of the aisle.

For example, the Pulse of the Nation Poll determined "Republicans who are offended by Black Lives Matter are the same Republicans who think people should not be so easily offended" and "Democrats agree that a woman should have the right to do what she wants with her own body. Unless she wants to sell her kidney."

The Pulse of the Nation Poll was picked up by major news outlets like Business Insider, giving Cards Against Humanity a huge press splash that fed directly into the company's ethos:

We are horrible people.

That's not all. Cards Against Humanity is regularly able to capitalize on big sales opportunities without significant investments.

A perfect example: Cards Against Humanity regularly flips Black Friday on its head, making a joke of the major sales day with anti-Black Friday humor.

In 2014, Cards Against Humanity raked in \$180,000 on Black Friday by selling literal bull crap. In the following year, Cards Against Humanity generated \$71,000 in Black Friday sales by selling *nothing*. You'd go to their website, enter your credit card information, then click a button to buy nothing.

In 2016, Cards Against Humanity famously collected \$100,000 on Black Friday to do nothing more than dig a hole, using the money to pay for a crew and machinery to cut a purposeless pit in the ground. Oh, and it live-streamed the entire thing.

Perhaps most impressive, though, was the company's Black Friday "deal" in 2013: a pack of cards was listed as \$5 more expensive for one day only, and they presented it as a once-in-a-lifetime event.

Sales actually increased for the day.

Because these stunts are so outrageous and even polarizing, Cards Against Humanity regularly drums up free press and word-of-mouth marketing, giving the brand exposure without investing in traditional marketing campaigns.

Mixing In The Good

It's not all crude humor, though. As a sort of living, breathing work of satire, Cards Against Humanity has also used its influence for good, even if it's done sarcastically.

In 2014, Cards Against Humanity purchased an island on Maine's St. George Lake as part of a fundraiser, and they've since been committed to keeping the island pristine and, in the words of the island's website, "free from someone building a summer home or a condo or a TGI Friday's™."

Although the optics on such a stunt are great, I will admit there was an issue with its execution that wrapped the company up in legal issues (basically stemming from taxes and land ownership).

Today, Cards Against Humanity is committed to keeping the island in good condition and "the okayest place on earth."

Pretty heartwarming for a game that highlights the crappy side of humanity.

Learning From Cards Against Humanity

The beauty in all of this is that each individual campaign aligns perfectly with the brand's nihilist personality. Even its purchase of the island was draped in anti-consumerism language.

It all comes back to the product: Cards Against Humanity is, as it says on the box, a game for horrible people. It gives players an opportunity to temporarily cast aside their better natures to revel in the hilarity of crude awfulness. By extension, the Cards Against Humanity personnel have done an excellent job reflecting that in their copy and marketing efforts.

Traditional marketing tactics tell us to do the opposite. Hype up the product. Sell the advantages. Highlight the benefits.

But Cards Against Humanity marches to its own drum.

This isn't something that happened overnight. Cards Against Humanity spent years building their brand, and now they're in a position where they can get away with just about any whacky

idea their team produces.

The lessons here: Be consistent and work hard to build your company's persona to the point that it feels like a living, breathing human being.

You probably can't get away with being crass in your marketing, especially if you work in a professional industry like personal injury law or banking. But you could likely benefit from taking a more human-to-human approach in your marketing at every stage of the buyer's journey.

Bottom line: Sometimes the best marketing doesn't *feel* like marketing. If you can properly align your marketing with your brand persona, you can uncover opportunities your competitors haven't found—all while better connecting with your target audience.

Chapter Takeaways

1. Great content is content that resonates with your target audience, not necessarily content you or someone on your team is excited about. This is incredibly important: *You* don't get to decide what counts as great content. Your target audience does.
2. Great content can be incredibly affordable, especially when you're able to get creative. With a little creativity, you can cost-effectively generate new, memorable, and impactful marketing campaigns—often in a way that doesn't *feel* like marketing.

How to Tie It Into the Rest of Your Marketing

1. Inject creativity into your strategy at every opportunity—regardless of the marketing channel you're using.

2. Revisit your brand persona and determine *exactly* how your brand communicates. Use these details to spark additional creativity in your marketing.

3. With the right amount of creativity and innovation, you could see some valuable press coverage. See Chapter 7 for more!

Chapter 4:

The Most Perfect Marketing Concept: The Act of Using the Product Is Marketing

I'm kicking this chapter off with an idea here from Seth Godin's *Unleashing the Ideavirus*: The best form of marketing is when using the product or service is itself a way of marketing.

This happens all around us all the time in small, often unnoticeable ways. The emblem on the front and back of each car you pass on the highway. The branded pen you accidentally took from your pediatrician's office and now sits at home in your junk drawer. The *Sent from my iPhone* at the end of the last email you sent from your mobile device.

All of these are tiny marketing moments that are often useless as a single event but powerful when they're repeated over a long period of time.

Let's dive in!

The Hotmail Case Study

One of the best-known marketing case studies of all time comes from the early days of Hotmail, the email service that Microsoft rebranded as Outlook back in 2012.

When Hotmail first started, it set itself apart from the competition by being free. This was the mid-1990s, remember, and email was generally a paid service.

But for Hotmail to become feasible, it had to gain as many users as rapidly as possible.

The company's solution was simple. At the end of each email, they added one sentence: "Get your free email at Hotmail."

In only two years, Hotmail earned 12 million users—and it sold to Microsoft in 1997 for \$400 million.

Not a bad payday!

Applying the Lesson

While the Hotmail case study is inspiring, I want you to think beyond it. Think about opportunities for messaging within your own business.

Some industries already have similar strategies built into their processes:

- Real estate agents commonly use yard signs with their picture and phone number when they're actively selling a home.
- Car dealerships regularly add their own decals or license plate frames on the back of cars they sell.
- Pizza delivery drivers often travel with a logo or light on the roof of their car to promote the restaurant they represent.

The question: *How can you build marketing opportunities directly into your products or services?*

This is a tough one to answer because the solution is often nuanced based on your industry, products/services, and goals.

Here are a few questions to consider that should help you get started:

1. Where are there opportunities to naturally insert social behavior or social media to get your audience

involved? In other words, is there any point during the buyer/customer journey where you can make the customer so excited, they want to tell their friends?

2. Where are there natural opportunities to insert your company signage or unique value proposition into the product/service? Think here about the real estate agents and car dealerships we just mentioned!

The more you can tie your marketing into the use of your products and services, the more likely you are to generate a new sale from a sale that's already in progress—or has already happened.

How to Manufacture Word-Of-Mouth Marketing

Many of the concepts we just discussed feed directly into word-of-mouth marketing, a powerful, low-cost source of leads—if you can make it happen.

The simplest pathway to word-of-mouth marketing is to give people something they're excited to talk about.

That sounds easy, but it's not.

In fact, people are *more likely* to talk about us when they have a bad experience. Research shows that consumers are two to three times more likely to leave an angry review of a company after having a negative experience than they are to leave a positive review after a favorable experience.

And that's just what happens online out in the open.

We can be sure our detractors are being just as loud throughout the course of the day with their family, friends, and co-workers.

But not all hope is lost.

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge: Raising \$115 Million In 8 Weeks

One of the most successful word-of-mouth campaigns of all time used social media as the engine to power its viral reach. The campaign: The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge of 2014.

If you were on social media back in 2014, you likely remember this campaign, but in case you need a refresher: The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge was a campaign designed to benefit the ALS Association, a nonprofit organization dedicated to researching amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

ALS activists proposed a simple challenge of recording yourself as you dump ice water over your head, then recording the entire thing to social media. At the end of your video, you nominate someone else to participate in the challenge within 24 hours or else they have to donate to the ALS Association.

The campaign quickly took off, and over a span of eight weeks, everyone from soccer moms to celebrities to politicians participated—often in creative ways. Sure, most people poured ice over their heads, but some dove into tubs of ice and others used heavy machinery to dump enormous loads of icy water over their bodies.

In a couple of months, the ALS Association saw a massive influx of \$115 million in donations, and ALS-related organizations worldwide pulled in a total of \$220 million.

I'd call that successful!

Why The Ice Bucket Challenge Worked (And How to Apply the Lesson)

Part of the reason the Ice Bucket Challenge was such a success was because word-of-mouth marketing was built directly into the campaign, causing it to go viral. At the end of every video, the participant nominated one or more people to join in—and that sparked a huge spike in overall participation.

Here are a few ways we can replicate their success:

1. Make content that resonates. The Ice Bucket Challenge had an emotional, empathetic component, but these videos were also entertaining. Everyone who poured ice over themselves showed themselves being shocked by the cold of the icy water, and many of the videos contained laughter from the participant or the individual behind the camera.

These videos contained everything you could ask for: entertainment, emotion, and the tense anticipation of watching someone endure an icy deluge! Your campaign doesn't necessarily need these exact components to resonate, but it should play into the wants and desires of the human psyche. Remember our discussion on human-to-human marketing in Chapter 2?

2. Be a significant part of the community. “Community” here could hold multiple definitions. You could win an award within your industry, thereby becoming a noteworthy company among your competitors and target audience. You could become involved in a local nonprofit focused on benefiting surrounding community members. However you decide to stand out, greater visibility means you're more likely to come up in discussions.

3. Rely on talk triggers. We'll dive deeper into talk triggers in the next section, but for now, consider this: Part of the reason the Ice Bucket Challenge was so popular was because people

couldn't help showing their friends videos of their favorite people pouring ice all over themselves. People willingly and eagerly talked about the ice bucket challenge, and this automatically created free marketing for the campaign!

If we can generate word-of-mouth marketing, we can spark a greater number of leads without a significant investment from your company.

Talk Triggers

Talk triggers are one of the most powerful generators of word-of-mouth marketing, and I often discuss them with companies who are eager for new ways to stand out from the crowd. They're often low-cost, and they can have a significant impact on our overall marketing success.

So, what's a talk trigger?

A talk trigger is anything your company does that people can't help but talk about.

One of the most popular examples of a talk trigger comes from Skip's Kitchen, a burger shop in Sacramento, California.

You'll often find a line to the counter so long, it extends all the way out onto the streets.

It's not because of advertising (Skip, the owner, is on record saying they've never paid for advertising). And it's not just because of their great burgers or service.

Instead, Skip's Kitchen is regularly packed because of playing cards.

When you get to the counter to order your food, a Skip's Kitchen employee fans out a deck of cards. If you pull a joker, your entire meal is comped—even if you're paying for six

other friends.

Let's think about this for a moment. Skip's Kitchen is basically giving everyone a 1 in 54 (almost 2%) chance that they could get a free meal. From a business perspective, taking a potential 2% hit across the board could sting.

But it's a non-issue, even though three people win every day, on average.

Since people win every day, there's *always* a chance you get a free meal.

That's draw number one.

Draw number two is the simple excitement that comes with drawing a card. It's a little like scratching a lottery ticket—there's a chance you could win! And like a lottery ticket, drawing a card likely releases a small dopamine hit to the customer while they're in line.

Then there's draw three: the thrill of winning. And when people win, they celebrate. They call out and announce it to the store, but they also tell their friends. Someone grabbing a quick bite for lunch might announce their success when they arrive back at the office. Excited teenagers share the good news on social media. A competitive friend might brag about their winnings in the group chat.

All of that chatter means people in Sacramento are constantly reminded of the food *and fun* at Skip's Kitchen—and that keeps them coming back over and over again.

Developing Your Own Talk Triggers

Most experts break talk triggers down into roughly five different categories:

- Empathy - The trigger is remarkably focused on the consumer.
- Usefulness - The trigger is at least somewhat influential in the recipient's daily life.
- Generosity - The trigger feels like an incredible value.
- Speed - The trigger is built into the surprising speed at which the product or service is delivered.
- Attitude - The trigger is tied to the attitude your company has while serving a customer.

More often than not, a talk trigger will contain some combination of those factors to get people talking.

When brainstorming your own talk trigger, I recommend striving to make sure it's:

- **Generous (or perceived as generous).** There needs to be *perceived* value on the customer's side. For the average Skip's Kitchen customer, the free meal seems like a great offer. From the restaurant's financial side, they're essentially giving away three orders a day in order to regularly max out their revenues. Not a bad deal!
- **Useful.** Keeping with Skip's Kitchen: They're not giving out quarts of motor oil when someone pulls a joker. That would be irrelevant and unuseful, at least in the context of someone visiting for a meal. Instead, they're offering the chance at a free meal, which is useful in terms of keeping money inside the winning customer's pocket.
- **Responsive.** In an ideal world, a talk trigger is something someone receives immediately, partially so they can receive instant gratification and partially so they have enough excitement to go and tell their network. At Skip's Kitchen, the process is immediate: draw a joker, get a free meal.
- **Remarkable.** You need a *wow* factor. Sure, the idea

behind Skip's Kitchen's talk trigger is simple, but there's a certain showmanship that naturally comes with a deck of cards and makes the whole experience feel like an *event*. That sort of memorability gets locked into the guest's mind—especially if they win.

- **Repeatable.** If your talk trigger isn't repeatable on a mass scale, all you have is a marketing stunt. Skip's Kitchen can fan cards all day every day, and statistics say they should, on average, lose no more than 2% of their revenue to free meals.

If you do a little research on your side, you'll find dozens of talk triggers (you might even be able to think of some yourself).

Chapter Takeaways

1. Marketing is best when it happens automatically through the use of the product or service.
2. Customer marketing is powerful because they do it for free *and* it serves as a form of social proof.
3. Developing a talk trigger can lead to years of *free* marketing.

How to Tie It Into the Rest of Your Marketing

1. Review all marketing collateral. Is it designed and written in a way that people *want* to share it?
2. Examine your products and services with fresh eyes. Can you build a social component into it?

Part 2: Digital and Traditional Marketing Strategies and Innovations You Can Apply Today

Chapter 5:

Blogging For Sales: How to Develop A Content Strategy That Works For You

I won't lie to you. As the author, this is the section I'm most excited about!

Before we start, though, let's set the stage: You have competitors. No matter what industry you're in, you're competing against *someone*.

And unless you're one of the biggest players in your industry, your competitors are getting more leads and sales through their websites than you are.

Way more.

The reason is simple: They have a larger presence on the search engine results page (SERP) than you do.

Try this experiment: Type your city and business industry into Google and track how far you have to scroll to find your own business listed in the search results.

So, if you're a financial advisor in Pittsburgh, type in "financial advisor pittsburgh" and see what comes up. If you're reading this book, you're probably not on the first page of results.

And that's OK. You can get there.

For now, though, scroll through the results. Does your website show up on the second page? What about the third?

Here's the sad truth: Most business owners and marketers struggle to make it to the second or third page in the search results. Heck, most of them don't even get below "the fold," the section of the search results!

If you don't show up in one of the top spots, you're missing out on that valuable traffic.

And as long as your competitors hold that top spot, they're going to keep getting it.

They'll continue generating more leads than you, squeezing you out of valuable business.

But you can stop that. And blogging can help.

In fact, blogging is one of the best strategies for improving your position on the search engine results page.

But there's more. Here are some more reasons why blogging is so valuable:

1. Search engine optimization (SEO) leads (leads that come in through Google and other search engines) have a 14.6% close rate versus a 1.7% close rate on outbound marketing efforts (direct mail, print, etc.). Think about that: If you had a chance to increase your close rate—the rate at which you turn leads into customers—8.5x, wouldn't you do it?

A 14.6% close rate means your website can work *for you* around the clock, generating new leads while you're busy closing sales.

2. Blogs help businesses get 434% more indexed pages (pages that are curated by Google). Having all of those extra indexed pages means having more chances at outranking your competition on a variety of high-quality search terms and

key phrases your prospects use at different points in the sales funnel.

3. 72% of online marketers say content creation is their most effective SEO tactic. Blogging is the cornerstone of great web traffic, and it can generate more leads at a higher volume than other marketing tactics.

Blogging For Success

If you're not blogging, you're missing out on massive opportunities.

Here's an example: As I mentioned earlier, I love music. More specifically, I like rock music with lots of bass and thick, fuzzy guitar riffs. That's why I started Monster Riff.

The website that powers Monster Riff isn't anything fancy—just a clean WordPress template.

Over the last year or so, I've only averaged about 2.5 blogs per month (sometimes more), but it's grown to the point where it sometimes pulls in thousands of pageviews per day.

At this time, there's no serious monetary component behind Monster Riff. I installed AdSense to generate a little bit of revenue from the project, but I'm not actively using Monster Riff with a sales agenda beyond occasionally helping bands with their marketing strategy.

But imagine if I sold guitars. Or distortion pedals. Or amplifiers.

Suddenly, thousands of readers a day seems pretty great, right? That's like having thousands of people walk into your shop every day.

If Monster Riff was my primary source of income or designed

to sell a significant number of products or services in the competitive music space, I would have more incentive to increase my blogging frequency from 2.5 times a month to maybe 2.5 times a week.

Empathy: Your Secret Blogging Weapon

Once you've decided to lean into blogging, it's time to become empathetic. Remember when we said all marketing is human-to-human marketing? This is one area where that sentiment really comes into play.

For blogging to work, the reader should *always* be your No. 1 priority. Otherwise, why should they care about what you have to say?

To start your empathy engine, consider these questions:

- What does your audience care about?
- What can they accomplish with your products, services, or expertise?
- Do they understand your products, services, or expertise?
- Do they understand the value of those products, services, or expertise?

Understanding the answers to these questions can influence everything from your keyword research to your own content calendar (we'll dive deeper into keyword research and content calendars momentarily).

More than anything, though, the empathy you generate from asking those questions should fuel the compassion behind your blogs.

Now, your blogs don't need to be sentimental (although there are some businesses and personas where that may be

appropriate), but your readers should feel like every blog they read was written just for them.

When you address the reader directly and make a personal connection, you build the trust necessary to turn a casual reader into a lead and a lead into a customer.

Establishing Your Goals

As you're making new discoveries through empathy, you should also work to establish your blogging goals. In most cases, you probably are after at least one of three major blogging goals:

- 1. Generating more traffic.** Of course, the real goal here is to *generate more traffic that turns into leads for your company*. If you're just starting off, you should focus on simply generating traffic from *potential* leads. Note: It's entirely possible to have a perfectly thriving blog and profitable blog by allowing ads, but that requires a very aggressive editorial calendar (more on that later).
- 2. Establishing your brand as a thought leader.** By consistently publishing great content over and over again, you demonstrate that you're experienced and knowledgeable about the most important facets of your industry. Even better, that level of thought leadership and empathy can create trust in your brand, which simplifies your sales process.
- 3. Converting traffic into leads/customers.** This is often (though not necessarily) an extension of our first goal. If you're selling services or products, you might find your conversions increase by writing blogs targeting people who are ready to buy *now*—and by wrapping calls to action into your copy and imagery.

Understanding what your ultimate goal is will help you determine what type of content you should create.

Here's how it breaks down for each goal:

Generating More Traffic

If you're aiming to generate as much traffic as possible, your content strategy ultimately revolves around search trends and the search volume around specific trends.

Let's revisit our financial advisor example from before.

When millions of Americans lost their jobs at the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, search queries with the word "unemployment" skyrocketed.

As a financial advisor, you could have capitalized on that search trend by writing financial advice specifically for people dealing with unemployment.

After building credibility and trust with readers, you could then have an opportunity to become their go-to resource for financial guidance.

Cons to prepare for: When you compete for traffic in a highly competitive field, the quality of your content has to be *really high*. Remember: There's a reason your competitors are holding the top spots, and it's typically because their content looks best to the search engines. We'll dig into that topic more when we discuss SEO.

Becoming a Thought Leader

Thought leadership pieces are especially useful in competitive B2B industries, but they're also impactful in B2C situations as well.

Essentially, you're aiming to create a deep well of insightful and educational content for your readers so that they begin to

know, like, and trust you enough to do business with you.

“Trust” is an important word here. If a consumer trusts your brand *before* they enter your sales pipeline, you can significantly increase your conversion rate on turning leads into paying customers.

Cons to prepare for: You’re on the hook for promoting it, as most thought leadership-based content isn’t primed for search engines.

Instead, these are often thought-provoking pieces designed to demonstrate authority while encouraging the reader to think about the subject on a deeper level.

I saw a video recently of a financial planner who was having his driveway torn up and replaced. He captured some footage of his driveway in shambles and explained how he was finally addressing his driveway because he had all of this money that had been previously allocated for vacations—but coronavirus got in the way. Instead, he was able to invest that money into his home (one of his most valuable assets). In a way, the ugly driveway was a metaphor for sound financial planning and enduring hard times to enjoy a better future.

Although the video was well-executed, it likely won’t rank at the top of too many search queries because the financial planner didn’t write a significant amount of copy to accompany the video.

Instead, the content creator has to work hard in sharing that thought piece on social media, newsletters, and through other channels to make sure people see that it exists—because it likely won’t pull in traffic through Google.

Converting Traffic Into Leads/Customers

If you’re aiming to convert traffic, you’ll have more success

writing for people who have already entered the buyer's journey and are either actively exploring their options, trying to compare products or services, or determining whether or not a product is right for them.

In most cases, you'll want to combine compelling content with educational content, and include enough clear calls to action to encourage conversions. For example, you might direct readers to your contact page, send them to a product page, or nudge them to click on the chat icon to start talking to a sales rep.

Cons to prepare for: You'll likely uncover a good amount of competition here, so you should pay close attention to your target audience's wants, needs, and desires. If you struggle to meet those wants, needs, and desires in your blog, you could lose a sales opportunity on your website.

Creating A Content Calendar

Once you determine your end goal, it's time for your next step: developing a content calendar. It's important to have content planned out ahead of time so that you stay on track—especially if you plan on being aggressive in your attack.

If you're sourcing content internally (i.e., generating content independent of an agency or external writer), you should create a content calendar that aligns with your goals and fits your content creation cadence. If you're very slow at creating content, you may want to write out a calendar a few months in advance so you have a better idea of what to write next.

I've seen some agencies approach this by building out a content calendar months in advance. This is good for when you know your seasonal trends and you're going after as much traffic as possible—especially through “evergreen content” (content that will stay relevant for a long time because the subject matter doesn't change very often, like a blog post

explaining the benefits of a 401(k) retirement plan).

I've also seen agencies take this month by month, with the end goal of staying a month ahead. This is beneficial in situations where you are taking a slower thought leadership approach in your content, or when you want to respond to trends in the news—effectively allowing you to be more flexible in your content creation and capture those trending keywords (like the “unemployment” example from our last section).

Understanding What to Write About

There are two major ways to figure out what you should write about:

1. Understand what your target audience is interested in.
2. Understand what your *keyword research* reveals as opportunities for high-quality traffic.

Even if you're writing based on what your target audience is interested in, you should still conduct your keyword research.

There are *many* different ways to conduct your keyword research, and different strategists will recommend different approaches. Some of these approaches rely on expensive tools like Semrush (an online tool for researching keywords and other SEO-relevant metrics).

In general, though, your keyword research looks like this:

1. **Pick subject verticals you might be interested in exploring.** For example, if you're a personal finance advisor, you might explore verticals (or subject areas) like “personal investing,” “retirement plans,” and “personal savings.”
2. **Dig into each of these verticals to explore keyword opportunities.** More specifically, you're looking for

keywords or keyphrases that have a relatively high search volume and relatively low competition (meaning few companies or individuals are competing for that phrase—which increases your chances of ranking on the first page with your blog). We'll look at potential tools you can use momentarily.

- 3. Explore how your competition is ranking for each keyphrase.** More specifically, look at factors like article length, article structure, the use of photos, the use of video, and the use of links. Seeing how those top posts in the search engine results page develop their own content should give you an idea of how to develop even *better* content.

As of this writing, some of the most popular tools you can explore for keyword research include (but are not limited to):

- Google Keyword Planner (<https://ads.google.com/aw/keywordplanner/home>) - Free
- Ubersuggest (<https://neilpatel.com/ubersuggest>) - Free
- Mangools KWFinder (<https://mangools.com>) - Sliding payment scale, and it tends to be one of the more affordable paid options
- Semrush (<https://semrush.com>) - Sliding payment scale
- Ahrefs (<https://ahrefs.com>) - Sliding payment scale

What to Include In Your Content Calendar

With your keyword research out of the way, you can develop a content calendar. Your content calendar can be as robust as you need it to be. In general, though, it's good to include:

- A brief description of what the blog post will be about
- A working title to help you stay focused while writing
- A list of relevant keywords (based on your keyword

- research) for each blog
- Relevant calls to action to include (more on those in a moment)
- A link to the working document, if available (if not, write down where it will be stored)
- Who's responsible for writing the blog (if you have multiple writers on your team)
- Strategies for promoting the piece of content
- Target publication date for each blog
- Link to the blog after it's published

You could add more—links to photo drives, links to research, links to subject matter experts, etc.—but the above line items should be more than enough to keep you and your team organized early on.

Proper Promoting: How to Get Your Content Out There

When built correctly, your content *should* gradually bring in more and more organic traffic from search engines like Google. But your work isn't done just because you hit "Publish."

You still have a responsibility to promote your content through other channels. Doing so ensures your content is seen by your existing audiences.

Consider pushing to:

- The author's LinkedIn profile (This is critical for establishing them as the subject matter experts they are!)
- Your company social media channels
- Your company email newsletter
- Your company print newsletter (if it has one)
- Your partners
- Anywhere else you have an active audience

When you promote to your most engaged audience members, you improve your chances of it being picked up and shared, thereby amplifying your reach!

Really, though, the best way for your blogs to make a splash is to ensure they perform well when it comes to SEO.

Showing Up On Google: Shortcuts to Better SEO

Heads up! We're entering the longest section of this chapter. There's a good reason it's so long, though: If your blogs aren't optimized for traffic, you're going to have a hard time getting eyes on them, especially if you're struggling to promote them through other means.

There's an incredible value in being the first result in a Google search—but there's a caveat we should keep in mind.

That first slot really only matters *when it's relevant to your business*.

Let's examine this idea for a moment. I receive plenty of spam emails to my agency every day and a common message I read is "I can get your company and your clients to the first page of Google!"

Internally, I typically reply with, "So what?"

Here's an important truth: *Anyone* can get to the front page of Google without really trying. Even your Great Aunt Sue, who grew up during World War I and has a two-inch layer of dust on that old computer in her attic, can rank on the first page of Google.

And it won't necessarily matter.

As an example, I can make up a word like “Agoogatarian,” which currently doesn’t have any results on Google, and I could write an extensive blog post about the word.

As long as Google indexes that blog post, it would be the one result for “Agoogatarian,” and it would be the top result on the first page.

But there wouldn’t be much value in having that first slot because there’s no search volume for that made-up word.

I don’t necessarily care if someone can get me to the first page of Google. And neither should you.

What you *should* care about is whether you or someone else can get your website to the first page of Google *for the target keywords or keyphrases you’re competing for and are relevant to your target audience*.

That is a much more difficult task.

The Challenge of Chasing SEO

There are two reasons generating traffic through SEO practices is so difficult. The first is competition from other companies and thought leaders. The second: The algorithms that Google, Bing, and other search engines rely on are constantly changing.

In general, these algorithms evolve in the hopes of creating a better user experience. Which makes sense, right? A search engine is a product, and it aims to be as useful as possible to the consumer.

But those frequent shifts make life more difficult for SEO-conscious content creators. Things that were important yesterday may suddenly prove less important today.

Here's an example that still has some digital marketers cringing: Do you remember Google+, Google's short-lived social media platform? At one point, maintaining an active Google+ profile was supposed to boost your SEO performance.

But then Google canceled the project after years of weak performance against the other social media titans. Suddenly, all of the time and effort businesses sank into Google+ for the sake of SEO was for *nothing*.

This isn't exactly unusual. Algorithms actually shift quite frequently—and sometimes with major consequences. Even action items like keyword-focused page titles and page descriptions have decreased in importance in recent years.

With the latest major algorithm update (which happened at the end of 2020), Google is *currently* placing a greater emphasis on:

- **Localized content** - The pandemic led to more people sticking around the house, and geographic locations in content became more important for people to understand what was in their surrounding region.
- **Cumulative Layout Shift (CLS) issues** - Ever go to click on a button but accidentally click something else because the page suddenly finished loading? This is a key focus point for Google in 2021 and beyond, so work to reduce the number of CLS issues on your site.
- **Your Largest Contentful Paint (LCP)** - This is a new metric Google wants to focus on in 2021 and beyond, and it's essentially a yardstick to see how quickly the biggest, most important section of your webpage loads.
- **E-A-T (Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness)** - Breaking these down into

more detail:

- Expertise - Who wrote it and do they have credentials?
- Authoritativeness - Are you recognized as an authority?
- Trustworthiness - Who is the author? What is the website's purpose? Where did the content come from?

All of these are important to pay attention to, but they're not everything. Some of them, like localized content, may prove less important as we get away from the pandemic.

With so much in flux, SEO-focused content creators must stay abreast of the latest SEO news. But that can be painful for someone who's more interested in running their business. In that case, it's better to rely on those tried-and-true SEO factors that rarely change in importance.

A Consistently Overlooked SEO Boost

Many, many, many blogs and companies are guilty of one commonly overlooked SEO booster: backlinks.

What's a backlink? A backlink is simply a link back to your site, preferably to a well-written and well-researched blog post or page you wrote.

Backlinks are valuable to search engines because they're a direct indication that a web page is valuable. Think of a backlink like a footnote to a primary source in a scholarly article. The more footnotes pointing back to a primary source, the more valuable that primary source is.

In the past, the general guidance around building backlinks for your site was simple: "Write great content, and people will link back to it."

If that ever was the case, it's certainly not the case now. With so many writers and businesses out there competing for attention, you'll find you have to be more aggressive and strategic in getting your own backlinks, and it's something *many* people overlook.

Strategies you can use to build up backlinks:

1. Find brand mentions without links. These are instances where your brand or leadership team is mentioned in the news without linking back to your site.

Tools like the Semrush Brand Monitoring Tool can help you pinpoint these instances, but you can also set up a Google Alert so you receive an email update every time your company is mentioned in the news. (A Google Alert, if you're unfamiliar, is an automated message from Google that notifies you when a certain subject is covered online. Visit [google.com/alerts](https://www.google.com/alerts) to learn more.)

Once you find an article with an unlinked brand mention, you need to:

1. Identify the author or site master.
2. Find a way to reach out (usually via an email address—see Chapter 7 for recommendations on finding email addresses).
3. Message them with a request to embed your site link in their copy.

It might sound tedious, but these efforts add up over time.

2. Check your memberships/associations. Think of how many associations your company is involved in—both at a high level and through its sales team.

While your company may have a formal relationship with a partnering company or a local nonprofit, your salespeople may

have connections inside the Chamber of Commerce or a local BNI chapter.

Regardless, if you're involved with an association or networking organization in any capacity, check their website to ensure your business is listed and that your company profile links back to your website.

3. Leverage press releases. You have more press opportunities than you might think (as we'll discuss in Chapter 7).

Sure, opening a new office or acquiring another business is cause for a formal press release, but you may not be giving yourself enough credit.

What about the latest donation you've made to the charity your company supports every year? What about the latest managing technique you've implemented? What about the record growth you saw during a recent economic downturn?

Framed correctly, instances like these can be spun into press beats. The latest donation looks even more impactful when you consider how much you've contributed over the years and how many lives you've touched in the process. The new management technique might not seem like much, but what if your overall management approach has been instrumental to your massive growth in the last two years? Pounding your chest about record growth during an economic crisis may seem selfish, but others may look at your business as an example of how to continue growing in the face of disaster.

Bottom line: Journalists are looking for stories. If you give them something worth talking about, they'll cover it—and they can link to your website in the process.

4. Try Help A Reporter Out (HARO). If you're unfamiliar with HARO, think of it as a sort of marketplace that connects

reporters with experts who can offer a quote.

Here's how it works: You sign up for HARO and tell it what your areas of expertise are. Afterward, HARO sends you multiple email blasts every day with quote requests from journalists writing articles on your areas of expertise.

Be warned, however, that HARO can quickly overwhelm your inbox (especially if you're not very good at maintaining "Inbox Zero").

5. Adopt the skyscraper technique. Originally developed by Brian Dean of Backlinko, the skyscraper technique is when you find a competitor's article or page that has a ton of backlinks, then decide to compete against that article or page by creating even better content.

Once you publish your content, you promote it—especially to all of the writers who originally referenced your competitor's article.

This might sound like a time-consuming task, but it's a powerful strategy for displacing your competitors on the search engine results page.

Be careful with your strategy. I have personally received requests for me to swap out my links—but to articles that had nothing to do with the content I wrote or the original link I cited!

This makes the writer look foolish and, quite frankly, like a bad partner. Why would I want to help them (now or in the future) if they obviously didn't even take the time to read my article?

6. Capitalize on broken links. Over time, links break, leading to a bad user experience. As we know, bad user experience is picked up by Google, and any article with broken links will rank worse on the SERP.

You can “help” websites by informing them when a link to your competitor’s page is broken and offering them a link to a comparable page on your website.

Little by little, you can chip away at your competitors’ backlinks while building up your own.

7. Guest post on other websites. Guest posting is an admittedly labor-intensive strategy for building backlinks—but it’s a surefire way of making sure your backlinks are high quality *and* it can expand your reach within your target audience’s community.

Some of the biggest advantages of guest posting:

- You can vet the website beforehand to ensure it’s authoritative enough to elevate your site with a high-quality backlink.
- You can speak directly to someone else’s engaged audience, potentially earning you new customers.
- You or your brand become a reliable resource to a wider audience.
- Depending on the website, they may even promote your post across their own marketing channels, thereby extending your reach and influence on social media.
- You have more control over the link to your website and the page you send people to.

Of course, there are some disadvantages. Writing for someone else automatically gives them a little more SEO juice, and the research, communication, and writing that goes into guest posting for someone else can take even more time than writing for your own blog!

Over time, though, guest blogging can significantly influence your domain authority, especially if you attack aggressively.

A Final Word On SEO

You will never regret strong, “qualified” (ready to buy) organic traffic. After putting in the work, you may even find a single blog post continues to generate tons of revenue for you—years after it was published.

Think about that for a second: You could have an asset that converts leads into buyers for years down the road *without paying for it!* That is the ultimate form of marketing, but you have to work to get there.

Evaluating Performance: How to Prove Your Blog Is Working

It’s time to measure your blogging success.

Depending on your software, it’s generally simple to track the month-over-month traffic to each blog post you write.

But that’s not the only metric to follow—nor does it tell us how much money a specific blog post generates.

You should also check:

- **Bounce rate.** Bounce rate shows how many people are leaving your site after viewing the blog (or any other page)—an indication of how well your content keeps people on your site. If you have a high amount of organic traffic, you might see a bounce rate as high as 80%, but including more inbound links to other articles, offering a variety of content types, and providing other user-friendly features can help you slash that percentage.
- **Average time on page.** The average time on page is a metric that measures how long people engage with

your content. This is an indication of how closely people are reading or viewing your content. For example: On Monster Riff and other client accounts with lots of video content, blogs that embed numerous videos often see an average time on page of 10 minutes or more!

- **FLOW.** FLOW is a visual breakdown of the pages people visit after reading your blog. This is an incredibly important tool for understanding how people *use* your site, and it should also give you a better idea of which embedded links they click on as well.

Another power tool: Google Search Console. Think of Google Search Console like a backend view of your website's performance on Google. Search Console tells you which keywords and keyphrases you're ranking for, how frequently you appear in search results—and much, much more. While there are many tools for tracking SEO performance, Search Console is one of the best once you learn how to read it—and it's free.

Breaking It Down to Dollars and Cents: How to Prove Your Blog Generates Revenue

One of my clients recently started committing to blogging on a more consistent basis this year, and the results have been outstanding. Leads through organic traffic are up nearly 30%, and he's swamped in the office with phone calls, intake forms, and getting his contractors lined up for gigs.

Unfortunately, his backend systems are so disparate, the only metrics I can focus on are:

1. How many times the contact form is completed by visitors who reach the site through organic traffic.

2. How many phone calls are made from the website by visitors who reach the site through organic traffic.
3. How many gigs he has in comparison to the previous month or the same month in the previous year.

Although these are good starting points, I want you to have better insights than these. At the end of the day, a blog is a marketing tool, just like a billboard, radio spot, or professional network membership.

In a perfect world, your blog contributes to your bottom line, even if it's simply a lead nurturing tool.

If your content is more focused on lead nurturing, the value to your bottom line is harder to prove—but not impossible.

There are many types of software out there that can track individual visitors and determine how they behave on the site. They all come in different versions and at different price points.

In a pinch, however, there are free tools that are available.

Setting up a tracking tool like Google Analytics and Google Tag Manager can show you when a visitor to your blog clicks on your site's "Contact Us" button, for example. And once that lead is entered into your CRM, you should note that they came through your blog.

Over time, you can calculate how many leads your blog generates—and how many of them convert.

I should also point out: Tracking blog performance is *much* easier if you're selling products instead of services. In fact, you can track sales from organic traffic right inside Google Analytics without a ton of additional coding—which is great for proving the value of an individual page or blog post on your website!

How to Get More Mileage Out of Your Blogs

A common mistake I see companies make is promoting a new blog post one time (on social media, email campaigns, etc.), and then immediately moving on to the next big piece of content they produce.

But this doesn't make sense, especially for those blog posts that perform well with your target audience and bring in significant amounts of search traffic. After all, these are key indications that a blog has value.

With that in mind, let's explore a few ways you can squeeze additional value out of your blog:

- **Create additional backlinks on your website.** If a blog post is popular, you can get more attention for it through your existing blog posts. Think about posts you've already published and look for opportunities to adjust their copy and embed a link to your new post. This one step could create additional traffic—and revenue opportunities!
- **Turn your blog content into text graphics.** Take your most impactful line or the crux of your blog post and immortalize it in a text-driven graphic. Use your logo and an eye-catching background, and you have a strong piece of content for social media.
- **Turn your blog content into text videos.** While this may seem challenging, platforms like Lumen5, Adobe Spark, and even Canva make this a pretty simple task with a small learning curve. This video can then be shared on social media, your website, or even at the top of the original blog post itself so people can watch the content instead of reading an entire page of copy.

- **Share it through your email channels (again).** It's perfectly acceptable to reshare content through your email channels, especially when you consider how many people probably *didn't* read it the first time. Pro tip: Pay closer attention to your subject line and preview text this time. Subject lines like "I didn't want you to miss this (1,012 people read it yesterday)" rely on some very basic persuasion principles that compel people to click while simultaneously highlighting the blog's popularity.

As with everything else, be sure your tracking is set up before pushing your blogs again. With proper tracking, you can demonstrate *exactly* how much revenue the second push earned—and that could make a strong case for doing it a third, fourth, fifth, or even sixth time!

Chapter Takeaways

1. Determine your goals before you start blogging. Once you understand your goals, you'll have a clear idea of how you should approach blogging as part of your marketing strategy.
2. Blogging is a powerful, reliable generator of qualified traffic—but it must be executed strategically. If you're unsure, meet with a consultant before taking the dive.
3. Blogging is as effective as the effort you put into it. If you slack off at any stage, your results will reflect that.
4. Data is your best friend in blogging. It tells you where opportunities lie, where you're succeeding, and where you need to improve.
5. Blogging isn't a get-rich-quick scheme. Blogging is about dedicated, focused efforts for a powerful cumulative effect.
6. A single blog post can be repurposed in many different

ways, including videos, infographics, quotes, and more.

How to Tie It Into the Rest of Your Marketing

1. Share your latest blog posts in the rest of your digital marketing efforts, including your email campaigns and social media campaigns—and don't forget about repurposing your content!
2. Your salespeople can become unlikely champions of your blogging efforts. Make sure they're aware of your latest blogging efforts so that they can share useful content with your latest prospects and important clients.
3. Look for potential blog topics everywhere your target audience provides feedback or asks questions. Look through old blog comments, listen to what your followers say on social media, and pay attention to the problems your audience complains about on related forums.

Chapter 6: Understanding Social Media on a Macro Level to Dominate on the Micro Level

You don't have to try hard to find stories of people who built their businesses on social media.

A simple Google search for “examples of companies thriving on social media” returns more than 57 million results.

But don't let that fool you into thinking it's *easy*. What you'll typically find, if you look close enough, is a caveat.

Most of the brands thriving on social media—brands that regularly turn their social media followers into paying customers—often already had an established and engaged audience elsewhere *before* jumping onto social media.

In other cases, the company was able to afford so many social media ads and high-quality content, they were bound to eventually succeed simply based on the size of their marketing budget.

Here's the simple truth about social media for marketing your business: Yes, it is possible to grow your business through social media, but it can be *really* difficult to pull it off, and it's even harder to do it really well—especially if you're not already proficient with the platforms you're using.

Unless you're paying for ads, social media is often a *lead nurturing* tool, something used to build trust over time and then convert people over the long run.

As we'll explore in a moment, social media has reached such

a difficult stage for businesses that some experts recommend not even trying without a dedicated ad budget (and many suggest starting at a monthly budget of \$1,000-\$5,000 to see any sort of meaningful progress).

But that's not really the case. You *don't* necessarily need a dedicated ad budget for platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

While it's true that most platform algorithms have made it more difficult for companies to succeed, the real issue is a creative one. Most companies struggle to create content their target audience genuinely cares about.

That's it.

If you can consistently create compelling content on a regular basis, social media can still be a great place for marketing—assuming a few other variables are in place!

In this chapter, we'll take a wide overview of social media best practices harnessed through years of research and practice. And while we could fill up books and books with everything you need to know about social media (and they'd likely be outdated within a few months), we'll focus on highlighting only the key points to keep in mind for your social media strategy.

These strategies have already been proven out, and they've been developed in such a way that they'll likely *never* grow outdated.

The Trouble With Social Media

I start each of my social media coaching sessions with a state of the union on social media for businesses—all of it compressed into less than 100 words. Here's what I write in the social media guide for each client:

The biggest social media platforms (including Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn) are businesses that make money through ads. The more ads they show, the more revenue they generate.

This creates an incentive to keep people on the platform for as long as possible.

Great content is a major part of that.

In general, these platforms “reward” content that is liked, commented on, or shared by followers by giving those posts greater reach (especially important when the algorithms prioritize people over businesses).

The more you can create content that people want to engage with, the better you’ll perform on social media.

There’s a lot to unpack here in these 99 words, so let’s take it a step at a time.

The biggest social media platforms (including Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn) are businesses that make money through ads. The more ads they show, the more revenue they generate.

Here’s an unpleasant truth: Most platforms don’t really care about your business unless you’re paying for ads, and even then, they don’t exactly make the ads process as simple as possible (and I’m talking about real ads here, not the boosted posts Facebook and Instagram encourage you to run).

Here’s a bit of history that should be helpful: In the early days of social media, businesses realized they could post all day to stay at the top of people’s feeds.

Over time, users came to hate it.

At the same time, the platforms ballooned to a point where they could start charging businesses more and more to compete. Eventually, social media reached a point where it felt like you had to “pay to play” on social media. It still feels that way today.

Business accounts on Facebook, for example, have a *much* harder time competing against personal accounts, simply because the business accounts are set up as business accounts.

The Facebook algorithm devalues them, showing their content to fewer people.

That is—*unless* businesses create content users care about.

When users genuinely care about something a company posts, they’ll engage by liking, commenting, or sharing.

Those actions, especially the comments and shares, are important signals that the content is worthwhile. The algorithm then immediately reassesses the content’s value and begins showing it to more people, earning you more impressions.

This creates an incentive to keep people on the platform for as long as possible.

Great content is a major part of that.

You’ve probably noticed that each social media platform is constantly experimenting with new content formats and ideas. The end goal, of course, is to find new, exciting ways for content creators to connect with fans and keep them on the platform longer. Again, the longer someone is on the platform, the more money the platform can make from them via ads!

Great content is critical to every social media platform’s success.

My wife recently downloaded TikTok, and the app has gradually become part of our weekend routine. As we're waking up in the morning, we'll flip through the app and see what's new. Almost always, we end up swiping to view the accounts we follow (instead of using the discover feature). This almost guarantees we'll see new content we'll enjoy because it's handcrafted by the creators we like the most.

This is pure gold to any social media platform. They want to know that their users are hooked in some way—and that they'll keep coming back for more.

As a business owner *and* content creator, you should strive to regularly create content that's so compelling, folks will even seek it out on the weekend while they're waking up.

In general, these platforms “reward” content that is liked, commented on, or shared by followers by giving those posts greater reach (especially important when the algorithms prioritize people over businesses).

The more you can create content that people want to engage with, the better you'll perform on social media.

This is the crux behind *everything* on social media—and one of the most important ideas we'll discuss in this chapter. Social media isn't about you. It's about your target audience—and the many ways you can engage them.

If you're not interested in creating content your target audience cares about, you shouldn't bother wasting your time with social media.

But if you *are* interested in making social media a viable part of your marketing strategy, pay close attention to the rest of this chapter.

Understanding Where You Should Be: Picking the Right Platforms For Your Business

Here's a question I hear every time a new platform starts to get widespread attention: "Should I be on [platform name]?"

It happened after Snapchat entered the zeitgeist. It happened when TikTok started to blow up. It happened when Clubhouse promised to take the world by storm.

I understand the question, and it *is* a valid question, but it's not the *right* question.

What they really should be asking: "Who's on [platform name]?" or "Is my target audience on [platform name]?"

The answer can fluctuate over time. Platforms that originally target one audience may eventually gain a different audience, which means platforms that are initially bad fits for your company may evolve into great opportunities for your business—provided you can create the right sort of content.

Here's a recent example: One of my consulting clients works as a performer in the wedding industry. In the early days of TikTok, he asked whether or not it was something he should focus on.

In those early days, it certainly didn't look like it was something he'd be interested in.

As a largely one-person operation, he was already struggling to keep up with Facebook and Instagram, and adding even just one platform into the mix can be challenging.

I told him that much early on: "Nope, TikTok is primarily used by high school students who are years away from thinking

about weddings.” (I will, of course, acknowledge that this is also an argument for hopping onto TikTok and getting in front of them *before* they’re in the market for wedding vendors, but that’s a different conversation entirely.)

What he was asking was whether TikTok would quickly lead to new business within the next few months.

And the answer was no.

Now, only a couple of years later, TikTok has become one of the most popular apps in the world, and its user demographics have skewed slightly. As of February 2021, 80% of TikTok users were between the ages of 16 and 34.

That seems pretty perfect, right?

When we discussed this shift, I also mentioned a second barrier—at least for his current content cadence and capabilities: It’s difficult to create TikTok-worthy content if you’re already struggling with Facebook and Instagram.

TikTok is filled with quick, one- to three-minute videos. The ones that perform the best are often funny, interesting, or incredible, and my client had trouble manufacturing this type of content on his own.

Essentially, performing well on TikTok would mean doing something completely new—after years of finding a rhythm he was comfortable with on Instagram and Facebook.

With that in mind, TikTok is *not* a good fit for him—unless he’s willing to adapt or invest in new strategies for social media.

For now, he’s much more comfortable focusing on images, text, and video in the same way he’s always done. While I still encourage him to push himself a little, I do agree with the decision. After all, it’s better to avoid doing a bad job and

risking your entire reputation.

Questions for Determining Whether a Social Media Platform is Right For Your Business

There's plenty of nuance involved when determining whether your company should pursue a specific social media platform. To help, here's a brief questionnaire you and your marketing team can consider:

1. Who are you trying to reach? Put another way: Who is your target audience? Ultimately, you're looking to exist in the same environment as the people who are most likely to do business with you (or who can lead to new business for your company—we'll talk about networking in a later chapter).

Example: If you're a geriatrics doctor running a small practice, you probably don't want to market through Snapchat or TikTok, where content is fleeting and the user base tends to skew young. Instead, you probably want to stick with Facebook and other more mature platforms.

This leads us to our next question:

2. Who's on each platform? In general, every platform draws a *slightly* different crowd. While TikTok skews young, Facebook serves a much wider audience. LinkedIn, meanwhile, caters to professionals.

Understand the demographics of each platform before committing. If you choose a platform blindly, you could wind up wasting a ton of time *and* money.

3. What sort of communities are on the platform?

Understanding who's on the platform *and* the communities that exist there is incredibly important as well.

Here, we'll define "community" as any large collection of engaged individuals passionate about specific topics.

A Facebook group is one example of a community. Another example, and one that's a little more illustrative for our purposes, is Reddit. Reddit is essentially a collection of forums dedicated to very specific topics.

How specific?

Well, it gets pretty nuanced—and sometimes there's overlap.

For example, as a writer and fan of the Rock/Metal underground, I often scroll through the r/StonerRock and r/DoomMetal subreddits. These are related genres, but the communities are slightly different. As a result, the content is slightly different as well—just as there's different content on r/Rock and r/Metal or even r/Music or r/IndieMusic.

But you'll also find overlap in many communities. I regularly visit r/BeAmazed, r/DamnThatsInteresting, and r/InterestingAsFuck, all of which users visit to share intriguing videos and graphics they've found on the internet. Some days, I'll find the same post in each of those three subreddits!

Communities are everywhere.

As previously mentioned, Facebook groups are similar communities, and they're valuable because they're a captive audience. Every Facebook group has its own rules and regulations on marketing and sales, but crafty salespeople or promoters can leverage these groups to great results.

As an example, let's say you run a small bakery in Fishtown, a small neighborhood in Philadelphia.

You might join separate groups dedicated to bakeries, groups dedicated to Philadelphia, groups dedicated to small

businesses in Philadelphia, and groups dedicated to Fishtown.

Each of these groups is related to your business, and each one can be leveraged to your advantage in different ways.

In a later section, we'll discuss how to build one of these groups for yourself.

For now, it's simply important to know these groups are out there and ready for you to join and engage.

4. Does my company have the resources to compete here? You can *very* quickly blow an entire year's marketing budget on creating a month of social media content. Great social media is financially and logistically difficult to create, so you might have to be extremely scrappy at the beginning.

Remember our discussion on creativity in Chapter 3? If you don't have a major Hollywood budget, go with what's possible.

A neighborhood restaurant I like has a bartender who's known by the regulars for being extremely peppy and friendly. The restaurant uses that to its advantage. Almost every day, I'll see a video on Facebook of the bartender excitedly jumping up and down in front of the restaurant's sign in the parking lot while she rattles off the day's specials.

The videos are fun and silly, and they're easy to spot because you'll often see her enormous, curly hair filling up the frame.

Each video might take five minutes to prep, two minutes to shoot, and another two minutes to upload. That's an entire video in less than 10 minutes!

When you're considering whether you have the resources to compete, ask yourself this: *How do I want my company to present itself?* That will tell you how much polish your

content should have.

If you're worried about creating high-quality videos, for example, YouTube probably isn't for you. You might also be scared by Instagram Reels and TikTok. But if you're good at images and graphic design, you might do well on Instagram and Pinterest!

The big lesson: Understand your budget. Understand your capabilities. Understand your goals. Understand your audience. This will help you figure out where you should be on social media.

Figuring Out What Resonates With Your Target Audience

As I mentioned in a previous chapter, you can't always guess what your target audience is going to care about.

The good news: They'll tell you through their actions. But you really have to pay attention.

Here's how I like to get a feel for what works on social media:

- **Check out your closest competitors.** What are their audience members responding to? Is it video content? Pictures? Infographics? Then dig deeper: How polished is their video content? Who's in their pictures? How are they sourcing their infographics?
- **Consider what your target audience cares about.** Oftentimes, I find the business owners I work with have some anecdotal idea of what their customers care about, but it's better to go straight to the horse's mouth. Do you have any surveys from customers? What are people saying in their online reviews? What does your sales team hear from their prospects?

- **Study how people have responded to your social media posts in the past.** What have they shared? What have they commented on? What have they liked?

More often than not, you'll find that what your target audience cares about the most *isn't* your services or products. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if the average post about your best-selling item performs more poorly than your average post about your team members.

The reason is simple: Your average consumer doesn't want to feel like they're being sold to—especially on social media.

This is a hard pill for many business owners to swallow, but it's an important medication to take. People are more concerned about getting value, entertainment, or education out of your posts than they are in seeing promotional content.

Remember: To get “permission” to share promotional content, you first have to win your target audience over by sharing content they like. Fortunately, your preliminary content and research should give you a pretty good idea of what they're most likely to care about—and how that content should be packaged.

Tracking Your Success

Once you've started creating content, the feedback you get from your followers is one of the best indicators of what they do and *don't* care about. “Feedback” here refers to the likes, comments, shares, and other types of engagement you receive on social media. *These* are your best signals to follow.

Here's how I'd encourage you to think about each one:

- **Likes** - Likes are good, but not incredibly valuable. Likes are the easiest way for a user to “approve” of a

piece of content. In some cases, people will “like” just about everything they see! I’ve seen both older folks and younger kids carefully scroll through their feeds and “like” each post that comes onto the screen. So, while likes are an indication of what’s valuable to your followers, it’s usually not the best yardstick for success.

- **Comments** - Comments are better than likes, but only somewhat valuable. A comment takes much more energy than a like because it requires the user to stop scrolling and actively write out a message. And if the message is positive, even better!
- **Shares** - Compared with likes and comments, shares are best. In just about every case, I would prefer a single share over 10 likes on a single post. Most platforms value shares significantly more than likes, and for good reason: A share says, “I care about this content so much, I want all of my friends to see it!” Consequently, you’ll generally earn more impressions from a share than you will from a like.

When I’m reviewing content and actively creating new content, I look through previous posts and pay close attention to the posts with the most engagement. Once I know which posts were engaged with the most, I can reverse engineer them to figure out exactly what the followers appreciated, and then I can apply this knowledge when I’m creating future content!

The 80/20 Rule

Speaking of creating content, let’s discuss the 80/20 rule,

The 80/20 rule is pretty simple: roughly 80% of your content should be for the benefit of your audience (business-related GIFs, super fan artwork, an infographic about your industry) and roughly 20% of your content should be sales-related.

Again, social media isn't about you. It's about creating relevant content your audience cares about.

Those numbers aren't written in stone. You could try 60/40 or 70/30 or 90/10, but the main goal is to avoid falling into the trap of making everything about you. If every post is about another amazing sale you have coming up this weekend, the only people who will follow you are those who are interested in your sales. You'll likely lose followers in the process, and then you'll see the number of new followers begin to dwindle.

Building Communities: The Power of A Captive Audience

A couple of years ago, I gave a presentation on social media to a number of business owners and solopreneurs in the wedding industry.

Over the course of our discussion, I talked about the roadmap for building your own engaged Facebook group for future sales.

One potential example I gave was for photographers interested in getting more senior photos for graduating high school students.

In theory, they could start a group dedicated to taking better selfies. Under this idea, the entire group could be dedicated to teaching young teenagers, recent graduates, college students, and even parents how to take better pictures of themselves on their phones.

People would be able to share their favorite photos, talk about apps they use, and even show off their own headshots from other photographers.

Done correctly, this little group could grow and grow to hundreds and even thousands of users from the

local community.

Now, don't get me wrong: Running an active Facebook group is a *lot* of work. Once you get into a few hundred or even a thousand members, you may have to moderate dozens of posts a day.

But once a month or every couple of weeks, you could drop in a promotional post to this captive audience—an audience you've built and nurtured and kept free of all other spamming photographers.

After building enough trust with these members, they're bound to give you business and think of you every time someone mentions they need a photographer.

Consider that for a minute. If you have 2,000 local members in your group, you are *constantly* the one photographer who's always at the top of their minds.

That's incredibly powerful. When photographers come up in conversation, they'll think of you. And, more importantly, when they need a photographer, *they'll choose you*.

You don't have to start a new Facebook group or subreddit or chatroom to build a community, but this example helps us see how facilitating connections between engaged individuals—either through our posts or other means—can be significantly impactful to our businesses.

Seeing It In Action: Real-Life Benefits of Engaged Groups

In a past assignment, I helped moderate a Facebook group for a medical professional who'd established his own health and wellness brand.

There were thousands of members, and we frequently sorted through dozens of posts every day to weed out ones that were negative, inappropriate, or misleading.

All in all, it might have taken a collective hour a day for three or four people to keep the group running smoothly.

If that sounds intimidating, let's remember what the end goal was: increase revenue and encourage repeat business by building community.

To that end, the group worked.

Participants who hadn't yet purchased from the health and wellness brand could get a second opinion—and they were always roundly encouraged by members who had taken the plunge).

Members who were struggling and thinking about taking some time away from the brand could voice their concerns—and members would swoop in to offer advice and encouragement.

All we had to do was make sure everyone remained civil and occasionally post on the client's behalf.

While I can't share hard numbers, I can tell you anecdotally that the strategy worked.

The group became a major source of site traffic, and every time we posted on the client's behalf into the group, we saw significant waves of engagement across *all* of the client's relevant channels—a serious ripple effect!

Building Your Own Community

Building your own community is possible—but it takes time.

More importantly, you need a strategy. Consider:

1. Does the community provide value to your target audience? In other words, does it meet a common need for your audience?
2. Is the purpose of your community defined clearly enough that people will understand what to post?
3. Is the name of your community descriptive enough that even people who stumble across it will know whether it relates to them?
4. Do you have a posting strategy for spurring engagement and encouraging others to post?
5. Do you have the time to check in on the group every day? Alternatively: Do you have someone on your team who can do this on your behalf?
6. Is the content in the group exciting enough that people will enjoy it and want to invite their friends?
7. How will you market the group? Do you have a strategy for spreading the word about it?

I've seen many group founders give up early on because they lacked a solid strategy and quickly felt overwhelmed.

Develop your strategy first, then get to work.

Borrowing Followers: The Art of Marketing With Someone Else's Pre-Built Audience

Imagine getting in front of an audience that's already assembled and perfectly aligned for your goals. Sounds like a great deal, right?

It's possible, but it takes a little elbow grease.

What we're talking about here is "borrowing" or "sharing" followers. You might also think about it as a form of

cross-promotion.

Let's say you own a construction company. Nothing overly complex; you just build and add additions to houses. On social media, many of your audience members are past clients, architects, and people who like the way you chronicle each build.

Now, let's say you also have a friend who's a local interior designer. They specialize in really making a home feel special, and sometimes they even partner with your company to make your houses pop. Their followers on social media include architects, people who are interested in interior design, and their own past clients.

The two of you share an important overlap in your target audience: people who are unhappy with their current living situation and ready for change.

If you're already partnering with this company in practice and you have a good professional relationship with this individual, it may make perfect sense for *both* of your companies to hype each other up on social media.

That means they should regularly share your content on social media through their own accounts.

And you should do the same for them.

The reason is simple: By promoting each other, you both reach an audience you otherwise wouldn't have access to. Over time, both of your accounts—and businesses—can grow together.

Putting It Into Practice

If you're interested in trying this technique, it's better to do it with professionals or owners of companies who already know,

like, and trust you based on your past networking.

Take it from me: I've seen people try this through cold emails or calls, and it rarely goes well.

It's better to establish the relationship first, then move in for the request.

Working Together For Better Results

You know how some companies like to say they're a family?

Here's a good litmus test: Check to see how many of their employees engage with the company's content on social media.

Most employees don't care about their employer's social media presence.

And that's perfectly normal. People generally dislike work to some degree, so why should they work part-time for their company outside of normal working hours by sharing company marketing materials?

That sort of distaste for company social media content is detrimental to company performance, but your employees can be *powerful* forces behind your social media.

Remember how we said platforms are basically evaluating each post to see how much engagement it gets?

Your employees are a captive audience, and if you can convince them to share your content, you're more likely to see better results.

Putting The Ideas Into Practice To Capture Your Employees And Others

Next, let's review some of the ways we can recruit people both in and out of your company for assistance in growing your social media presence.

Leveraging Employees With LinkedIn

If you really want your employees to engage with your business, start with LinkedIn. This is especially useful if you're already in a B2B space.

Even a little bit of engagement helps on LinkedIn. I've seen accounts that normally get maybe 20 impressions *without* engagement suddenly receive 60 impressions with only a single "like." Add a few more likes or shares, and you'll likely start to see hundreds or thousands of impressions.

If you can get even a handful of likes and shares from your team members and industry partners on every LinkedIn post, you can grow your business page quite quickly—especially if you're creating content your followers and team members genuinely care about.

Highlighting the Individual

Another hack on social media—and a shortcut to getting your employees involved—is to feature them on your social media channels.

It goes back to basic human psychology: People like being praised, and they like being praised *publicly* even more.

Even a simple headshot and a few sentences about why you love working with them can be extremely powerful. Done well, and they may even be willing to share it with their friends—the

very community who's most likely to engage with it even further.

Recruiting Others: Reaching Beyond Your Employees

Once you've tapped into your employees, you can begin looking elsewhere for assistance.

In general, we should *never* directly ask for engagement on a social media post. Although the tactic *can* work on Twitter, most platform algorithms may automatically ding your post and show it to fewer people—all because you asked for likes or shares.

We have to be savvier.

Fortunately, there are ways to manufacture engagement without much trouble.

You might occasionally see promotions on platforms like Instagram asking you to join “engagement groups.” Essentially, these are small groups of account owners who agree to like and comment on every other member's posts.

All they have to do is drop their latest post into the group chat, and all of the other members are honor-bound to engage.

Failure to engage consistently could put you at risk of getting kicked out.

To a certain extent, these groups can work. Getting even 10 or 20 likes, comments, or shares within the first few minutes of posting can be a powerful boost to your exposure because the algorithm will want to continue showing the piece of content to new people.

Unfortunately, many people struggle to keep up with groups like these, especially as membership increases. In a worst-case scenario, members will share dozens of posts for you to engage with every day, preventing you from accomplishing more important tasks.

This can become overwhelming, so it's not generally a tactic I recommend.

Still, the idea is sound: Get others to engage early on, and you'll see better, faster results.

A few tactics you can use to spur engagement include:

- Use eye-catching video and imagery. Whenever possible, include *multiple* videos and images in a single post.
- Ask compelling questions to begin conversations.
- Write interesting copy about topics popular among your target audience.
- Tag other people and businesses, when appropriate. Tagging someone immediately sends them a notification to check out your post, and they're very likely to engage in some way.

Google My Business: A Social Media Platform We Shouldn't Forget

Before we wrap up our section on social media by discussing bots and DMs, I want to bring up one of the most overlooked social media platforms in existence, one we mentioned in Chapter 1: Google My Business.

If you don't recognize Google My Business (GMB) by name, you'll recognize it in practice: When you Google a small business and see a profile with company pictures and contact information, *that's* GMB.

If you still haven't set up your GMB profile (as recommended in Chapter 1) and you're a small or medium business with a local focus, *do it right now*. I'm not kidding.

It takes less than 20 minutes to set up and the results can be astounding. Here's why:

- Your Google My Business account increases your discoverability when people are looking for your services in your area—especially when they're searching on Google Maps.
- Google My Business allows people to review you—great for building trust with people who find your brand and are wondering whether or not they should do business with you. More reviews make you appear more popular, and they could potentially help you show up in more places.
- Google My Business gives readers all of your relevant contact information so they can reach out to you quickly, essentially eliminating the need for them to visit your website to find your contact info and potentially get distracted along the way.
- You can post to Google My Business, similar to the way you post to Facebook or Instagram, and doing so can help you become more visible when people are searching for your products or services in your area.

Unlike other social media profiles, Google My Business *doesn't* take a lot of effort to set up or maintain, so get in there and get moving!

A Quick Word On Bots And Mass DMs

On platforms like Instagram, you'll find there are *many* people

who promise to build your fan base quickly at an affordable rate. When they try to explain their tactics, their language is often filled with unnecessary technical jargon, but many of them are ultimately leveraging the same principles.

I receive these messages all the time, and they all promise quick results at an affordable rate.

In general, these folks are using a sort of “mass DM” service on the backs of bots, which are essentially automated programs that behave like people but perform very specific tasks. Basically, a bot will scour hashtags related to your business, identify people using those hashtags, then send an automated message to those users to hype up your profile.

I hate this because it’s essentially a form of cold spam emails, but without *any* sort of humanity behind it.

I’ll admit that I’ve received these offers enough that I’m occasionally tempted to try it out, but I never commit because these tactics are spammy and devoid of personality. Plus, there’s nothing to prove that the followers you earn through this process are even people who will ultimately care about your business.

If you think this is a tactic that’s worthwhile to your company, so be it. But I generally discourage this strategy. Instead, I recommend focusing on creating great content on a consistent basis to gradually build a valuable, invested following that genuinely cares about you and your business.

Chapter Takeaways

1. Social media isn’t about you, your company, or your brand. It’s about being *social* and creating exciting connections with your fans and target audience.
2. We should exist where our target audience is, not

necessarily on the platforms that are most popular in the moment.

3. As a marketing tool, social media is only as valuable as you make it. Continue to focus on engagement so the algorithms will favor your content.

4. Content isn't always easy to make, and it can be time-consuming. Done well over an extended period of time, however, it can be transformative.

How to Tie It Into the Rest of Your Marketing

1. To find new ideas for social media, look for what people are responding to in your other channels.

2. Other marketing efforts—like your flyers, live events, and blog posts—are easy social media fodder.

Chapter 7:

The Power of Press and Bloggers: Giving the Community What It Wants

A friend of mine recently sat down with me for advice on marketing his upcoming album.

He had a tentative release date for mid-fall, and he wasn't exactly sure where to start.

After writing out a comprehensive release strategy that covered months of marketing activities and new opportunities, I hopped onto a Zoom call to present the strategy and hand him the keys.

Before talking specifics, I explained something extremely important: My friend, who is an extremely bright and gifted musician, doesn't have a product problem. His product—a yet-to-be-released debut album—is solid. I have no concerns about his record being well-received by the people who eventually listen to it.

Instead of having a product problem, my friend has an *audience* problem.

As his current Bandcamp, Spotify, and Instagram numbers attest, he doesn't have a huge following yet.

So I made something incredibly clear at the beginning of our meeting: Much of his success surrounding his eventual album launch will revolve around the amount of exposure he can get and relationships he can form in the months leading up to his album release.

Sure, social media followers are cool, but not all of them are going to purchase his album. The people who buy records are the ones who matter most, and he has to work overtime connecting with others to make the next few months matter.

I outlined numerous strategies for him to follow over the coming months, but the most important steps were:

1. Partnering with other bands and musicians with existing audiences to collaborate on new singles, with the goal of getting in front of those existing audiences in turning them into fans of his music.
2. Connecting with the press in his genre—including other bloggers, podcasters, and radio hosts.

Recently, he spent an entire day blowing up my phone with good news. He had connected with a prominent band and they were collaborating on a new project. He had emailed the host of a music podcast, and they had a date set up for him to make an appearance. He even had an interview set up with a writer for a publication to feature him and his work.

All of this was exciting.

The friend in me was thrilled that my pal was gaining so much traction only a few weeks into making a serious effort in his marketing and press strategy.

The marketer in me, meanwhile, was excited because one of my clients was experiencing an important truth: With the right strategy, you can enjoy press pick-up—no matter who you are.

In this chapter, we'll explore the challenges of PR, practical secrets for developing your own press strategies, and ways to develop press relationships that work *for* you in the long run. We'll also look at a few real-world press strategies in action!

PR Companies: Are They Worth It?

Should you use a PR company to help spread news about your company?

Probably not. Sure, there's a time and place for PR companies, but you (as a small or medium business) generally won't need them.

My intent here is *not* to disparage PR agencies or independent publicists, but I've been around long enough to know you have to be very careful in who you work with. In many cases, the major value of a PR company or publicist you work with is their email list and industry contacts.

I've seen some of these lists from bad companies; they're massive, poorly maintained monstrosities often acquired through dishonest means. Over time, the value of these lists decay even further. Editors leave their jobs. Publications shutter. Websites are bought and sold.

Chances are, you'll never see who's on these lists.

Let me be clear: There *is* value in what a PR agency does. Press placement in major publications can be a huge boon to your company's exposure and revenue, and appearing in even a handful of publications or websites is better than no coverage at all. PR experts are often well-connected, and they can help you appear in the best spots for maximum impact.

But you should weigh the costs versus the outcome carefully. You probably don't need to pay a PR agency thousands of dollars every year for goals your marketing department or digital agency can likely handle.

In addition, your company *should* already have a pretty robust list of email addresses from past clients, current customers, and industry partners, which could make a PR

agency redundant.

When A PR Company or Publicist Makes Sense

So, when *is* it a good idea to use a PR company? There are some instances where it makes sense to have an experienced PR company or publicist in your corner. Those moments include:

- **When you've seen steady growth and are ready to take the next step.** This is especially true if you're a fast-moving professional solopreneur with lots of thought leadership, or you run a quickly growing startup. In other words: You need extra assistance to help you get placement in the right places that will help you reach the major leagues.
- **You're ready to scale at a massive level.** *Ready* is the key word here. There's an old story about a small company that finally found placement in The New York Times, only to realize they couldn't keep up with the massive increase in orders—which resulted in tons of frustrated consumers who eventually turned against the brand. *Ready*, in this case, implies you have already streamlined your processes, you have an excellent product or service, and you have the personnel, leadership, partners, and vendors in place for a massive influx of business.
- **You're aiming to take business from the competition.** A PR team can elevate your brand, and it can help you gain the level of awareness your biggest competition is getting. Just be ready: They'll notice. If you push hard enough, they could bite back with their own marketing campaigns.
- **You've determined you need to make a significant**

splash for a new product or service. This may be the case if you rarely launch new products/services or if you're certain that the new offering could be a cash cow for your brand (which would then make the sudden investment worthwhile for your company).

- **You're severely limited in your resources.** In this case, you:
 - Don't personally have the bandwidth to manage press outreach.
 - Don't have any team members with enough bandwidth to learn or manage press outreach.
 - Can't afford to hire someone internally to help manage your press outreach.

If you don't meet any of these criteria, you're likely better off managing your own press efforts or pursuing a different strategy to reach your marketing goals.

Understanding The Intersection of Target Audience and Press

There are likely hundreds of sites you could submit relevant news to and never hear back from.

If you're managing your own press outreach, the trick is to understand which publications are most relevant to you and your goals.

Ideally, you're looking for publications with a significant amount of traffic and an audience/subscriber base that's closely related to your own target audience.

That often requires a great deal of research beforehand.

For example, one of my clients, a realtor in the Pittsburgh region, recently reached out because she had received a note from an ad salesperson at a magazine neither of us were

familiar with.

Her question to me: Did it seem worth it to write an article/ad to promote one of her fancier homes that had just hit the market?

That depended, I told her. There were a few questions I wanted the publication to answer before my client made any sort of investment:

- How quickly would their article/ad be published and distributed into the hands of the subscribers?
- How many subscribers do they have?
- Where are their subscribers located, and how many subscribers are in each of those cities?
- What are their subscriber demographics? What is their income, age, gender, education level, etc.?
- How have past articles/ads converted in their magazine?
- How have previous houses sold in their magazine?
- Which ads/houses tend to perform best with their audience?

The obsession over details may sound excessive at first, but there are many reasons to carefully vet every publication before doing business with them—whether it's a one-time purchase or a long-term relationship.

If you sink a ton of time into developing a relationship with a publication that can't help you find new leads, you've wasted time *and* missed out on potential profits.

When you're approaching a new publication, consider these questions:

- **How much traffic do they get/how many subscribers do they have?** You could try checking the site on SimilarWeb (<https://www.similarweb.com/>) or check out their social media following. If they have

10,000 followers or more, they probably have a decent-sized readership or subscriber base.

- **How do their subscribers or readers align with your target audience?** If you're aiming for a geographically-focused publication, this is probably a no-brainer. The Pittsburgh City Paper focuses on things that happen in Pittsburgh. Industry publications are a little trickier, so look to see who they're catering to.
- **Have they covered businesses like yours in the past?** If a publication isn't interested in promoting businesses or publishing press releases, you might have trouble getting featured.

Start with these questions—they'll help you stay focused.

Sometimes the Smallest Voices Have the Biggest Impact

You don't need to land in the biggest publications to meet your goals. Sometimes the smaller publications with active fanbases (think of them like micro-influencers on social media) can have the biggest impact on your performance.

One example: I interviewed a solo musician on Monster Riff who was actively working to build his fanbase. Throughout the published article detailing our interview, I embedded some of his Bandcamp songs so readers could listen to his music while they were reading.

I received an excited note from him a few days later: His Bandcamp numbers had increased *significantly* after the interview, and he was thrilled that people were listening to his music.

The lesson: You don't need to get into HuffPost or Forbes or The New York Times to see improvements. Smaller

publications with engaged followings can be just as beneficial.

If you're not sure about the influence of a blog or website or publication, first check out their comments section on individual articles. Are people leaving messages? Are they having conversations? From there, check out their social media. Are people sharing their content? Are they commenting?

All of these are signals of an engaged or unengaged audience. If a publication has an engaged audience, it's a strong signal that the publication is likely worth your efforts!

Leveraging Technology To Uncover Ways to Contact The Press

Once you've identified a publication that could be a good fit, it's time to figure out the best way to contact a publication representative.

Now, I'll give you a fair warning: If there is anything in this book that seems unsavory, it will be this section. What follows isn't illegal by any means, but it may feel strange or uncomfortable as you go about it.

Here's a little-known sales hack: You can find email addresses for people you'd like to talk to even when those addresses aren't published out in the open.

Consider your company's website. Does it have a team page? If so, the team page likely lists out your employees and their titles within the company, as well as their contact information. If someone (including pushy sales teams) is trying to reach someone at your company, the team page is one of their first destinations.

You could do the same thing while trying to contact someone at your favorite publication.

But what if the emails *aren't* listed? Are you completely out of luck?

Nope. Far from it.

The internet has generated plenty of sales tools to help you pull email addresses from places they aren't visible. As of writing this in 2021, here are a few tools you could use to find email addresses for potential contacts:

- **Snov.io.** Available in a free and paid model, Snov.io works both as a browser plugin and as a website. With the plugin, you can visit any website and click the Snov.io logo in your browser, and the plugin will provide a list of email contacts connected to the domain. You'll find similar functionality back on the Snov.io website. Just as cool: Snov.io will tell you how confident they are in each email and how likely it is to be active.
- **Hunter.io.** Very similar to Snov.io, Hunter.io helps you identify active email addresses linked to a specific domain. One feature I like about Hunter.io: It tells you the most common formula for an email at a certain domain (e.g., first initial + last name + @domain). If all you have is a contact's first and last name, you can likely guess their email address based on this formula.
- **LeadIQ.** Like Snov.io and Hunter.io, you can use LeadIQ to pull email addresses from prospect accounts in LinkedIn. Once you've found someone on LinkedIn you think is a good fit for your press endeavors, you simply click your LeadIQ plugin logo, and a dropdown will appear with contact information for the specific individual. From there, you can add the contact to a specific list. Note: Since LeadIQ is meant for serious sales pros, it generally comes at a higher cost than tools like Snov.io and Hunter.io.

If you're not deep into sales, a lot of this can feel icky and invasive, and that's OK. That's a sign that you respect people's privacy.

But know this: Getting those email accounts is sometimes the only thing you need to start a close relationship with a member of the press.

Making Friends With the Press

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the big value many PR pros have is their email list. Over a few years, they might build up a list of thousands and thousands of industry email contacts—all so that when you come to work with them, they can say, “Sure, we'll write up your press release, and then we'll send it out to our 10,000 industry contacts!”

Sounds great, right?

The big problem, though, is that many of these small PR shops are simply working from an enormous list of industry contacts (that they may or may not have acquired or built through less-than-honest means) and they ping that entire list constantly for *all* of their releases.

There are two problems here:

1. A list of 10,000 contacts isn't a list of 10,000 highly-qualified, living, and breathing individuals who truly want to receive your press release. Lists naturally break down over time as people leave their email addresses behind, and some names are added without consent, which means the emails they're sent sometimes end up in the spam filter.
2. When someone is constantly bombarded by a PR source, they start to tune it out. I receive maybe half a dozen press releases a day through Monster Riff and about 99% of them are about bands I wouldn't normally cover. The main reason I

don't unsubscribe is because I like to stay on top of what's happening in the industry.

To overcome this, you have to treat all correspondence with the press as if you were emailing a friend. You wouldn't bombard them with content they wouldn't care about, right?

How to Become Friends With Your Press Contacts

I often coach bands on interacting with the press, and my primary advice usually boils down to:

1. Always be friendly with press contacts. Treat them like a friend, and always take their wants and needs into consideration when communicating. If you send something to a press contact, like an image, PDF, or link, make sure it's easy to click or download.

2. Actively engage on your favorite publications' social media accounts. This is especially important for those small but influential publications completely run by one or two people (think about the blogs in your industry that have one influencer at the helm). If the same person who writes the majority of the publication's content also manages the social media presence, they'll recognize your name—and be more willing to work with you.

3. Read the guidelines before submitting. Most publications have guidelines on how to submit a story or a form you should complete before sending something. Finding and following these rules is a sign of respect, and ignoring them could mean your email falls into the slush pile that never gets read.

Ultimately, I want these bands I coach to reach the point where they can send a press release to their closest press contacts and be basically guaranteed placement since they're

pals with the editor. I want the same for you.

Reaching this point takes time, but it's worth it.

And I can tell you as an editor myself, there are certain bands and musicians within the industry that I would do just about anything for—simply because of the relationship we've built over time. In cases when one of them submits something that *doesn't* fit perfectly, I work with them to explore how we can reangle it so it's a good fit for Monster Riff. That doesn't always mean they get placement in the end, but their chances are significantly higher than it is for any band that reaches out for the first time.

Giving the Press Something Noteworthy

Big companies get big press because they have big money. They have PR teams to make big announcements (like Miller Lite buying their ad in *The New York Times*, as we discussed in Chapter 3). They have deep pockets for flashy new products and marketing campaigns. They might even have a pop culture icon as their CEO—which is great for keeping the brand in the spotlight.

Small companies aren't that lucky.

Instead, a small company might only get press when they:

1. Launch inside a small town.
2. Do something so irresistibly noteworthy that a good journalist can't ignore it.

This second item is especially important for one reason: It means you can manufacture great press beats, which are events or ideas worthy of press coverage.

That's huge.

Although you can't match the budget of a Fortune 500 company, you can creatively generate new ideas that are too good for journalists to pass up.

Putting It Into Practice: Manufacturing Press Beats

If you can make interesting, compelling, exciting ideas come to life, you can capture the attention of the press and their readers.

In the following sections, we'll explore two stories: one about a rock star and his band, and the other about my agency and a small pizza company.

Making A Nine-Year-Old's Dreams Come True

Out in the Philadelphia region is a father-son duo called Delco Detention that enjoys covering their favorite hard rock tracks. That alone isn't really noteworthy—until you consider that the son is only nine years old and plays the electric guitar better than most touring artists.

Thanks to the father's consistent Twitter posts (usually video snippets of them playing covers of rock songs together), Delco Detention caught the attention of living rock hero Neil Fallon.

Now, Neil Fallon might not be a household name, but his band Clutch has made waves in the rock and metal communities, grabbing multiple Billboard 200 slots and even reaching the top of the US Top Hard Rock Albums and US Top Rock Albums in 2015.

Neil Fallon offered to sing over one of the son's original songs—a move that helped catapult Delco Detention into the national spotlight.

Even major industry publications covered it.

That was huge for Delco Detention, and the duo has ridden that adrenaline rush into partnering with numerous other singers and guitars in the rock and metal underground. In fact, they were recently gifted a guitar solo from the guitarist for Fu Manchu, another legendary rock band!

That's awesome.

But think about this from Neil Fallon and Clutch's perspective. Neil spent maybe only an hour or two helping Delco Detention (he sat down for a Zoom meeting with Delco Detention, penned his own lyrics, recorded his vocal track, then made a short video clip in his shed), but his band got a ton of free press out of it.

This was a true win-win: Delco Detention earned enough street cred to start collaborating with major players, and Clutch had a nice press bump during a time when they weren't touring or releasing new album material.

Think About It

Essentially, Neil Fallon from Clutch was doing a type of charity work: he was donating his time and talents to support someone else.

Charity work through your company is a powerful way to gain additional traction in the press, on social media, and with your fans.

But there's a caveat.

It has to feel genuine.

If your philanthropic efforts look and feel like a publicity stunt, they'll come across as a publicity stunt.

Which means no one will care.

To make sure it *doesn't* feel like a publicity stunt:

1. Partner with an entity that makes sense. The charity you align with should share a similar mission statement or morals as your business. If you run a conservative-leaning business, like a gun shop, it might not make sense to back a liberal-minded charity, like a family planning organization.

2. Partner with an entity you *truly* care about. If people ask about the partnership (and they will), the response should be passionate, not robotic. Picking something you're emotionally invested in makes it that much easier.

3. You have to do it all year long. Sure, you can have a single annual event to support your favorite nonprofit, but you have to regularly weave that connection back into your communications. Talk about it on your website, share their posts on social media—constantly connect the organization and your partnership back to your mission statement and your overall marketing efforts. When it's finally time to lead up to your event, your marketing won't feel weird or unnatural.

Neil Fallon working with Delco Detention was a natural extension of his personal and professional brand, and it wound up helping his own band in the process!

A Pizza-Eating Contest Takes a Slice of the Newspaper Pie

One of my very first clients at Poetica Marketing was a small pizza shop in a tiny Pittsburgh neighborhood with a minuscule marketing budget.

Perfect, right?

Realizing that they needed to deepen their ties within the

community, we launched a pizza-eating contest to be held on one hot summer day.

We did all the usual stuff you do when announcing such an event on social media, but we added a twist: I buckled down and recorded myself gobbling down an entire pizza from the shop.

That was the major crux of the entire promotion, and it was enough to help the event get featured in the Pittsburgh City Paper—the area’s big events publication.

Between social media and the press coverage, the event pulled in multiple rounds of contestants, and it even attracted multiple professional competitive eaters from the surrounding region.

That’s a sizable amount when you consider we had limited funds to promote a one-time event in a small town of about 3,500 people.

Some of the turnout was a direct result of our social media and word-of-mouth marketing during deliveries, but getting into the Pittsburgh City Paper sparked the biggest boost to our attendance.

Think About It

The lessons here:

1. Get creative. You don’t have to sit down and eat an entire pizza on camera for social media attention, but you should realize that there are *infinite* ways to get the word out. If you can’t come up with anything off the top of your head, get together with your team and try some classic brainstorming tactics.

2. Even a small bit of press can be helpful. The only paper

that covered the event was the Pittsburgh City Paper. We missed out on the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, TribLIVE, WTAE, NEXTPittsburgh, or any of the other major news publications in the Pittsburgh region.

But that little bit of coverage was enough to bring out more than enough people for a lively event.

3. Sometimes the press picks things up without you informing them—but you should inform them. Here's something worth noting: I hadn't planned for press coverage leading up to the event. The event was small enough, I figured, that not many people would care.

But they did, as the Pittsburgh City Paper can attest. They picked up the news item on their own.

Now, the best we can do is speculate how the event would have gone had I been more aggressive in getting word out to local journalists! Learn from my mistakes and get working!

Manufacturing Your Own Press

As we just discussed, you *can* get press coverage if you want it. You just need to do or say something worth covering.

For some publications, that means having a big impact on the community, like using your business and its customers to raise \$100,000 for a local nonprofit.

For some publications, that means creating an irresistible limited offer, like giving away a year of your company's services for \$1.

And for some publications, it's just the promise of free pizza through an eating contest.

It all depends on where you are, what people care about, and

what counts as a “news” story.

In Smalltown, USA, something as mundane as the town hall getting a fresh coat of paint could become front-page news.

Of course, once your company reaches a certain size within the industry or your immediate community, press is relatively easy. If you’re big enough, every acquisition or product launch from your company means it’ll get covered in the local business journal and beyond.

Most of us aren’t there yet.

The good news is that there’s an art to drumming up press, and you can learn it.

Tactics to consider include:

1. Determine what the right people care about. Here, you’re targeting the intersection of four different groups of people:

- The people you already do business with
- The people you *want* to do business with
- The people who work at the publications you want to cover you
- The people who read those publications

Finding that one thing that makes all of them tick is *critical*. If you can’t hit that perfect intersection of ideals, you’ll likely miss the mark

2. Focus on reaching journalists as people. I talk about this idea all the time with the bands I consult with through Monster Riff. For context, most bands are hungry for press coverage, which means they often use the “spray and pray” technique of writing up a bulky email and then sending it out to as many people as possible.

When you reach out to journalists, reach out as a fellow person. A journalist has competing priorities at any moment, including deadlines to hit, research and interviews to tend to, and edits to make.

They will *always* appreciate a personalized outreach over a form email that is obviously a form email.

As a journalist myself, I can always tell the difference between a band email that was written for Patrick Schober, the editor of Monster Riff, and a band email that was sent to Monster Riff and 100 other publications.

3. Make your pitch compelling. When you reach out to journalists, you have to make them *care*.

What about your news is compelling? What makes it intriguing or worthwhile for your industry, community, or customers?

The journalist needs everything packaged as efficiently as possible, so be sure your pitch is *perfect* before reaching out.

Capitalizing On Press Coverage

Unfortunately, even if you snag front-page treatment in your local newspaper, you're not guaranteed to become an overnight success.

Think about it: Not everyone who reads the local newspaper cares about you, your business, or your cause—and that's a major reason why it's so important to be targeted in which publications you reach out to!

Instead, *you* are responsible for ensuring your press coverage helps to move the needle.

That means distributing that news clip through every channel you have, including:

- **Social media** - Your dedicated social media followers will be excited to see the link. You could also pull out your favorite quotes and turn them into graphics or even short videos for your social media efforts.
- **Email newsletter** - Again, if you've done the heavy lifting of building a dedicated email list, your diehard fans will love seeing the news.
- **Your website** - If you've received positive press coverage, adding it to your website is a powerful *trust signal*, a way of demonstrating to your readers that your company is respected within the community. You'll often see "As Featured In" sections on a website's homepage to demonstrate trust and authority.
- **Your network** - Don't be shy of sharing your press coverage with some of your more casual networking connections. It's a good thing to plug when you're reaching out to them (which you should be doing on a regular basis—as we'll discuss in Chapter 8). Letting them know you're popping up in the press is another important trust signal.

Chapter Takeaways

1. Press coverage is better (and easier) when you have good relationships with the people at each publication.
2. PR organizations *can* be worth the price, but make sure you can justify those invoices.
3. Don't ignore the power of the press, no matter how small you think your company is or how niche your business might be.
4. You can manufacture press by providing the right

press beats.

How to Tie It Into the Rest of Your Marketing

1. Press coverage is great fodder to share across your other marketing channels.
2. Engagement in your social media could hold the clues to your next big press beat.
3. Your press coverage is great material to share on your website!

Chapter 8: The Momentum of Networking For Referrals (And How to Do It On Your Terms)

For some, networking is exhilarating. To them, meeting prospects and potential referral partners is a thrill, and the relationships formed through networking become invaluable to their growth.

I'll be honest. I've seen the best and worst of networking. The most productive relationships I've formed over the years have been excellent referral sources and partnerships for my business—but I've also met folks who have left me feeling drained, deflated, and depressed.

Your success in networking largely depends on how strategic and intentional you are in your execution, and you'll have to carefully calculate whether or not certain networking strategies are worth your time.

One example: I was a BNI (Business Network International—a professional referral network) member for a couple of years before bowing out.

If you're unfamiliar with BNI, the organization promotes the philosophy of “givers gain,” the idea that those who offer referrals are more likely to receive them. With this as its starting point, BNI has become a popular networking organization that links business owners and sales reps together to pass referrals back and forth.

But BNI never quite worked for me—at least not in

my chapter.

Each week, I'd watch as referrals were exchanged between other members, and each week I'd drive home without anything to show for it. And it's not as if I wasn't a trusted member of my chapter. In my second year, I was elected Treasurer—essentially putting me in charge of the chapter's finances for events and memberships.

The referrals that did trickle through were often too small or ill-suited, and I once found that I was spending 10-20 hours a month on BNI-related activities with often *zero* new business coming in.

I should clarify: None of this is intended to be a knock against BNI. What I failed to understand at that time was that *I was in the wrong chapter*. There were only two other marketing-adjacent companies in my chapter: a tiny filmography company whose owner rarely attended meetings and a print and promo company with its own team of in-house writers and designers.

My chapter simply wasn't optimized for digital marketing referrals. If there had been a web developer, a videographer, photographer, media buyer, or digital ads specialist, I might have had more opportunities.

The truth is, *I* failed to grow the marketing niche within the chapter, and I eventually left—partially because I had become too busy through other marketing channels, but largely because I still wasn't seeing the results I'd wanted.

Learn from my mistake: *Find networking channels that make sense for your business.*

In this chapter, we'll outline:

- The pros and cons of networking—and how to decide if it's right for you and your business model.

- How to identify networking channels (like BNI or the Chamber of Commerce) that can actually generate qualified referrals.
- How to leverage your existing network to bolster your image.
- How to leverage platforms like Alignable and LinkedIn as you search for the perfect referral partner.

The Pros and Cons of Networking: Developing A Strategy That Works For You

Let's keep something important in mind: Networking is about connecting with people in a way that builds enough trust in you, your business, and your team to generate qualified referrals that lead to new business—both quickly and over a long period of time.

In a best-case scenario, a single referral can lead to repeat business for years to come, generating thousands and thousands of dollars in revenue!

But networking isn't always easy. In fact, there are a few pros and cons to networking in search of referrals—especially when it comes to the traditional networking events (which we'll dive into in a moment).

Whether you're an experienced networking pro or you avoid them like the plague, it's important for us to get on the same page. Let's review some of the pros and cons:

Pros of Networking

A few of the biggest pros to networking:

- **Networking, when done correctly, becomes a**

passive lead generation stream. In many ways, your most valuable network connections are like a 401(k): The longer the relationship grows, the more powerful it becomes.

When you repeatedly do good work for your referred clients, your referral partners will grow more enthusiastic about recommending your business.

- **Networking is a good opportunity for professional growth.** As a solopreneur in the early days of Poetica Marketing, I understood all too well how lonely the entrepreneur lifestyle can be.

Especially at the beginning, *every* decision I made had a profound impact on my business and clients. That's a big, stressful responsibility.

Meeting with other professionals on a regular basis often helped me hash out some of my biggest challenges as a business owner. In fact, some of the best advice and marketing hacks I've picked up over the years have come from sidetracked conversations over coffee.

- **Networking expands your sphere of influence.** This is one of networking's most obvious benefits, but it's an important one to highlight. Networking can help you tap into markets you haven't dominated yet, and that could lead to juicy new revenue streams.

Cons of Networking

A few of the biggest cons to networking:

- **Networking is time-intensive.** Finding, meeting, and nurturing a relationship with the right people is time-consuming, and it may potentially interfere with running the day-to-day operations of your business. If you're a

solopreneur, intense networking requires skillful command of your daily calendar.

- **Networking is challenging.** In most cases, you're not selling directly to your target audience when you're networking. Instead, you're gradually pitching to someone who has *access to an audience you want*, and you have to beat all of the other professionals in your area of expertise.
- **You have to actively maintain and grow relationships.** As hinted above, you have to nurture your referral relationships. You can't stop at saying "Hi" on LinkedIn. Instead, jump onto Zoom. Meet for coffee. Go to happy hour. Make a real connection.
- **Referrals are an unreliable source of business.** This is the biggest con to networking. As I mentioned in the intro to this chapter, I personally gained only a few referrals through BNI—a *program designed for referrals*. If this had been my only tactic for gaining new business, I would have been in a *very* painful financial position as a business owner. If your business is built on the back of referrals, your entire revenue stream could dry up if the referrals suddenly stop coming in.

Zoom Out: Why Networking Is Worthwhile

Regardless of your industry or business model, networking in some capacity or frequency is likely a worthwhile addition to your business development strategy.

As with everything else, though, you must commit to it regularly. Even setting aside an hour a week—specifically for checking in with old connections or to actively form new ones—can be transformational.

One of my best networking relationships is with a local SEO

Specialist. We don't pass a ton of business back and forth since we overlap in many areas, but I value the time we spend together.

About once a month, we'll meet at a coffee shop for a few hours to discuss the latest trends in our industry, workshop problems we're currently facing, and provide general life updates.

This is incredibly valuable. If I ever have an SEO-related struggle, I know I can reach out to her for advice or insight.

I've found similar benefits on Reddit, the massive social media network (which we discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6). I regularly scroll through the marketing and SEO subreddits to read some of the biggest challenges people are facing and to offer some of my own advice.

As you'd expect, this has directly led to multiple relationships with other marketing professionals who understand many of the challenges I face, and we can always come to each other with our own challenges.

Simplifying Your Networking Strategy

With all of that out of the way, let's touch on some important networking strategy pointers:

- 1. After connecting, add them to your email newsletter** (which you're hopefully already sending out on a regular basis). Getting them on your email newsletter list ensures they keep up with all of the cool, important work you do on a regular basis *and* keeps you top of mind when a client, friend, or family member needs someone in your field. Of course, you should *always* ask permission before sending anyone an email.
- 2. Use platforms like LinkedIn, Alignable, and others**

responsibly. The beauty of networking platforms like LinkedIn and Alignable is they can help you become extremely granular.

If I'm looking for an advertising expert in my area, I could hop onto LinkedIn right now and search for an ad specialist who is a 2nd or 3rd connection in a certain region and (if desired) even within a certain agency.

Since I'm a LinkedIn premium user, I can reach out whenever I'd like, but I have to connect with *intention*.

Remember: *Whenever you reach out to someone new for the first time, be clear in what you're after.*

Platforms like LinkedIn and Alignable are regularly abused by spammers and overzealous salespeople who are only interested in making a pitch, and users are rightfully skeptical of anyone who drops into their DMs.

Instead, introduce yourself strategically. State your background and your goals, and then explain why you're interested in getting to know the individual better. You might even ask them for advice while you're at it just to get the ball rolling!

3. Set a reminder to connect regularly. If you already have a CRM (customer relationship management software), you could use this to help you remember to check in with your most important networking partners on a regular basis.

Short of dropping them into a CRM, you could try apps like Garden, UpHabit, or Call Your Friends.

The important thing here is to devise a system where you can regularly contact and communicate with your referral partners so you're constantly top of mind for them.

4. Always show up prepared with a polished elevator pitch.

There's a reason everyone talks about having a good elevator pitch. At any given moment, you should be capable of giving a unique, compelling reason to use your business and reasons why your company is better than the competition.

Refining your pitch is a sophisticated art form, but it's worth honing your pitch until it shines and sparkles.

Which sounds better:

Option A: Hi, I'm Pat. I'm the owner of Poetica Marketing, a marketing agency.

Option B: Hi, I'm Pat, the owner of Poetica Marketing, a results-driven content marketing agency passionate about generating leads through compelling copy and data-backed strategies.

Option C: Hi, I'm Pat, the owner of Poetica Marketing. We're a results-driven content marketing agency passionate about generating leads through compelling copy and data-backed strategies. We rely on expert blogging, innovative social media techniques, and a dash of human psychology to reach and *resonate* with target audiences.

Chances are, you picked Option C. The difference here isn't just in the details, it's in the word choice. Notice how every word and phrase carries important meaning. "Results-driven." "Passionate." "Compelling copy." "Data-backed strategies." Each of these phrases is intentional. And if someone isn't quite sure what they mean, that's an easy conversation starter!

Whenever you're headed to a potential networking event, take your elevator pitch out of your mind and examine it. Do you need to tinker with it? Is it possible to enhance it?

By continuously refining it, you'll always be ready.

5. Be unapologetically yourself. Networking, whether it be in

the cliché networking event format or in a one-on-one setting, is best done when you're relaxed and feel your best.

Part of that is knowing yourself and knowing your body. Did you eat a good breakfast before leaving the house? Do you have to go to the bathroom before heading in? Does your outfit make you feel confident?

Much of it, though, comes down to the way you carry yourself. Sure, your clothing and outward appearance matter to a certain extent, but so does the way you square your shoulders, the way you sit in your chair, and the way you treat the barista behind the counter.

Don't forget how to be *you*.

Do you prefer floral printed dresses over pantsuits? Great. Rock it. Do you like loud, eccentric ties over the blue one with the cornflowers your wife likes so much? Good. Wear them.

Like your signature, your dress preferences are unique identifiers about you as an individual, and the more unique you appear, the more likely you are to stand out during conversations.

More importantly, be open. If you haven't already, get comfortable talking about yourself with others. Share that funny anecdote about getting your three-year-old ready for school. Tell them about the time you couldn't find parking outside the coffee shop you're visiting. Hell, talk about your weekend plans.

When you act as yourself—not as some sort of droning representative for your company—you can make the human connections we talked about in Chapter 2.

6. Always be clear in what you want. I'll write it again since this is *the most important part of this entire section*: Always be

clear in what you want. Making friends through networking is fine, but friends won't help you grow your business. Serious referral partners will.

The most important details you can express during a networking session are:

- Who you'd like to do business with (being as specific as possible).
- Which services/products you're trying to push.
- How your products and services benefit others.

You want your colleagues to know *exactly* what a good referral looks like, and the more specific you can be, the better. When your referral partner understands what's best for your company, they're less likely to forward low-quality leads.

The Folly of Traditional Networking Events—And Where To Find Other Opportunities

I'll be the first to admit it: I hate traditional networking events.

I hate them. I hate them. I hate them.

On the car ride there, I get that dreaded pit in my stomach. On the walk into the building, my heart starts pounding. And as I approach the other attendees, I feel the sweat forming on my forehead and seeping into my undershirt.

I dread huge halls with tons of strangers I'm expected to be social with. It doesn't make sense to me, and it's always been overwhelming.

And I'm not alone. Jon Levy, the behavioral scientist and author of *You're Invited*, argues most people hate networking in the traditional sense. Everyone comes to the table with their

own agenda, and they're generally interested in *getting* rather than *giving*.

Instead of relying on traditional networking events, I opt for more intimate one-on-one networking opportunities over coffee or Zoom.

If you're anything like me, you may benefit from doing the same. Sure, you might overcome your social awkwardness in time by continuing to visit large networking events, but you could also harm your brand if you come off like a dope in front of a group of strangers.

If you *do* thrive at traditional networking events (and I know plenty of people who look forward to them), great. Try to make them part of your routine.

And while there are bound to be major industry events in your area every year, that's not the only opportunity for you to network. Regardless of whether you like big events or not, you can also explore:

- Local or regional seminar opportunities, where you can pair networking with learning (and where you already have something in common with the people you meet).
- Monthly or quarterly mixers at local incubators or shared workspace offices, where the crowd may be smaller.
- Your alma mater's alumni network, if they have one.

Finding New Ways to Stand Out While Networking

When you *are* networking with new people, you should have one or two strategies ready to help you remain memorable. Business cards used to be the answer, but they've grown stale. Here are a couple of recommendations to keep in mind:

1. Rethink the traditional business card. You've probably

seen the latest in business card “innovation”:

- Clear plastic instead of paper
- Alternative sizes so your card stands out from the rest of someone’s collection
- Vertical text alignment (again, so your card stands out from the rest)
- Business cards with sections cut out for stylistic purposes
- Business cards cut into objects for business reasons (e.g., business cards in the shape of a cupcake for a pastry chef)

There are a ton of creative approaches you can take with your business card, and a clever marketer or printing company can help you uncover all of your options.

If you have an idea for something bespoke, be sure you examine all of your options before tapping out. There’s likely a local vendor who can help!

2. Use something other than traditional business cards.

Some of the best business cards I’ve seen in my career weren’t business cards at all.

My favorite examples were when the contact information was printed on:

- A thin flash drive in the shape of a business card. This is slightly outdated for 2021, but it’s still an interesting concept—and the inherent value of a flash drive prevents most people from tossing it into the trash with the rest of their business cards.
- A Gameboy cartridge with the company logo and personal contact information in the sticker area. This was a clever trick from a game developer.
- A branded beer bottle opener. This was passed to me

by a DJ. It's not a perfect fit for her industry (I would have encouraged her to use branded mini CDs with party mixes on them), but it's something that's functional and can become a conversation starter.

- Branded coasters for a beer company. This is functional and a great conversation piece at a party. Plus, every time someone sees it while they're drinking, they'll think of the beer company.
- A book given away with traditional business cards as bookmarks. There are a few reasons I love this one. First, a book is an excellent signal of industry expertise. Second, a book is something you have to carry around while networking, and it will naturally lead to conversations with other people at the event. Third, the pages of a book can naturally hold multiple traditional business cards, and the book holder can distribute those business cards during the book-related conversations that inevitably pop up. In short: Your book ends up marketing for you.

Let's break down why these "business cards" are so effective.

1. **They're functional.** Each of these items—from the flash drive to the book—is functional and can be used in the course of a day. With that in mind, the person holding your "business card" might think about your business every day or week, depending on how frequently they use the item.
2. **They're memorable.** Because they go against the traditional 3.5" x 2" paper business card, they stand out. Most people stuff business cards into their pocket and never think about them again, so anything unusual is going to stand out in their minds.

If you can rethink your business card while focusing on functionality and memorability, you can be sure it won't wind

up in the trash!

An All-Purpose Networking Hack: Care

One of my clients is a networking genius—or at least that’s how I often think of her.

The few times we’ve gotten drinks, she seems to bump into people she knows or quickly makes friends with complete strangers. In one instance, someone she met only a few minutes prior felt comfortable enough with her to tell her about his recent heart surgery *and he even showed her pictures of his healing chest.*

I quickly came to admire her for her innate ability to connect with anyone anywhere, and so I asked her what her secret was.

There was no secret, she said. She simply tried to approach everyone—including new business colleagues—with love. She takes the time to understand the individual before diving into a deep business relationship.

Looking back, she’s even done the same with me. In our first out-of-office meeting, she spent maybe half an hour getting to understand my personal and professional past, and I told her plenty of stories about meeting my wife, moving to Pittsburgh, and some of my more interesting agency experiences.

We have a good working relationship because we understand each other personally and respect each other professionally.

I’ve used this same approach in my role as the editor of *Monster Riff*. In the early days when I would interview bands and musicians, I’d often jump right into the interview, rattling off question after question.

But I’ve found that slowing down and allowing for small talk

gives us an opportunity to connect beforehand. In some cases, they even reveal interesting details I hadn't considered or known before jumping on the call, and I'm able to tap into these details later in the interview to benefit my readers.

Approaching people with love sounds corny, but it's an effective networking tool. Keep it in your tool kit.

Borrowing From BNI: Giving To Get

I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that I was a member of BNI early in my career.

BNI, as I also mentioned, promotes the idea of "givers gain." In a nutshell, the idea is that you should give referrals in order to get referrals.

Every time you give a referral, you build up trust and create more reason for reciprocity. (Remember our section on persuasion in Chapter 2?)

That's powerful.

Outside of a networking organization like BNI, though, passing referrals along on a regular basis simply makes you look more influential.

Think about it: If you seem like someone who's incredibly well-connected within the community and you're able to solve people's problems, suddenly you become an influencer.

This brings us to the most important part of networking: Networking *isn't* about meeting as many people as possible. It's about meeting as many people as possible *to benefit as many people as possible*.

Using Your Network to Build Your Network

Although referrals are the best part of networking, you can also use your network to build your network.

Early on in my career, I got into the habit of ending every one-on-one session by asking for recommendations on other people to talk to in whatever industry had come up in conversation.

If I was meeting with an ads specialist, for example, I would ask them about their industry partners—and ask for introductions to those individuals as well. That could get me a meeting with a web developer, a copywriter, and a social media manager—all from one meeting with an ads specialist.

This kept my calendar busy in the early days of my business, and it gave me an extensive network of professionals I could lean on when I needed advice, guidance, or a vendor for a client project.

Chapter Takeaways

1. If networking is going to be a meaningful part of your marketing strategy, be consistent in your networking.
2. Maintain your professional relationships. Touch base with industry partners on a regular basis and add folks to your email blast list (with permission).
3. Have a polished, memorable elevator pitch that helps you stand out and expresses value.
4. Rethink your business card so people remember you and your brand.

5. Remember the BNI philosophy of “givers gain.” If we want people to refer to us, we should actively refer to others.

6. When networking, be clear about what you're after and what you're not after.

How to Tie It Into the Rest of Your Marketing

1. Tap into audience insights from your networking partners for tips or tricks in engaging with your own customers and target audience.

2. Networking is an opportunity to humblebrag, so go into each meeting with a recent case study or review ready to share.

Chapter 9: Thinking Outside the Box When It Comes to Promotional Items and Merch

In a past life, I traveled around the country to attend industry events focused on Accounts Payable and Payroll.

It was very, very exciting.

One of the *very* exciting parts of these events was the small mountain of “swag” I would build in my hotel room. By the very nature of attending lectures and walking through the showroom, I’d be bombarded with team members who seemed hellbent on making sure I received their promotional water bottle or stress ball or pen or keychain.

Most of it was junk.

If anything lasted more than a week in my possession, it was because I’d actually found a use for it. One water bottle, for example, has been around for a few years, in part because they designed the bottle with a really neat bit of copy laid out like it was an actual newspaper.

In general, though, people don’t care about your branded stress balls.

They don’t need a notepad with your logo on it.

And they certainly don’t need a low-quality pen to remind them of your company.

And yet, there are entire businesses that thrive off of making these promotional items for other businesses.

In this chapter, we'll discuss the nuances of using products in your marketing—and how being a little clever and having a little fun can help you separate yourself from the competition.

Products As Part Of Your Sales Strategy

When I first started Poetica Marketing, I found myself in a tough spot.

I had recently connected with three different business owners. I'd written up and presented my proposals, and each business owner seemed excited about their specific marketing plans.

All I needed was to draw up three different contracts and get their signatures. I was only a few steps away from three new clients.

But then something happened.

They disappeared.

No matter how many times I contacted them or which communication channel I tried, none of them seemed interested anymore.

That was a lot of potential cash to leave on the table, especially in those early days of the company, so I sent everyone one final email, then hatched a new idea—something that was bound to catch their attention.

I have a corny, often punny, sense of humor, so I sent each business owner a Chia Pet around the holiday season. You likely remember the Chia Pet sensation from the '90s and early 2000s—you basically plant and grow chia seeds on top of a ceramic base that looks like a pop culture icon. In each box, I slipped in a simple note: "Business is more fun when it's

growing. Here's hoping we can work together in the new year."

I dropped the boxes in the mail and waited.

A few days later, I had an email from one of the recipients: "OK, you got me. Let's meet and get things started."

The Chia Pet concept was goofy and borderline childish, but I didn't have anything to lose.

And it helped me convert one of my cold prospects into a sale, giving me a 33% success rate right out of the gate!

I'm not saying you should make Chia Pets part of your sales process (and I'll explain why it wasn't a perfect fit for my sales process later on), but I am encouraging you to think about your marketing and sales process in a fresh light.

In this chapter, we'll explore how a fresh approach toward branded products and promotional items can help your company stand out in a crowded industry.

Using Products to Become Memorable

In our last chapter, we talked about the value of rethinking your business card into *products* to become memorable.

But you can also use branded products as a natural part of your marketing to stand out even better.

Rethinking Live Experiences

When Poetica Marketing scheduled its first event coordination gig, we wanted to make sure we did at least one or two things to make the client feel extra special.

The first tactic was a surprise: We gifted the client a custom lighting design spearheaded by my talented wife, Regina, who's also Poetica Marketing's Events Coordinator and has nearly 10 years of experience in lighting design and the technical side of theater.

The client loved it, and it made the room feel ten times more glamorous than it actually was.

Second, and more important to this conversation, Regina and I wanted to provide our clients with something elegant on their favors table, so we designed and sourced custom branded wine bottles for the event at a relatively low price point.

At the end of the night, everyone who'd been at the event took home a bottle of quality wine with our client's logo. This is something unique and unusual for most casual events, and it's something that the recipient can place on their mantle long after the bottle's empty.

Essentially, the bottle is serving two purposes here:

1. The bottle serves as a reminder of the wonderful experience they had. Until they finally uncork the bottle and drink the wine, anyone with the bottle will keep it near the rest of their wine at home. Every time they go to their wine collection, they'll see the label, remember the event, and then remember our client. Every time they drink wine in their house, they'll think of our client.

2. The bottle markets to a wider audience. Most people drink socially. In an ideal world, the recipient will hold onto the bottle of wine until they have guests. Naturally, they'll talk about how they received the wine at this event, which inevitably leads to them talking about what our client does. Essentially, our \$15 wine bottle works as a long-tail word-of-mouth marketing tool.

Building Lessons Into Future Products

Seeing such a positive response has led to custom bottles becoming a regular part of our own company experience.

New clients receive a custom bottle of wine with their logo on it and a thank you note after their first month of business with Poetica Marketing. Clients of Monster Riff receive a bottle with their album cover on it (though we're actively looking into ways to transfer the same concept onto cases of beer—a product that's much more rock 'n' roll).

And when this book is finally published and printed, it will become part of the sales process as well. Early on in our conversations, I'll send a book over as an indication of the level of thought and attention to detail I put into each and every marketing strategy. In fact, there's a chance you're reading this book because you inquired about becoming a client!

In both cases, the product serves a purpose well beyond its design. The book isn't just a book. It's a sales tool. It's a conversation starter. It's a seed that's planted in the mind and reminds the reader of Poetica Marketing's existence every time they see it on their bookshelf.

The wine bottles and beer cases work the same way: Sure, you can drink the product, but the sentimentality of the product being designed *specifically for you* makes it hard to throw away. Instead, it becomes a display piece—and a constant reminder of the brand behind it.

Think of it as a little billboard someone places in their house. It's the same concept.

Weaving Products Into Your Own Client Experience

When thinking about adding products into your client experience, don't grab just anything off the shelf. You and your team should put plenty of thought into your next steps.

When picking a product, remember these recommendations:

1. It should be personal. Whenever possible, you want the product to feel like it was created just for them. In some cases, that means printing their name on it. In other cases, that means sending them a handwritten note, like I did with the Chia Pets I mentioned earlier.

2. It should be functional. Your product should *not* be something that winds up in the junk drawer or, even worse, in the trash. At best, it should be something your client, prospect, or industry contact uses on a daily or weekly basis. At worst, it should be something they inevitably use at least once (like the bottle of wine).

3. It should be memorable. Remember when we ran through those business card alternatives in the last chapter? Each of them was unique and unexpected, and that helped them become memorable.

4. It should be a conversation piece. You want the product to market for you in the long run. A branded bottle of wine on display is an inevitable conversation starter.

Think about your product the same way. Ask yourself: What will get people talking *in the future*—well beyond the moment they first receive it?

5. It should make sense for your brand. Let's think about the Chia Pet story I told at the beginning of this chapter.

In the early days of Poetica Marketing, I was still figuring out who I was as a marketer, as a business owner, and as a professional.

There were no hard and fast rules about Poetica Marketing because I wasn't enough of a visionary at the time to establish them.

The Chia Pet idea was a shot in the dark, and it's probably not something I would try again today.

Although it's fun and lighthearted (and I think of myself as fun and lighthearted), I want my clients to understand that I take their business seriously. Marketing has a profound impact on a company's revenue, which has a direct financial impact on the company's employees, which directly influences the lives of their families.

I take that seriously.

Chia Pets are fun, but they don't reflect the gravitas I bring to the table today.

If I were stuck in the same spot in 2021 or later, I might send them a copy of this book (content is on-brand for Poetica Marketing!), a custom bottle of wine with a bespoke message, or something else entirely!

Chapter Takeaways

1. Don't give away useless, unwanted junk with your logo on it. Be thoughtful in creating something unique and memorable.
2. Weaving product marketing into your sales cycle or client experience can assist in conversions and in building long-term relationships.
3. Focus on developing products that market on your behalf for

extended periods of time. If you can give away products that are conversation starters or even conversation pieces around the house or office, you can ensure your brand is brought up in conversation later on.

4. Develop products that are simultaneously personal, functional, and memorable.

How to Tie It Into the Rest of Your Marketing

1. Any time you or a company representative interacts with the public, you have an opportunity to share your custom merch.

2. New products are exciting and often fun, and you can share them on your social media channels or write about them on your company blog. Depending on your relationship with the product vendor, they may also be willing to share their design for your product with their own following.

Final Thoughts: Where to Go From Here

Between the thoughts shared in these pages and the case studies we explored together, my biggest hope is that you feel inspired.

More than anything, I want you to feel like you're ready to take on the world with a fresh perspective.

As you move forward, you'll likely find that there are *still* blind spots in your knowledge.

That's totally understandable.

Even the best of us need to work hard to remain at the top of our game.

Before we part ways, I want to make you privy to some of my favorite marketing books, thought leaders, and tools—a few of the very resources I use to stay informed on a daily basis.

Newsletters To Subscribe To

Here are some of the best newsletters available today (in my humble opinion):

- **tl;dr** - Working under an acronym for the phrase “Too Long; Didn’t Read,” tl;dr delivers daily snapshots on everything from SEO to social media. Saijo George, the editor, condenses the latest updates down to less than 100 words at a time, so it’s easy to read while I’m still sipping my morning coffee.

Sign up here: <https://tldrmarketing.com/>

- **The Tilt** - Founded by *Content Inc.* author Joe Pulizzi, The Tilt does a great job of adding context to the latest marketing updates and insights. It's a longer read, so give yourself some time to work through it.

Sign up here: <https://www.thetilt.com/>

- **Marketing Brew** - Run by Morning Brew (another great business newsletter), Marketing Brew condenses the latest marketing research and trends into plain English. You might even get a bit of humor mixed in as well!

Sign up here:

<https://www.morningbrew.com/marketing>

Podcasts To Listen To

I love podcasts, and you'll often find me listening to one while I'm working out in the morning and later when I'm making breakfast. Some good ones for marketing and business include:

- **Social Media Marketing** - Led by Social Media Examiner founder Michael Stelzner, the Social Media Marketing podcast features experts on a variety of topics ranging from Instagram Stories to Facebook Groups. Each episode has tons of great, actionable takeaways.

Listen here:

<https://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/shows/>

- **Seth Godin's Startup School** - Led by marketing guru Seth Godin, Startup School is a series adapted from a growth-focused mini-conference he spoke at a few years ago. Godin discusses many of the hurdles startups face, and he has some great perspectives and insights on marketing.

Listen here:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/seth-godins-startup-school/id566985370> (or anywhere else you get your podcasts)

- **Entrepreneurs On Fire** - In *Entrepreneurs On Fire*, host John Lee Dumas interviews entrepreneurs *every day*. He's interviewed the likes of Seth Godin, Gary Vaynerchuck, and Tim Ferriss, and his insightful episodes are usually around 20-30 minutes long.

Listen here: <https://www.eofire.com>

Books To Read

There are tons of great books out there on marketing, and you can find many that rely heavily on research, many that rely heavily on personal experience, and many that include a workbook component. I won't provide you with an exhaustive list, but some of the books that have stuck with me the longest include:

- *Marketing Rebellion* (Mark Schaefer) - In *Marketing Rebellion*, Mark Schaefer takes a look at being human in a time where it's easy to mass-produce content and ignore your target audience.
- *Content Inc.* (Joe Pulizzi) - An excellent book on content strategy, Joe Pulizzi unpacks how strategically writing high-quality content can be transformative to your business. The original was written back in 2015 (a lifetime ago in digital marketing), but the lessons still hold true today.
- *Alchemy* (Rory Sutherland) - Throughout *Alchemy*, Rory Sutherland unpacks some of the biggest ideas and latest research in building, nurturing, and growing highly influential brands.

Keeping Up With Me

If you'd like to keep up with me, you can check out my latest writing and thoughts here:

- Poetica Marketing:
<https://www.poeticamarketing.com/blog>
- LinkedIn Articles:
<https://tinyurl.com/PatrickSchobersArticles>

Of course, you're always welcome to check out Monster Riff as well. If you're a metalhead or someone who enjoys a good riff, go ahead and give it a read.

- Monster Riff: <https://monsterriff.com>

If you'd rather get in contact with me directly, just drop me a line.

My email address: patrick@poeticamarketing.com

You're always welcome to get in touch. I love talking shop and tackling complex problems.

Good Luck!

With all of that out the way, I wish you the best on your journey. Building a business is hard work, but it's incredibly rewarding.

And, like I said at the beginning, business is most fun when you're making money.

Best of luck,

Patrick Schober
Poetica Marketing, Founder
Monster Riff, Editor-in-Chief

Glossary

Lead - A consumer who could be a potential customer for your brand. In most cases, this consumer becomes a lead when you acquire their name or contact information.

GMB - Google My Business.

Google Analytics - A tool from Google that allows webmasters and business owners to track site visitor behavior on their website.

Google My Business - Google My Business. A Google-owned platform that allows you to control your business profile in Google search results.

Google Search Console - A tool from Google that allows webmasters and business owners to track how their webpages perform on Google's search engine.

Google Tag Manager - A tag management system that allows you to track custom code on your website.

Influencer - Anyone who can *influence* their audience. An influencer is someone who has a captive audience that will listen to their product or service recommendations.

Micro-influencer - An influencer with a small follower count, especially on social media. In general, a micro-influencer has between 10,000 and 100,000 followers.

Organic Traffic - Website traffic from Google and other search engines.

Prospect - A lead that has entered your sales pipeline.

ROI - Return on investment. Your ROI is the revenue you

generate from an investment of time or money.

SEO - Search engine optimization. How “optimized” your site is determines how it appears in search engine results.

SMB - A small- or medium-sized business. The definition of “medium” varies from authority to authority, but it’s generally smaller than 500 employees, and some argue that it should be fewer than 100.

Social Proof - A public and positive review of your company, products, or services.