

Turning client contact into great client testimonials

Whenever you're in contact with a client or customer, take the opportunity to ask them about their buying experience.

Most customers are happy to give feedback and appreciate that you care for their opinion. You'll get valuable insight and a potentially glowing testimonial for your website or marketing material.

Testimonials build trust with future clients, sidestepping the need for 'hard selling.' As text is written from a customer's perspective, it's considered to be much more reliable than standard marketing.

Engage your customers. Any point of contact is an opportunity to upsell, gain further trust or a testimonial, even if it stems from a complaint.

Don't be shy. When you get positive feedback, ask to use it for your marketing.

Ask the right questions. Be specific, how have you helped them? Focus on benefits.

Make your testimonials credible. Where possible, use names, client location and if applicable, photos. The more information you provide, the more credible you become.



Get permission first! Don't use a testimonial unless you have asked the client. Think about sending a gift and be sure to thank them for their feedback. They're endorsing your brand, after all.



Marketing your eco-friendly status

More and more businesses are branding themselves as eco-friendly hoping to net eco-aware clientele. If your business is cleaning up its act then this is a great way to promote your efforts. However, if it's just 'greenwashing', it can blow back at you.

Experts have referred to being green as a new business hygiene factor: it may not be a selling point but rather a commonly expected attribute such as being ethical or producing high quality products and services. Are you simply doing it to make more money or is it a direction you'd like your business to take permanently? It may be a natural progression or conversely a major shift.

Before investing time and money into rebranding your business, ask yourself:

- Will it add value for your current client base?
- Will it help to tap into a new market demographic?
- How will your market respond to your new status?
- Will you be able to increase your prices?
- Will you be able to sustain your new sustainability?
- Are your competitors doing it?

Making green choices should be beneficial to your business and indirectly to your clients regardless of how or if you market it. Make sure the image is aligned with your business' core values and that your customers are likely to respond positively to your new sustainable brand.

INDEX

Turning client contact into great client testimonials	1
Marketing your eco-friendly status	1
Maintaining your blog content	2
Attracting followers and promoting your blog	2
Recognising burnout - before you get burnt	3
Minimising human capital risk when buying a business	4
Netiquette and FYI	4



Maintaining your blog content

Maintaining the content on your blog is a big commitment and one of the biggest pitfalls bloggers find. You need to be patient, persistent and disciplined. Make a plan and establish how often you think you should be posting (the recommendation is at least two to three times a week.) Work out whether this is feasible, who on your team can manage it and then start to think about what you should be writing about.

Ensure you spend a decent amount of time on research. Remove yourself from noisy and busy environments and focus on finding clear, relevant and interesting content.

Track it. Encouraging feedback via comment boxes can help gauge how many people are reading your blog entries but it only skims the surface. For a small cost you can choose between an array of traffic tracking tools such as Google Analytics, Awstats and Woopra. These tools highlight the number of people actually visiting your site.

Look at getting your team on board to help develop content. It's a great way to help staff feel they're valued by contributing to company content and brainstorming sessions can act as a great team building exercise.

Start writing. Basically, the more you update your blog, the more it will appear in search engine results.

'Do what you do so well that they will want to see it again and bring their friends.' Walt Disney

Attracting followers and promoting your blog

Once you start writing your blog, you want to ensure someone is actually reading it. There are a number of ways you can engage followers.

Tell your customers

If you send out client newsletters, use them as a tool to mention your blog. Add the link to your email signature, company website and business card. If your business has a facebook page, LinkedIn or Twitter account, promote your blog entries here as you write them.

Increase Traffic

Use search engine optimisers (SEOs) to direct readers to your site. It's great to let your customers know about your blog, but what about all the other people who aren't aware your blog even exists? With strategic use of keywords, your blog will appear at the top of search engine lists and entries relevant to the reader's search criteria will appear.

Other ways to increase traffic

- Recruit guest bloggers
- Comment on similar blogs with relevance to your own
- Use RSS feed readers to notify blog subscribers of a new post
- Look at advertising your blog. Pay per click, AdWords and StumbleUpon are just a few of the web tools you can use to drive traffic to your site



Keep your fan base

Retaining readership is just as important as establishing it. In order to build trust with your readers, take the time to write your blog with their point of view in mind. Ask for their input and allow for comments. Gaining reader feedback encourages interaction and helps you to gauge what customers want and what they're interested in. Most blogs allow you to screen the comment and okay it before it's posted on the site to avoid rude or bullying behavior.

Keep an eye on the number of followers you have. If the number dwindles, rethink what you're writing about and look at going back to the drawing board.



Signs you may be experiencing burnout:

- You're withdrawn at team meetings
- You find it increasingly hard to get out of bed in the morning and are often late to work
- You often feel bored and distracted, often paying more attention to the clock than the task at hand
- You offer excuses instead of solutions
- You feel your performance has slipped
- You haven't had a good day at work for some time
- You find yourself regularly disagreeing with colleagues
- Work stress is filtering into your personal life
- You're experiencing health issues

Ideas for minimising the effects of burnout

1. **Establish a morning ritual.** Don't start the day late, groggy or hungry. Enjoy time in a favoured spot (living room, local café etc). Feed your brain, breathe and ease into the day.
2. **Exercise regularly.** It will increase blood flow to your brain, relieve stress and offer much needed time out from work.
3. **Expand your social horizon.** As they say, get a life! Don't be trapped by daily boredom. Bring back variety.
4. **Relinquish control.** Enjoy your time outside the office; your business can probably survive without you.
5. **A holiday is a break from work.** Turn on your Out of Office Assistant, record a detailed voicemail message, ignore your mobile, and if necessary, delegate responding duties.
6. **Get out and improve strategic brain flow!** Partake in regular strategic brainstorming outside of the office.
7. **Don't get hung up on what hasn't been done.** Focus on the current task and give it your undivided attention.
8. **Don't take on other people's issues.** It's great to support a colleague or employee in personal conflict but don't let someone else's baggage weigh you down.
9. **Learn to say no.** Too much on your plate? Surrender! Analyse what is consuming your time and delegate.
10. **Invest in your personal development.** Grow your skills, both relevant to and independent of your current role. You never know when a new role could emerge.

Recognising burnout - before you get burnt

Burnout is a contributing factor in the downfall of many SMEs. What once made you joyously jump out of bed can leave you hitting the snooze button on the alarm clock, post-work related nightmare.

There are many reasons for burning out:

- **Burning the candle at both ends.** Driven workaholics often find their ambition pushes them over the edge
- **You're tired and bored.** You've been a mouse on the same wheel for too long, and productivity is probably slipping along with your enthusiasm
- **You're under-stimulated.** Your current role offers few challenges and little recognition of your skills. You feel unmotivated, on a one-way trip to nowhere

Any bells ringing? Perhaps it's time to figure out why you're feeling this way in order to make effective choices and get your career on track. Your job accounts for roughly 40% of your waking life - generally it should be stimulating and enjoyable.



11. **Carefully manage your calendar.** Leave space for impromptu things and 'share' your schedule with others.
12. **Write a blog.** Direct some of that pent-up creativity and vision online - it might even help your business!
13. **Become a volunteer.** It might satisfy you to offer your skills to something outside of your own organisation.
14. **Get back to the drawing board.** Review your job description and key tasks, what could you do better, more creatively? Just imagine it's your first day on the job.

Burnout can take years to set in and finding the right solutions won't happen overnight either. Learn to recognise your triggers, and the reasons behind why you're feeling stressed by your working life. Then you can make direct choices to get back on track.



Minimising human capital risk when buying a business

Buying a business in NZ? Chances are you'll be buying a Small to Medium Enterprise - a business with between 3 and 50 employees and a turnover of \$250,000 to \$10,000,000.

One of the most substantial risks facing SMEs is the loss of key people. A profitable, solvent business can quickly begin sinking if key human assets jump ship. Minimise your human capital risk at the outset by undertaking and implementing prudent risk management processes.



Things to consider:

- 1. Shareholder purchase and sell agreements.** If you are buying a business with other investors make sure you seek legal advice on your shareholders agreements for the buy and sell of shares following major events such as death or serious incapacity.
- 2. Key person risk.** As a new owner, you may not be the 'key person' on day one. Establish who has the expertise or business knowledge that is vital to your business' success as a part of due diligence. Who does the business rely on? What is the current process for managing human capital risk?
- 3. Business debt.** Bank funding for the purchase of a business might require you to personally guarantee, offering your personal assets as security against a loan. You may also need to guarantee leases and supply agreements. Carefully consider what you are agreeing to.
- 4. Insurance factors.** Unfortunately, you can't buy insurance to protect against business failure from bad decisions or poor management but you can protect against serious events affecting key people that could cause the business to fail and you to default on your debt.

When purchasing a business, it pays to engage a human capital risk specialist and implement a robust key person analysis process. This will enable you to understand how and why a business is vulnerable and the potential financial risks of not acting in advance, while enabling you to minimise risks and make informed decisions going forward. Check out www.triplejump.co.nz - a reputable specialist risk management company.

Netiquette - Maintaining your inbox

- 1. Have trouble receiving emails from certain people?** Add their email address to your approved senders or address book so they get through your spam filter.
- 2. Clear your spam filter regularly!** 9 times out of 10 this is where that important email you were expecting ended up.
- 3. Regularly check your junk email.** Sometimes important emails will end up here so don't bin them by mistake.

FYI...

RSS is short for Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication. RSS feeds allow you to subscribe to news, blogs or websites without having to regularly check back to see if the content has been updated. Instead, when an update is made, a link is sent directly to your email address to notify you. It's a great way to stay informed on your favourite sites, without being bombarded with regular e-newsletters.



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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