

**MASTER ATTENTION IN
A NOISY DIGITAL MARKET**

**FASTER,
SMARTER,
LOUDER**

AARON AGIUS and **GIÁN CLANCEY**

ADVANCE PRAISE

“I’ve created four multimillion-dollar companies in my career by building my own personal brand, leveraging that to see growth in the companies I create, and then implementing many of these same strategies for my companies as well. This book shows you many of the steps I’ve personally taken in order to continue to grow my brand and many of the steps I still undertake to this day.”

—NEIL PATEL, CO-FOUNDER, NEILPATELDIGITAL.COM, QUICKSPROUT.COM,
CRAZYEGG.COM, KISSMETRICS.COM

“If you have the opportunity to work with Gián and Aaron, DO IT. They are the secret weapon for companies like Salesforce, Target, and Coca-Cola. Plus, they are just awesome people to hang out with.”

—CHARLIE HOEHN, AUTHOR OF *PLAY IT AWAY* AND HEAD OF VIDEO, SCRIBE
MEDIA

“Aaron and Gián take you on a journey that reveals their insights on how to grow your brand in a digital world. This comes from years of blood, sweat, and tears for their own business and helping many other entrepreneurs. They are not just teachers but also practitioners. This book is a holistic dive into the art and science of what is required to succeed at business in a global economy.”

—JEFF BULLAS, CEO, JEFFBULLAS.COM

“Digital marketing experts Aaron and Gián have a superb level of knowledge about effective strategies that involve new social media web technologies. Their visualization and creativity alone are phenomenal, but they add a seasoned layer of strategy, business, and experience that make them a cut above the rest. Their ability to mix such a high level of creativity with an expert level of strategic thinking in the marketing world, let alone

the social media marketing world, is evident in the ongoing success of their business, Louder.Online.”

—NICOLE GULLIVER, DIRECTOR, RELIABLE RESOURCING PTY LTD.

“I have had the pleasure of both knowing and working with Gián and Aaron for the past five years. They are both subject matter experts and thought leaders in the field of digital marketing.

“Their creativity and attention to detail is second to none, and they show the same level of professionalism and enthusiasm no matter what the task at hand. They have surrounded themselves with a dedicated team of like-minded professionals providing market-leading strategies and solutions with exceptional ROIs on all things digital.

“From startups to high-profile, established brands, their company, Louder.Online, always delivers strategies and solutions that closely match the needs and expectations of even the most ardent of clients.

“In an industry that is fast becoming overpopulated with service providers, Gián and Aaron are always at the forefront of research and development, embracing new technology and their resultant strategies, and they continue to be one of the industry’s shining lights.”

—PAUL MCKINNON, MBA, CPA, VIRTUAL CFO

“In 2012 at Mindshare, a WPP agency, I was first exposed to Aaron and Gián’s thinking: data-led, channel agnostic, and content-centric. Things were never the same again. I thought about marketing differently. Search was sexy, exciting, and vital for clients. Then results came flooding in. Not only should you read this book, but you should also draw all over it, give it to a client, and refer to it before you answer any business challenge.”

—PHIL OHREN, CEO, INTENDER DIGITAL

“These days, digital marketing is no longer optional. It is necessary. Starting with the basics and packed with step-by-step instructions, as well as real examples, this book takes the uninitiated into the world of digital marketing in ways only someone who started from scratch and worked their way to success can. Definitely a must-read for entrepreneurs who want to grow their businesses online.”

—VALERIE GO, OPERATIONS MANAGER, LOUDER.ONLINE

“As a content creator in the digital marketing space, I’ve had the privilege of working with marketers of all colors and stripes. It’s immediately obvious to me when a marketer really gets it and when they’re just parroting what they’ve learned from following others. Aaron and Gián are two of the rare marketers out there who don’t just follow digital marketing best practices. They intuitively understand the theory behind them, as well as how to put it into practice. They truly walk the walk, as the results they’ve been able to achieve for their clients at Louder.Online prove. For them to put their principles and practices into writing is a gift to the marketing community. Don’t miss it.”

—SARAH RICKERD, OWNER, ARBOR MEDIA GROUP

“For me, navigating the world of SEO in order to rank my websites on Google is a bit like wandering around in a dark room with a blindfold, with someone continuously putting new obstacles in my way. Aaron and Gián at Louder.Online were more than a beacon in the dark. They proved to be the sunshine that allowed me to claw my way out, start getting some good results on Google, and drive traffic and sales to my sites.”

—GARY JOHANNSON, ART DIRECTOR, BLUEHORIZONPRINTS.COM.AU

“Aaron and Gián are two of the most driven, creative, and inspirational people I have had the pleasure of knowing both on a business and personal level. The fact that they have joined up to share their wealth of knowledge on marketing should make anyone with an interest in this field go out and buy their book.”

—AMY SUTTON, DIRECTOR OF SALES AND MARKETING, SAMUJANA.COM

“Aaron and Gián are the most professional people I have had the pleasure to work with. Their experience and knowledge in content marketing and branding are well proven, and their client management skills are refreshing. I was not surprised to see that they are now guest speakers at high-profile events around the globe.”

—ALEX STARKEY, CEO, HYDROPEAT

“Aaron and Gián are my go-to resource in a sea of noise—on all things digital marketing. If you’re a founder or entrepreneur trying to grow your business, listen to them!”

—DENNIS YU, CO-FOUNDER AND CEO, [BLITZMETRICS.COM](https://blitzmetrics.com)

“When it comes to content marketing, I think about Louder.Online. It’s no surprise that I found more than a few gems in their book. It’s a must-read.”

—JOSH FECHTER, CO-FOUNDER, BAMF MEDIA, [SQUIBLER.COM](https://squibler.com)

“When it comes to marketing, you want to follow practitioners, not just spokespeople. Aaron and Gián understand branding from building their own personal brands firsthand—not to mention the amazing firsthand experience they’ve had building up the brands of their clients. They’ve learned through doing, which is always the best teacher.”

—LOGAN YOUNG, CO-FOUNDER AND HEAD OF TRAINING, [BLITZMETRICS.COM](https://blitzmetrics.com)

“I can’t speak highly enough of Aaron and Gián, the founders of Louder.Online. I’ve known them as individuals for years, and they have done an incredible job growing Louder.Online from a small, humble agency to the global agency that it is today. Not only are they incredible marketers in SEO and content marketing, but they are also great people who serve their clients, connections, and friends well—and I believe this has contributed to their amazing success as a business. If you want to build a brand and a global business, these guys know what they’re talking about!”

—DAN SIEPEN, CO-FOUNDER, GROWTH HACKERS AUSTRALIA

“In a digital world with so many self-proclaimed ‘experts,’ it’s refreshing to read a book from two people who have been there and done it themselves.

“I was skeptical that this would be another run-of-the-mill marketing book with high-level takeaways. But instead of lip service, Gián and Aaron have packed it full of real and actionable stories of success. A must-read.”

—WILL BLUNT, FOUNDER, BLOGGERSIDEKICK.COM

“Aaron, Gián, and the team at Louder.Online are leaders in their field. Their thinking and the approach in this book align with much of what I’ve done in my career to get where I am today. An absolute must-read!”

—SUJAN PATEL, CO-FOUNDER, WEBPROFITS.AGENCY, MAILSHAKE.COM

“But according to one of the world’s top digital marketers, Aaron Agius, co-founder of the global digital agency Louder.Online, these three skillsets are now morphing together, forcing agencies to scramble to upskill and offer a better service to their clients.”

—FORBES



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This book is dedicated to Charlie and Harry, who constantly inspire us with their dedication and enthusiasm toward living life to the fullest.

You are and will always be the biggest part of our why.

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If you want something you've never had, you must be willing to do something you've never done.

—THOMAS JEFFERSON

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to humbly blame the following people for continually supporting us and the crazy ideas that have allowed us to build our dream company, challenge ourselves daily, and become better humans.

It's your fault for believing we could be better humans, partners, parents, and business owners who continually strive to push the boundaries of how we live our lives, conduct ourselves in business, learn from our mistakes, and share our knowledge openly.

You have given us your time, understanding, love, and support in building our knowledge and experience and opening up our minds and doors to opportunities we are grateful for.

First and foremost, we would like to acknowledge the people who taught us we could be anything we wanted to be: our parents.

To Barry and Lorraine Clancey and Paula and Phillip Sanders-Agius. We cannot be sure you truly knew what you were enabling or the challenges that would come from raising children who believed in themselves, but this is by far the most profound gift we both are so grateful for in our lives. Thank you.

To Dominique, Andrew, Yvette, Brendan, Nicholas, Amy, Dimity, Luke, Micah, Gab, Carly, Alex, and Joel, thank you. To all the little people you've created who bring so much joy to our lives and inspire us, thanks for making them too.

From the very start, we have had some amazing human beings put their faith in us and help us build Louder.Online. To Peter and Maria Fiori, thank you for your support.

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To all the people who have taken time to debate ideas, helped us network, invested time and faith in our brand, bought us a drink on challenging days, or brightened our days with their humor and positive outlooks on life.

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To our book team, Kevin Murphy, Chas Hoppe, and the best publisher ever, Kate Rallis. Thank you for making this process so easy for us. It has been an absolute pleasure working with you all, and we are grateful for your expertise and countless out-of-business-hours meetings. It has been such an enjoyable experience because of you, and the injection of humor was very much appreciated. Chas, we owe you a few drinks and a large loaf of bread!

To the heart and soul of Louder.Online, our team. It's been our honor to invest and work alongside equally determined, innovative people like yourselves who truly embody the spirit of our brand. To each and every one of you, we are eternally grateful for your investment in us both and the work you do for Louder.Online.

To the best leadership team on the planet. Louder.Online is the company it is today because of you. To Phil Ohren, Paul McKinnon, Micah Riddell, Valerie Go, and Sarah Rickerd, thank you for your leadership and loyalty. We are what we are because of your dedication and leadership.

To the little people with the biggest impact, our children, Charlie and Harry. You are the gentle reminder daily of what is most important in life. You are

the inspiration that constantly feeds our souls to push ourselves to be bigger and better each day. You are by far the greatest achievement and measure of success in our lives, and we are both so deeply proud of the people you are and all that you teach us.

To Aaron (from Gián): Last, I wanted to finish with my greatest gratitude of all, to my coauthor, partner in crime, and all-around best guy, Aaron Agius.

Words cannot describe the gratitude I have for being permitted to learn from you and be inspired daily by you.

It is an honor and privilege to walk this journey with you, continually create and push boundaries, and forge our own path in life. To our many adventures, thank you. To working endlessly the way you do, thank you. To encouraging and supporting me, thank you. For embracing and accepting me for the crazy, ambitious human that I am, thank you, thank you, thank you. My world is infinitely better because of you.

To Gián (from Aaron): Ditto.

Finally, to all the people who have laughed at our crazy ideas to build something from nothing and to all those who doubted us along the way. Thank you. Because of you, we found another way forward, and we were reminded that the only people who need to believe in a dream are those who will keep finding ways to make it happen. We did it our way, and it has made all the difference.

“A book is but a construction of words on paper without a reader.”

To all the people who purchased and read this book, thank you. You have made an investment in our story, experience, and learnings that we hope will inspire, teach, and enable you to grow and scale a brand that you are truly proud of.

We all start somewhere, and here is a great place to start.

FOREWORD

BY NEIL PATEL

A few years ago, I was in Malaysia for work when Aaron and Gián happened to be in the area too. As we've done regularly, we agreed to meet up for drinks and found ourselves in the most unique of places: the Heli Lounge Bar.

Something like this place can only exist in a country like Malaysia, where there are far fewer rules governing private enterprise.

By day, the Heli Lounge Bar is exactly what its name suggests: an active helipad on top of a high-rise in the city. By night, it's converted into a makeshift bar, with tables, chairs, and everything.

Not to sound overly dramatic, but when you visit the Heli Lounge Bar, your safety is in your own hands. There are no guardrails, fences, or other measures in place to protect you.

The only thing keeping you from going over the edge of the building is your own self-control and awareness of your own boundaries and safety. Obviously a great place to be throwing back a few vodkas!

It's an experience unlike any other—equal parts exhilarating and frightening.

As exhilarating as it was up there, Aaron and Gián seemed to be at ease in these surroundings.

Here we were, having drinks atop the dangerous, unregulated rooftop of a skyscraper, and yet they carried on like they did this sort of thing all the time.

This didn't surprise me, given the industry in which we all worked. Like that helipad, digital marketing is wide open with few barriers to entry. The

opportunity is there for anyone to seize, but only those aware of the risks are able to thrive.

No one is there to set up guardrails for you, so if you don't do it for yourself, the dangers may prove far too great.

What makes Aaron and Gián stand out is the way they actively create their own boundaries and thrive within them. With every choice they make, it is clear they are genuine about their intentions and impact in the world—which has made all the difference as they built their company, Louder.Online, into a leading voice in the marketing world, with a strong technical game, a commitment to helping people, and content, content, content.

Separately in Gián, I saw that she also brought something entirely different to the table. While most marketers are laser-focused only on the how, Gián's expertise is in the why.

Marketers can A/B test landing pages, generate backlinks, and fine-tune their Google Ads game all they want. And while those things are absolutely important, equally important is the human touch—demonstrating credibility, growing your community, and, above all else, delighting your audience.

This book will teach you everything you need to know to make your brand stand out in a noisy digital market. Masterfully blending cutting-edge tactics with proven, time-tested marketing strategies, this book has something for everybody—whether you're a bootstrapped solopreneur or the CMO of a Fortune 500 company.

But make no mistake: this isn't some book you read over a weekend, then take a few days to set up a digital brand, and call it a day.

Thousands of brands enter the digital arena each year. Some of them make it, but most of them fail. Why? Because they were all splash and no substance, heavy on dreams but low on strategy.

In *Faster, Louder, Smarter*, Aaron and Gián will certainly encourage you to dream big, but they know all too well that to reach your dreams, you have to do things right.

I know the high-impact steps outlined in this book work because I've used them—and continue to use them—to grow my own businesses over the past fifteen years.

The question for you, then, is not whether this book will help you grow your brand, land high-value clients, and become a thought leader in your industry.

The question, instead, is whether you're ready to take the steps necessary to thrive in an arena fraught with risk.

—NEIL

Neil Patel is a New York Times best-selling author. The Wall Street Journal calls him a top influencer on the web, Forbes says he is one of the top ten marketers, and Entrepreneur magazine says he created one of the hundred most brilliant companies. Neil was recognized as a top one hundred entrepreneur under the age of thirty by President Barack Obama and a top one hundred entrepreneur under the age of thirty-five by the United Nations.

FOREWORD

BY TUCKER MAX

The first time I met Aaron, I almost threw him out of my house. He committed the cardinal sin for dinner guests at my house. He showed up with really cheap wine.

Not quite what you'd buy at 7-Eleven, but still, it was grocery store wine. Not even the fancy grocery store wine. There are always a few at the grocery store that are eighty dollars or one hundred dollars. They are not good, but at least they show you're trying. No, Aaron brought two bottles of wine that he'd probably spent no more than twenty dollars apiece on.

The only reasons I didn't throw him out were that (1) I guessed that he had no idea what good wine was (most people don't) and (2) I'm not actually going to throw an adult out of my house for bringing bad wine. But I did think about it.

Then I took the wine that I had opened a few hours earlier from my cellar (yes, I'm one of those types of wine snobs). A 2002 Hundred Acre (Kayli Morgan vineyard). This is very, very good wine.

Aaron was not even all the way through the glass when he looked at me and said, "Oh man, this is amazing. I feel really stupid. I brought bad wine, didn't I?"

That's the thing about Aaron: he makes mistakes, but the dude learns real fast.

He learns so fast that a month later, a bottle of Penfolds Grange—the best wine made in Australia—showed up at my door.

So what does this have to do with this book?

The fact is, Aaron is an incredibly fast learner, misses nothing, and if you feel behind in content marketing, you rely on him and Gián to catch you up—fast.

The fact is, very few people know how content marketing really works but can also explain it in a way that makes sense to people who don't get it. Not only that, even fewer can tell you exactly what to do, and when, and how, and why. This book solves that exact problem. Aaron and Gián give you a concrete, actionable plan for digital marketing using a combination of proven best practices and social psychology (how it works, why it works, etc.).

At their agency, Louder.Online, Aaron and Gián have done so many amazing things in marketing, it's hard to list them all. My favorite is the simple fact that most of the baller marketing people I know actually call Aaron for advice.

When you are the go-to person for the people who are famous for knowing marketing, then you're getting it done.

Be careful reading this book. It can be deceptively simple.

The core theme of the book is easy to understand: great marketing adds value. Rather than being a brand who's out there to game the system, produce shallow engagement, or make a quick splash, Aaron and Gián are advocating a long-term approach to building a digital brand. They're going to tell you to generate credibility by creating valuable content, foster deep connections with stakeholders, and share content that actually helps and informs your target audience.

And they are right. Their approach isn't based on gimmicks but on proven, actionable strategies that work just as well for fledgling startups as they do for multinational corporations.

Your goal should be to make the audience feel engaged, wanted, and valued so they become brand ambassadors (in a word, delighted). This should occur at every part of the sales funnel, even for (1) those audience members

who don't need your product or service but who are fans of your brand, and (2) customers who have already made a purchase.

Most of the specific strategies they outline in this book you have probably heard of but aren't doing yet: build a robust email list, produce compelling content, create an effective landing page, and run targeted campaigns on Facebook and Google.

And they're going to show you how these work with plenty of real-world examples of successful marketing strategies, from thought leaders like Neil Patel and Gary Vaynerchuk to brands like American Express and Tiffany's.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that simple to understand is easy to execute, though. It's not. What they recommend that you do requires what will be a complete shift in mindset for most companies.

But that's fine. You can learn as fast as Aaron does, because you have his book as your guide.

—TUCKER

Tucker Max is the co-founder of Scribe Media. He's written four New York Times Best Sellers (three hit #1), which have sold over 4.5 million copies worldwide. He's credited with being the originator of the literary genre "fratire," and is only the third writer (after Malcolm Gladwell and Michael Lewis) to ever have three books on the New York Times Nonfiction Best Seller List at one time. He was nominated to the Time Magazine 100 Most Influential List in 2009. He received his BA from the University of Chicago in 1998, and his JD from Duke Law School in 2001. He currently lives in Austin, Texas, with his wife Veronica and three children.

INTRODUCTION

Who knew making forty cents could feel so good?

It was 2008. The global financial crisis was in full swing. We were living in Thailand on extended vacation, relishing in our adventure on a small island off the coast. Never wanting this experience to end, we decided to take our lives in a bold new direction, earning enough money online to allow us to live how we wanted and where we wanted.

We didn't have much experience in online business together, but since we were naturally curious people and eager to try new things, we decided to give it a go. Plus, with Aaron's IT and technical background and Gián's marketing savvy and passion for the behavioral sciences, we figured we had a dynamic foundation on which to build a business.

Bolstering this foundation was our vision not for *what* we would do, but for *how* we would do it. By building a mobile, decentralized company for ourselves, we could eventually grow our company and recruit employees who wanted to live the same way. Whatever we could do for ourselves, we could also do for others.

All of this sounded great. The question was, how would we get started?

A STALL, THEN A BREAKTHROUGH

Flash forward four months. We were out of money and living back home in Sydney, Australia, glued to our computers every minute of the day trying to work everything out. Occasionally, Gián would take on some contract work to pull in a little income, but that money would always go right back into online courses so we could learn the many ins and outs of our craft.

Finally, with hardly a penny to our names, we decided the only path forward was to focus on building our business around search engine optimization (SEO), at first focusing on affiliate marketing as a means to an end. In a nutshell, affiliate marketing is the practice of driving traffic to a client's website—in our case, sites in the hotel and accommodation business. Using a well-researched set of keywords and phrases designed to

rank us at the top of travel-related web searches, we found existing sites where we could contribute content, create links, and drive referral traffic back to our client. For every click on one of our links, we would earn a commission.

Why SEO-based affiliate marketing? First off, it was free, and we couldn't afford paid advertising. Second, we saw it as a learning opportunity to become experts in SEO from the ground up. As a bonus, we enjoyed the competitive nature of it.

Slowly, we started piecing everything together. And one morning, we woke up to find our first payday: forty wonderful, beautiful cents.

It was a far cry from the million-dollar affiliate marketing success stories we'd heard about, but it was a revelation. It proved what we had suspected about making money on the internet, which relied heavily on automation and scalability. We were ecstatic.

The next day, those forty cents became \$400. The day after, it grew even more. By the end of the week, we had seen staggering exponential growth, our first lesson in scalability.

From there, the business that would one day be known as LouderOnline took off. Over the next year, we became so effective in our SEO game that our success couldn't be ignored, with brands from across the globe reaching out to us to learn our secrets. As our fledgling consultancy began to grow, our dream of traveling the world and working on our own time became a reality.

Today, our agency focuses on helping global brands reach their full potential online, consulting on how to optimize their web presence and generate leads and sales through things like SEO, content marketing, Google Ads, paid social ads, and managing online reputations. The better we get at what we do, the more we find ways to grow both horizontally and vertically. And as our brand continues to grow, so do the brands of the companies we work with.

In the end, that's what it's all about for us—succeeding so that we can help others succeed, delighting in helping others take control of their lives and careers. What more could we ask for?

FINDING YOUR OWN PATH

It wasn't easy to find people like us over a decade ago. Back then, the corporate world still hadn't fully embraced the concept of a telecommuting workforce distributed across the globe making money as internet marketers. Even our own families thought we were crazy, insisting that we were better off getting real jobs and riding out the global financial crisis.

We knew what we wanted, though, and we were ready to fight for it. The story of that fight—how we took those first steps, the people who supported us, and our dedication to always build and learn from past successes and failures—is why we decided to write this book.

FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION

If you're reading this, you're probably fighting for your vision at this very moment.

Like us, you've probably spent countless hours in coffee shops trying dozens of different strategies to get noticed, make an impact, and grow your brand.

Maybe it's not working. Maybe you feel like you're spinning your wheels—and maybe you are. It's not a good feeling. Trust us, we've been there.

But if you're like us, you're all in. You *will* make your business work, even after everyone around you has lost faith.

If you have this kind of conviction, whether you're setting off on your own or looking to improve the inbound marketing efforts at your company, you're already on the right path. No matter how uncertain things became in those early days, we never doubted ourselves—not when we spent our last \$120 on an online course, not when our families begged us to get real jobs, and certainly not when we couldn't afford more than a loaf of bread to eat.

THE OVERWHELMING NATURE OF IT ALL

No doubt about it, it's tough to get a business going and get noticed. A lot of it comes down to that old catch-22: you can't get noticed until you have some work and experience behind you, but you can't get any work and experience if no one knows who you are.

Such is the nature of the attention economy, and it can all be a little overwhelming. When you're on the outside looking in, you see all these successful entrepreneurs who make everything look so easy. You want to capture some of that lightning and bottle it for yourself, but everyone is selling a different set of tactics to get there. In such an environment, how do you know what path to choose so that you can start monetizing your skills?

It's a fair question, and one we didn't know the answer to right away. While we learned that you can still get pretty far if you put your head down and dive in, it sure would have been nice to have a mentor to help us overcome some of those initial stumbling blocks.

Today, we have the honor and privilege of being able to mentor others so they don't have to be as directionless and overwhelmed as we were.

OUR FIRST EMPLOYEES

We may not have had a mentor to guide us through those early days, but we weren't completely alone either. Aside from each other, we always had our families. Sure, they thought we were crazy, but they were also the first people to roll up their sleeves and lend a hand. Without them, we couldn't have built our business nearly as quickly as we did.

There's a lot that goes into building and scaling a business, too much for us to do ourselves. A lot of this work was rote and tedious, but during the global financial crisis, once they saw that our business was taking off, many of our younger siblings and friends were happy for the extra cash. Every time they completed a specific process, we paid them a generous fixed rate. Soon, they were competing to see who could outearn the others by completing a hundred processes in an hour. It was grunt work, but they were happy to help out.

Watching this turnaround made us realize how far we'd come in such a short time. These same family members now working for us had literally

cried with laughter after we told them about our newfound fortune of forty cents. Now they had bought into our vision completely.

They may not have seen what we saw in those forty cents, but we remain eternally grateful for their hard work in the early days. Without it, LouderOnline would not be what it is today.

FIND SOMEONE YOU CAN TRUST

A good support system helps you move your business forward in so many ways. We had a common vision and faith that our little venture was going to work, and this was invaluable as we weathered the emotional strain of starting our own business.

Our first piece of advice to you, then, is to find someone to back you. It doesn't matter who it is—a close friend, your spouse, an enthusiastic neighbor, you name it. It doesn't even matter if your support group actually believes in you.

Eventually, once you've established your brand, you'll have a whole network of peers who will be more than willing to chime in with their support. But until then, you need someone who will crack open a beer with you on a crappy day, let you vent, and remind you that you've got this.

GROW THAT GOOD FEELING

The great thing about a good support system is that you want to pay that goodwill forward to others. Even before we made our first forty cents, we had a vision of empowered, independent employees, people who could work on their own time from anywhere in the world.

When you give your workers control of their environment, it empowers them to give more to you. The people who work for us are all entrepreneurs in their own right. They aren't robots mindlessly completing tasks. They're as passionate about their industry as they are about how they want to live. They're invested in what they do, and the quality of work and dedication we receive from them reflects that.

These days, a distributed team isn't as novel as it was in 2008. Companies of all sizes have embraced this approach to fantastic results. It was all a bit

of trial and error when we first tried it, but it worked wonderfully, and we've never looked back.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Okay, enough about us and what drove us through the early days. Let's talk about how this book is going to help you stop feeling overwhelmed and start seeing results.

STRIKING A BALANCE

A powerful brand is one part technical savvy and one part social smarts. We teamed up on this book to bring you both sides of the equation—Aaron with his technical and practical know-how and Gián with her marketing experience and passion for the behavioral and social sciences. The result is a book that balances process with humanity, proven marketing strategies with a heartbeat. After all, it doesn't matter what you do if you can't relate to the mindset of your prospective customers.

Always remember that the end user looking at your website and other marketing materials is a human being. And the thing about us humans is that we're creatures of habit. For all the marketing data and best practices, it's still remarkable how much learning takes place just by watching people offline.

Strategy is great, but as marketers, sometimes we let data and processes bog us down. Pay attention to the people on the other end of your operation. Ask them questions. Learn how you can make their lives easier. When you do, the process and strategies often take care of themselves.

In the following six chapters, we're going to teach you how to create a powerful brand, how to attract and then grow your audience into an engaged community, and finally how to convert that community into paying customers.

Here's how we set up this book to get you there.

THE CONTENT

The six chapters in this book are meant to take you through the customer or client journey, from obtaining a following to converting sales and

maintaining clients. This basic flow will help you build a successful online business.

- Chapter 1: Build a Better Brand. This chapter is about building credibility and validation—the cornerstones of any successful brand.
- Chapter 2: The Numbers Game. With your strong brand in place, this chapter shows you how to increase traffic to your online platforms through a variety of proven best practices.
- Chapter 3: Rules of Engagement. Now that you've learned how to boost your traffic, this chapter shows you how to improve engagement by nurturing your audience.
- Chapter 4: Inclusion for Everyone. An engaged audience produces a passionate community. This chapter shows you how to leverage that community by growing advocacy.
- Chapter 5: Total Conversion of the Mind. Here, you'll learn how to train your following to start buying from you.
- Chapter 6: We Think You're Delightful. Now that you've nurtured your audience and unlocked your sales, this chapter teaches you how to keep your clients and customers after the initial sale.

As you read through, remember that no one expects you to do everything at once. In fact, we don't recommend it. We could have written an entire book for every subtopic in every one of these chapters. There's a lot to learn and digest, and you'll get more value out of the experience if you slow down and take things one step at a time.

Also keep in mind that you don't have to copy our process exactly as we've laid it out in this book. This approach has worked well for us for over a decade, helping us grow from a two-person operation run out of apartments and coffee shops to a globally recognized agency that works with some of the world's biggest brands. The approach we've laid out here is designed to help your company find balance. Sure, you can set up a sales funnel (see chapter 2) using paid traffic to generate huge amounts of revenue if you don't care about your brand. You can also go the opposite route and focus too much on your brand and not enough on bringing in revenue. We wrote this book to offer you a shortcut to finding that happy middle ground.

GOOD IDEAS BUILD ON EACH OTHER

We set up these chapters in a specific order so you can maximize the effectiveness of each step. For example, it's probably not a very good idea to try to drive traffic to an owned web asset (chapter 2) if you still haven't established your brand (chapter 1). You can if you're only interested in short-term gains, but we're here to train you to become more process-minded so you can stick it out for the long haul.

To focus your reading, each chapter follows the same basic template: the what, the why, and the how. In other words, first, we'll introduce a concept, then we'll use concepts from social science and real-world examples to demonstrate why this concept is important, and then we'll show you how to do it on your own. We expect that you won't apply every single strategy exactly as we did, and that's fine. As long as you understand the concepts you *do* apply and where they fit in the big picture, you'll still get plenty of value.

While this book has a lot of big concepts, we tried to keep the industry jargon and lingo to a minimum. Anyone looking at growing their business should be able to pick up this book and use it. Some jargon is unavoidable, though, so we'll be sure to explain what we mean whenever industry-specific terms pop up.

Also keep in mind that we will be returning to certain topics throughout the different chapters in this book. For example, we have sections on guest blogging in both of our first two chapters (and several other mentions of it throughout the book). This isn't because we're fond of repeating ourselves, but rather, because a tool like guest blogging has applications on multiple fronts, such as building credibility (chapter 1) and generating traffic (chapter 2). So if you see us bringing up certain concepts more than once, just know that (1) that concept is probably important and (2) our discussion of that concept will vary based on the larger goals of that chapter.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

This book will help you create a digital brand that attracts and engages a loyal traffic base with repeatable traits. By the end of this book, you will have a better understanding of the online behaviors that drive customers to interact and engage with your brand. Once these behaviors are understood

and accepted, you will understand which marketing tactics and results you should apply.

Each chapter will follow this approach. For instance, in the first chapter, we'll be talking all about branding. First, you'll learn what makes a better brand, and then you'll learn what it can achieve—specifically, how to attract better, more lucrative clients and contracts with a dramatically reduced lead time.

Once you understand that, you'll learn which branding actions can help you create that impact. And through this, you'll come to understand that high-profile appearances on the TEDx stage or in *Forbes* aren't about vanity, but rather a helpful step in growing a strong brand and scaling your business.

We know these strategies work because we've lived them. We are thought leaders in our field, publishing dozens of articles and delivering keynote speeches around the world. We employ an award-winning team, and we work with some of the biggest and best brands around.

There's an old legend that Henry Ford once took issue with paying a \$10,000 bill to General Electric for their help in troubleshooting a problem with a generator. To Ford, it appeared that all the engineer, Charles Steinmetz, had done was climb a ladder, mark a line on the generator with chalk, and instruct some workers to replace a few parts. So Ford asked for an itemized bill. Steinmetz complied, returning a bill that read, "Making chalk mark on generator, \$1. Knowing where to make the mark, \$9,999." Upon reading this, Ford promptly paid the bill.

The point is, there is tremendous value in knowing how to do things the right way. We've spent over a decade building the processes and strategies presented in this book. These processes have helped us go from making forty cents to building a multimillion-dollar digital agency, and from getting by on humble loaves of bread to sampling our favorite dishes in our favorite locales around the world.

More important than our success, however, is that we've had a lot of fun along the way. Thanks to a lot of grit, determination, and commitment to our process, today we get to travel and work where we want, when we

want. Sure, there are more logistics now that our business has both employees and clients distributed around the globe, but as we'll share in this book, logistics are easy once you have a good system.

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

One of our favorite sayings is “If you want something you’ve never had, you must be willing to do something you’ve never done” (Thomas Jefferson).

Whether you’re already an established corporate brand or looking to transition from a corporate job to your own business, whether you’re going at it full-time or building a digital brand on the side with a friend, we know you bought this book because you want something different. You too want to do something you’ve never done. We can’t wait to help you get started.

AUTHENTICITY: IT’S YOUR CHOICE

Before we dive into the book, a warning. For every marketing strategy we share, there’s a way to exploit it—probably more than one, actually.

We’re not going to spend our time with you moralizing. It’s your choice how you behave in the marketplace. If you want to make a quick buck by pulling a fast one on your customers, we may think you’re making a mistake, but we can’t stop you.

However, we can say this: if you want to stick around for the long haul—which, if you’re reading this book, we’re sure you do—then you have to be authentic and credible in everything you do. In our experience, authenticity is the only way to sustain and grow a business.

GET READY

In the following chapters, we’re going to give you everything you need to kick your business into overdrive and thrive in the digital marketplace. But remember, the payoff is up to you. The results you get will be proportionate to how much you put in.

As you set out on your journey, don’t forget that it’s okay to start off small. Just look at us. We scraped by for months just to earn our first forty-cent payday. It was the only way to become the brand we are today.

If we could do it, so can you.

CHAPTER 1

BUILD A BETTER BRAND

WHAT IT IS

Leveraging paid, owned, and earned media channels to create credibility factors for your brand.

WHY IT WORKS

Credibility factors create social validation. Examples from Neil Patel, Ramit Sethi, Gary Vaynerchuk, and Louder.Online demonstrate the ways in which social validation benefited their brands.

HOW IT WORKS

it's all about credibility • the three different kinds of media • the benefits of social validation • branding begins on day one • creating your own content • guest posting • editorial contributions • video • creating a good email signature • speaking gigs • books and podcasts

Let's say you've opened a new bakery. You've recently finished setting up shop, and you couldn't be happier with the fruits of all your hard work. You've got your name and your logo, the interior is masterfully decorated, your vendors and pricing system are set, your staff is in place, and you've got a line of dough recipes that is sure to win your customers over.

Speaking of customers, do they know about your new business yet? If not, how are you planning on getting the word out? Are you going to turn on the

“open” sign and hope for some foot traffic, or are you going to go out there and start marketing your brand like there’s no tomorrow?

Whether you’re running a bakery or a digital business, these are the questions you should be asking yourself. Your first job is to grow leads and sales by building a credible brand. After all, not only is having a strong brand the best way to *get* customers, it’s also the best way to *keep* them.

In this chapter, we’re going to show you the ins and outs of building a better brand from the ground up. As you’ll see, there are plenty of ways to approach this—and plenty of ways to succeed on a small budget. But first, let’s talk about the keystone of any successful brand: credibility.

IT’S ALL ABOUT CREDIBILITY

Pretend you’re observing two different talk shows running in two different studios, side by side. Both are discussing the same subject, and both have guest speakers who use near-identical talking points. The difference is that in Studio A, the speaker is introduced as Joe Blogs, while in Studio B, the speaker is introduced as *Doctor* Joe Blogs.

Once the two speakers are done talking, who do you think audiences are more inclined to believe?

TITLES MATTER

Not just anyone can run around calling themselves a doctor. It’s a licensed profession with standardized training, and most of us accept this. Therefore, when someone is introduced as a doctor, we’re more inclined to hear what that person has to say on topics related to their field.

That’s how social validation works, and that’s why most people are more comfortable choosing Doctor Joe over average Joe. All other information being equal, we look for secondary indicators to decide whether someone or something is credible. Usually we’re not aware we’re doing it, but it’s a necessary mental trick we all use in the process of forming opinions and making decisions.

THOUSANDS AND THOUSANDS OF MICROJUDGMENTS

The process of social validation and credibility works the same for brands as it does for doctors. The second a prospective customer is exposed to your brand, whether they're walking by the storefront of your bakery, checking out your business card, or clicking on your website, they're using every available indicator to decide whether your company is worth their time.

Sure, every now and then our brains make connections that they shouldn't, but most of the time, this process works. And it's a good thing too, since our ability to make these microjudgments saves us hours of time each day.

We've certainly noticed the social validation process at work at Louder.Online. As soon as we began to establish some credibility in the marketing community, our brand started gaining traction. Before, visitors would depart our website as quickly as they had arrived. But once our name began to mean something, they started inquiring into our business, presenting themselves as leads rather than bouncing away from the site.

CREDIBILITY CAN BE EXPLOITED

Building credibility may be the bedrock of building your brand, but make no mistake, credibility can be exploited. Sadly, it happens all the time.

For instance, remember garcinia cambogia, the miracle supplement that was supposed to change dieting forever? When this wonder pill hit the scene, affiliate marketers were eager to boost their conversion rates and move more product.

So what did they do? They found a doctor who was willing to go along with their scheme and provide a few quotes touting the alleged benefits of garcinia cambogia, and they plastered this information all over their landing pages. Sure enough, it worked. Skeptical visitors put their faith in this unscrupulous doctor, and conversion rates skyrocketed.

Little schemes like this might work in the short term, but your audience will eventually wise up. Just remember, no one likes to be tricked. Preying on prospective customers' assumptions may earn a short-term profit, but it's the opposite of what credibility is all about.

THE THREE DIFFERENT KINDS OF MEDIA

The story of our doctor is an example of earned media. It shows how credibility can be leveraged in order to build a trusted brand based on social validation.

In inbound marketing—a process of creating valuable content and distributing it to audiences around the web in order to attract visitors to your own website and organically grow a community of people interested in your brand—earned media is a valuable tool in a marketer’s toolkit, but it’s not the only tool. Marketers rely on a combination of three types of media—paid, owned, and earned—in order to build awareness of their brand, product, and service.

PAID MEDIA

Anyone can buy their way into a paid media space. Instead of credibility, the currency of paid media is, well, currency. You’re probably familiar with certain types of paid media such as TV ads and billboards, but paid media can also include digital elements like Google Ads and Facebook ads.

Paid media may not carry the kind of authority or impartiality that earned media might, and it can be expensive. On the plus side, however, it gets your brand in front of your prospects’ eyes and can be very useful when trying to reach a specific target audience.

OWNED MEDIA

Any content you create for an asset you own, such as a blog post on your website, is an example of owned media. The immediate benefit of owned media is that you set the rules. You get to be seen the way you want to be seen—ideally in a way that rewards audience expectations.

The challenge with owned media is that it’s up to you to find and create your audience. Whereas with paid media, you show up and appeal directly to a large audience of prospective customers, with owned media, your audience has to come to you. For instance, if you’ve just created a website from scratch, you could have some great content, but no one’s going to see it unless you find a way to drive traffic to your site.

EARNED MEDIA

As we've discussed a little bit already, earned media comes in many forms, but at its foundation is credibility. If you have built a reputation as a thought leader in your industry—most likely through a combination of paid and owned media—then the earned media won't be far behind.

Perhaps it's an interview for TV, radio, or a podcast. Perhaps it's a feature in a blog or magazine. Whatever the case, now that you've earned your way there, you have an engaged audience eager to hear your message. Even better, each appearance on an earned media channel brings more credibility for your brand and your message, and it provides an opportunity to leverage a new audience.

TAKING A BALANCED APPROACH

Like all good things in life, you need balance in your branding strategy. Each media type has its strengths and weaknesses, but the right blend can deliver some fantastic results.

To understand why, it's important first to understand the online behavior of your users. It would be nice if you could find your audience all in one place, but in reality, they're spread out across all three media types. Some users stick to earned media sites because they prefer content with demonstrable credibility. And while owned sites can become a great source for engagement over time, you need paid and earned opportunities to create loyal followers. Finally, while paid might be the easiest way to get in front of as many people as possible, those same people are also increasingly tired of being interrupted by yet another ad.

In other words, ignore even one of these media channels and you risk limiting or taking away a significant chunk of your target market. Ultimately, it's up to you to decide what kind of market you want. Do you want to focus on one approach and gain one-third of the market, or do you want to take a shot at 100 percent of the market through a balanced approach?

WHAT ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA?

At this point, you may be wondering where social media fits into this whole scheme. The simple answer is, it depends on how you use it, as social marketing activities can fall into any media category.

For instance, social platforms can be used as owned media in that they let you create and host a slew of content, but this is akin to building an empire on rented land. You have to follow certain rules, and your content can be taken away from you at any moment. You can also leverage social channels for earned media through likes, shares, and communities, but by the same token, you can also gain paid assets through targeted ads and boosted posts.

In other words, the question isn't which type of media social channels fit into. The question is how you use them.

THE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL VALIDATION

Every form of media can up your social validation factors. Your goal as a marketer is to build up as many of these indicators as you can.

As you leverage paid, owned, and earned opportunities to work toward this goal, remember that every indicator matters. For instance, if you're that doctor on the talk show, how do you look? Are you scruffy and unkempt, stumbling onstage like a confused mess? Or did you take your time to compose yourself in a way that's appropriate for daytime TV?

Let's take a look at some of the ways we can improve our social validation factors and present a more credible brand.

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

When you tell someone you've been to a Michelin-star restaurant where you used your American Express black card (Centurion), their ears are going to perk up. Suddenly, you have social capital. You're seen as a successful somebody because you're associated with an expensive, hip place to be and an exclusive credit card awarded only to big spenders (more on this in chapter 4).

SHARING KNOWLEDGE

Do you know about things other than yourself? Do you share that information with your community? This is an especially powerful social validation tool in online marketing. Whenever you share content, you're

demonstrating to others that you're knowledgeable and helpful. This is doubly true when you share content for free, as it indicates that you're not only a good content producer but a good person as well, someone willing to share your knowledge and expertise with others.

VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Just like a doctor's visual presentation matters on a daytime talk show, so does your online presentation. With every touch point, whether a website or an email, you must consider technical elements like design and layout, as well as interpersonal elements like tone and voice.

POSITIONING

Leverage your contacts. Consult with other entrepreneurs with strong brands. Learn from them, share with them, and build your own social validation by association with other credible sources.

WHOM DO YOU KNOW?

Tell your communities whom you've worked with. Ask past clients to share a quick write-up of their experience that you can put on your site. This is another great way of leveraging someone else's credibility to boost your own.

BUILDING A STRONG PRESENCE

All of these social validation indicators accumulate over time to build a strong brand presence. Each little bit helps reinforce the perception of you and the brand you represent—from how you walk into the room for a meeting to how you present yourself online. The more attention you pay to these details, the more people will want to work with you.

Just remember, if you pay attention to one element of your presentation but ignore others, people will notice. For instance, you could have the best-tailored suits in the world and project a real-life persona of an entrepreneur at the top of their game. But if your website looks like it was designed in 1996, that image you cultivated gets a big wrinkle. You may *want* to portray the image of an in-control entrepreneur, but people who see your site will likely decide you're not quite there yet.

Again, these social indicators aren't always accurate. You could have an amazing business but a bad website, just like you could be a tremendously successful entrepreneur who prefers ratty jeans and T-shirts. But right or wrong, this is how our minds work to determine whether a person or brand is credible or not.

PRESENTATION IS A DIFFERENCE-MAKER

Not paying attention to the presentation of our proposals cost us considerable business in the early days. One time, for instance, we put together a presentation for a prospective client who was getting ready to release a book. We had all the right strategies in place—essentially the same framework as the vendor who won the bid—but we put zero effort into actually making our proposal attractive and readable.

After that, we told ourselves that would never happen again. To land contracts at the enterprise level, your proposals can't just read well; they have to look good too. These days, we work with a graphic designer on every piece of content we produce to make sure it's the best it can possibly be.

Remember, good design isn't all about looking flashy. It's helpful as well. If you've written a strong proposal, it's going to get passed up and down the line to people who haven't met you or heard your pitch. To them, that proposal is all they have to base their judgment on. So why not help them out by making it look as good as it possibly can?

LEARNING FROM THE BEST

Now that you've learned all about how credibility and social validation can help your brand, it's time to see these concepts in action.

The following are stories from three of our favorite thought leaders—Neil Patel, Ramit Sethi, and Gary Vaynerchuk. Each is a master in their own right in the industry.

NEIL PATEL

Neil Patel has built a string of successful businesses over the past several years. How? He focused on cultivating a strong personal brand from day one—and he hasn't looked back since.

One thing that makes Neil stand out is his consistency. Because of the low barrier to entry, the marketing world sees a lot of fly-by-night entrepreneurs who are hard at work building their brand one day and then gone without a trace the next. Neil has proven his staying power, delivering huge amounts of content to paid, owned, and earned channels each month.

Neil's commitment allows him to leverage his existing audience and personal brand every time he starts a new business. When he decided to pivot from his marketing agency and start companies like Kissmetrics and Crazy Egg, he didn't have to start from scratch. His audience already knew who he was and trusted in his work.

Even with this commitment, none of Neil's success would be possible if he didn't also create great content. Whether it's long-form content, blogs, or video posts, he masterfully builds an affinity with his audience, inviting them along as he continues to set more ambitious goals for himself.¹

RAMIT SETHI

Ramit Sethi got his start in the personal finance sector, though his ideas for how to help people save, invest, and be financially smart were different from many others in the industry. These days, he's a *New York Times* best seller.

Ramit's message is all about enjoying the things that matter in life. Where other money experts preached self-discipline and discouraged expenses like five-dollar lattes, Ramit told his followers they could enjoy their creature comforts if they were also smart about automating their investment systems and planning for the future.

Since then, Ramit has grown his platform from personal finance to all sorts of personal development—including how to build businesses and how to reduce anxiety in meetings. This pivot came naturally because it aligned with his personal brand, and every piece of content he produces reflects a specific tone and style. His voice cuts through the usual marketing chatter because he didn't try to tailor his voice to anyone. He speaks authentically to his followers, and they appreciate him for it.

GARY VAYNERCHUK

In the marketing world, Gary Vaynerchuk is a household name. At the core of his success is his understanding of the value of the personal brand. In fact, he spun a whole business out of it, called VaynerTalent, which helps other entrepreneurs build strong personal brands focused on compelling content and thought leadership.

Much like Neil Patel, one of the ways Gary succeeds is through the sheer volume of content he puts out. Much of that content effort focuses on video, which he knows can be cheap to produce, is cheap to distribute, and generates the highest engagement rates.

Gary's relentless energy and ability to surround himself with the right people means he has an incredible sense of what works and what doesn't. One of his defining factors is his passion. Gary may know the ins and outs of personal branding better than most, but nothing he does feels forced. He's not concerned with ticking off some checklist of best practices but rather with doing what he feels is right in that moment.

THE LESSON: CARVE YOUR OWN PATH

If there's one common thread among these personal branding experts, it's that they never forget who they are. Yes, they have a highly developed sense of what will or won't work across different media channels, but they're always authentic.

At the end of the day, that's what cuts through. If you're reading this book solely so you can learn what boxes to tick off on your branding journey, you might be missing the point. Be your authentic self, commit to providing great value to your audience, and *then* make sure that your presentation aligns with those goals.

It's a bit of a juggling act—and the reason so many would-be entrepreneurs drop off after giving it a go for a few months. But in the long haul, building an authentic brand is the only way to build a strong brand.

CASE STUDY: A CO-BRANDING SUCCESS STORY

When Louder.Online decided to create more visibility for our brand, Aaron partnered with marketing expert Neil Patel to leverage his audience and boost credibility—all while adding value through a few pieces of helpful, compelling content.

This resulted in a couple of comprehensive branding guides on Quick Sprout—*The Complete Guide to Building Your Personal Brand* and *The Complete Guide to Building Your Blog Audience*.² These guides have been a win-win for all involved. They provide entrepreneurs with two in-depth business resources while simultaneously boosting the personal brands of both authors.

The benefits didn't stop there. By leveraging Neil's audience, traffic to Louder.Online increased dramatically, as did our standing in the industry. As of this writing, *The Complete Guide to Building Your Personal Brand* is ranked among the top Google search results for "personal branding," making it one of the most visible and clicked guides on the subject. Talk about social validation!

BRANDING BEGINS ON DAY ONE

Generally speaking, sales is a short-term game, while branding is a long-term one. Like many brands, when Louder.Online first started out, we were focused solely on the short term and did nothing to build our brand. Here's why that wasn't such a good idea.

HIGH ON HOPES, SHORT ON CASH

As a bootstrapped company—that is, a company getting by on minimal outside investment and limited financial resources—our goal was to turn a profit as fast as possible. Even when small profits began rolling in, the last thing we wanted to do was invest it back in our brand. We knew branding had value, but with limited key performance indicators (KPIs) to go by and limited resources to invest, it was tough to justify, though it's something we should have been doing from day one, just like our friend Neil Patel.

Perhaps you've encountered the same dilemma. Why put energy into something that might not pay off for years when you're barely getting by as it is? We know it's a tough sell, but we also know the numbers don't lie. It's not something you can factor into your annual forecast, but over time, a business focused on both sales *and* branding will see greater growth than one focused solely on sales.

NO FAKING

Besides our focus on short-term sales, we were also worried about credibility. How could we build a brand when no one knew who we were? What if we were put on the spot with a tough question and couldn't come up with a satisfying answer? We didn't want to fake our way to the top; we wanted to earn it. So we benched the branding conversation altogether.

Today, we see things a little differently. You don't have to know all the answers to be considered an expert. You just have to know more than the people you're talking to at the time. We're still learning new things. Even if you don't have name recognition, social validation, or credibility yet, you can still be helpful.

WHAT IF NO ONE KNOWS YOU?

If we were to go back and do it again, we would start by highlighting some other aspect of our business. Chances are, you chose entrepreneurship because you're passionate about your chosen field. We certainly were. And looking back, we could have easily found a way to harness that passion to create compelling content.

Even if no one knows who you are, you still have an opportunity to build credibility. You're still an expert on something. Maybe you have an environmentally friendly product and you're great at explaining how it's made. Maybe your company prioritizes work-life balance for all its employees. Maybe you offer a 100 percent return guarantee if customers aren't happy with your product. Any one of these options is a great way to start building a community around your brand.

However you approach it, the bottom line is this: every company has a reason why it is in business. Find that reason, and use it to find your brand's voice online.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE

We may have put off the branding conversation for the first few years, but that doesn't mean we weren't learning. Luckily for us, by the time we did get serious about building a world-class brand for ourselves rather than just for our clients, we had the knowledge and experience to accelerate the process.

In some ways, this proved beneficial. While many brands are unsure of how to build their platform when they have little experience to point to, we already had the clients and case studies needed to demonstrate our credibility and highlight our experience. That became the entire basis of our branding strategy, and it worked well.

There's an old saying that the best time to invest was a hundred years ago, but the second-best time is today. It's the same for your brand; the best time to invest is day one, but the second-best time is now.

THE BIG PAYOFF

Once we began to focus on our brand, we started building up our credibility indicators. The more indicators we accumulated, the more people and companies became interested in what we were doing. The more they became interested in us, the more engagement we created, and the more sales we converted.

That's when the earned media opportunities began to pay off. Eventually, in *Forbes*, Aaron was named one of the world's leading digital marketers. This in turn opened the doors wide for more podcasts, interviews, and speaking opportunities. Being able to have that, along with the many other credibility indicators in our proposals, enabled us to start closing much larger deals than we had been.

PUTTING IT ALL INTO ACTION

By now, we're sure you have plenty of great ideas about how to start building a better brand. You've learned all about the value of credibility and social validation. You've seen how some of the best inbound marketers make their magic happen. And you've heard our cautionary tale about the early days of Louder.Online.

Let's start bringing it all together with the following strategies for shortcutting your brand growth.

CREATE YOUR OWN CONTENT

All the inbound marketing strategies in this section proceed under the assumption that you're capable of producing strong, compelling content.

We're sure you're up to the task, but to grow your brand with guest posts and speaking gigs, first you've got to prove your merit to the rest of the world.

To do this, start by producing a series of pieces for your website. You don't need a lot, but make sure you have at least a few strong pieces. Then, use those as writing samples when you begin contacting other websites for guest spots.

GUEST POSTING

We've already talked about the value of leveraging other people's audiences as a way of growing your brand. It's kind of like being the supporting act in a concert. Sure, everyone came to see the headliner, but if you've positioned yourself well, they're happy to see what you're all about too. Do a good job, and you'll pick up a fresh crop of fans for yourself.

We recommend a scaled approach to your guest posting strategy. Create several pieces of content a month on a variety of channels. You can do this yourself, but if you find it too much work, hire an agency to help place your content.

Whatever road you take, be sure to do your research in advance. Identify sites where you think you'd be a good fit. Then use a platform like [BuzzSumo.com](https://www.buzzsumo.com) to figure out what types of content perform best in terms of likes, comments, and shares. That way, you can pitch the right content to the right people and dramatically improve your chances of success.

Once you've produced a significant number of guest posts, the results will start to build. As your body of work grows, so does your credibility, leading to better opportunities on higher-profile sites with larger audiences—which ultimately leads to opportunities for more lucrative contracts with higher-profile clients. That's scalability in action!

Guest posting works so well because you are not only growing your audience, but you're also creating a ton of links on a ton of different websites that all send readers back to your own site. This in turn helps improve your search rankings and boosts the content on your site, which then gets you even more traffic from search engines. It will take a few

months to get this feedback cycle going, but once it is, the benefits are well worth it.

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Guest posting is a great way to build exposure in industry-specific publications. But once you've mastered that game, it's time to move on to bigger editorial publications like *Forbes*, *Entrepreneur*, *Huffington Post*, *Inc.*, or Business.com.

These editorial contributions are a lot like guest posting but on a much larger scale. You get to share your message with your biggest audience yet, you're creating much higher-value links to your site, and most importantly, you're upping your credibility factors. Who wouldn't want to tell people that they write for *Forbes* or that they have a column in *Entrepreneur*? The implied authority that comes with regular editorial contributions is a great way to set yourself apart and open up other personal branding opportunities like interviews, speaking gigs, and podcasts.

VIDEO

Over the past several years, no content has produced better results than video. It's cheap to distribute through paid ads and social channels, and it's a proven difference-maker.

Marketers often think they need to become master instructors for their video content to work. The truth is, all you have to do is be authentic. Document your life. Share what you're up to in short, simple segments. You'll be surprised how well it can work.

CREATE A GOOD EMAIL SIGNATURE

Here's an often overlooked inbound marketing strategy: once you've started down the road to becoming a content pro, update your email signature.

A proper, professional email signature is the cherry on top of a strong email campaign. It provides that extra bit of credibility to your message.

In other words, if you've written for *Forbes*, share a link to the article in your signature. If you've built up a roster of household names as clients,

make sure your prospective clients know. It could be the difference between a deleted email and a clicked link.

SPEAKING GIGS

Now that you have a solid branding platform in place through videos, guest posts, and editorial content, the speaking opportunities should start rolling in. When they do, consider contracting a speaking agency to help you handle requests and formalize your strategy.

To start with, most of your speaking gigs will be free. Just like with guest and editorial content, you'll need to trade your way up the chain before this strategy starts to pay off financially. Again, it's a process of building up your credibility factors. Once you can say that you've delivered a keynote to a thousand people or that you've had speaking engagements overseas, you'll be able to leverage that for bigger and better opportunities.

Put in the work, and eventually you can command fees of \$5,000, \$10,000, or \$15,000 for a half hour of work. That's already a tremendous return on investment (ROI), but don't forget that these speaking gigs also help grow your audience and generate new leads.

BOOKS AND PODCASTS

The best public speakers don't just show up and deliver a knockout speech. They nurture leads by adding value to the experience.

Books have become a great takeaway for the attendees at your events. In recent years, services like Scribe Media have emerged to streamline the production process and get books in your audience's hands quickly and efficiently.

Similarly, podcasts are another growing opportunity for seasoned speakers. Services like Interview Valet make getting and managing podcast opportunities a snap.

SOME FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Branding strategies work, they're scalable, and they will help you get to your destination faster. While there is no perfect path to brand growth, if you follow the techniques we've outlined, you'll likely take years off your

growth curve. Before you get started on your branding journey, here are a few final considerations.

CONSIDER OUTSIDE HELP

The more you go it alone, the longer this process is going to take. If you're on a tight budget, you may have no choice. However, if you have money to invest, consider bringing in outside agencies to help speed up the process and skip some of the initial headaches of setting everything up.

TAKE A MULTICHANNEL STRATEGY

If you focus solely on guest posting and editorial contributions, it's going to be harder to get where you want in terms of brand growth.

The components we've laid out in this chapter are meant to build off each other. More guest content leads to more editorial content. More editorial content leads to more speaking gigs, and so on. While no one starts off giving TEDx talks on the first day, you will build to this faster by growing your credibility factors across a variety of channels.

MARKETING FADS COME AND GO

It's natural to want to jump from one of the latest marketing hacks to the next. Everyone likes new and exciting things, and some of them could even prove valuable.

However, it's best not to put all your marketing eggs in the fad basket. The approaches we've presented here have been consistent credibility indicators for a long time.

OWN IT

Many inbound marketers focus on building their brand through social media channels. For some, this is a sound strategy, but it's not foolproof. In fact, finding a formula for success can be tricky.

That said, we're sure you will want to have some sort of social media presence for your brand. So here's a little bonus tip: listen to your audience and provide value with every interaction—yes, even the negative ones.

Customers often use social channels to complain about a brand. Maybe a shipment was delayed, or maybe a product didn't work as advertised. Whatever the case may be, don't ignore the problem. If you do, you risk taking a major blow to your credibility.

Instead, own the mistake. Show your audience that you're listening, that you care, and that you're going to make it right.

A quick Google search will show you plenty of case studies where brands owned their problems so successfully that it actually *grew* their credibility. Your community wants to see that you're a stand-up problem-solver. If you can demonstrate this consistently, there's no better social validation in the world.

EVEN RAPID GROWTH TAKES TIME

None of the most iconic brands became household names overnight. Brands like Nike, Coca-Cola, IBM, and even Facebook took years to reach the kind of ubiquity they currently enjoy.

In other words, don't forget that the branding journey takes time even if you make all the right moves. Most likely, you'll experience a series of different phases as your brand continues to grow.

How much time will it take? Well, that depends on you and your budget, time, and resources. Factor in changes in the market and the rise of new services that could help accelerate the process, and that's a lot of variables.

So while we'd love to tell you that following the strategies we've presented will help your brand soar to new heights within a year, that wouldn't be realistic. However, if you continue to use these techniques to chip away at your market, you'll continue to grow.

¹ To see what makes Neil so good, check out his website at <https://neilpatel.com>.

² These guides are great additional resources for your digital marketing journey and can be found easily through a quick web search. Check them out!

CHAPTER 2

THE NUMBERS GAME

WHAT IT IS

To generate leads and sales, brands can use multichannel marketing strategies to drive traffic to their owned assets.

WHY IT WORKS

Inbound marketing strategies help create what is called *the halo effect*, someone's overall impression of a person or brand.

HOW IT WORKS

the importance of building traffic • credibility matters every step of the way • the halo effect • the six steps to inbound marketing • inbound marketing action plans • lessons learned on the inbound highway • client logos • testimonials • how to find the pain points • speak to the pain points • build an influencer network • work on SEO • referrals • Facebook ads • Google Ads • email lists

Now that you've begun to establish your brand, it's time to start generating traffic. That means you need to get your content out there for people to see—and then make them curious enough to stick around and learn a little more about you.

As the title of this chapter implies, generating traffic really is a numbers game. To earn those numbers, though, you have to leverage all that social

capital you built up in the last chapter into something more tangible. Yes, you have to be credible, but you also have to be *visible*.

Some brands prefer to take the perspective popularized in the movie *Field of Dreams*: if you build it, they will come. In other words, they believe that if you set up your web assets, your target audience will find you. This may be true if, in the case of *Field of Dreams*, you're the only baseball diamond in the cornfield. However, what if your neighbor sets up another diamond right next door—and then your other neighbor down the street follows suit? Suddenly, it's not enough that you've got a charming little ballpark in the middle of a farm. If you want anyone to visit, you have to start thinking about how to stand out among your neighbors too.

That's what mastering attention in a noisy digital market is all about. Yes, it's important to build good web assets. However, you need to put up some signs and attract attention in order to generate traffic. In this chapter, we're going to explore this process in more detail—focusing not only on how to attract attention, but also how to keep it.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING TRAFFIC

It probably goes without saying that if you're building a digital brand, then generating traffic to your online assets, whether paid, owned, or earned, is pretty important. Sometimes brands think of traffic only in terms of getting people to their website. In reality, your goal should be to build an audience, which means engaging people across digital assets including, but not limited to, your website and social media channels. Without an audience, you've got no one to play to. You could be the most credible person in the world. You could have the best brand, the best product, the best service, but if no one knows how to reach you, it's pointless. That will not transfer into business growth.

When you start growing your audience, your brand starts building affinity. People start to know who you are—and some even start to like you! A lot of this depends on your credibility indicators, which reinforce the authority of your brand. Through the strong, helpful content you provide your visitors, you begin building a relationship with your audience.

CREDIBILITY MATTERS EVERY STEP OF THE WAY

Your website isn't the only place where credibility is important. Credibility threads through every stage of a relationship—the initial touch points, content, nurturing, conversion, and reactivation.

Ultimately, your goal is to gain brand advocates. The more you present a unified front through every step of the customer journey, the more likely you'll earn those advocates. Here are some credibility tips to keep in mind.

PROTECT YOUR CAPITAL

The number one rule of investing is to protect your capital. In marketing, your brand *is* your capital. The more you invest in it, the better it's protected, and the greater the payoff.

Look around, and you'll see that the top people with the biggest brands are always reinvesting in their brand. They're also super protective; they don't want their brand to be associated with the wrong people, be used in the wrong way, be seen in the wrong way, or have the wrong things said about them. They're leery of anything that might detract from their image.

All of the thought leaders we talked about in chapter 1—Neil Patel, Gary Vaynerchuk, and Ramit Sethi—are all meticulously protective of their image. As businesspeople with great marketing knowledge and experience, they understand that building credibility for their personal brands isn't just about driving traffic. It affects *everything*.

WHAT'S THE BEST PATH TO CREDIBILITY?

Of the three media types we discussed in the last chapter—paid, earned, and owned media—not all put you on the same path to credibility. For instance, paid media certainly has a place in your marketing plan and can promote credibility, but you need more than that if you want to accelerate your credibility process. You also need relevant, useful, and timely content shared through owned and earned channels.

Despite this, when the budgets of so many medium- to enterprise-size clients are carved up, we usually find that 80 percent or more goes to paid media. Only a small percentage goes to SEO, inbound marketing, or other organic channels.

From a certain perspective, this is understandable. Businesses have investors who may have deep pockets but who also want to see a return on their investment. To please their investors, these businesses will throw all their money at ads in hopes of generating quick revenue. Their profit margins aren't as high, since they're spending a lot for limited results, but since it looks good on the revenue side, they keep at it.

To succeed in the long term, it's all about good old-fashioned credibility, and the best way to get this is to boost your earned media efforts. You want people to visit your site because they *want* to be there. The best way to generate a higher conversion rate is to attract visitors who have already made positive subconscious judgments of you and your brand.

RACK UP THOSE MICRO-COMMITMENTS

Every positive judgment someone makes about you is a micro-commitment to your brand. Each micro-commitment means someone has become more familiar with you, agreed with something you've written somewhere else, or appreciated your take on something.

The more commitments they make, the more they will want to investigate you or your brand further. By the time their investigations have led them to your website, they've already made several micro-commitments—all without having to make a major commitment like purchase, inquiry, or lead. Getting someone to your website involves a series of micro-commitments, or small processes.

Build your earned and organic channels, and you will start to see better brand affinity, more micro-commitments, and ultimately more conversions. That means setting your budget needs to align with what's actually happening and what matters.

THE HALO EFFECT

Why does building credibility matter so much in the digital branding game? Because it contributes to what's known as the *halo effect*.

In a nutshell, the halo effect is your overall impression of a person or a brand. These figurative halos color how we view a person or brand based on what we know of their positive qualities like character and integrity. The

more you show off your positive qualities, the stronger your halo, and the more your influence will grow in the industry.

CREDIBILITY STARTS A MOVEMENT

In *The Power of Habit*, author Charles Duhigg uses the analogy of the civil rights movement to illustrate how credibility contributes to the halo effect. As Duhigg explains, Rosa Parks's arrest may have been the catalyst for the civil rights movement, but that movement didn't begin in earnest until Parks's church decided to do something about it—even though, because of their race and unfair segregation laws, they had little power. From there, the larger community got wind of the church's actions and joined in.

It all happened by association. Many in the community didn't know Parks personally and had little knowledge of what she had gone through, but because those closer to her were willing to stand up, tell her story, and say, "This is what we're going to do about it," it created a steamroll effect.

THE FACEBOOK PHENOMENON

Mark Zuckerberg describes the origins of Facebook in a similar manner. If you're like us, you came to Facebook gradually. For ages, we knew what Facebook was but weren't interested in it enough to sign up. Eventually, though, we saw that all our friends were on Facebook, we wanted to see what they were up to, and then we followed their lead and signed up. The power of association was a huge driver for Facebook getting the sign-up numbers that it has.

IT'S ALL ABOUT COMMUNITY

Both of these examples show the power of the halo effect. Each of us gives credibility to a person or brand based on external factors and judgments. In this way, community members become ambassadors for people or brands we're unaware of. Because of our subconscious loyalty to our community, we eventually join in too and become ambassadors ourselves. Build up enough credibility factors and the halo will show itself.

That said, it's important to help your community along. If you've worked with a brand like Coca-Cola, you want people to know it. Show their logo on your site, or share a case study of your experience with them. People are more likely to visit your site because of the halo effect—because of whom

you're associated with—*not* because some flashy marketing tactic strong-armed them into it.

THE SIX STEPS OF INBOUND MARKETING

Boosting your brand's halo effect lies at the heart of inbound marketing. By creating and distributing content in the right places across the web—specifically, places where your audience visits—you will attract visitors to your owned channels.

That's why guest blogging for other publications is such a powerful example of inbound marketing. Let's break it down step by step:

1. You know what the site is all about and what kinds of content its audience prefers.
2. You see a clear crossover between that audience and the kind of audience that is attracted to your brand.
3. You create a piece of content tailor-made for that audience and let the website publish it.
4. The style of writing incites the audience reading it to click the embedded links or read through to your bio and check out your website.
5. Now on your website, members of your target audience can read additional helpful content on your site and opt in to your email list.
6. Those members of your target audience now get live updates of your own content as it's published.

Inbound marketing can take many other paths, but this is a good example of how it can work. You create content elsewhere, people click through to your site, you provide them more helpful content, and the relationship deepens.

LEARNING FROM THE MASTER

If you want to see an inbound marketing master at work, look no further than Neil Patel.

Neil creates twenty to thirty pieces of long-form written copy a month—which is not to mention the many other kinds of content he creates. He publishes on a wide range of websites and has been doing so for many years. Not only is it good brand-building, his efforts also drive traffic to his website, where he provides additional content that turns those people into leads.

To be fair, Neil has a small army of people to help with different elements of his process. But while his whole editorial process is heavily structured, he's the one writing the content.

There's a tendency to want to farm out this kind of work, but Neil has learned that it's hard to get other people to replicate or grow your brand for you in a way that's authentic to who you are.

You can get assistance here and there, but if you want a strong personal brand, *you* have to be the one in charge. You can enlist others to line up podcast and live appearances for you. Just remember that at the end of the day, you are the one who has to show up and be the expert. No one can replicate the things that make you authentic.

Like anything in life, if you can get help with automated outsourcing, scaling, or handling the administrative side of things, then by all means, get as much help as you can and focus on the tasks that only you can do. That frees you up to nail the things you need to nail.

INBOUND MARKETING ACTION PLANS

Now that you've got a sense of the basics of inbound marketing, let's take a look at the four key inbound marketing actions and what role they play.

Thanks to the internet, many of these inbound actions can be done automatically and at scale. Just remember to make sure you have a good process in place first before you start to automate.

ATTRACT

This one is a little self-explanatory. Your goal is to attract traffic from your target audience to your brand, website, or social assets. Whatever the case, once they have taken an interest in your brand, it's time to take interest in them, build that contact as an asset, and market to them at a future date.

CONVERT

Once you've attracted strong leads, now what? That's where conversion comes in.

First things first. If you want to convert traffic, you have to make sure you're getting the right kind of traffic. You don't just want traffic for the sake of traffic, or traffic that won't convert.

Second, keep in mind that "conversion" doesn't mean "sale." Your conversion point can be many different things. It all depends on what you're aiming for with the traffic.

Sometimes your conversion point is getting your visitors to fill out a lead form or opt in to your email list. Sometimes you want them to comment on your content. Whatever you've predefined as your conversion goal, that's how you measure success—and as long as you're successfully converting traffic, you're halfway there.

CLOSE

Conversion is great because it adds dimension to your relationship with your visitors. However, as we're sure you well know, your ultimate goal is to get your leads to buy your product or service. For that, you've got to close those deals.

Being a good closer isn't about bombarding your leads with sales messages. Instead, it's about managing the sales funnel—a process or system designed to take visitors and push them from the point of reading content and being interested all the way to closing the sale. Take time with your leads, nurture them down your funnel, and weed out the people unlikely to purchase your product or service. *Then* close and make that sale.

We know this is the part that's got you most excited, and we cover all of it in chapter 5. But here's our advice: if you want to get really good at converting and closing, you've got to lay the groundwork in the rest of these chapters first.

DELIGHT

It might sound like a revolutionary thought, but we're big fans of keeping clients happy. If your customers are happy with the experience, encourage them to become an advocate for you and amplify your halo effect. After all, if they're happy with you, they're probably happy to use their voice to drive additional people to your brand and business. We'll talk all about this in chapter 6.

LESSONS LEARNED ON THE INBOUND HIGHWAY

If we've learned one thing from our own inbound marketing experiences at Louder.Online, it's that you shouldn't try to master all channels at once. Actually, this applies not only to inbound marketing but also to marketing in general, including paid advertising.

Everything works as long as you do it right. Paid advertising works. SEO and content marketing work. Inbound marketing and social marketing work.

But as many of our clients have noticed, none of them work very well if you spread yourself too thin. Marketing aside, you still have a business to run.

Prioritize and choose which tactics to follow. Don't try to do it all. Multichannel marketing is great. Just make sure you've mastered and automated one channel before adding another.

WHAT MAKES SENSE TO YOU RIGHT NOW?

We've found that most startups want to jump on the SEO/content marketing bandwagon right away. The problem is, those tactics take at least six to twelve months to pay off. The question in this scenario is: how are you going to build brand awareness in the short term and generate revenue until your SEO and content marketing starts to take root?

In this case, it might make more sense to focus on some initial paid marketing and then slowly build in your SEO and content marketing. That way, you'll start with immediate traffic through paid channels, followed by long-term, cheaper, and higher-quality organic search traffic.

WHAT DOES YOUR BUDGET ALLOW?

Many years ago, when Louder.Online was still in its infancy, we didn't have much money for advertising. Instead, we found a credible third party to do a write-up on our referral incentive program.

Through our previous work, we had plenty of contacts among major brands like IBM and Apple. These were the kinds of clients we wanted. The third-party content about our incentive program drove visitors to a landing page, where they would provide us referral details and give us leads through their networks. Once that lead converted, we sent the person who referred that lead \$5,000 as a thank-you.

We knew that building credibility and leads was one factor, but we knew we couldn't grow as fast as we wanted to by relying solely on that. By incentivizing our network to generate leads for us, we were able to open up a whole new inbound channel at minimal cost. After all, who doesn't want an extra \$5,000?

The reality was that we didn't have a choice but to try this incentive program. We didn't have the funds for anything else, but we did have the time and energy to master this inbound channel.

Through this program's success, we learned that even if you don't have the established credibility of a fifty-year-old brand, you are still an authority on something good. You may not have money, but you do have options. No matter what stage your business is in, there is always a path you can take.

REPRESENTING YOURSELF CREDIBLY

Once you get the credibility machine up and running, it tends to sustain itself. Aaron writes between ten and fifteen guest posts a month for publications and websites. Through that, we get referral traffic and links, which then improve the rankings for our website.

We executed this strategy over time, starting at small sites and graduating to larger ones. If you're reading this book, you probably aren't landing guest post slots on top-tier editorial publications like *Forbes* just yet. Instead of charging ahead right out of the gate, you will have to build toward that strategy little by little.

Start by networking with influential people in your industry. You can then utilize them in a joint venture where you're leveraging their audience when you don't yet have traffic to your site. From there, start building the following credibility indicators into all your owned channels.

CLIENT LOGOS

All of your client-facing content must represent the quality your brand will deliver. Sharing client logos is an excellent way of indicating the quality of work you're capable of—and the caliber of associates you work with.

Client logos also look good—they are professionally designed, after all—so they're a visually pleasing feature to add to your website.

Here's the trick. It's a given that you're not going to get the big companies right out of the gate. No one does. At the same time, you want those credibility indicators. So what do you do?

Work for free.

Reach out to a brand you admire and offer to do a small body of work for them. It's a great way to trade up the chain; you offer them something of value, and they reward you by legitimizing your brand. The first few logos you earn become notches on your belt that you can leverage for bigger, top-tier logos later on.

You may not have many logos or you may not have had many clients, so it becomes a bit of a chicken-and-egg issue. It's a challenge to attract attention when you haven't worked with anybody.

To get around this, in the early days, we helped out other agencies who had a range of clients, and we got to work on some of those campaigns. We did white-labeling work. We acted as account managers on different projects, which meant we had experience in different industries with varied clients, and we could leverage that. Don't worry about doing all free work and nothing else. Build your credibility, and you'll get more significant work. In the interim, you can get smaller clients and small bits of work.

TESTIMONIALS

Once you've started bringing in some work, whether it was a free brand-building gig or actual paid work, you need testimonials. Here, we can't stress this point enough: you must actively work to collect testimonials. Make it an integral part of the account management process.

There can be a large range in the quality of testimonials, from people giving you one sentence to maybe giving you too much. Ideally, you want the testimonial to focus on how much your work has improved the performance of their own website or business.

Maybe they complimented you by email, maybe they sang your praises on social media, or maybe they gave you a testimonial on LinkedIn. Whatever the case, whatever the length, and whatever the platform, it's all valuable. Capture it, store it, and gain permission to use it where necessary.

Testimonials aren't just good for your website or LinkedIn profile. Use them for proposal documents, case studies, and even web copy. Those little one-sentence snippets you've been collecting are especially great for these kinds of documents.

Getting testimonials at the beginning is another chicken-and-egg conundrum. Just like with client logos, we found that the easiest, most valuable way to gather early praise is to offer free work to the right people in exchange for some kind words. If you've worked for another business in the industry, you'll have experience that you can claim within that context that you may be able to leverage for praise as well.

HOW TO FIND THE PAIN POINTS

Our prospects come to us because they're looking for someone to improve the search ranking for their content, boost traffic, build their brand, promote specific campaigns, or reach other conversion objectives that will ultimately lead to a sale.

Before we even get on the phone with them, we identify the areas where they're suffering in a three-step process:

1. We have a quick look through their site from a technical perspective and determine whether it's indexable and appealing to Google.

2. We check their content to see if it's valuable, interesting, educational, or entertaining. We make sure it's the sort of content that people want to share socially and build links to from their own websites.
3. We use a suite of tools to analyze all the links that exist to their website. We can determine what content is being linked to, where the links originate, and the types of sites, links, and anchor text that make up those links. Then we determine whether the links come from editorial publications, directories, or spammy sources.

In other words, we do our homework. We know their problems the second we get on the phone with them. That becomes an invaluable first step toward earning their trust and business.

You're in business because you know your craft really well. For us, our craft is knowing what makes up a successful marketing campaign. A lot of the problems our prospects and clients experience are apparent up front. For instance, many of them think a three-hundred- to five-hundred-word article about their product or service is what content marketing is all about. But no one wants to link to a sales pitch. Your content has to be compelling and valuable beyond that.

SPEAK TO THE PAIN POINTS

Whatever type of content you're producing, your copy needs to touch your prospects' pain points. It's not about selling your product or service. It's about solving a problem.

If you can explain in detail the ins and outs of the problem, the impact it carries, and the feelings associated with it—if you can explain the pain someone is experiencing better than they can—you will be seen as an authority in that particular field. You're telling them, "I understand what you're looking for. I understand the problem you want to solve." Communicate this before your prospect does, and you'll look even better.

Writing copy that focuses on solving pain points is critical for attracting and converting traffic. Why? Because when people come to you or your website, they're already experiencing problems. If you can describe the hell

they're going through and how it's impacted their lives, family, relationships, finances, and so on, you've already begun to build rapport.

Everything flows after that, because then you earn the chance to say, "Here's how we will solve it." Just remember not to start pitching solutions until you've reached this point. If you haven't demonstrated that you understand the problem, you'll lose all credibility by going straight for the pitch.

EVERYTHING IS A CREDIBILITY INDICATOR

Take a look at your bio, your business cards, your proposal, and pitch documents. How do they look? Are they professionally designed? Do they look like someone put thought and care into making them?

If not, make presentation a priority. All client-facing content should represent you in a positive way and engender credibility.

ESTABLISHING CREDIBILITY

You're trying to use logos. You've got testimonials. If you've been smart, you've even made collecting case studies part of business as usual.

Seriously, we can't overstate the value of case studies when you're trying to land clients. If you don't have any, that's a real lost opportunity for you. This is your chance to brag about the quality of your work!

If a prospective client asks for case studies, and you only give them a blank stare, it's akin to hitting a brick wall at full speed. Negotiations are over.

The following methods are the meat-and-potatoes approach to driving traffic. As you go through this list, limit the number of things you try at once. Get good at one method before moving on to something else. If you dilute your focus, you dilute your results.

You only have to be successful at one thing as a business, one product or service, have one sales funnel, or one channel of traffic. You'll have plenty

of opportunities to do more, but it's best to get good at saying no until you're sure you're ready. Otherwise, you risk stretching yourself thin and never getting anything done.

UTILIZE INFLUENCER PLATFORMS

Influencer networks have exploded along with the social media boom over the past decade. Whether influencers are on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or somewhere else, they use these platforms to create connected communities within their industry, position themselves as thought leaders to grow their brand, and advocate for other products, services, and brands they enjoy. An influencer's performance is often judged through metrics like social follower counts, opt-in follower counts, and likes, shares, and other similar criteria. In the broadest sense, the higher those numbers, the greater that person's influence is deemed to be.

With their large, dedicated audiences, these influencers can help put other brands on the map with a well-placed mention, share, or endorsement. While some marketers might take the organic approach by cultivating relationships with these influencers and then asking for a plug (see the next section), others are happy to pay for that privilege.

To fill that need, pay-for-play platforms like NeoReach, Revfluence, and Exposedly¹ have popped up to connect brands with influencers. Once you've signed up, you simply choose from a list of available influencers in your market, specify the desired task (i.e., promoting your product through a series of five tweets), pay the fee, and watch the magic happen. Ultimately, your relationship with that influencer is purely transactional, but if your goal is purely to broadcast your message to a larger audience, this approach certainly has its place in your marketing strategy.

CONNECT WITH BIG-NAME INFLUENCERS

If you're not interested in the pay-for-play option, your other choice is to build relationships with influencers and earn those endorsements organically. This might sound daunting, but it's not as tricky as you might think. When we see influential people out there achieving big, wonderful things, we tend to put those high performers on a pedestal. We want to reach out and learn from them, but we assume they're busy and don't want to be bothered, so in turn, we don't even bother trying.

Trust us, influencers are not untouchable. It's great to admire them, but don't be afraid to reach out and learn from them. In fact, as known A-lister Tim Ferriss has pointed out, it's often a lot easier to get in touch with a big-name influencer than you think. Bigger goals equal less competition, after all, so if your goal is to reach out to the biggest A-lister possible, you probably won't have as much competition as you think. It's a greater *perceived* difficulty than a real difficulty.

If you're going to reach out to influencers, however, don't just go straight to the ask. No one likes opening messages that say, "Hey, share my content," "Link to this," or "Can you do me a favor?" Instead, look for ways to add value to their lives first.

To add value, determine what's impactful to your influencer. Can you help with their content, even if you're just liking, sharing, and commenting on their posts? Many influencers live and die by the success of their content. Offering thoughtful responses to their work and sharing with a wider audience is truly a big help.

The more you engage, the more these influencers will notice. They'll come to think of you as someone who adds value to their lives and community. Eventually, the relationship builds.

Provide an influencer with value, and they'll be certain to respond to your messages. But even after you've reached out to them directly, it's still not time for the ask. Keep trying to help them. Once you've gained enough credibility, *then* you can ask for help.

Always remember that the relationship is more important than the ask. Think of it this way: if you ask a friend for a favor and they say no, you don't think much about it. You just keep going. It's not the end of a friendship. So it is with influencer outreach. Just because they can't help you now doesn't mean your relationship won't pay off later.

WORK ON SEO

One tried-and-true way to drive inbound traffic to your website is through search engines, mainly through Google, since it owns about 90 percent of the US market. In other words, SEO should never be an afterthought—

though it shouldn't be your only focus either. Instead, find a way to strike a healthy middle ground by building your SEO on the side while using some form of paid marketing to bring in traffic.

In most of the websites we come across, organic search traffic is one of the highest-converting channels of traffic. When people click through to your site as a result of an organic Google search, there is implied authority and trust. With ads, you can buy your way to the top. But if you're the first entry below the paid options, they'll know you earned that spot. At least according to Google, you have the most relevant answer to a given question.

To master SEO, we recommend you follow these three pillars.

#1: TECHNICAL

When you focus on SEO, keep in mind that it's about a lot more than having the right keywords. These days, good SEO is the result of having a good website that is crawlable, indexable, mobile friendly, and otherwise technically sound. So don't let it slide. Make SEO part of business as usual from the moment you start building your website. Make sure you build the right structure on your website using the right platform, and you'll save yourself a lot of costs down the road—and take a big leap in terms of potential opportunities.

#2: CONTENT

Your content has to be readable. You can't play word soup to try to get all the keywords in. Like any business, you must add value. If you want to be found for certain keywords, you need content that exists on your website that is targeted around those keyword sets.

Maybe you're trying to game the search engines (which we don't recommend). Maybe you think keyword density matters to the rankings (not as much as you think). Either way, if this is your focus, you're missing the core point of all this, which is to provide value.

That said, keywords are fine if you're leading with value. If you can do both, the results will be a whole lot more successful and less risky than trying to hack your way there.

#3: EXTERNAL LINKS

We've already talked about the value of guest blogging for credibility factors (see chapter 1), but now let's talk about guest blogging as an essential SEO strategy. Remember, the established websites in your industry have larger audiences than you do. Guest content leverages those audiences and boosts your visibility in search engines.

First, do your homework and identify the site you want to write for. You're looking for the right audience that's the right size with the right authority and credibility.

Next, reach out to the site owner or editor and offer to create content that fulfills these two criteria:

1. You know through your research that readers will find it valuable.
2. You have expertise on the subject.

Once you're approved, it's time to start producing. Make sure to link back to relevant websites supporting your claims, especially ones with good data that explain something more in-depth than you did in your post. If you've created great editorial content on your own site, link back to that as well so people can learn more about you and read more of your content—thus enabling you to attract that audience to your business.

Do this right, and you check off the following boxes:

- You're driving referral traffic through to your site that you otherwise would not have reached.
- You're demonstrating expertise and building credibility.
- You're building direct links to pages on your website.

Is there a right number of backlinks? Yes and no. From an SEO perspective, search engines love links. They love to crawl a link and hop to another blog post or site that's relevant. In that way, backlinks assist in crawling and indexing of new content and send freshness indicators to old content to indicate it's still relevant and important to Google.

Perhaps a better way to look at links is to think of them as votes. For every link you get from across the web, someone is voting in favor of the quality of your content. However, not all votes are equal. In terms of the halo effect, the links from higher-authority sites like *Forbes* shine a lot brighter than those from Joe Blogs.

However, as valuable as links are, it's even more important that your content is readable. Again, the goal is to add value. Anytime you make a statement, back it up with a link that supports it. Follow that rule, and you probably won't go overboard.

IF YOU REMEMBER ONE THING ABOUT SEO...

Don't try to cheat. Seriously.

Gaming the SEO system doesn't work in the long run. You *will* be caught eventually. If you're in it just to make some quick money through a "churn and burn" business model, then you'll likely be okay with the risk. However, if you're trying to build a loyal client base and a brand that people care about, this is a surefire way to sabotage your business.

Don't build spam links—and don't think you can wash your hands of it and outsource your link-building efforts on the cheap. Remember, you're competing against companies that are throwing thousands of dollars per month into the same body of work.

Google can and does penalize websites that cheat. They will penalize even massive companies without mercy.

If Google kicks you out of the index, you're facing a long road to recovery at best, and a dead end for your business at worst. We have seen businesses literally close their doors overnight because they couldn't recover from penalties that stripped them of 90 percent of their organic search traffic. Pay attention to Google's terms of service and take them seriously.

Otherwise, if it's readable, valuable, educational, or entertaining, and if you're backing up statements with links, real data, and facts, then you're golden. Never forget the human element. You can't build trustworthy businesses if you're playing the dark side and risking penalties.

REFERRALS

Referrals will always be critical to a business—especially new businesses, which tend to rely on referrals to get off the ground.

You can use different platforms to automate the whole referral process. In fact, plenty of tools are available to embed into your website, mailing list, or other channel, and automatically ask for referrals at the proper time—offering discounts on a product or service as a reward.

With that said, let's talk about the two most common types of referrals.

#1: PAID

This is what we did to sign up clients in the early days. We paid large sums of money to whoever referred a client, and we made sure we hit up existing clients for family and friends. We shared all of this through social media channels and even earned some press coverage. Word got out, and we saw great results.

If you're considering a more formal organic referral program (which we would recommend), you'll have a variety of tools and programs to pick from. Your job is to know what you're offering and when to offer it, whether at the point of sale, after one month, after a big win, or after you've reached a certain level of traffic. Whatever benchmarks you set will trigger a referral request and offer a big discount.

#2: ORGANIC

Here's a free way to increase business: just ask past customers or clients for a referral. If you do a good job, satisfied clients are happy to do the selling for you by word of mouth. If your offerings are truly high quality, everything else will flow from there and bring in lots more success.

FACEBOOK ADS

Few ad platforms or technological advancements in recent years have rivaled the massive impact of Facebook ads. Depending on what you're selling and the investment you put into it, they can be unbelievably successful. Let's look at a few reasons why.

#1: SO MANY OPTIONS

Facebook allows you to target ads based on a ton of different criteria. Remember all those email addresses you've captured along the way? Those

are in play. Just plug them right into your custom audience when creating your ad. This approach is great if, for instance, your targeted ad is offering a 10 percent discount on repeat purchases.

#2: LOOK-ALIKE AUDIENCES

This is one of the best things Facebook has ever produced. Look-alike audiences take the custom audience you've built through your existing client base, as well as through other interactions such as views of your content, engagement with a profile, and people who have added to carts, and build you a new audience—all based on the characteristics, interests, demographics, and psychographic targeting of current purchasers.

This algorithm helps you target people who are near exact matches of your current audience and allows you to advertise to them. Finding look-alike audiences used to be all guesswork. Now you can utilize one of the smartest algorithms in the world to do it for you—and the results are incredible.

#3: VIDEO ADS

Video ads on Facebook are one of the cheapest forms of advertising around—and they can say so much more than text ads or images. For a couple hundred dollars, you can get hundreds of thousands of views. The best part is, video ads work for about anything: products, services, or sales videos, even videos solely for educational or entertainment value.

Facebook also enables you to retarget and send another set of ads to anyone who's watched your other video for a preset consumption period. Once you gauge interest in the video, you can send a second ad that pushes your audience further down the funnel. And speaking of sales funnels...

#4: CUSTOM SALES FUNNELS

Salesforce has said that it takes six to eight touch points before a prospect becomes a client.² In the area of the web, some of those touch points include connecting socially, reading a blog post, opting in to your emails or newsletter, and reading more, then inquiring about your product.

Sales funnels can look and act in many different ways on many channels with different technologies, but the end goal is the same: to take potentially cold audiences and drive them through to a closed sale.

As we've already discussed, you can reach those touch points with clients in a variety of ways with a distributed multichannel approach focused on marketing, traffic, and brand awareness. Whenever we refer to sales funnels, we're especially focused on organic search traffic, Google Ads (which we'll talk about in a minute), and Facebook ads.

Here's what makes Facebook ads so great: formerly, when you'd go to an ad platform, you would write an ad for your product, a person would click on the ad, and they'd go to your landing page and buy your products. With Facebook ads, you can build out intricate sales funnels that have layer upon layer of dependencies and smarts behind them. You can manage all your sales, branding, and traffic straight from Facebook. You don't even need any other platform if you put your time and focus into Facebook.

GOOGLE ADS

When compared to Facebook, Google Ads is an entirely different beast. The basics are the same—it's still ads, still paid media—but with one big difference. Like Facebook, Google Ads is an auction system. However, while Facebook focuses on interests, Google Ads focuses on intent.

Google Ads used to be a lot cheaper to place your ads at the top of the search results. You used to pay cents on the dollar per keyword. Now big brands bid on keywords so aggressively, they'll cost fifty dollars or more for each click per keyword.

That prices a lot of people out of the Google Ads game. The good news is, there are other ways to compete.

The big organizations might chase the fifty- to hundred-dollar keywords, but they go after only the main terms. You can compete on longer title keywords. For instance, "designer clothes in Los Angeles" is a lot more specific than "designer clothes"—and there's less competition for that too. Focus on the longer, more specific terms, and your cost per click goes way down.

Another way to bring your cost per click down is by creating custom, quality landing pages for your ads. The higher Google assesses your quality

score, the lower your cost per click will be. (For a full discussion of landing page optimization, see chapter 5.)

WHAT'S BETTER: FACEBOOK OR GOOGLE ADS?

Depending on your budget, you may want to invest some money into Google Ads, Facebook ads, or both. Either is a great way of realizing instant traffic while you work on the organic side of things. Google Ads is typically more expensive than Facebook ads, but it also has a proven track record of success for businesses of all sizes.

When deciding which channels to use, consider what your audience is doing when you're trying to capture them. With Google Ads, they're searching for a product or service *in that moment*. You have to pay a premium to capture that kind of traffic. If you decide to, make sure your landing pages are well designed, high-converting, and packed with credibility indicators.

On the other hand, Facebook has advantages too. It is cheap and offers industry-leading targeting options based on interests, demographics, location, and so on. The downside is that, while you may be able to target your audience with tremendous accuracy, that audience isn't searching for your product or service in the moment. You have to nurture the prospects more.

Ultimately, it's about identifying where your business is and then determining your resources, time, and budget. You must keep things compact and tight so as not to dilute your focus.

EMAIL LISTS

If you follow a lot of entrepreneur success stories, you've probably heard more than one say their email list is one of their most valuable assets.

People don't give their email address to just anyone. If they've shared it with you, they have given you permission to send them information and offers. They're highly likely to convert.

How likely to convert? Statistics estimate the average return at one dollar per member per month, so if you've got ten thousand people on your email list, they should be worth \$10,000 to you.³ Note, however, that to see these results, you need an engaged list, true fans who would buy anything you

offered, not window shoppers who only opted in because you gave away a free iPad one day.

You'll have tons of options for building your mailing list, but the key message is, build it from day one. Don't wait. The more it grows, the more access you have to the right people and the more you can push an offer through anytime and know you can get a return. Here are a few of our other favorite pointers.

#1: CREATE FRESH CONTENT

Email lists should consistently have effort put into growing them. Make sure you provide fresh content on a regular basis—and make sure your visitors know it. Convert visitors by encouraging them to opt in, and make the process visible and easy.

#2: USE REFERRAL TRAFFIC

If you're getting referral traffic from other sites, you can run paid traffic to landing pages. Keep the landing page simple. Its sole purpose is to convert visitors to opt in to your mailing list. You can build your list very rapidly this way.

#3: GENERATE FEEDBACK

Think of those online influencers with hundreds of thousands of addresses on their list. That provides incredible value for their businesses. If you have a new offer, a survey you want to run, or a new product idea you want to test, you already have a dedicated audience you can email for instant feedback and sales.

#4: DON'T SELL

At Louder.Online, our strategy is that we educate and entertain with our content, and selling is not the primary goal. People don't like constant 10 percent offers or Black Friday sale notifications. We all get quite enough irritating reminders of commercialism as it is.

If you're friendly and conversational, and you add value by solving problems and answering questions, you'll get sales inquiries without having to ask for them. The sales funnel can operate in multiple ways.

INBOUND "GROWTH HACKS" IN ACTION

Now that we're just about through, you're well on your way to mastering the traffic game. Use these strategies, take it slow, and soon you'll start generating traffic that not only visits but also converts.

Before we go, first a note on "growth hacking." This term has really taken off over the last few years. It sounds great, but really it's just the same time-tested marketing principles with a new name. That said, if there is a difference, it's that today these strategies are backed by a lot more data, insights, and technology to analyze your marketing efforts. Here are a few parting examples of brands that have growth hacked their way to the top in recent years.

AIRBNB

The secret to Airbnb's success is brilliant: they leveraged the massive audience of Craigslist. In the early days, Airbnb gave visitors an option on their website to cross-post their listing on Craigslist. This resulted in a lot more views per ad, and each Craigslist posting created a link back to their own website—which then helped with SEO. This led to explosive growth that rocketed them past their competitors.

HOTMAIL

Back in the nineties, when Hotmail was ready for explosive growth, they did a simple thing. At the bottom of each message a user sent, they included a link to sign up for a free Hotmail account. Anyone who received a Hotmail message could get their own free email address—which was a real breakthrough at the time. Hotmail spread virally because of that one simple line embedded at the bottom of all their emails, resulting in huge growth and dominance in the email arena for years.

DROPBOX

The file-sharing giant Dropbox saw explosive growth when they implemented a two-sided referral program. If you created an account with them and then referred someone else who then also signed up, both of you got free storage space—and Dropbox got twice the new users. When you utilize a two-sided referral plan, it means double the growth.

PAYPAL

Before PayPal, payments on eBay could be insecure and confusing. PayPal streamlined the process and made it more secure. As more people on eBay adopted PayPal as their default payment option, PayPal became more valuable to the platform. Eventually, the two companies struck a deal: eBay could use the PayPal logo on their site, and both would benefit from the implied credibility and security.

THE BOTTOM LINE: OFFER VALUE

For each of these examples, smart data usage enabled their marketing and distribution plans to work. A wealth of data exists out there today. It's up to you to use that data intelligently to fuel growth that otherwise wouldn't exist.

Everyone has access to all of these marketing channels—Facebook, Google Ads, SEO. But the most successful growth hacks have often been about leveraging a preexisting audience and data from multiple sources, and using that data to fuel growth.

One last reminder: once you have that technical component mastered and are engaging your audience, don't forget to provide something of value. Every single one of these growth hacks gave something of value, and the returns were tenfold.

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- ¹ These three platforms are just a sample of the many options available. To get a better sense of the different pay-to-play influencer platforms, check out this post by Influencer Marketing Hub: <https://influencermarketinghub.com/top-influencer-marketing-platforms/>
 - ² Fergal Glynn, "It Takes 6 to 8 Touches to Generate a Viable Sales Lead. Here's Why," Salesforce, April 16, 2015, <https://www.salesforce.com/blog/2015/04/takes-6-8-touches-generate-viable-sales-lead-heres-why-gp.html>.
 - ³ Pamela Neely, "How to Calculate Email Subscriber Value—and Why You Should Care," September 13, 2013, <https://pamneely.com/email-subscriber-value-2/>.

CHAPTER 3

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

WHAT IT IS

Once you've attracted your audience's attention, engagement drives them further down the funnel, encouraging them to participate and interact with your content and community.

WHY IT WORKS

The more your brand appears in front of your audience, the more your name will be front of mind when they're ready to make a purchase decision.

HOW IT WORKS

the psychology of engagement • prosocial behavior: the cornerstone of engagement • engaging across multiple touch points • nurturing leads • permission-based marketing • do small favors • creating valuable content • lessons learned at Louder.Online • paying attention to your audience

Now that you're getting traffic and leads, it's time to master your engagement game. The goal? Get those leads interested in you. Make them curious. Make them want to know all about you.

In other words, you want to stay top of mind. Once someone reaches your website, social profile, or other touch point, you need to be interesting, stand out above the rest, and start building a relationship with them.

Now, we know what you're thinking: engagement is your chance to point prospects toward a sale, right?

Not quite yet.

Remember, first-time visitors to your site are cold leads. They don't know you, and you don't know them. Do you really want to start off your new relationship with a sales pitch?

Throughout this chapter, when we talk about engagement, we're still talking about bringing value to the table. Rather than making a sales play, you should be asking, "How can we be of benefit to you? How can we solve your problems? How can we listen to you? How can our solution, service, or product provide value to your life?"

That focus on adding value and transforming them from a cold visitor to a warm, living, breathing human being also furthers your credibility. It's about serving, not selling. Don't worry, the selling will come later, but right now, all you want is your prospects to be comfortable with knowing you.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ENGAGEMENT

In the 2015 movie *Focus*, Will Smith's character, Nicky, poses as a businessman, who, along with his partner, Jess, played by Margot Robbie, have box seats at a football game. Over the course of the game, Nicky and Jess strike up a conversation with another businessman, and they start making friendly wagers about the outcomes of certain plays.

Soon the stakes begin to escalate. Nicky instructs the businessman to pick a player's number on the field below. If Jess picks the same number, Nicky wins. If not, he loses everything. Tension mounts, eyes narrow, and both pick the number fifty-five. Nicky wins.

Was it luck? Was it recklessness? As it turns out, neither. From here, the audience quickly learns that Nicky set the other businessman up, subliminally planting the number fifty-five everywhere the man went throughout the day. Nicky used a well-tested psychological principle and seeded the number in the guy's head. He *knew* what number the businessman would pick before the businessman did.

That's how successful multi-touch-point engagement works. Your job is to be where your prospects will be. Of course, we don't want you to manipulate anyone like Smith's character did. Instead, wherever you appear, we want you to add value, to create a positive association in your prospects' minds.

That way, when it comes time for sales further down the track, it's practically a given that you'll close. The prospect is happy to give you their business because you've connected with them through a process called prosocial behavior.

PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR: THE CORNERSTONE OF ENGAGEMENT

If you've read this far, you're here for the long game. You want to be part of the industry, not just grow your bottom line. You genuinely want your business to help others. That's what prosocial behavior is all about. As consumers, we return to the brands that give something to us, the brands that say, "I'm not here to take your money. My brand is about giving."

If you're serious about engaging your community, all of your marketing actions must be prompted by empathy, moral values, and a sense of responsibility, not a desire for personal gain. Engagement is not about selling. It's about providing and giving value. It's about understanding others' problems and offering solutions. It's about making others' lives easier.

No matter what business you're in, you have plenty of things you can give away for free. Perhaps it's knowledge based on your own experiences—whether it relates directly to your business or not. Perhaps it's a mentor program for your followers. Relationships don't last when they're focused on sales, but they flourish when they're focused on offering value. That's what keeps customers coming back.

Think about the friendships in your own life. You probably use kind words with each other. You probably speak fondly of your friends to others. The more this happens, the more you want to be around those people. This is the kind of feeling you want to grow with your brand.

ENGAGING ACROSS MULTIPLE TOUCH POINTS

Multichannel marketing is exactly what it sounds like: marketing to your audience across a variety of channels to create a wealth of touch points. Nicky did this masterfully in *Focus*, subtly attracting his target's attention at different touch points throughout the day. He was successful because he understood that it takes multiple touch points—at least six to eight, according to Salesforce—to generate a viable sales lead.¹ Since you're in the business of closing sales and not hoping for them, it's in your best interest to do everything you can to increase your probability of success.

Just because someone has arrived on your website, it doesn't mean you get to start selling to them right away. A visit to your website is just one touch point, meaning there's still more work to do. With the data you've captured about that visitor, your next move could be to start sharing targeted content with them on their social networks. That's two or more touch points right there, but that's still not enough. You've got to keep it going.

Perhaps the content you shared was super helpful and your prospect signed up for your mailing list. That's a third touch point—and an incredibly valuable one. From there, you'll have a variety of possible actions to take, leveraging paid, owned, and earned channels to create a viable lead.

Ultimately, your goal is to be front of mind for your prospects whenever they think about your industry, product, or service. If you nurture each relationship, become omnipresent in your prospects' communities, use smart technology and data, and focus on great content, you'll be a pro in no time.

AUTOMATE YOUR TOOL BELT

Multichannel marketing might sound like a lot of work, but there are tons of platforms, tools, and software available to help you automate the process.

When we first got started, a lot of these helpful tools either weren't available or weren't nearly as robust and powerful as they are today. Back then, if we got a visitor through organic search, we had a lot of legwork to do to track and target visitors and ultimately generate leads. Most of today's tools and software allow for a more automated—and a more personalized—approach. The more personalized you are, the stronger the relationships you

develop with your visitors, and the quicker you can move them down the funnel.

You will have plenty of options to research and build your tool belt, but one of our favorites is the Facebook pixel. This piece of code is installed on your website and tracks visitors' behavior—how they arrive to your site, the actions they take (or don't take) while they're there, and where they go when they leave.

With this pixel activated, whenever that visitor is on Facebook, you can then send them targeted ads calibrated specifically with details of where they went and what they did on your site. For instance, if they simply visited the homepage, you can send an ad that says, "Hey, come check out these other pages." If they viewed specific pages on your site, you send content that supports whatever they were looking for.

The Facebook pixel works especially well for e-commerce stores. Let's say someone came to your shop, put a whole bunch of things in their cart, and then abandoned it before making a purchase. Next time they're on Facebook, you can offer them an extra 10 percent off to encourage them to complete their purchase. It's incredible how many different ways you can intelligently use Facebook ads based on pixel data pertaining to the user journey.

This process is a great example of the power of personalization and one-to-one marketing. In a nutshell, the more personalized your message and the closer your targeting is on the individual level, the more effective it will be. Interest-based, demographic, and biographic data certainly play a part in a broader sense, but adding a personal touch will dramatically boost your engagement rates.

ONE-TO-ONE MARKETING IN THE REAL WORLD

Meet Bill. The other day, one of Bill's friends shared a blog post on Facebook. This headline caught Bill's interest, so he clicked through to read it, and in the process, he ended up on your brand's blog post. Because you write strong, compelling content, Bill found a lot of value in the article and rewarded you by opting in to your email list so he could get future posts delivered directly to his inbox.

Between that and the Facebook and Google pixels he picked up while on your site, over the next couple of weeks, Bill is starting to see your content just about everywhere he goes. Occasionally, he clicks on other interesting blog posts, sometimes even sharing them on his own social networks, thereby deepening his relationship with your brand and drawing others who see your content on his social feeds into the cycle.

When Bill read that first blog post and opted in to your mailing list, he wasn't in the buying phase. He didn't need your particular product or service yet, but nevertheless, he showed interest in your content. A few months and several touch points later, Bill ends up finding himself in need of your offerings, and because you've repeatedly provided him content of value, your brand is the first one that comes to mind.

This is the non-nefarious version of what Nicky did in *Focus*. By creating prosocial value over a series of touch points, you built credibility and engagement with Bill, seeding the idea of your brand in his mind until the day came when he was ready to buy. While it takes time to nurture prospects like Bill, you can run this funnel on a “one-to-many” scale, filling the top of your funnel with hundreds, even thousands, of people just like Bill at the same time, driving each toward a specific desired outcome—ideally conversion (chapter 5).

HOW TO MAKE PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR WORK FOR YOU

When you leverage prosocial behavior as a marketer, you're operating from an indirect sales perspective. In other words, rather than angling for a sale, you're working to build engagement and credibility to seed your brand in your audience's minds. Even if certain audience members aren't direct buyers, they can still become brand ambassadors for your company. Just look at Bill. He didn't need your particular product or service at first, but he nevertheless helped your brand build credibility through his increasing engagement—reading, sharing, and commenting on your content.

Even if someone isn't in the buying phase right now, the day may come when they are. If they have a positive view of your brand, you'll be their first thought. Here are a few tips to ensure that you are.

CONTINUE TO NURTURE YOUR LEADS

At Louder.Online, it can take us between three weeks and six months to close a deal with a client, and that's *after* we've hit our six to eight touch points and the client has inquired about doing business with us. In that six-month span, we have to continually nurture that lead, provide value, and build rapport. Otherwise, we'll have no hope of closing.

IT'S NOT ALL ONLINE

Prosocial behavior encapsulates both online and offline—the way you present yourself, the way you're attentive to requests, and the way you treat the people who helped get your brand off the ground five years ago. If they reach out for a cup of coffee to catch up, honor that.

On the flipside, honor mentoring opportunities as well. Invest in half-hour coffee meetings with young marketers. One day, they might be the top decision makers at the big brands you want to work with. It's not about trying to convert a sale right away. Instead, it's about putting yourself in a better position to get sales over the next several years.

These person-to-person moments are amazing for creating future opportunities. Many of the big entrepreneurs we work with give us business because they know us personally. Whatever you're creating online, create it in the real world too.

PERMISSION-BASED MARKETING

You can still nurture through a single sales channel. One of our favorites is our weekly autoresponder series through our email list. We love email because it's permission-based marketing. Audience members have asked to receive your content, and they'll keep asking for more as long as you continue to provide value.

Again, don't worry about the sell. Focus on content that is educational or entertaining. Maybe once every five or ten emails, you can mention your product or service through a soft call to action: "If you're interested, give us a call or click this link."

DO SMALL FAVORS

Small favors make the user feel safe and that they are not giving too much. When trying to get people to opt in to an email list, you need to give something of value away. People protect their email addresses. Often, companies give away free e-books or access to different things to capture that information.

At Louder.Online, we offer a site analyzer tool. First, people subscribe to our email list, then they put in their URL, we scan their site, and we tell them what they need to work on from a marketing perspective. From there, we continue to educate them week after week to improve their marketing. Not only does this build our email list, but it also does a great job of getting the right audience in front of us.

HOW DO YOU DETERMINE WHAT'S VALUABLE?

Valuable content answers questions or solves problems. If you're doing this—and you're not talking about your product or service—then you're providing value.

How do you know you're answering the right questions? Simple: you've done your research. You know your audience and their pain points, and you know how to solve their problems.

If you're still not sure, ask them. Send out a survey through your community. Ask contacts what their problems are directly once they've enrolled in your mailing list—and then respond with interest once they've told you their problems. Again, you can automate this whole process through tools like Survey Monkey.

One person who does this well is Charlie Hoehn. He asks in his emails to his own audience, “What do you want my content to be about?” or “What do you want answered?” or “What are your top five questions or fears?” When he talks about anxiety, for example, he asks in his emails, “What topics do you want me to address?” Then he creates content, videos, blogs, and emails answering these questions. It's incredibly effective and incredibly easy to pull off through email.

A lot of medium-sized brands think it's beneath them to ask their audience questions like this. They have a content team with a vetted strategy behind

them, and everything is all planned out. In our experience, that's an old-school perception from the corporate world.

We've learned a different lesson: you can't solve someone's problem or otherwise help them if you don't ask the question. It's not unprofessional to ask what your audience wants. Most of the time, people will give you answers that either you never thought of or even your own analytics may not point to.

LESSONS LEARNED AT LOUDER.ONLINE

We're not the only business to say this, but we really, really wish we'd committed to building our email list from day one. We planned on it, and we knew we were going to get there eventually, but it took us a while to finally get around to it. As a result, we missed out on a lot of future sales and a whole lot of brand-building opportunities.

Here's what really got us kicking ourselves. All this time we weren't building our own mailing list, we were helping other clients build theirs! It was painfully obvious these firms were bringing in a ton of revenue through their email lists, and yet there we were, twiddling our thumbs.

Eventually, we got our email list going—and we've been grateful for it every day since.

Even if your website shuts down, you still have that list. Even if your business closes, even if Facebook changes their algorithm and their organic reach, it doesn't matter; you have your list. It is one of your business's most valuable owned assets.

Remember, your email list is valuable beyond direct engagement. It also allows you to advertise to that specific audience through platforms such as Facebook. When you're a startup, you care about immediate ROI. It's hard to balance the long-term stuff with the immediate stuff. You're time-poor and trying to manage many things. We've been there. We get it.

Regardless, your email list is of prime importance. Take the time to invest in it. With the automation tools available to you, the up-front time

investment isn't as bad anymore, and it's a guaranteed way to accelerate your growth curve.

BRANDS THAT PUT THESE LESSONS INTO ACTION

Throughout this chapter, we've talked about ways to automate engagement to create time-effective multichannel marketing campaigns. Through these platforms—which can exist in email, on your website, or really anywhere—you can create funnels for pulling in cold visitors and pushing them down the path of interest in your product or service, educating and providing value along the way. Here are a few platforms we particularly enjoy.

INFUSIONSOFT

Of the platforms we've used, Infusionsoft by Keap is one of the most well known. It's complicated in some ways, but it also offers a ton of flexibility in terms of managing your email list. If you're building your list and you're trying to personalize messages and nurture your audience, Infusionsoft can help you determine what piece of content to send based on a given user's actions—or lack of action.

Maybe they open each message and click on every link. Or maybe they're not reading or responding to anything. Either way, you can continue to send relevant emails that speak to their behavior, which leads to better nurturing and personalization in your marketing moving forward.

AUTOPILOT AND DRIP

Autopilot and Drip are similar to Infusionsoft. The difference comes down to the level of complexity and how many personalization options you want, when the email should be sent, and how frequently you should send it. These options are both nice and cheap, and they'll do what you need at a basic level until you're ready to take things further.

FACEBOOK

Facebook has built-in functions and the ability to build different funnels within the ad system. For instance, when Bill read that blog post he found through his Facebook friend, he was pixelated. From there, without even knowing it, he was entered into a specific sales funnel of your design that

then tracked Bill's behavior and made decisions on what kinds of ads he would receive based on his browsing decisions.

If for some reason Bill became less responsive, you could adjust your targeting accordingly. For instance, if Bill spent only three seconds watching a video you sent, you wouldn't need to give up. Instead, you could see if another written piece of content is more his style (he did first show interest in your brand through a blog post, after all). If, on the other hand, Bill stuck the video out for a full ten seconds, you would learn that he's at least somewhat interested in video content and redirect him down a different funnel.

That's the quick version of how a Facebook funnel and targeting system could work. However, there's plenty more to know. Facebook funneling is a huge and involved process, one that we could write a whole book on—and perhaps one day we will. In the meantime, we encourage you to visit <https://adespresso.com/blog/> to learn a variety of ways to elevate your Facebook funnel game.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR AUDIENCE

The principles we've outlined in this chapter remain the same across any channel. Continue to give the audience what they're looking for and provide personalized marketing through any platform you choose to employ.

One last tip before we go: pay attention to the kinds of people who make up your audience. A person's email address and Facebook information are key identifying factors to marketing on any channel. At a basic level, these data points help you understand who your audience is. Maybe you think your target audience is one group, but the brands and people subscribed to your list tell a different story.

This could be a good thing or a bad thing. It could be that your subscribers are a better representative of whom you *should* be targeting. However, it also could be that you're attracting the wrong people and need to adjust your tactics.

Whatever the case, there's intel to be gathered from these lists, and data is power. It's shallow data, but having this basic knowledge is the key to effective engagement.

¹ Fergal Glynn, "It Takes 6 to 8 Touches to Generate a Viable Sales Lead. Here's Why," Salesforce, April 16, 2015, <https://www.salesforce.com/blog/2015/04/takes-6-8-touches-generate-viable-sales-lead-heres-why-gp.html>.

CHAPTER 4

INCLUSION FOR EVERYONE

WHAT IT IS

Everyone likes to feel important, valued, and part of a group—in a word, included.

WHY IT WORKS

Inclusion builds relational value, keeping your brand top of mind among your target audience and encouraging them to share that value with others.

HOW IT WORKS

the power of relational value • how relational value drives behaviors • building customers and advocates • the magic of brand advocacy • how to use Facebook for growth • how to use LinkedIn for growth • how to use Twitter for growth

Think about your favorite coffee shop. What makes it your favorite? Is it your favorite because of the convenient location near your office? Is it your favorite because the coffee's better than it is anywhere else? Is it your favorite because of their loyalty programs? Or is it your favorite because of how they treat you—how they make you feel valued and appreciated?

It's probably a little bit of all of those. But we've found that the businesses that don't just take, but also give something back, tend to inspire the most loyal customers. By this point in the book, the reason shouldn't be a

mystery: treating your customers well creates added value to the experience.

Everyone wants to be seen and appreciated on some level. It feels good. And when something feels good, we tend to seek it out more and more. If your local barista puts you in a good mood every morning and adds a little extra spring to your step, you're going to keep coming back.

This chapter is all about relational value, or making your customers feel significant, appreciated, and welcome. That's how you build communities and advocates, which is hugely important in connecting with your online audience.

When you create this kind of engagement, you create either a conscious or a subconscious connection. From here on, you play a role in that person's life, even if only on a small level.

THE POWER OF RELATIONAL VALUE

To understand relational value, we must first understand the concept of important others. These are the people who make our sphere of influence, or the real and imagined relationships we have with those we consider important others. Through the subconscious process of the halo effect (see chapter 2), we relate value to both influential people (i.e., celebrities and industry experts) and to influential brands. When these perceived influencers pay attention to us and create a value system (e.g., VIP promotions, premium content online, and partner programs), we respond accordingly, reveling in our perceived position of extra power, and reward those influencers and brands through our behaviors.

Relational value isn't just some vague, feel-good concept that marketers aspire to. It can be measured. Just look at the way bloggers pay close attention to the number of hits their posts receive. Or watch how marketers across channels measure the ratio of positive to negative feelings expressed by others, the degree of thoughtfulness, and the willingness of others to sacrifice on the individual's behalf. Each of these is a universal indicator of relational value.

So what's going on inside our heads that makes relational value so powerful? Each of us carefully tracks and responds to changes in the experience of relational value. For instance, if we observe a positive change in relational value, we feel things like joy, delight, excitement, pride, and love. The more the good feelings keep coming, the more value we detect, the better we feel—and the more good feelings we share with others.

You can see these factors at play all the time. For instance, if you see an entrepreneur who's trying to slowly build their brand, and an industry all-star comments, engages, or likes their piece of content, that entrepreneur will often create a social post purely about that fact. It creates an aura of self-importance for them and makes them feel valued.

That's also why, at the end of every year, there are always fifty new posts about the top marketing and business influencers to follow—each written by contributors who have included each other on their own lists. Sure, there is value if someone engages with you positively. But there's also the danger of becoming an echo chamber of people congratulating each other and not advancing anything. There are plenty of people out there who create inauthentic content purely to manufacture a sense of relational value, but those won't be the names you'll know in ten years' time, because they won't be around anymore.

HOW TO ACHIEVE RELATIONAL VALUE

Although there are an infinite number of different specific ways to achieve relational value, they all fall into two broader processes:

1. **Agentic (self-focused) processes.** These include successful competition with others that demonstrates one's effectiveness, social status, self-reliance, achievement, competency, and power.
2. **Communal (other-focused) processes.** These include the capacity to be giving, nurturing, loving, self-sacrificing, and compassionate.

Of these two processes, we look more closely at using agentic processes online, as these allow us to provide and demonstrate the power of our connection with our audience, thus bringing them a feeling of self-

empowerment, exclusivity, and the perceived increased social status of being associated with our brand.

Communal, other-focused processes work well too. These include offers like “Buy ten coffees, and get the eleventh one free.” These kinds of programs and marketing tactics succeed because they come from a place of giving and nurturing.

REAL-TIME EXAMPLE

Literally as we were writing this chapter, Aaron received an email from one of the people on our autoresponder lists. The person was responding to an educational post titled “What Would 421 Percent More Revenue Mean for You?” The message, which came from someone Aaron spoke to over twelve months ago, said, “Hi Aaron, can I chat with you again and get a fresh proposal?” Just like that, Aaron got a warm lead through nurturing, educating, and making his audience feel valued through helpful content.

You never know when your audience might move from being a brand follower or advocate to being an active buyer for your product or services. When that purchase moment comes, the brands that will be top of mind are the ones that have made a person feel valued. It’s like planting seeds. No one should expect a flower to bloom the next day. It’s a long-term process. Just like your work watering that plant will pay off eventually through the rise and bloom of a flower, relational value pays off the more you take care of your audience and nurture your relationship.

HOW RELATIONAL VALUE DRIVES BEHAVIORS

When you think of an angry person, it’s pretty easy to describe what they might look like. Their shoulders rise. Their chest lifts up like they’re in fight-or-flight mode. Their fists clench, and their jaw stiffens.

Naturally, we’re not trying to get you to evoke those feelings in your customers. However, we use the example of the angry person to demonstrate that different feelings are associated with different behaviors. You’re not likely to see a happy person puff up, narrow their eyes, and clench their fists when they see you.

Your job is to make your followers feel like VIPs. If you can do that, their behavior will follow accordingly. They'll be more inclined to share your content, to start engaging and having an opinion, and to recommend you to their friends and acquaintances. Here are some quick examples of relational value in action.

GOOD FEELINGS CAN BE MEASURED

However you act online, it produces data. Here's an example: a few years into our business, we noticed that it had become popular for e-commerce companies to offer free shipping. For the first businesses to do this, it was a risk that had to be calculated and averaged into sales and forecasts. However, a funny thing happened. The moment these companies offered free shipping, their followers became a lot more comfortable buying online, and sales spiked.

Seemingly small changes like this reflect to buyers the kind of care and value you put into your work. It may just be free shipping, but it shows that you're always looking for ways to address customer concerns and eliminate potential roadblocks. This makes them feel valued—and they return this sense of value with a purchase.

THE CENTURION CLUB

For many in the entrepreneurial world, it's almost an unspoken goal to be part of the American Express (Amex) Centurion Club, represented by a black, invite-only charge card that offers amazing benefits—such as concierge services, extremely late checkouts at hotels, concert tickets, free upgrades, points earnings, and more. Not just anyone can become a Centurion member. First of all, you need to have a certain spending threshold to qualify for this club. It carries a prestigious reputation in the marketplace. People want it, because it means their value is being recognized in some fundamental way.

The club is an ode to the quality of the community they built. It feels exclusive and yet inclusive for those in the group. They feel unified, as though they're part of a team. A lot of advocacy automatically happens because of how Amex builds their program and how the perceived value and real-world value exists for members of that group. People are

encouraged to talk about it, to strive for it, and to try to pay for it when they can.

We've seen this exclusivity value come into play more than once. When many entrepreneurs meet up for drinks almost anywhere around the globe, these little metal black cards often come out to pay. Why? Because they demonstrate that entrepreneur's association with an elite club. Just to be invited, they have to meet a minimum monthly spending threshold. Their ability to meet such a high spending threshold implies (even if it's not the case) that they've reached a certain level of success in their business.

In practical terms, Amex's Centurion and Platinum cards offer spending perks and other benefits. However, the Centurion card offers an extra credibility badge that the Platinum card doesn't, and the card's marketing reflects that. To some, the ability to show they're big spenders doesn't mean much, while to others, it means the world. We're not here to weigh in either way.

TIFFANY DIAMONDS

We're not trying to pick any fights here, but there are better diamonds available than Tiffany's. Yet it doesn't matter. Tiffany's has built a brilliant brand that people want to be associated with. Companies like Amex and Tiffany's didn't just create VIP offerings to lure in a bunch of suckers. They relentlessly create credibility for their brands through their content until they have something of substance that earns them a positive perception.

The payoff for their efforts didn't happen overnight either. Brands like Tiffany's have to work consistently to portray themselves as high-end, desirable brands that people want to be a part of long before they actually are. They bring with them a perceived level of success or prestige that demonstrates their successful cultivation of relational value. Both Tiffany's and the Amex Centurion Club sell an image, not a product, and they do it very well.

THE ENTREPRENEUR/MENTOR

A lot of entrepreneurs have high-end mentorship programs. They create these programs when their brand has reached the point where people perceive value in their knowledge and expertise. Once your following has

grown and you've built up your credibility indicators, it's time to build programs like these to keep and grow your audience.

THE MAGIC OF BRAND ADVOCACY

People don't need to buy from you to become brand advocates. Anyone can be a fan of your brand, even if they don't need your products or services at the moment.

Consider brand advocates as an important part of your community. They'll connect with you through LinkedIn and other social platforms. They'll opt in to your newsletter. Most importantly, they will share your content with others. They might never have purchased your product or service—perhaps they're not there yet on the purchase cycle or they simply don't have the need or requirement—but they are still attached and invested in your brand value.

WHERE DO BRAND ADVOCATES COME FROM?

Your brand advocates can come from a variety of places. For instance, perhaps one of your brand advocates was a high-up executive with a company that worked with you in the past. She might not need your services, but she does play golf on Sundays with all her other executive friends and is singing your praises. She's giving out your business card, asking others to connect with you, and introducing you through emails.

HOW DO THEY FIT INTO THE MARKETING PICTURE?

Brand advocacy is a bonus. It comes in addition to—and often as a result of—your normal marketing efforts. Once you've created a loyal database of followers, when you execute and consciously market to your audience, your advocates will do free work for your brand.

For instance, when you send an advocate a piece of content through your email list, they might send it on to three people, creating a chain effect for your brand. At this point, you're no longer in control of who sees the message, but that's okay because it's being shared with *more people* than your core followers.

Brand advocates themselves are credibility indicators. People generally only share messages they believe in. If you've created valuable content, that validation comes back to you when others spread your message.

To be clear, brand advocacy is not always a sales thing. For example, if a colleague sends out an article of ours on growth hacking, it's not to sell something. They're just trying to be helpful by sharing a perspective on the market.

However, even in this scenario, we get value. People will read the article, see our bylines at the bottom, and perhaps want to learn more about us and our company. In the five seconds it took to share that content, we scored a big win.

INCLUSION AFFECTS THE MIND AND BODY

Brand advocacy stems from our fundamental desire to include and feel included. If you produce helpful content, your audience feels valued and wants to pay that feeling forward. It literally creates a chemical reaction, producing feel-good endorphins that feed off each other and reinforce positive behaviors. This rule of science isn't a marketing effect in itself but rather a natural behavioral reaction that we marketers can use to our benefit.

When you create something of value, people feel like they're getting something for free. Value is coming from a particular brand, and that brand is associated with a positive perception. Whether now, six months from now, or six years later, that perception will eventually come back to your company in a positive way.

ADVOCACY IN A SOCIAL WORLD

When we first got started in 2008, businesses weren't embracing digital platforms and social media the way we do today. Platforms like Facebook were largely for personal use. Then businesses realized they could capitalize on these channels if they were smart about it. They already knew the power of brand advocacy, but now they had to learn how to create value for their audiences and encourage them to share.

To be a true influencer in any market, to earn potentially lucrative leads, you need to produce content that filters out into your networks and gets

shared. You want people to write comments like, “Wow, I never saw it from that perspective,” or “I didn’t realize it was actually that easy to take these steps,” or “This is the same problem I’m facing in my business and this person’s just answered so much of it, but I don’t know this person.” Comments like this are solid gold.

GOING VIRAL

In the real world, when we’re influenced by something, we feel compelled to share with others, perhaps over a cup of coffee or around the water cooler. We create emotional connections. Even in the realm of business, emotions happen all the time. When a piece of content goes viral—meaning it’s being shared at a rapid pace across networks—it’s the result of your brand seeding the right value and emotional connections to your content.

Sharing is instinctive to us. Humans feel safer in groups of two or more. Just look at the bond between a mother and her newborn. From the moment we’re born, we know the power of connecting with another human being. This same core feeling also drives our desire to connect with others on social platforms.

Every connection is a form of intimacy. That’s why businesses should use them as their *voice*, and not as their sales platform. You have to connect with others authentically if you want brand advocates and viral content.

BEAT THE FILTERS

We live in a saturated world. There’s an insane amount of content out there. We’re only human. We may process information at incredible speeds, but we cannot process everything we see every day. We *have* to filter things out.

These are the stakes for your brand. Make even one misstep and get filtered out. We do this all the time. Just ask Gián how quickly she’ll scroll past a piece of content that even implies the word “sale.”

To beat the filters, you have to deliver the unexpected. Give your audience something they don’t need but that has inherent value. Perhaps it changes their perspective when they read it, or maybe it presents them with a new path forward for a business problem they’ve been facing. If you’re

consistent in sharing your knowledge and making connections, you'll be creating a legion of online brand advocates in no time.

THE HUSTLE'S BRAND AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

One of the better ambassador programs we've seen online is The Hustle's.¹ First, we like that they use everyday language, copy, and conversational text—and not jargon. They speak to their audience like friends, which is much more appealing to the masses and especially to the audience they're targeting. They use that language in all the copy they produce.

If you go to their homepage, you can opt in via email; then they will ask you if you want to be part of their ambassador program. Once in that program, you are allowed to invite others to the program by email. If you meet a certain level of sign-ups, then they give away high-quality merchandise they have carefully designed and know their fans are interested in.

Because of The Hustle's connection with Tim Ferriss—the *New York Times* best-selling author of *The 4-Hour Workweek*—they even give away live “ask me anything” sessions (typically referred to as AMAs) with him on Facebook for members who've reached a certain level of the ambassador program. Not only do people feel like they're spoken to in the right way, but they also enjoy actively working for the brand so they can receive great value in return.

The tools The Hustle uses aren't especially advanced. Anyone can build a similar ambassador program for a few hundred dollars using platforms like Maitre'D and Grytics, or even by adapting freely available open source code. With these basic tools, though, their email list has grown to over 300,000 subscribers.

HOW TO USE FACEBOOK FOR GROWTH

A friend of ours, Josh Fechter, made \$200,000 on Facebook by building a group of marketers, business owners, and investors—all high net-worth individuals.

To build the group, he followed a specific set of steps:

1. **Understand what the community is after.** To determine this, Fechter performed research; studied other groups, even other fan pages; and identified what got the most engagement in terms of content.
2. **Learn what keeps groups alive.** A lot of groups die because their members lack time, energy, and focus.
3. **Determine who belongs in the group.** Fechter built target personas around whom he wanted in the group by determining their income levels, job titles, age, and location.
4. **Create engaging content.** Even with the right group members, Fechter needed to engage his audience with content they could learn from and implement. No high-level strategy stuff; it had to be actionable. So he created a series of long-form tactical guides, long-form stories about the work he did, and videos showing walk-throughs of *how* he did things.

To further supplement his content and provide value, Fechter also provided live-streaming talks from various conferences, reaching out to influencers similar to his target personas and interviewing them on behalf of the group. He also made sure that whatever content he posted looked good, had a snappy headline, and was otherwise “clickable.”

LEARN FIRST, ACT SECOND

Fechter didn't just jump into this project blind. He researched extensively before making a move. He understood who the influencers were in the space he was playing in. He wanted only people who already had a following, could advocate on his behalf, and could draw other people into the community based on the positive association.

BUILD CORE MEMBERS

Even when he started recruiting members, Fechter did so slowly. First, he invited what he considered his core members, people who would also contribute content to the group. Fechter wanted no advertising or self-promotion in this group. People couldn't just post whatever they wanted. Only high-value content was allowed.

BUILDING WITH THE RIGHT TOOLS

As the group grew, Fechter used a tool called Grytics, which is an analytics platform that shows what attracts the most likes, shares, comments, and views. This allowed him to double down on what worked and continue to feed the engine with similar content.

He also grew the group with Facebook ads. This was especially cost-effective because he was driving traffic on Facebook itself and not offsite (buying internal clicks are much cheaper than buying offsite clicks).

Then Fechter focused on email outreach by pulling data out of LinkedIn, understanding people's job titles, and looking at their group activity. His virtual assistant got the names and email addresses of the members of relevant groups. He then entered that information into an email automation tool and produced an email template that said, "Hey, I noticed you're a marketer in this area and are part of this group on LinkedIn. I think you'd find some content over here in this Facebook group valuable. Come over and take a look."

PUT IN THE HOMEWORK, WITNESS THE GROWTH

Because of the scale of the project, Fechter grew the group quickly, and he successfully attracted the kinds of people he was looking for. In fact, the group exploded so quickly that he had to change it to invite-only. This in turn created a type of exclusivity similar to what we saw earlier with Amex and Tiffany's. Once they had to be approved for membership, even more people wanted to join.

MONETIZING

As you can see, it's a lot of work researching and building even a simple Facebook group if you want to do it the right way. There had better be a payoff, right?

The way Fechter finally leveraged this group was brilliant. In order to capitalize and monetize his group, Fechter did a one-time post that said, “I’ve collated all of the best posts from the group in the last year into this e-book. Anyone who wants access, I need you to sign up for a free trial of this platform over here.”

Because the majority of the group were marketers and business growth people, getting them to sign up for a free trial of an SaaS tool likely to benefit all of them was a smart move. A ton of people signed up for the trial and stayed on afterward, and he made \$200,000 for the business.

It was only one post, but that one post was literally the culmination of a year’s worth of work building the group, curating content, creating value, and fostering trust. Only after all of that did he make a soft ask by saying, “Here’s a free trial of my service that you might find interesting.”

Value doesn’t just occur overnight, and neither does credibility and growth. If you want things fast, you’ll have to go through paid advertising channels; but to build a credible brand, you’ve got to travel a different path and provide long-term value for people. So here’s to Josh Fechter, another perfect example of an “overnight success” that was years in the making!

SCALING TO SMALLER FACEBOOK COMMUNITIES

Now that we’ve told you Josh Fechter’s success story, we should probably add a caveat. Fechter had a considerable amount of marketing knowledge prior to that project. If you’re just getting started, you might not. However, Fechter’s basic approach is the same one we’ve been advocating throughout this book.

1. **Research.** Determine the kinds of people you want to participate in your group, targeting high-value members who can boost credibility and engagement wherever you can.
2. **Value.** Make it clear that your group isn’t about self-promotion—either for yourself or for your members. Then provide content that will be interesting and helpful to your audience.

3. **Nurturing and engagement.** Once he grew the group's initial members, Fechter bolstered its ranks by inviting others to join and participate. He then continued to encourage participation, asking his members about what they were most interested in learning.
4. **Exclusivity.** After the group grew to a certain point, Fechter realized that in order to keep it engaged, he had to make it invite-only, in the process creating higher demand among would-be members.
5. **Conversion.** With his in-demand group firing on all cylinders, Fechter finally converted many of his participants—all while continuing to offer value.

The great news is, this basic strategy works on any scale. If you're building a small Facebook community, use the data available to you, even if it's just simple things like the interests of your existing community. You might find common factors. Maybe they all like *Seinfeld* or Led Zeppelin—or 50 percent or more do. You can then produce content that appeals to that audience in that way.

Pop culture connections like this are a great way of adding relational value since you're bringing in influences your community members already respect. For instance, you could share your business message using only *Seinfeld* quotes. Recently, during the buildup to the latest Star Wars movie, we saw a video explaining how Han Solo embodied the five most essential leadership traits.

If you use the data available to you in a smart way, and especially if you connect it to something relevant and topical, people will want to share. Just don't force it, and make sure it's something your community is genuinely interested in. Once you're sure you've built a strong, dedicated community that values what you do, then you can begin to move toward conversion (just like we will next chapter!).

A NOTE ON FACEBOOK FAN PAGES

So far, we've focused a lot on Facebook groups, but fan pages are another potent marketing option. The big difference between groups and fan pages is that groups have a much higher organic reach. If you post a piece in a

group, loads of members will see it. If you post on your fan page, however, less than 2 percent of your followers are going to see your content.

About that 2 percent reach: that number was reported years ago, and because of the platform's changing priorities, it has likely gone down even further. In that regard, especially when compared to groups, it's practically pointless to post your content to a Facebook fan page.

A lot of businesses think that if they have a fan page, they'll get eyeballs on whatever content they share. We want to shake them and say, "That's not marketing! You're just dropping hints to a small number of people." Think of it this way: if you have a thousand fans, fewer than twenty will see a given post. Is that worth the effort? This is a real bugbear of ours when it comes to content distribution. You've got to put strategy behind the growth of groups and fan pages.

So how *can* you do that with fan pages? Is there a way to increase organic reach? Yes, but it's pay-to-play—though if you want to get involved, you can do it cheaply. Our good friend Dennis Yu has a program called A Dollar a Day, whose purpose is to help marketers understand that even small ad buys on Facebook can have value. Essentially, Yu's argument is this: would you rather work within the tiny amount of organic reach you get, madly churning out endless content with diminishing returns? Or would you rather spend a dollar a day—or thirty dollars a month—to get more views with less content?

Especially after you factor in the costs of producing content, the latter option becomes much more appealing. The bottom line is that even small spends get eyeballs on content, encouraging those viewers to share and help grow your audience. By spending just a little bit a month advertising your page, in other words, you can help accelerate your rate of organic growth through increased exposure.

You can either pay for ads or create a group and get better reach there. If you're going to use a fan page, you need to look at increasing engagement levels, which comes down to understanding your audience's desires, encouraging them to engage, and getting more of the right people onto the

page. Eventually, you will have a fan page full of engaged people likely to become ambassadors for your brand and expand your reach.

HOW TO USE LINKEDIN FOR GROWTH

LinkedIn is fantastic, especially in B2B applications. Just like with Facebook, one of the best things you can do is create a group. We did this many years ago with a group called Global Marketing Leaders, a title we chose to boost credibility and state a common aspiration of our members. We've added only our target audience to the group—marketers at medium- to enterprise-level companies around the world.

We still get positive feedback from this group almost daily. We'll get emails telling us how great the group is because the content shared is not offer-related but value-related. We're glad they noticed! All we ever share are case studies, previews of upcoming technologies, how-tos, tips for fine-tuning, and methods of addressing common pain points. We're all dealing with the same things at the same time and solving each other's problems.

The problem-solving component is wonderful. As much as we hate to admit it, we still don't know everything. But we have a great platform to ask. "How does everyone think about X?" or "How have you worked around this problem?" All of this engagement has led to other great perks, such as interview requests and free tickets to seminars and conferences.

Another thing to consider on LinkedIn is their direct message (DM) campaigns. You can run these just like you would an email campaign. Just know that if you run DM campaigns to anyone outside the group, you're limited to the number of people you can send to, even if you're connected to all of them. We think it's better to have them as members so you can message them anytime and create a sense of community.

HOW TO USE TWITTER FOR GROWTH

Twitter works differently than Facebook or LinkedIn. You cannot build groups or fan pages, but you *can* build a following.

The basic idea with Twitter is to find and engage the right people, which you can do by searching their bio and looking for other demographic

indicators. Follow the right people, and unfollow the wrong ones. Then create a content stream that's part curated and part your own. As always, it's all about adding and creating value for others.

TWEET FREQUENTLY

Twitter is constantly in motion. Only a few people will ever see a given tweet, no matter how many followers you have. The more you tweet, the greater your visibility.

Here, some scheduling software will help you, something like Buffer or MeetEdgar. Those tools not only let you post new stuff regularly but also repeatedly schedule good content that you want eyeballs on. Change up the title with each post, and use analytics to tell you which one works best.

BUILDING FOLLOWER COUNT

People are classified as influencers largely based on the audiences they have on platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Twitter, however, is one of the only platforms where you can publicly gain access to follower counts. As a result, it's a big driver for influencer scoring algorithms and manually aggregated blog posts about top influencers.

Some people say Twitter is dying. We say tell that to the influencers with 300,000 to 500,000 engaged followers. It's true that on Twitter you can't create groups and engage as directly as you can on other platforms, but if you're sharing regularly, Twitter can absolutely factor into your overall influencer game.

BE A FOLLOWER

Following others is a great way to build your Twitter platform. Look for influencers similar to yourself or your brand, have a look at who they're following, then start adding them and their followers.

FINAL THOUGHTS

By now, you've learned a thing or two about inclusion for everyone—specifically, how relational value feeds into brand advocacy and how you

can use concrete processes to earn it. As you're mapping out your strategy, here are a few final things to keep in mind.

IT'S A LOT

There are so many fans, so many streams of content coming, that no one can possibly read every piece from every person they're following. Think about it: if you're connected to five hundred friends on Facebook, and every one of them updates their status once a day, that's five hundred pieces of content you're expected to scroll through. It just doesn't happen that way.

You've got to play the algorithm game to stay in your audience's feeds. Every social media platform has a different algorithm, but each is based on similar factors—how long you've been connected with people, how influential they are, the engagement they get on their posts, etc. The biggest factor for most platforms is how relevant the content you're sharing is.

IT ONLY TAKES ONE POST

Hopefully, we didn't just crush your social outreach dreams with all that talk of algorithms and reach. Take heart: all of this effort *can* pay off. All it takes is one piece of content that someone randomly sees in their feed to create a brand ambassador.

We know this happens, because it happens to us as audience members all the time. When we find a link to something we like, we don't just read the content. We look at the producer. We click on their profile and look at everything they've posted. Keep posting, and eventually something you share will connect.

BEST PRACTICES CHANGE

More recently, even LinkedIn has changed the way it operates to act more like a social platform. At the time of this writing, it focuses more on engagement and content, as opposed to its original function of job hunting and lead generation. Naturally, content creators are quickly adapting to the new model.

If you're smart about how you use status updates, you can increase your views and your viral reach on LinkedIn. As we write this, the trend is smart

copywriting with a focus on being vulnerable in a place where people typically aren't.

Here's how it works. When people scroll through their feed and see one or two sentences that form a shocking or otherwise provocative statement, they need to click through to see the rest, which usually includes some tactical information or a short lesson. The readers of these posts then like the post, comment on it, or share it—and then it takes off in LinkedIn's algorithm.

Following these tactics, we've received millions of views on our content in just one or two weeks—and we know people who are getting a hundred million views in a couple of months. It's not just vanity metrics; if you do it right, you'll make connections, get interview requests, and generate leads for your business. It's about the credibility and community growth that exists because you're different in a platform where it traditionally hasn't been that way.

LEARN THE SYSTEM

As we've said with so many of the tactics in this book, there are always ways to game or exploit the system. But even if you try to cheat, if you're not cheating with a certain intention and level of skill, you're not doing yourself any favors.

We love learning how to game as much stuff as possible, largely because we want to know what to look out for and make sure we're not making the same mistakes. In the process, we usually learn a lot about how to do things the *right* way. We love understanding why things work, how they stick together, and how people are both gaming it and using it for good.

¹ Check it out for yourself at <https://thehustle.co>.

CHAPTER 5

TOTAL CONVERSION OF THE MIND

WHAT IT IS

Conversion is the process of getting leads, prospects, and audience members to take a desired action—whether that action is signing up for a mailing list, liking a social page, or making a purchase.

WHY IT WORKS

Conversion brings many other marketing processes to bear, each designed to demonstrate credibility, build a relationship, and provide value, which in turn encourages your target audience to convert.

HOW IT WORKS

show you care • the online trail from audience to customer • optimizing for conversion • conversion lessons the Louder.Online way • how landing pages work • the golden rules of optimization • incentivizing the customer to convert

Finally, the moment you've all been waiting for: conversion.

These days, Louder.Online is no stranger to the million-dollar deal, but that wasn't always the case. First, we had to master every step of the process that we've outlined in this book—establishing credibility through our personal brands, converting traffic into a community of brand ambassadors, and *then* converting them into customers.

As you work through this chapter and start learning how to convert your fans into clients, just remember: million-dollar deals usually don't go down on the internet. We use the internet to warm up our community, provide value, create credibility, and fine-tune all our business processes. The million-dollar contracts, however, we close in person.

That's why getting your name and face out there through speaking engagements is so important. It's your best opportunity to meet and network with other entrepreneurs who want to work with you and who refer you to clients. Once you've reached that point, then the magic starts to happen.

SHOW YOU CARE

Every chapter, we've stressed the importance of authenticity and adding value to every single interaction with your community. Closing deals is no different.

By the time we'd moved on to the big-money deals, we'd learned to stop talking about ourselves and our offerings. Instead, we took every opportunity to show we cared about our prospective clients' needs and pain points. First, we keyed into the language they used in describing their problems and met them on their level. After showing them we understood, *then* we began to talk about how we could impact their lives and solve these particular problems. It was never why our product was so good or why we were better than our competitors. It was always about offering solutions.

Again, even that wouldn't have mattered if we were just a couple of smooth talkers they met on the street. We only earned the right to offer solutions after we put the time, money, energy, and effort into building credibility for our brands.

It wasn't any one thing, but rather the combination of those factors, that moved the needle for us. We showed them that we put the work in—from how we engaged online to how we crafted our proposals.

If you can do all that, you don't need to tell anyone how great you are. It shows in everything you do. When it comes to the million-dollar contracts, it's not what you say but what you do.

THE ONLINE TRAIL FROM AUDIENCE TO CUSTOMER

How do you create online tactics to move your audience from followers, supporters, and ambassadors to customers? By understanding people's psychological triggers.

In each of our brains is a primitive area called the amygdala. It controls our gut reactions and emotions, keying in these primal responses within three seconds—which is five times faster than conscious thought. That's right, not only do our emotional reactions come first, but they also make a more lasting imprint than rational thought. The question is, how can we use these subconscious triggers to convert clients without being evil?

The not being evil part should be pretty straightforward. The mass appeal thing is admittedly a little trickier. The short answer is that there is no single way to do this. We all process information a little differently. Some people are drawn more to visual content, while others may have an academic background where words are dominant.

As poet Maya Angelou said, "At the end of the day, people won't remember what you said or did. They will remember how you made them feel." Appealing to everyone will be challenging, but combining the following strategies will help you grow a larger audience.

IT'S CALLED SUBCONSCIOUS FOR A REASON

We don't always realize when we've been subconsciously triggered. All we know is that when it happens, we know there's a certain behavior that follows, whether we're aware of it or not. In other words, we don't buy products or services. We buy answers to problems, pathways to wants, or a secret door to our heart's desires.

To convert your audience from followers to customers, don't talk endlessly about your product's best features. Instead, create content that produces genuine gut reactions. Show your followers there's something in it for them.

BREAK ANALYSIS PARALYSIS

Once your customers begin to see that you're offering something of value, you can start to sweeten the deal. This will help you to break analysis

paralysis—that feeling of indecision that comes when a prospective customer feels overloaded by options and information.

How do you sweeten the deal? Give them a feeling of exclusivity, like we talked about in chapter 4. Make them feel like they're part of an important group. Psychology shows their actions will reflect their newly attained status. To further entice them, find ways to add value to their experience, such as first month free, money-back guarantees, or free delivery.

USE IMAGES

The human brain loves images—and we can process them sixty thousand times faster than text. Ninety percent of all data that the brain processes is visual, which is why when you're talking to someone, many of your perceptions of them come from their body language.

Visual connections work especially well online. Even if you're producing content that's largely text-based, supplement it with images to improve comprehension. Things like graphics and cartoons help establish the basic parameters of your content. When viewers see this, that comprehension gives them an endorphin hit and propels them to engage with your content more deeply.

FRAME MESSAGES AS STORIES

If you want your audience to remember what you're all about, tell them a story. Everyone loves stories, especially ones with catchy titles and strong hooks.

Your job is to find your brand's story. When you do this, you help your audience understand how your product adds value to everyday life. That's why case studies are so effective: they show your company in action in a relatable, real-world situation.

VIDEO: THE PERFECT COMBINATION OF IMAGERY AND STORYTELLING

We can't stress the importance of visual communication as a part of effective storytelling. The more visual content you share, the better chance of

conversion you have. That's why video content is essential to any online content strategy.

Video is just about unstoppable when combined with good storytelling. One video opportunity we love is sharing your customers' stories, especially stories that show how the customers learned something or what triggered them to get into the market.

OPTIMIZING FOR CONVERSION

If you've been doing everything we've said, you've already done a lot of the heavy lifting by building your credibility—you're educating; you're an authority; you're sharing your client logos, case studies, and testimonials; and you're always providing value and solving problems for your customers. Now that you've mastered the art of credibility, let's talk about some other approaches to help speed the conversion process along.

Before we dive in, though, first a note on tone. At this point, your leads are much further down the sales funnel. They've made several micro-commitments to your brand, they know what you're about, and they're comfortable with your message. That means you can start being more direct, taking opportunities in your content to inform them of the products and services you have for sale and encourage them to learn more. Previously, we've encouraged you not to write from a sales perspective, but now the training wheels are off. Go ahead and pitch away!

THE BENEFITS OF OPTIMIZATION

Let's say your website is getting a thousand visitors per month, and your conversion rate is 0.1 percent. After you tweak a couple of things, your conversion jumps to 0.2 percent. It may not sound like much, but you just doubled your leads and revenue—all because you took the time to optimize. Not enough people realize what a little attention here can make.

Now, you may be wondering, is a 0.2 percent conversion rate any good? Maybe not. As a rule of thumb, marketers like to target a 2 percent conversion rate. That said, it all depends on what your conversion point is. Remember, conversion can mean anything. Are you converting a sale or converting a lead?

If you're trying to achieve leads, it's a lot easier to have a higher conversion rate because there's no risk to the lead. It's an inquiry as opposed to a purchase. Sales are trickier, because it's harder to persuade customers that your systems are in place and that your credit card facilities are secure.

Instead of wondering what your conversion rate should be, simply start wherever you are and work to improve it. We once read a great story in the *Harvard Business Review* about Olympic coach Dave Brailsford, who enlisted his cycling team to get 1 percent better across a series of metrics—1 percent faster, 1 percent stronger, and so on. These seemingly small gains created remarkable results for his team, propelling his British cycling team to win seven of ten gold medals in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and then three out of the next four Tour de France events.¹ We think this is a great blueprint for success. Stay focused on making constant minor improvements, and watch as they create massive benefits for your business.

SPLIT TEST EVERYTHING

A lot of times when marketers optimize their websites for conversion, they focus on things like button size, text, colors, or font. However, the most important thing is still your copywriting. Is it written for the right audience? Is it optimized for sales or information? Could you swap it out for a more eye-catching video?

To answer these questions, A/B test everything. Create multiple copies of a landing page, each with a single variation. Direct traffic to each of them and see which performs best in terms of leads, sales, and conversions.

That can be a time-intensive process, but the good thing is that you can learn as you go. Once you've moved the big rocks and figured out what works best, focus on the pebbles next.

AI TESTING

Want to optimize faster? Consider one of several artificial intelligence (AI) tools on the market. An AI machine runs thousands of simultaneous tests against landing pages to get you fast results. While this may not seem particularly useful or appealing to small businesses that may not have much traffic, it's a godsend for websites that get millions of visitors per month.

If you're running such a high-traffic site, it likely means you're already doing a lot of other things right. Your copywriting is strong, your content is compelling and valuable, and you're engaging audiences in a variety of ways that keeps them visiting time and again. At this point, you're looking to fine-tune your site in any way you can to help press your advantage and encourage conversions.

That's when the small tweaks to your site, such as button color or text, start to matter, potentially leading to massive revenue improvements on the back end. When you get to this point, first, great job! No doubt it took a lot of good decisions to get you there. To keep making those gains, the first tool we'd recommend is Google Optimize.² This tool helps you set up multiple versions of your landing page and run traffic to each.

OPTIMIZATION DONE RIGHT

Want to see what a big difference optimization can make? Here are a couple of quick examples:

- Basecamp, one of the most well-known online project management tools, did some conversion optimization by changing the design of their homepage. It wasn't a huge change. They just replaced their text with a human image, which psychology has shown to increase relatability and engagement (both useful conversion triggers), leading to a 102 percent increase in conversions as a result.
- One airline, Nature Air, changed the call-to-action button location for booking flights—earning a 591 percent increase in conversion in the process.
- Performable, now HubSpot (a company that gets hundreds of thousands of visitors a month), a well-known online marketing tool, changed the color of their call-to-action button from green to red, leading to a 21 percent increase in conversions.³

Still don't believe small things can make a big impact?

BUTTON? WHAT BUTTON?

If you're putting in the effort by creating good content, paying attention to design, showing value, speaking to the right audience, and appealing to a person's emotions, your conversions will start to go through the roof.

To this end, no single element, no matter how small, should get overlooked. One common problem we see on landing pages is bad button placement. How can anyone convert if they don't know where to click?

A lot of landing pages try to draw you in with a mess of copy. They go through this huge spiel and then put the button right at the bottom. However, it's important to remember that a lot of your visitors are going to give up and leave well before they've reached the bottom.

Luckily, the solution is easy: put multiple call-to-action buttons throughout the text. This helps the visitors who are ready to convert immediately and saves them the hassle of having to look around. As with the previous examples, where changes did increase conversion, focus on fine-tuning the buttons came only after producing compelling copy with strong credibility indicators and good design. Once you've done that, feel free to start trying A/B testing things like button placement to see what kinds of results you can produce.

CONVERSION LESSONS THE LOUDER.ONLINE WAY

In the early days, we spent a lot of time, energy, and effort *not* worrying about our brand or our credibility, in part because we didn't understand the role it played in converting a sale. Even if we did focus more on those elements, it may not have done us much good in the short term. Because we lacked experience, we lacked many of the elements necessary for moving visitors to our conversion goals:

- Our landing pages lacked credibility badges such as the companies we worked for or where we'd been published.
- We couldn't speak with confidence based on case studies and examples.
- We couldn't list where we'd been seen or what publications we'd appeared in.
- We couldn't get our content shared by leveraging our audiences or influencer relationships.
- We didn't know how to get the best bang for our buck with paid ads to landing pages, let alone where to put an opt-in button for higher

conversion once visitors got there.

- We didn't know what tone to take as we moved prospects further down the sales funnel.

We had the same basic skills in 2008 as we do today. Talent-wise, there was nothing stopping us from walking into any enterprise-level client, taking on the same kind of work we do now, and giving them tremendous value. However, we didn't have any brand recognition and weren't sure how to build credibility in the marketplace.

It wasn't until we started building credibility for our brand by sharing case studies and testimonials that our conversions started to pick up—and when they did, luckily we paid attention. These days, we understand the value of branding and credibility when it comes to converting clients. We're now a lot better at telling our company's story, establishing ourselves as influencers, giving away the knowledge we've built up, and focusing on providing value every step of the way.

It may sound simplistic to focus on such small details. However, we found that elements such as these were literally the difference between struggling to land \$50,000 deals and closing million-dollar deals with enterprise-level clients—and without expending any extra effort.

GREAT PRODUCT + LOW CREDIBILITY = BAD CONVERSION

We've seen so many startups with great products. Maybe they make recycling easier. Maybe they improve vigilance in communities. Whatever the case, they solve a problem.

Having a great product is, well, great. However, if your brand hasn't created credibility or told your story in a way that resonates with users, it's a lot harder to achieve conversion. Credibility gets your foot in the door.

Now, here's the tricky part: once your foot is in the door, you have to make good on it. You have to live up to your reputation.

In other words, you don't show up to a million-dollar negotiation dressed like a clown—that is, unless you're in the business of selling designer

clown suits. Then, and probably only then, is dressing like a clown the same as dressing for success.

UNDERSTAND YOUR PROSPECT'S MOTIVATORS

A smart brand is constantly on a parallel journey. On the one hand, you're creating value, building credibility for your brand, and growing your following. On the other, you're gaining intel. You're learning what motivates your audience.

Social media makes this easier than ever. Whoever's going to be in that boardroom with you, check out their Facebook interests. Check to see how active they are on LinkedIn. Pay attention to whether they're viewing and engaging with *your* content. By this stage, you should have a great database of intel on your audience. Use it.

Remember that LinkedIn group, Global Marketing Leaders, that we talked about last chapter? We've learned so much about our audience's pain points through that group. Every day, we get to hear from top marketers about the questions and challenges they're facing—so we tailor our content to address questions and challenges and help remove those pain points.

It sounds easy enough, but too often we see organizations build content around their own internal objectives. They say, "We want engagement levels of XX percent in the future." These goals might be attainable, but then they turn around and create content and PR pieces all about their products and services.

Because they never ask what their audience wants, they never address their audience's problems—and their conversion rates continue to lag.

ANTICIPATE YOUR AUDIENCE

At Louder.Online, our marketing is always data-led. Gián first learned this approach while working at IBM. Every year, IBM would run a back-to-school promotion, bundling computers with other essential items like mice and keyboards. All this came from good intel. IBM knew that a certain percentage of their audience had kids, so they targeted that group with helpful deals that made them more likely to convert. The data IBM had

collected allowed them to know exactly what to bundle. Past purchases and past e-commerce trends told them all they needed to know.

This is a good strategy for any marketer to follow. Somewhere in your business, there is data. Whether you're looking at it or not, it's waiting there ready to drive your next tactic. If you can organize and utilize that data, from there, just like with IBM, it's just a matter of putting the bundles together and getting the word out to your audience.

IT'S ALL IN THE SEARCH TERMS

Another great way to anticipate your audience is through what they're searching for. If your audience is looking for back-to-school products, for example, you could run a pay-per-click ad for a keyword phrase like "top ten computers for schoolchildren."

If you really want to up your conversion game, however, you can focus your phrasing even more: "Buy school-approved laptop for children." Here, the keyword is "buy." Anyone who uses this term is already in the buying phase; now they're just looking for the right product.

Remember, all of this is a building process. Unless your product is revolutionizing the world and you've got some viral trend going, you won't get the same conversion rates as an established brand until you've built those foundations of credibility and value.

HOW DO LANDING PAGES WORK?

Landing pages are incredible conversion tools if used correctly. For every keyword you're buying ad space around, you need to have a unique, distinct landing page with one goal and one goal only: converting the visitor.

This means no top navigation and no main menu. Everything is optimized around your keyword—including title, content, and copy—and all of it should lead directly toward your call to action. Make the choice really, really simple. Either click to convert or don't. Also, keep in mind that conversion for landing pages isn't always for a sale. Conversion can also mean lead generation or building an audience for your email list. Whatever the case, set your conversion target and then make that the only available

click on your landing page. If you can do this, you have a much higher chance of converting the traffic you gain from keyword searches.

THE LANDING PAGE PROCESS

To understand this a little better, let's use an example. Say someone is looking for an electrician in a specific city. Their keywords might be something like “electrician Chicago.” Since you're a Chicago-based electrician, you've purchased ad space with these keywords. So as soon as the user puts in these terms, an ad pops up that says, “Looking for an electrician in Chicago? We're Chicago's number one electricians. Click through to see how we can help!”

Seeing that you're exactly what they're looking for, they click through to learn more. This takes them to a single landing page that doesn't give any navigation options to get to any other pages on the site. It has credibility indicators about whom you've worked for, where you've been featured or mentioned, the services you provide, and possibly your pricing. All of this is designed to drive the visitors to a single call to action—such as “Call now” or “Use this inquiry form.”

WHY LANDING PAGES MATTER

If you're paying for clicks, you want to make sure you're getting a return on that investment. For instance, it's great that you might be getting ten thousand visitors a day, but if you're not converting any of them, it's a bit of a moot point.

Surprisingly, even really large companies make this kind of mistake. They'll pay huge amounts of money for Google Ads traffic (which, as you remember from chapter 2, goes to the highest bidder), guaranteeing they'll be the top search results in their market.

But then they waste this prime real estate. Instead of driving traffic to a custom landing page, they send visitors to service pages on their sites. To visitors unfamiliar with the brand, these pages are confusing. They might mention the visitor's specific search term, but they also list a whole range of other options. Worse, they provide the visitors plenty of outs through other site links and have no clear call to action.

These companies are leaving a dump truck's worth of money on the table, and they don't even know it. If you're paying for traffic, custom conversion-focused landing pages are a must.

ONE LANDING PAGE PER KEYWORD

Another mistake companies make is driving multiple keywords to the same landing page. This is perfect if conversions and ROI don't mean much to you, but we're guessing they do.

Creating additional variations is neither difficult nor time-consuming. It's as simple as copying the landing page you've built and customizing it with the next keyword—and going that extra step and crafting unique landing pages for every keyword will help you convert better.

PLAY BY THE RULES

Google is the biggest game in town when it comes to web searches. If you want to succeed, you have to play by their rules.

Their job is to provide the most relevant answer for any given search term. That means that the more relevant your ad is to your landing page, the higher your quality score for that keyword and ad. The higher quality score you have, the less you pay per click.

In other words, if you optimize correctly, you'll earn cheaper clicks through to your site—and more traffic to your landing page. And because your landing page is optimized for a specific keyword, that influx of traffic will reward you with higher conversion rates as well.

That's why it's doubly harmful to those companies that pay for clicks and then send visitors to a homepage or service page that's barely related to the keyword search. Not only are they frustrating visitors, but Google is penalizing them with a low-quality score. These companies are paying through the roof, but because they're cutting the corners that matter the most, they're not getting the results they hoped for, and they don't know why.

It's all about working within the boundaries set for you when you execute these tactics. If you do it right, it's a win-win-win: Google is happy with

you, your visitors are happy with you, and you're happy with your success.

USE TEMPLATES TO GET STARTED

We don't expect you to become a landing page wiz overnight. However, you'll get there faster if you take advantage of the many landing page optimization tools out there.

A great one to start with is [Unbounce.com](https://unbounce.com). They offer tons of configurable landing page templates. All you have to do is punch in the right credibility indicators, create your copy, and determine your call to action, and then [Unbounce.com](https://unbounce.com) takes care of the rest.

THE GOLDEN RULES OF OPTIMIZATION

You'll always have loads of things to test with conversion optimization. In fact, you can test forever—and you should.

At the root of optimization is A/B or split testing. Create two landing pages that are identical except for one difference. After you see which performs better, move forward with that as your primary page, create a new landing page with a new variation, and then repeat the process all over again.

Whatever your conversion rate, your goal is to improve it. Luckily, there's always something to test, even if it's a simple thing like changing the color of a button. To get started, here are a few of our golden rules of optimization.

WRITE GOOD COPY

The biggest needle-mover in terms of conversion optimization is your content. Well-written landing pages perform better. The same principles apply even if you forgo copy in favor of video. The quality has to be apparent, clearly identifying a certain problem or pain point and then offering a way to fix it.

UP THE CREDIBILITY

If all the traffic you're paying for is going cold, it could be your visitors are unsure either if they're in the right place or if they can trust you. We'll say it again: credibility indicators make a massive difference. Be sure to include things like references, reviews, and testimonials.

DON'T MISS OUT ON FOMO

Fear of missing out, or FOMO, is a huge psychological factor for conversion. If applied correctly, it can be that final push that converts a prospect into a proper customer.

Upping the FOMO factor is especially helpful on e-commerce pages. Try putting in a stock countdown of your product. If visitors know you had fifty of a product but have only seven left, it creates a sense of urgency. Suddenly, the prospect is worried that if they don't buy soon, someone else is going to beat them to it.

AVOID SLOW LOAD TIMES

People tend to be impatient. Faster-loading pages lead to more conversions—meaning a lot more potential money in your pocket. For example, a one-second delay in load time can mean a 7 percent loss in conversion, which can lead to 11 percent fewer page views and a 16 percent decrease in customer satisfaction. To put some real-world numbers on that, if your site typically earns \$100,000 in revenue a day, a one-second slower loading time could lose you \$2.5 million in sales a year.⁴

Terrifying, right? Fortunately, there's plenty you can do to speed things up:

- Optimize your images by reducing their file size. Yes, we know your web designer is really proud of how everything looks, but that won't do you any good if no one sees it. If necessary, use a professional who knows how to improve load times.
- If you create a great graphic, don't include the accompanying text in the image. Search engines can't read that.
- Limit the number of scripts—CSS, JavaScript, etc.—that you run.
- Find a good host. Even if your content is optimized, if it's hosted in a slow environment or in a different country than your viewers, it could hurt you.
- Host your site on a CDN, or content distribution network. On a CDN, your website is not hosted on one single server at one single location in the world. Instead, it's hosted on multiple servers in multiple locations, loading from the one that's closest to the visitor. If you're a global company servicing multiple countries, then load time could be severely affected.

Mobile has taken off in recent years and has an infinite future. If it's not already your primary device for web browsing, most likely it soon will be. As a result, Google has created what they refer to as a mobile-first index. They make sure that content is optimized for mobile devices through a service called Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP). These AMP versions of your page load quickly by getting rid of all the junk found on desktop landing pages. This is all quite helpful, but remember, Google isn't responsible for your site's speed. You are.

LEARN FROM FORM DROPOUTS

FOMO goes both ways. Prospects are afraid of missing out on deals, and marketers are afraid of missing out on information. Platforms like Shopify use analytics to help you see who's buying what and where they're buying from—which is always handy to know.

Even better to know is what's happening with the people who *don't* buy. There are plenty of tools to help you track how many form fields were filled in and where people are dropping out. The latter factor is especially helpful since it will help you analyze your performance and identify where the friction points are on your page.

For instance, you may discover that having three different fields for first name, last name, and phone number are slowing people down. Or you may discover you have redundant fields. There's bound to be friction somewhere. These tools are relatively cheap and can be a big boost for optimization.

ADOPT CLOUD-BASED USABILITY TESTING

Even the most objective marketers are too close to their work at times. Luckily, many cloud-powered sites exist to help lend you a bit more objectivity. These cloud-based testing sites allow you to get feedback from people you don't know or those who don't know anything about your brand. The problem is, marketers often overlook them because they're impatient to get their product or service to market.

That's too bad. Conversion rates increase when you take constructive feedback seriously. We get it. When you're a small business owner or a marketer, you hate hearing anything negative about your baby. We were

there once too, but trust us when we say getting feedback is the smartest way to move forward. If you put in a couple of extra minutes up front, you'll save yourself tons of time in the long term.

Another reason to get outside advice is that we all see things differently. Your job is to appeal to as many people as possible at once. You can guess at what that may be, or you can know by collecting data and inviting other users into the process.

Outside opinions can also reveal assumed knowledge issues. For instance, you may be a Chicago-based electrician, but when someone searches for "Chicago electrician," they could be looking for either a residential or commercial electrician. If you're a commercial electrician, you want to make sure you make this distinction to avoid drawing the wrong kind of traffic.

SOME OF OUR FAVORITE USABILITY TOOLS

You'll find plenty of cloud-based options to help you test usability. One tool we're especially fond of is fivesecondtest.com. The service is simple: you input the URL of your landing page, users have five seconds to view it, and then they provide feedback. If no one could figure out what your page was about, or if a high percentage of people found it unappealing, you know what you need to focus on next.

[Usertesting.com](https://usertesting.com) is another crowdsourced tool we like. Here, users log in, you share your site and give them a goal, and then they try to find their way through under your guidance.

Other usability tools we love include Hotjar, Lucky Orange, and Crazy Egg, just to name a few. They're all effective and cheap, so there's no real reason not to install at least one on your website.

INCENTIVIZING THE E-COMMERCE CUSTOMER TO CONVERT

Up to this point in the chapter, every optimization strategy we've discussed is equally applicable to both service-oriented and e-commerce businesses. Here's where the paths diverge. If you're a service-oriented business, your

digital marketing strategy will be the big difference-maker in encouraging leads to convert. If your business is focused on e-commerce, however, your approach to getting customers over the finish line will be a little different. Here are some final optimization tips.

BUNDLING, CROSS-SELLS, AND UPSELLS

One of the main goals of e-commerce is to increase a person's average order. The chief ways to accomplish this are bundling, cross-sells, and upsells. Making these suggestions is pretty straightforward. At the point of purchase, simply say something like, "Look, these products are often bought together," "You could increase to the next size for X amount of dollars," or "Customers have purchased this product combination ten times in the last hour." Not only are you increasing average order volume and therefore revenue, but you're also adding value to the purchaser. Everyone wins!

Bundling should be data-led. In other words, it should be based on what other people have bought. Don't just create a bundle based on what you want to sell or where your biggest profit margins are. And don't leave the bundling choices to the customer either. For the highest conversion rate, let the data choose the best bundles for you.

REWARDS

How many times have you bought something online and then found an email for a 10 percent discount on your next purchase? Psychologically speaking, rewards systems are a great way to encourage repeat purchases and brand loyalty. They work especially well with small repeat purchases.

There are plenty of ways to go about it too. Some brands offer free products with repeat business. Others enroll customers in a points program—the more they buy, the larger their discount becomes over time. And don't forget the always-popular punch card strategy: make nine purchases and get your tenth one free!

PARTNER PROGRAMS

We're big fans of this one. With the partner program, a purchase on one site is good for a discount on another. This is great for companies with complementary products. Once someone buys from you, inform them that

you're also associated with companies X, Y, and Z. Then offer a discount code valid at any of these partner sites.

Finally, there's the long-term subscription discount. If you offer a service for fifteen dollars a month, be sure that you also offer a twelve-month subscription option at a significantly reduced rate.

GAMIFICATION

Everyone likes a little fun and games. So it's no surprise that gamification, where you use a gamelike feature on your site to incentivize your visitors to consume and engage with your content (e.g., by completing a task or taking a quiz), has become tremendously popular over the years.

Gamification can be applied to many processes, tools, websites, or services. Whatever the activity, the idea is that you make it more gamelike, encouraging people to meet certain challenges or compete against others. Once they reach whatever goals you've set for them, they get a reward—building loyalty and engagement in the process.

Jillian Michaels, the fitness coach from *The Biggest Loser*, is a great example of gamification in action. To encourage participation and repeat visits to her site, she offers goal-setting and tracking options to help users lose weight.

You can even make pop-ups fun with gamification. We especially like a plug-in from Shopify called Wheelio. Whenever a first-time visitor finds their way to your site, a little spinning wheel pops up, saying, "Spin the wheel to earn discounts on your first purchase!"

Psychologically, this resonates with visitors because it gives them a sense of control over what value they take away. But it's also valuable to you: when they spin that wheel, they're signaling that they're gearing up to make a purchase. That's what makes the pop-up wheel so valuable. It has the power to convert a browser or researcher into a customer.

RETARGETING

E-commerce stores especially have a lot to gain from retargeting. As we said earlier, the average number of touch points before a purchase is

between six and eight. Retargeting is a great way to stay top of mind, especially when a visitor has come close to making a purchase but had a last-minute change of heart.

One great retargeting tool is the Facebook pixel (see chapter 2). The flexibility of Facebook ads really shines here, as you'll have a ton of retargeting options based on whatever actions your visitors took—or didn't take—on your site. For instance, if someone added something to their cart but didn't purchase, you can try to nudge them over the edge with an ad designed to encourage them to purchase the item, perhaps with a 10 percent discount. Alternatively, you can also retarget people based on what they purchased in the past, or you can cross-sell with other products.

A friend of ours who runs a lingerie site uses this process masterfully. Through data collection, she's learned that a lot of moms who go onto their site will fill their cart and then not buy. Sometimes it's because they were just daydreaming or making a wish list of things they want. But other times, it's because they've added so much to the cart that the total has gotten way out of hand.

After consulting her data, our friend looked at what price point converted the best and designed her retargeting efforts around that sweet spot. Her messages would say something like, "Hey, we noticed this was the last item you added. If you took this away, the cost would only be X." Since she started these retargeting efforts, she's converted a lot of abandoned carts into purchases.

There's also a good lesson here. It's not always about trying to convert everything someone has in their cart. Sometimes it's about going back and saying, "This was on your wish list. It was the first thing you thought about, the first thing you added." Many people explore a site and add things they don't want, but whatever they added to their cart first, that's what they came to your site for in the first place. The lesson? Sometimes working backward leads to higher conversions.

REDUCING ABANDONED CARTS

There are other ways to reduce abandoned carts besides retargeting. Whatever path you take, your first goal is to understand why visitors are

abandoning carts in the first place. Maybe the price was overwhelming. Maybe they were just browsing. Maybe they were just looking for good products so they could go find a discount code for the same thing somewhere else. Maybe your checkout system looked dodgy, and they didn't trust you with their credit card information.

Once you have your answer, your goal is to counteract that objection—ideally before it happens—so you can meet the problem head-on and increase the likelihood of a sale. Some options we've seen include:

- **Real-time chat features.** If someone has a question, they can ask a living, breathing human being right there in the moment.
- **Credibility indicators.** People need to feel secure giving out protected information. Whatever processing and security services you use for your transactions, feature their logos prominently, especially on the purchase page.
- **Include high-quality images.** Bad photos of your inventory don't make you look professional.
- **Reconnect with email.** Tools like Infusionsoft help you reach out to prospects to entice visitors back. Depending on where they are in the funnel, or what their last action was, you can customize your message to meet them where they are.
- **Retargeting.** We already talked about Facebook ads, but Google ads are also highly effective in making sure you're putting the right offers in front of your visitors at the right time.
- **Delivery discounts.** Sometimes the cost to ship something can equal the cost of the product itself. Other times a product will take too long to ship. Wherever you can, offer discounted, free, or expedited delivery options.
- **Create a safety net for returns.** Customers want to feel protected with their purchases. Add value by guaranteeing 100 percent satisfaction or their money back within thirty days. If you truly stand by your product and brand, this is a no-brainer.

Here's our final word on conversion. We've discussed tons of ways to up the conversion ante throughout this chapter. Now that we're at the end, it's

time to once again remind you to be authentic and add value to all your conversion efforts.

If you're not careful, the same tactics can make you seem less like a helper and more like a stalker. That's a good way to watch your conversion rates plummet.

Our advice? Put yourself in the buyer's shoes. Follow up with a few attempts, and then leave it there if they're not responding. If they're still showing interest—for instance, perhaps they abandoned a cart, clicked on an ad later, but then still didn't purchase—you can go ahead and make one more offer. Just keep your focus on providing value and not being manipulative, and you should be fine. No one likes to be stalked, and you don't want to undo all that credibility and value you created to begin with.

¹ Eben Harell, "How 1% Performance Improvements Led to Olympic Gold," *Harvard Business Review*, October 30, 2015, <https://hbr.org/2015/10/how-1-performance-improvements-led-to-olympic-gold>.

² <https://www.google.com/analytics/optimize/>

³ Bob Ruffolo, "12 Amazing Conversion Rate Optimization Case Studies," Impact, December 27, 2016, <https://www.impactbnd.com/blog/conversion-rate-optimization-case-studies>.

⁴ Data courtesy of Strangeloop Networks: <http://www.bryaneisenberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/infographic4.jpg>.

CHAPTER 6

WE THINK YOU'RE DELIGHTFUL

WHAT IT IS

In the spirit of building and maintaining brand advocacy, the best brands work to make their customers feel valued and important, even after the purchase.

WHY IT WORKS

Positive reinforcement produces strong physiological reactions in people, which then drives positive, repetitive behaviors in support of the brand.

HOW IT WORKS

have fun with token offerings • little gestures matter • delight even when you don't need to • what goes around comes around • designing digital delight • keep it simple • underpromise and overdeliver • prioritize customer support • follow up • take it to the real world • be accountable • make the world better • delight your team • be part of the solution • know thy customer • think in advance • showcase clients

Up to this point, you've learned the importance of branding and credibility, how to leverage that to gain traffic to your website and create leads, how to engage your audience, and how to bring everything together to convert your audience into customers.

Here's the big question: now that your audience is converting into clients or customers, how do you keep them loyal? How do you convert them to

repeat customers? How do you encourage them to refer your business to family and friends?

In short, you need to be *delightful*.

Delighting your audience is the key to scalability. You will always target and build your credibility. You will drive more traffic, nurture your audience, and make them feel valued until they convert. So why not encourage them to convert again? After all, repeat customers are the best customers. When customers have seen that you live up to—or even exceed—your reputation, and that you continue to add value even after you’ve earned their business, you’ll have created a fan for your brand.

Once someone is your fan, they become your advocate. They spread the word about your brand organically through their own networks, recommending you to friends, family, and even acquaintances who might need your product or service.

Want to scale your business quickly? Delight your customer base. Make it easy for them to become brand ambassadors, and watch your earned traffic grow.

WHY DELIGHT YOUR CUSTOMERS?

We’ve already talked about psychological triggers to action. Physiological reactions to delighting are a little different but just as important. The bottom line is that everyone likes to be celebrated.

Actually, we don’t just like it. Being celebrated literally changes us. The human brain has been shown to exhibit neuroplasticity—meaning our neurons can change their physiological properties in response to outside factors. In other words, the more we’re celebrated, and the more we’re thanked for our business and ongoing support, the more our brains adapt to these positive stimuli.

Thanks to all those feel-good endorphins, positive recognition makes people feel incredible, and naturally they want to keep that feeling going. So they continue to engage with your brand, sharing and commenting on your content, and looking for other ways to increase your visibility.

The opposite also applies. When you fail to celebrate, reward, or delight your audience and customers, you're telling them that their advocacy isn't all that exciting or important to you. That's probably not a message you want to be sending.

PERSONAL TALES OF DELIGHT

There are plenty of ways to delight your audience and create brand ambassadors. However you go about it, your goal is to strengthen the connections between yourself and your advocates. The best part about being delightful is that it's contagious; the better you make others feel, the better you feel as a result. Let's start with some examples of how delighting can work from both an interpersonal relationship and a personal branding perspective in marketing.

HAVE FUN WITH TOKEN OFFERINGS

Have you ever gone to a conference or industry event and walked out with a gift bag full of fun goodies? Have you ever *not* walked out of an event with something fun? The objects in that goodie bag could be anything, from a fidget spinner to an iPad, or anything in between. In many ways, the specifics of the object don't really matter. What's important to the gift givers is that these token offerings reinforce positive feelings of that experience—and therefore, their brand.

We get hundreds of requests weekly to meet with people. While we unfortunately can't honor every single one of these requests, for the people we do decide to meet with and invest our time in, we work to make these business and networking experiences memorable. One fun token Gián enjoys sharing at meetings, especially with other women while she's on overseas trips, are little lipsticks she buys from an organic Australian company called Lük Beautiful.¹ Not only are they trendy, but they also look great in the flower fabrics they come wrapped in. Everyone always loves them, and they remember Gián for her gesture.

LITTLE GESTURES MATTER

Tokens of appreciation work even better in one-to-one interactions. The next time you meet a friend for coffee or some other casual social event,

think of what you can bring with you to show your friend or loved one how much they mean to you.

For instance, Gián and her friends love to meet up for coffee on their birthdays. Whenever Gián shows up, she always brings a little card to wish her friend a happy birthday and say how much she values their friendship.

It may just be a little card, but it matters. Usually afterward, Gián will get a message from her friend in the evening saying something like, “I had a spring in my step all day because of the nice things you said and the little gesture you made.”

Yes, even little gestures kick the endorphin process into gear. Gián made her friend feel special, and then that friend went out into the world and felt like doing better, being positive, and seeing the glass as half full.

DELIGHT EVEN WHEN YOU DON'T NEED TO

As we were gearing up to write this chapter, Gián was interviewed for a local paper to get her perspective on digital marketing. It was a hot summer's day in Sydney, so she brought a stainless steel water bottle as a small gift.

The reporter was tickled by the thoughtful gesture, which Gián explained was part of her personal brand. If she's going to make the time to meet with someone, she wants that person to walk away with more than just knowledge and experience.

The water bottle wasn't just a giveaway but also a show of gratitude. Gián was thanking the reporter for seeing value in what she did, and the gift was her way of returning the favor—and showing what she stood for.

WHAT GOES AROUND...

Gián has also learned that if you delight others, they look for ways to delight you. The general manager of one company often emails her with messages like “It's great to have you on board as a brand ambassador for us” or “Hey, I've just sent you a random product because you're so great.” Those free little products are fun perks. Not only are they appreciated but they also keep that GM's company front of mind.

Ultimately, however, it's not the gifts that bring delight but rather the gesture, the act of giving the gift. Small tokens act as a way of checking in with someone, indicating that you've been thinking about them, that you appreciate what they do and want to show your gratitude.

DESIGNING DIGITAL DELIGHT

If you want to create digital delight, it starts with the design of your website to make sure it's user-friendly. It can't be ugly or otherwise horrible to look at. It must easily give customers the answers they're looking for—adding extra bits of value along the way. From there, the following tips should put you on the right track.

KISS (KEEP IT SIMPLE, STUPID)

Want your website to be user-friendly? Drop the jargon. You don't want your visitors to feel overwhelmed or confused. Instead, be conversational. Be approachable. If people are comfortable using your site, they'll share it with others.

UNDERPROMISE AND OVERDELIVER

Many businesses are in the habit of overpromising, boldly stating that their product or service is the best in the land, bar none. This could be true, but it likely isn't—and such overaggressive bragging isn't a good look on anyone. If you're in the habit of overpromising, make sure you deliver. If not, be prepared for the eventual tsunami of negative feedback when your customers wise up.

Otherwise, if a ton of negative feedback doesn't sound like your cup of tea, go the opposite route: underpromise and overdeliver. Yes, this has become an overused phrase in recent years. But this is one cliché we're big believers in. Live by these words, and you'll create lifelong fans.

PRIORITIZE CUSTOMER SUPPORT

This one is massive. Don't just pay lip service to customer support. Live it. Set up your brand to be attentive, responsive, and legitimately helpful. Make support available on every channel—including phone, email, live chat, and social networks like Facebook and Twitter. Your customers should never feel like they're stuck solving problems on their own.

Your aim is to resolve any issues on first contact. If people come to you with issues and you just stick them in a line and don't get back to them for days, they won't be happy. The quicker you resolve issues, the more delight you bring to the experience.

FOLLOW UP

It's not good enough for your customers to be happy the first time. You want to learn what you can do better the next time too. Use surveys, such as Survey Monkey or Google Surveys, to follow up with your customers. Both are free to start and offer a variety of customizable options.

Remember, it's not just about getting feedback. It's also about building relationships and showing that you're not only in it for the money.

TAKE IT TO THE REAL WORLD

One of our favorite things to do is send our clients something like pizza or cupcakes. It's pretty easy to set up. We just liaise with the GM and say, "We're sending pizza to your office on this day. How much should we order?"

Or if one of our contacts is heading out on a business trip, we'll send them something we know they'll enjoy reading on the plane. Other contacts we'll take out for steak and a beer. Others we remember to recognize on birthdays and special occasions.

These little gestures are fairly standard at Louder.Online, but they sure do go a long way. Often, our ideas for these gestures stem from a general conversation with a client prior to a meeting. As the conversation progresses, the client might mention a desire to boost team morale or recognize their team's efforts. We may not have specific products or solutions to offer our client in these situations, and we're certainly not in the pizza industry, but we are in the business of solving problems—so what better way to show them support than a pizza party or some other gesture that aligns with their culture and goals? Whatever it is, the action and thought are what is most important.

Anything like this is great if you're in a service-based business. By saying, "Hey, we appreciate you," you're deepening relationships. You're showing

you give a damn, that you've got a face, and that you're not just another supplier.

BE ACCOUNTABLE

Put your hand up and be honest when you've made a mistake. Take the blame, be responsible, and try to resolve it as quickly as possible.

A lot of the time, this comes down to making sure you've got the right people working for you. We call this the "hiring people who have the give-a-shit factor." Your employees should care about their work beyond the salary they're taking home. They should care enough to help and support your business and brand reputation. If they do, then they'll also care about the people they're helping. If you've got those kinds of people on board, delighting customers is a whole lot easier.

Don't forget that accountability extends into the social media realm as well. You will never have 100 percent customer satisfaction. Sometimes you might make a mistake, and sometimes you might have an especially picky customer or client. Whatever the case, if they complain about you online, that little problem just got a whole lot bigger.

Replying as quickly as possible is key to reputation management. Don't just try to solve the problem. Show empathy for their problem too. Offer a suitable solution. Show not only the customer, but also everyone else watching, that you give a damn.

SPREADING DELIGHT IN THE REAL WORLD

People don't expect businesses to care, which makes it a great way to both differentiate yourself and have fun while you're at it. Here are a few examples of delight done right.

GIRAFFING AROUND (OR STICKING YOUR NECK OUT)

A while back, Chris Hurn, the CEO of Fountainhead, stayed at the Ritz Carlton in Florida. His son left his stuffed giraffe behind. When the son asked where it was, Chris said the giraffe was fine, that it was just taking an extra-long vacation at the resort. Moments later, he called the Ritz Carlton

in a panic. A little bit later, they called back, said they'd found it, and asked what the best way was to return it.

Chris explained what he had told his son and asked if they were willing to play along. They were. When Chris and his son got the giraffe back, it came with a set of pictures depicting the giraffe enjoying his extra day of relaxation. The giraffe sunned himself by the pool with sunglasses, and he rode around in a golf cart along the beach. He enjoyed a fancy dinner at the hotel restaurant.

The Ritz Carlton didn't need to do any of that. They were just trying to delight their customer. It was a fairly small gesture, but imagine the impact it had on the family (not to mention the fun the staff probably had setting up the photographs).²

TIGER BREAD?

A UK supermarket called Sainsbury's had a three-year-old girl named Lily Robinson write to them asking, "Why is tiger bread called tiger bread? It should be called giraffe bread. Love from Lily Robinson." After all, Lily observed, the bread didn't have stripes like a tiger, but rather spots like a giraffe. Sainsbury's wrote back saying they completely agreed, they were changing the name of the product, and her family would now get discounts on giraffe bread. This fun little moment went viral, earning Sainsbury's a lot of free advertising in the process.³

NO SHOES? NO PROBLEM

Zappos, a trendy shoe retailer known for their cheeky promotions and customer service, has a remarkably robust history of delighting customers for such a young brand. One of our favorites is the story of a best man at a wedding who, through an unfortunate shipping error, was in danger of going barefoot for his friend's big day. Desperate for a solution, the beleaguered best man called Zappos, described the shipping snafu, and explained the bind it put him in. The customer service rep went above and beyond, overnighting a new pair of shoes directly to the wedding destination, upgrading the best man's account to lifetime VIP, and then providing a full refund for the shoes. Not only did Zappos earn a self-proclaimed customer for life but also a vocal brand advocate who has shared the story of his experience far and wide across the internet.

This story is a great example of delighting the customer as an intrinsic part of the sales process. However, it's worth pointing out that Zappos is so dedicated to delighting their audience that they often do great things that have nothing to do with their brand or products. One time, for instance, during a frigid New England Thanksgiving in Massachusetts, they paid all toll charges for a section of roads between 5:00 and 7:00 p.m., just to make travel less stressful during the holidays.⁴ Now, that's being delightful at its best!

BE BIGGER THAN BUSINESS

Even if you're an online business, delight often happens in the real world. Encouraging people to buy online does not mean you have to delight them in the same way. It doesn't even have to be aligned to your brand. Just because you sell widgets doesn't mean you can't send someone to Disneyland.

That's where some companies have blinders on. They think, "Oh, that doesn't speak to our brand." Repeat after us: it doesn't have to.

A lot of brand ambassadors don't follow your brand because of your product or service. Many of them don't even need your product or service. Instead, they follow you because they like what you stand for. They like that you're about more than just making money. They like that you're human. In those situations, they don't have to know a thing about your product or service to be delighted by your brand and recommend you to others.

When you delight others, even if they aren't your customers or clients, they want to share the experience. Endless content is created around these delightful stories. The best ones often go viral, getting shared thousands of times by people who have never heard of your brand before (but who might need your product or service). This kind of free PR is worth millions of dollars in free media, advertising, and credibility indicators—all because you're in the business of delighting.

MAKE THE WORLD BETTER

There's a lot of fear and uncertainty in the world. Part of your job is to avoid contributing any more. But how?

First, never forget that at the end of a transaction is a human being. Next, follow these tips.

STAND FOR SOMETHING

Align yourself with a worthy cause. That way, you can showcase what you stand for and be part of something bigger than yourself.

Even small businesses can make the world a better place on the community level by supporting local food drives or youth sports programs, for instance. Customers are proud to associate themselves with something that's changing the world for the better. In fact, research has even shown that when comparing companies with competing products or services, this kind of social consciousness can be the difference-maker in winning certain customers over—even if the price point is greater!⁵

Recently, brands have begun “rounding up” for a good cause at the checkout line. If a bill is \$49.95, for instance, the cashier will ask the customer if they'd like to round their total out to an even \$50 by donating an extra five cents to charity. It's an easy ask—who wouldn't be willing to donate five cents to a good cause?—but more importantly, it associates the brand with a good cause, earning them some goodwill in the process. Psychologically speaking, this feel-good strategy is doing a lot more than generating donations for a good cause.

FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS

Offering a good service is not enough to become a customer's number one choice. You need to keep evolving and finding ways to be better.

At Louder.Online, one question we always ask is: how can we create more value? We put this question everywhere. It's written on sticky notes around the office. It's written on whiteboards and tacked to our desks. We're not satisfied with only one answer to this question. We ask it and answer it in new ways all the time.

DELIGHT YOUR TEAM

We have a globally distributed team, which means we travel to see many of them every year. We also get a lot of free tickets to conferences, concerts, and other events. Instead of taking them all for ourselves, we offer them to

our team first, because if they feel valued, our clients will feel valued. Not only does this delight them, but it also gives them the opportunity to develop professionally and bring new ideas to the company.

WHAT IF YOU DON'T DELIGHT CUSTOMERS?

If you want a degree in how to *not* delight customers, we can think of no better example than Amy's Baking Company, which in 2016 was portrayed rather unflatteringly on Gordon Ramsay's show *Kitchen Nightmares*. After Ramsay condemned the business as being "too difficult to work with," the owners took to their Facebook page, launching an all-out all-caps attack not only on Ramsay's show but also on anyone on Yelp and Reddit who had a bad word to say about them, calling their audience "stupid," "little kids," and straight-up "shit." Suffice to say, it wasn't a good look for them.

Even after such an outburst, the people at Amy's had the opportunity to show accountability and mend fences. However, they just made matters worse, falsely claiming their account had been hacked and they weren't responsible for anything they'd posted. Now, you don't have to be a master marketer to know that what happened with this company is the complete opposite of reputation management.

Ultimately, it's too bad. If you don't understand the potential consequences of your actions, it can be difficult to make good choices. Most likely, the people at Amy's Baking Company were just trying to make it by in a world they didn't fully understand, letting one bad choice lead to another until they spiraled out of control.⁶ Since we don't want you making the same mistakes and ending up in a marketing book as an example of how *not* to delight your customers, here are some tips on how to recover from the eventual speed bumps you're likely to encounter.

DON'T MAKE DRAMA PUBLIC

If your team has failed a client, don't start getting into every little detail about what went wrong, and definitely don't throw anyone under the bus. Such behavior won't inspire confidence in your client—and it definitely won't delight them. Instead, simply take accountability for what went wrong and show that you're taking steps to fix it. No one wants to see you and your coworkers airing your dirty laundry.

BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

All those credibility factors you've been building can vanish in a flash if you fail to delight your customers. Negative experiences go viral if they're not addressed.

People have a natural inclination to share negative experiences more than positive ones. Why? Because when there is an injustice, people want to be heard, and they want to make it right.

The question is, when a customer of yours feels cheated or otherwise slighted, what are you going to do about it? Sure, you can be part of the problem, point to the terms your customer agreed to, and act like it doesn't affect you. Just know, however, this is a risky gambit. If the court of public opinion deems your actions unfair or unjust, the damage your indifference can do to your brand simply isn't worth it.

Instead of being stubborn, flippant, or flat-out ignorant, be part of the solution. Take the blinders off, listen to your customers, and support them however you can. Then do what you can to improve your terms of service so other customers don't suffer similar injustices down the road.

HOW TO DELIGHT CUSTOMERS ONLINE

When you write your business plan, your first question should be: what differentiates you from your competitors—whether at the start of the sales cycle or anywhere else on the conversion path? How do you appreciate your audience and show loyalty? What makes you worth caring about?

How you answer these questions can make a world of difference in your business. As we wrap up this chapter, here are some final things to consider to help you stand out from the crowd.

KNOW THY CUSTOMER

Listen to everything. Make sure you understand what they want, what their pain points are, and what makes them tick.

Yes, this data will help you convert. But it will also help you show your gratitude, something that goes beyond a discount voucher (although those are great too).

When Gián was at IBM running an employee gratitude program, she asked people to fill out a survey where one of the questions gave two options: recreation or relaxation. That was it. There was no other context, and no one knew what the intent behind that question was.

As the IBM employees came to find out, it determined their reward. Relaxation earned them a hundred-dollar spa voucher, and recreation got them a hundred-dollar voucher to a local sporting goods store.

Get creative with questions like this. Learn as much as you can. It will make the delighting stage more personal and fun.

THINK IN ADVANCE

We're data-led marketers all the way. By the time someone has converted, you should know a ton about your customer already—especially if you used all the tools and followed all the tips we've suggested.

However, if you still have some question marks, here's a tricky, super-technical tip: ask them.

People love to feel included, to feel like what they have to say is valued. Even if the question feels obvious to you, they will respond.

CELEBRATE THE CUSTOMER

Share positive feedback about your customer on your social accounts. If you receive a message from a customer saying, "Hey, I had such a good experience" or "This product was so great," you've got a great opportunity here. First, thank them for their feedback. Then, ask whether they mind if you share their comments online. Nine times out of ten, they'll be flattered you asked and happy to say yes because they had such a positive experience. Sharing messages like this will not only strengthen your relationship with that customer but also increase your credibility with your followers.

SHOWCASE CLIENTS

Similar to celebrating your clients or customers, you can also go a little more in-depth and showcase them. Explain to your audience what the client's problem was, what you did to solve it, and what they achieved in

the end. Then tell your audience a little more about what your client does and provide a backlink to their website.

Most clients love this, since it helps to expand their reach, but be sure to get their permission ahead of time—and don't forget to ask if you can put their logo on your website for that extra credibility boost!

HAVE FUN

Don't be afraid to show your personality once in a while and throw some jokes into your emails. It helps you connect with others and shows you're not overly formal or corporate—that your brand actually has a personality.

TRACK YOUR NET PROMOTER SCORE

A net promoter score, or NPS for short, is a management tool used to gauge the loyalty of your customer relationships. The NPS serves as an alternative to traditional customer satisfaction research and claims to have a stronger correlation to revenue growth.

In a nutshell, you ask your customer a series of questions geared around whether they would recommend your brand to others, with scores for each question ranging between one and ten. Scores of nine or ten mean the customer is a promoter, seven or eight mean passive, and six or below mean they're a detractor. This is a great way of ensuring you're getting good feedback and determining where you stand compared to your competitors.

SURVEYS AND GIVEAWAYS

Surveys help you understand what people want, when they want it, and how they're asking for it. Once you know this, you can add value by tailoring your giveaways or free content and delight them at any stage of the pipeline.

¹ <https://lukbeautifood.com/>

² Chris Hurn, "Stuffed Giraffe Shows What Customer Service Is All About," *Huffington Post*, May 17, 2012, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/chris-hurn/stuffed-giraffe-shows-wha_b_1524038.html.

- 3 “Tiger Bread Renamed Giraffe Bread by Sainsbury’s,” BBC, January 31, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-16812545>.
- 4 “10 Zappos Stories That Will Change the Way You Look at Customer Service Forever,” Infnit Contact, October 29, 2013, <https://www.infnitcontact.com/blog/zappos-stories-that-will-change-the-way-you-look-at-customer-service/>.
- 5 Andrew McCaskill, “Consumer-Goods’ Brands That Demonstrate Commitment to Sustainability Outperform Those That Don’t,” Nielsen, October 12, 2015, <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/press-room/2015/consumer-goods-brands-that-demonstrate-commitment-to-sustainability-outperform.html>.
- 6 Seriously, you have to read this one to believe it: “Social Media Crisis—Amy’s Baking Company Bakery and Boutique,” Medium, April 11, 2016, <https://medium.com/15-s10-smm/social-media-crisis-amy-s-baking-company-bakery-and-boutique-7568f9956016>.

CONCLUSION

ARMED FOR THE LONG HAUL

As you've probably learned by now, this book is not for people who want a quick fix to building a brand. To succeed in the long haul, you must have an authentic reason why you're in business, something that sets you apart from everyone else.

The big, encompassing message of this book is *value*. From your very first step, your goal is to create value through your product or service. It doesn't matter what business you're in; you're probably walking into a saturated marketplace. Your point of difference isn't what you do but *how* you do it. How do you treat your clients and customers? What's your sales process? What central point of value are you offering?

In deciding this for ourselves, first we outlined what our brand was and what we wanted to become. Then we built our brand entirely around that point of difference. By doing so, we invested in our long-term success—and it paid off.

Anyone can try to run an affiliate marketing scheme and make some money over a year's time. But if you want to be around in fifteen, twenty, or fifty years, you must have a larger vision of how your brand will benefit the customer, their community, your industry, and even the world.

The steps we've outlined in this book are not a quick process. They're not the only way to succeed, but they've worked for us and countless other brands. However you approach your own business, it's essential that you focus on building your brand, optimizing your traffic sources, engaging your community, and giving them something valuable at every turn. With those ends in mind, here are some final reminders and bits of advice before you go.

SHARING IS CARING

Whenever you can, don't hold on to knowledge. Share case studies and solutions that can benefit others. Give it away. By creating a brand focused on value, eventually all your brand ambassadors will convert to customers. And once they've converted, continue to give things away. Inspire loyalty by delighting them at every turn.

FIND THE RIGHT EMPLOYEES—AND DELIGHT THEM

A big piece of always providing value to your customers is employing the kind of people who will stand alongside your brand with you. You don't want people who simply show up and do their job. You want people who are committed to being part of the solution, whether they're fixing internal problems in your company or external problems among your client base.

These are the traits of a good employee. It doesn't even matter if they have the right skillset for the job when you first bring them on. They can learn. If they're resilient and resourceful, you can bet they'll find creative solutions to get their job done.

When you find the right employees, remind them how you feel about them every day. At Louder.Online, we don't only focus on delighting our customers. We also find ways to delight ourselves and our employees. That's how we find the energy to keep moving our company forward.

YOUR CUSTOMERS ARE EVERYTHING

Your business is only as good as your customer base. It's not merely about goals, forecasts, sales, and marketing. Yes, you need those too, but each must be approached from the viewpoint of what your audience needs and wants. With that in mind, every piece of content you create, every tactic you employ will reflect your clients' perspective—and not your company's.

That's one of the biggest failings we see in brands entering the digital marketplace. They fail to see things from their customers' point of view.

DON'T STRETCH YOURSELF THIN

With all the tools and information that exist out there, there's a lot to distract you. Just remember that if you try to do everything all at once,

you're going to fail. Go an inch wide and a mile deep, as they say. Get good at a few things before tackling others.

DON'T SETTLE FOR ANYTHING LESS THAN GREAT

Anything that doesn't move the needle is a distraction. Granted, some efforts to move the needle take time, such as SEO and email lists, but long-term strategies such as these are proven difference-makers and shouldn't be ignored. Focus on the core elements that your business depends on to succeed, get good at those, and stick to them instead of jumping from one thing to the next.

That's what the great brands do. Sure, we had a lot to learn on the road to growing our brand, but once we found a formula that worked—the formula we've outlined in this book—we committed to it. We still write around twenty guest posts a month in different publications, as well as making editorial contributions. We still continually build our brand, earn referral traffic, and show up in the places we need to be seen. We still focus on getting interviews, speaking engagements, links, and conference invitations. Find out what works for you and your business, eliminate the rest, and keep at it.

LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES

If something didn't work for us, we learned other ways to approach the situation. We learned a lot of ways how *not* to do things—and we wrote this book in large part to save you from making the same mistakes.

When you feel like something doesn't work or isn't as effective as you'd like it to be, don't think of it as failure. Ask what you can learn from it instead. In digital spaces, there's always data available to teach you something. Don't ignore those lessons. They are invaluable to your long-term success.

LEARN FROM OTHERS

When we started our agency, we had no mentors and no guidance. There were few books on the subject and very few courses. Online business simply wasn't what it is today. And with nothing to compare us to, our detractors told us we were doomed to fail.

We had to stick everything together, mostly by trial and error. It was hard, but it also gave us a deep understanding of what we were doing.

If you're just getting started, you get to skip that trial and error. There are plenty of courses, books, and other resources on how to succeed in the digital marketplace.

All the strategies and processes we've outlined in this book we learned firsthand, sometimes through success and sometimes through hard lessons. The more you make use of this information and the data you collect, the more you can start seeing better—and faster—results.

USE DATA

Great brands use data. We built our business around data, but we started off in traditional marketing jobs that didn't. There's a common saying among the big-time marketers in these corporate environments: "Fifty percent of my marketing works. I just don't know which 50 percent." Those brands threw their budget at offline campaigns and display ads like street signs, billboards, and other paid media where it's difficult to track their success or determine ROI.

That's too bad. Offline efforts like this certainly have a place, but they shouldn't be the basis of an entire campaign. Today, everything has a digital footprint. Use it. If you do, you'll already be doing better than a lot of the global brands we know. We had one client, for instance, who was spending \$115,000 a month on display advertising. Not only did they not realize how much they were spending, but they also didn't know if that advertising was generating any results. After working with them, we saved them over \$1 million right off the bat by reducing their display ad budget to \$15,000 a month. Then, by focusing their energy in more cost-effective areas, we helped them more than triple their conversion rate.

The moral of the story is to use data religiously. Understand what works, what doesn't, and why—and watch your marketing efforts become much more effective in the process.

REVIEW YOUR GOALS

As a company, continually review your goals. It's the only way to keep growing.

For us, our two-year goal was nothing like our current one. We were a smaller company with a smaller client base. You must move the needle not only with tactics but also with goals. Stretch yourself as a company and keep reviewing your progress. You can't move forward if you don't have a plan for where you're going and how to get there.

BE HUMAN

It's easy to get taken up with all the different technologies, apps, and processes out there. However, never forget that on the other end of those processes are human beings. Create processes that align with how humans actually behave—not how you want them to behave.

To do this, use everything you know about human behavior, and keep learning more. Reflect on your own behaviors and instincts. Study the behavioral patterns of your clients until you understand what they're trying to achieve.

After you've built up your human intelligence, design your strategies and tactics around it. And never, ever forget that we are emotional beings with emotional goals. Keep that in mind with everything you do, and you will find success.

BE A MENTOR

Once you have found some success, share it. Become a mentor for those further behind you on the path. Be a sounding board. Be a teacher. Share what you've learned, and in the process, you may uncover ways to find new success for yourself.

Even the leaders of the world's biggest brands have mentors. The greatest GMs we know both have mentors and *are* mentors. Learning from others and then sharing that knowledge is a big part of being successful in business.

Don't believe us? Just go to a conference or two and watch how the speakers conduct themselves. You'll see pretty quickly that these high-performing leaders are *still* focused on learning more. They have a bottomless thirst for knowledge. They want to be more, to create more value both in their work and in their lives.

UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF ROI

ROI certainly has a purpose in marketing. When it comes to the tactical execution strategies discussed in the first five chapters of this book, ROI and other metrics become valuable pieces of data essential for adjusting elements of your content such as tone, call to action, usability, and so on.

In fact, using ROI in this way can save you from knee-jerk reactions when, say, your SEO and content marketing efforts aren't going the way you planned. Instead of throwing your hands up in the air and giving up on SEO and marketing altogether, you can instead adjust your approach by working to understand what is working and what isn't.

That said, ROI isn't everything. It's important to remember the big picture too and invest in your brand. Delighting your clients with an office pizza party, for example, doesn't have a direct, measurable ROI, but it *does* associate your brand with authenticity, value, and benefiting others—which is invaluable if you want to see real growth and longevity.

At the end of the day, make sure you're taking a balanced approach to how you look at ROI. Use whatever data you can to understand what's working and what you might want to do next. However, when it comes to positioning your brand as authentic, valuable, and delightful, it's more about generating goodwill and positioning your brand for the long haul than it is about concrete numbers.

BE PATIENT

If you just put a new tactic into play three weeks ago and you're still not seeing the results you want, don't give up. Instead, figure out what isn't working.

- Maybe you need to review the tactic or parameters for your target audience.
- Maybe you need to review your data.
- Maybe you need to strengthen your copy and keywords.
- Maybe you need to admit that this particular strategy isn't your forte.

Whatever the case, remember that just because you're not seeing success doesn't mean the tactic is obsolete. The strategies we've outlined throughout this book have proven successful for countless companies—there are literally millions of people making money online right now. If a particular approach isn't working, don't abandon it. Figure out what's going wrong, fine-tune your approach, and try again. If you're still not sure, it's time to invest in teams who know what they're doing and who can help you build your own knowledge base and point you in the right direction moving forward.

YOU ARE YOUR BRAND

Respect your audience. Believe in them. Deliver value. If you ignore value and benefit, it will speak to the value of your brand. Creating value in the marketplace is an extension of yourself. It shows that you enjoy helping others, that you care about how others feel, and that you're looking to build a career that you're proud of. If you focus only on making money, it will show—and your company won't last. If you want to be in it for the long haul, you have to stand for something more.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP

Finally, we'll close with a word of support. We know how hard it is to get a business started. We know how hard it is to hit your target KPIs as a marketer for any brand. We also know how hard it can be to reach out and connect with people of real credibility and value within the industry.

It's easy to feel alone when you're first getting started. We certainly did. Thought leaders weren't nearly as willing to share their expertise ten years ago as they are today. Those days are over, and we've made it our mission to make sure it stays that way.

If you just spent your last twenty dollars on this book, or you're down to your last loaf of bread, look us up. If we're doing our job right, you should be able to find us with ease—and that's why we're Louder.Online. Send us a message and tell us what you thought. After all, by buying this book, you've invested in us, and if there's a way, we're happy to return the favor.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

AARON AGIUS is the CEO and co-founder of Louder.Online, a global agency that has worked with brands like Salesforce, IBM, and Coca-Cola. Named as a leading digital marketer in a *Forbes* article, Aaron leverages his thought leadership and speaking engagements to help businesses optimize their efforts and accelerate their growth.

GIÁN CLANCEY is the CMO and co-founder of Louder.Online, where her passion for science has fueled countless world-class data-led marketing campaigns for global brands. Growing up in a large family taught Gián the power of close, authentic relationships, which she uses to fuel passionate engagement with employees and stakeholder communities.