

The R words: relationships, rapport, retention

There is a saying that the best customers are the ones you already have. So once you've schmoozed and wooed someone into your client base, how do you go about keeping their business? Establishing trust and maintaining rapport in your business will be critical to building strong client relationships.

When you're getting to know your clients, it's important to identify common ground. The easiest way to start doing this is by listening. Learn about people by asking questions and from here you'll soon find that there's common ground you can talk about and use to build an element of rapport. You may have children of similar ages or like the same sorts of leisure activities. By asking questions, you'll make your client feel welcome. That, in turn, will create a sense of ease, perhaps encouraging them to open up to you more. You may also find it increases your own enjoyment in your work and this will shine through to customers and colleagues.

It's important to be open and honest. Let your clients get to know you, your hobbies, your pursuits and your interests. You may think people won't care. Perhaps you're right but, without realising it, your clients will gradually warm to you through this additional knowledge of you. This doesn't mean you should randomly start to waffle on about yourself over a business meeting. If you have a Facebook business page, a monthly newsletter or an About Us page on your website, be sure to include personal and fun facts about yourself and your team, adding a human element and a face to your business.

Always make yourself approachable. Be positive, down to earth and always portray a 'yes!' attitude. As soon as you start to put up any sort of wall, it's likely that clients will begin to back away. Make your clients feel important by personalising letters and emails and always using first names. Your interpersonal communication skills will improve as you focus in this way. Encourage your team to behave the same way in all aspects of client service to maintain this ethos across your company.

Ensure you respect your clients' time because it - like yours - is valuable. Be prompt when returning phone calls and emails and, most importantly, be on time if you're meeting in person. Unless your car breaks down or some other unforeseeable disaster strikes, there's no excuse for tardiness. If you say you're going to do something and you don't do it, it's not a good look. Even better, under promise and over deliver.

These are all things that help your business stand out, make people remember you. Try to make it a great experience for them to deal with you every time. It's one more reason for them to tell their friends and colleagues about you. In successful businesses, great service stands beside great products. Great client relationships help you take your business forward so you can build your success into the long term.



'We believe that customer service shouldn't be just a department; it should be the entire company.'

Tony Hsieh

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Moving pictures

Online video for your website or blog

If you're thinking of how you might refresh your website or pep up your blog posts, you might consider how videos can help. Video posts can help you engage customers. If you want to let people know about a new product, showing them how it works may work better for you than just telling them.

It's often difficult for people to take on information if it's in a purely text format. In the fast pace of the working week, they are time-poor and under fire from a continuous barrage of information.

It's not only that people don't have the time. They don't have the headspace. They have emails coming at them from all corners of the globe, incoming calls, and regular updates from social media and news feeds. As people work to take on more and more information, their overworked attention spans become shorter and shorter.

However, as work and leisure habits seem to be undergoing a continuous revolution, online browsing is part of almost everyone's day. And it's not only text people are browsing. YouTube has changed the game. A short video message has much more appeal than an invitation to download and read through a white paper. It's quicker and it's easier to digest. Viewers are using YouTube videos to see what products are available, how to use them and what other viewers think about them. And YouTube has opened the way for businesses to make marketing and how-to videos easily accessible through their own websites.

In a Forbes Insights survey, 75% of the executives interviewed watched work-related videos on business-related websites at least weekly. More than half watched work-related videos on YouTube at least weekly. Studies indicate that if your blog post includes a video, it's three times as likely to attract viewers.

It's the old story: 'a picture paints a thousand words'. If you can make the picture move, so much the better.

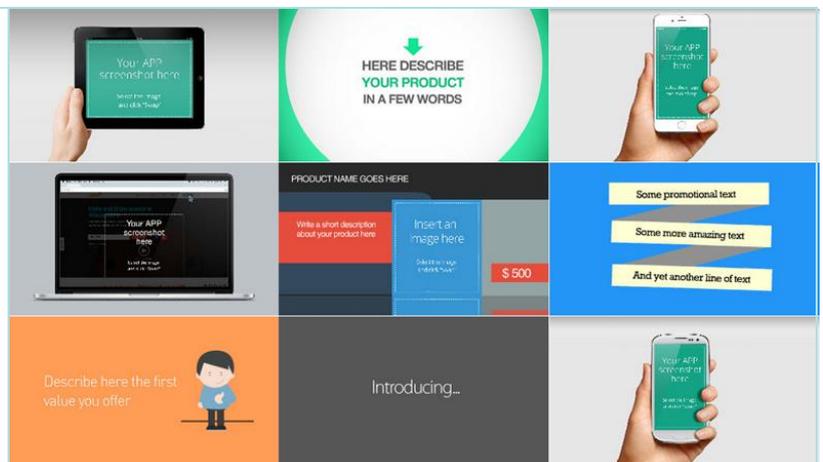
'It isn't about the words you say. It's about the energetic message you send.'

Pete Carroll

Video DIY - Wideo

A host of providers have online software to help you make your own videos. If you google 'how to make a video', the search results list products and providers catering both to people who want to make videos for family and friends and businesses wanting to make simple, punchy videos for clients and prospects.

Depending on how fancy you want to be, you can upload photos, video footage, voiceovers and music. You can add text, create animations and choose from pre-set themes and backgrounds.



You can use many of the tools for free. Some providers have tiered pricing depending on whether you want to make short, simple videos or longer, more complex videos with higher resolution.

Wideo (<http://wideo.co/>) is one such tool. It's an animated online video creation platform that allows you to create, edit, and share videos online for free.

Just set up an account to start. You can either create from scratch or select one of their templates and work with that to make your own video. There are 'how to' videos to show you around the app and a storyboard template to help you organise your ideas and plan out your video beforehand.

When you've finished, you can select to share or download your video. From here you can upload to your website (don't forget to add title and description tags to make it easier to search online). You can also upload your video to YouTube, Twitter or Facebook and either share your link or embed it on the site.

Taking it to the world

Great business communicators have their antennae out for signals all the time. They're alert to what others are saying on every level. They're also aware of how they project themselves, in person, on the page or screen and in the subliminal cues they send out in their own body language. But what if you're doing business overseas or with people from another culture? Do all those signals translate in the same way?

Nope.

Body language is not universal, any more than any other language. What may indicate open, friendly communication in one country may mean something quite different somewhere else. If you're building your export business, it pays to be aware of how various gestures and body postures are interpreted in the country where you want to foster better business relationships. Even at home, an understanding of what non-verbal cues mean in different cultures can be helpful, if your workforce or client base is multicultural.

Awareness of non-verbal cues will help you to communicate more effectively at all levels. If you're taking your business into places where you're not sure of the cultural subtexts, it may help to add this to your business research.



Did you really mean that?

The OK hand signal (index finger and thumb together, other three fingers extended). In Japan it usually refers to money or a request for payment. In Brazil, Russia and some parts of Germany, it's considered extremely rude and in Turkey, Venezuela and some parts of Europe it signifies a person is homosexual. In France it means 'zero'.

The thumbs-up which so often means 'it's all good' to us, is rude and insulting in the Middle East. As a numerical indicator it's problematic as in Germany and Hungary it refers to the number 1 while it represents the number 5 in Japan.

'It's rude to point' is something many of us grew up with as a caution not to point at other people, though it was ok to point at objects or places. However, pointing is genuinely considered rude in many parts of Asia and South America. If you want to point out something or someone, it's better to use an open hand with all fingers together.

Beckoning people to 'come here' by curling the index finger with the palm facing up is considered insulting in Slovakia and many parts of Asia. It may actually be cause for arrest in the Philippines. If you want to gesture for people to come closer, particularly in much of Europe and Asia and in some Pasifika countries, then hold your hand palm down and move your fingers in a curling motion.

Room to move

Even how much personal space you take up and how much space you accord to others sends a message.

Personal space operates on a sliding scale. It's influenced by culture, gender and context. Two women will tend to stand closer together than two men or a woman and a man. People from crowded places such as China or New York City will be used to a smaller circle of personal space while those from sparsely populated places such as western Queensland will be accustomed to a much bigger 'bubble' of personal space.

Sometimes personal space is artificially created by avoiding eye contact and angling body posture away from other people such as in a crowded tube carriage or in a lift. Then, as soon as people exit the train or lift, they automatically take back their 'natural' personal space.

Status will influence personal space, as people will instinctively give someone of high status more space. This is more noticeable in cultures where people are more conscious of status, as in Asian countries. Cultures where personal relationships are considered important in business will tend to shrink the personal space bubble, as in parts of South America and Africa.



Netiquette: 5 questions to ask about your online video

Can you find it?

If you go to the trouble of making a video and uploading it to the web, you want people to be able to find it, right? So you need to understand that videos that you embed on your site are invisible to search engines. To overcome this, create a video sitemap to capture the details about your video so web browsers can find it.

YouTube will automatically sitemap your videos which is useful. But then the search will point to YouTube and not to your site so you need to think about how to work with this. It might be a good idea, for instance, to use YouTube for videos that build general awareness of your brand while making sure that videos which build product awareness can lead browsers back to your site.

What's it called?

It's obvious that the title needs to be accurate enough to point to what the video's about. However, in the cyber logjam of online searching, the title also needs to be clever enough to be appealing and to stand out. Before you post, think 'would I click this?' If you're not sure, test it with colleagues and friends.

What's your plan?

Before you post, think about what you want viewers to do once they view it. What pathway will they take? Is there a call to action which will lead them back to your website? Do you want them to ask for more information, sign up for regular posts or buy a new product? Take another look at what you're about to post - is there enough information there for the viewer to take the next step?

Does it start a conversation?

If you're posting a video, think about posting it to a range of platforms, starting with your own website and Facebook, for example. But if your viewers can see it through a range of media, vary the context. Don't just have the one standard caption or accompanying text. Aim to start a conversation and then keep it going. Think about editing your video into several short teaser videos and post with text that looks at the content from different viewpoints.

Are you making the most out of YouTube?

Remember YouTube is more than just a storage platform. It is a social media platform as well as the second largest search engine on the Internet. Think about how you can create greater engagement with it by connecting with similar videos on other channels to start a conversation. Take it beyond just uploading - start talking about it.



FYI...

Video snippet is the thumbnail image for a video which comes up in a Google search next to the link. Google has changed the way it does things so that now only videos posted on YouTube and websites for large companies show video snippets in search results.

Video sitemap is a document to tell Google about all the videos on your website so it can index them correctly. If you use YouTube, Vimeo or a similar platform to store the videos on your site, Google will direct searchers to that storage platform, not to your website. It won't index them as part of your site unless you have a sitemap. So the sitemap is an important tool for making sure your video content can be read by search engines and for targeting your audience and leading them to you. Ask your web designer or IT consultant how to make this happen, if you want to make the most of your video marketing.

An Important Message

While every effort has been made to provide valuable, useful information in this publication, this firm and any related suppliers or associated companies accept no responsibility or any form of liability from reliance upon or use of its contents. Any suggestions should be considered carefully within your own particular circumstances, as they are intended as general information only.

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