



Rockets Don't Fly Themselves

Everything in space obeys the laws of physics. If you know these laws, and obey them, space will treat you kindly.

—Wernher Von Braun, February 17, 1958

For businesses, change is guaranteed. Industries advance, ideas expand, products morph, and customers move on. Similar to space travel, everything's in orbit. Nothing remains still.

Whether you're just about to launch your rocket ship or you're already in flight, change is coming like a speedy comet. It won't bend to your will. You'll need to either embrace it or get out of its path.

Yes, it's scary. You and every other business owner, marketer, or budding entrepreneur have experienced the uncertainty of tomorrow. I've pondered these very thoughts: Will my business survive? Have I set the right trajectory? What's coming? Am I ready?

Despite the assurance of change, *there's something that remains fixed—and most businesses overlook it.* You've been watching for change and likely missed the one thing that has remained constant: people.

People don't really change. I'm talking about you, your customers, your partners, and your peers. They might leave you for a competitor, but at their core they haven't really changed at all. And people are what make or break your business.

2

Launch

People want valuable insight, access to great people, and recognition before they want products and services. If you can keep your eyes fixed on people and their desires, half your mission will be achieved before you begin.

My kids are girls. Have you ever tried brushing a moving child's hair? You either need to walk along with her or force her to stop. Too often, we treat our customers like children.

Stop trying to force customers to conform to your desires and instead walk beside them and see what happens.

People don't want to be pitched to, marketed to, or herded like cattle. People do want information, answers, access, and recognition—and they want it all for free.

Three Big Questions

1. *How can you attract leads, prospects, and opportunity without actively selling?* Imagine no cold-calling, no advertising, none of the kinds of activities that you either hate doing or you know costs a fortune.
2. *How can you gain access to influential people in your industry?* Is there an easy way to work with people who have the highest imaginable profile? If they were willing to help you, without hesitation, how would it impact your business?
3. *Is there an easy way to connect with and gain the trust of prospects and customers?* How can you cut through the noise and gain the attention of people? Is there a proven way to earn their trust and support?

The Problem with Marketing

I've been told marketing success means spending lots of money.

Here's how the American Marketing Association defines it: "Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have

value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.”¹ Yeah, it’s a mouthful.

Focus on two words here: “exchanging offerings.” Most of us have been taught that *marketing is about making an offer that attracts people*. We’ve been trained to focus on crafting the right arrangement of words and delivering them in the right place, at the right time, using the right medium.

We’re treating people like fish. If we just create a better lure than our competitors, silently climb into a boat, and simply cast that bait right on top of our customers, they’ll bite. Or so the theory goes.

And the word “exchange” implies a two-way process between the company and the customer. Your business makes an offer and the prospective customer is compelled to comply.

Frankly, if there weren’t some level of truth to this, marketers would be out of business. I’ll be the first to admit that I’ve successfully employed some of these very tactics.

But *here’s where marketing lets us down*: It can’t predict when people are ready to buy the type of widget you have to sell.

For example, I’m going to eventually need a new car. But right now I’m very happy with my existing car. There’s no marketer out there who can predict with any degree of certainty when I’ll be done with my car. Some might notice that I just incurred a huge repair bill. Others might make assumptions based on how long I’ve driven my car or how many miles I’ve accrued. But no one knows what will ultimately motivate me to ditch my car. Heck, I don’t even know.

So marketers are forced to make educated guesses about me. Worse yet, they’re forced to pay others to reach me.

To get in front of my eyes and ears, auto dealers and manufacturers must place ads in the magazines I read, sponsor commercials and placements during my favorite television shows, place ads on the Web sites I frequent, and get airtime while I’m in my car—just to mention a few.

At the time of this writing, the U.S. automotive industry was spending more than \$400 to market each car sold, adding up to more than \$4 billion annually!²

¹ American Marketing Association. Definition of marketing (approved October 2007), www.marketingpower.com/AboutAMA/Pages/DefinitionofMarketing.aspx, 2010.

² “Nielsen: U.S. Ad Spending Up 4% in Q1,” *Radio Ink* (October 2010), www.radioink.com/Article.asp?id=1982517&spid=30800.

4

Launch

Do you have that kind of money? Is your product or service profitable enough to include that kind of expense? Is your volume big enough to afford dropping millions of dollars into a campaign with no guarantees?

Is there a better way?

The Internet as the Great Paralyzer

The Web has changed business forever. It's the kind of change that has really scared established companies. And rightly so! Could this great equalizer also be the demise of businesses?

The idea of selling direct to consumers anywhere in the world has been transformative. It didn't just put travel agents, department stores, and newspapers out of business. It also allowed average Joes like us to compete. All of a sudden a good idea could gain traction and grow.

Businesses like Amazon and eBay became billion-dollar enterprises. Any information on any topic could be found instantly. And rich knowledge was available from anywhere—home, office, car, or the beach. Crazy ideas, like putting people's faces up on a Web site and enabling friends to connect, have brought people together by the hundreds of millions.

But for every Internet success story, there are a million ideas that never come to fruition. The success of the Web also prevents many people from taking action.

For example, back in the mid-1990s, I owned a creative services agency. We helped high-tech businesses look good. Our business was booming—until the day the tech market crashed. We lost a lot of business. I was faced with the ugly and unfamiliar face of change.

I decided to focus my business in a new area. I settled in on writing white papers (persuasive documents that help people make decisions). To my shock and horror, I discovered I was not the first agency to specialize in white papers. There were others.

My first reaction was, "Oh man, this sucks." And I pondered going back to the drawing board.

Maybe you know someone with a similar story?

Competing via the Web is a lot like graduating high school: You might have been the smart kid or the popular one at your school. But the second you headed off to college, you realized there were a lot

more smart people. And maybe up against some of them, you were not so smart anymore.

The Internet takes local competition to a global stage. All of a sudden you're competing with hundreds or thousands of businesses. They're everywhere. Now you're up against smart folks from New Zealand, Germany, Russia, India, and Japan.

Stepping up to compete on a national or global stage can be very intimidating, and downright paralyzing. Maybe it's even been a hindrance to you?

How can you grow your business without massive financial investments? Is there an easy way to leverage the power of the Web without worrying about the competition?

Meet the Enemy: Channel Overload Syndrome

Is your attention fragmented? I know mine is!

Channel overload syndrome happens when information is transmitted faster than it can be received. It's like those intense rainstorms that cause raging rivers, taking out everything in their paths. Instead of pouring down rain, bucket-loads of information are dumping on the brains of your customers and prospects. And simple umbrellas don't cut it.

As a result, people are retreating, shutting down, and seeking refuge from the information onslaught. People are literally tuning out!

Think about it. Your e-mail inbox is crammed with a never-ending stream of messages, you have billions of possible Web sites to surf and videos to watch, your physical mailbox is full of junk mail, and everywhere you turn you see and hear commercials. Let's not overlook voicemails, text messages, instant messages, tweets, and Facebook updates. And what about those stacks of dusty magazines and unread newspapers?

All these choices present a huge problem for any business. If your customers aren't receiving your messages, they're likely not thinking about your business either.

So what can a business do? What are the obvious choices?

One option is to try to communicate across all the channels. Another choice is to ignore how the world is changing and do what you've always done.

6

Launch

If you attempt to engage all the channels, it will cost you a fortune, and you'll never be able to keep up. There are just too many, and new channels seem to be emerging each year.

Hiding your head under a pillow will also lead to your demise. If you can't see the need to change, you'll slowly shrink your audience and hinder your business.

Is there another option?

Do People Really Trust Your Business?

Fewer than one in three people trust marketing messages, according to Edelman Digital's annual survey of trust.³ That's a pretty dismal number.

The study also found that *trusting companies is more important than delivering great products and services*.

Do your prospects and customers trust you?

If great products alone won't gain the trust of consumers, what will?

"For all companies, it's about laying foundations for sustainable growth by deepening relationships with customers, and, with trust in business arguably at an all-time low, that's not an opportunity that one should turn down lightly," said Jeremy Darroch, CEO of the U.K. broadcasting giant BSkyB.⁴

If the default position of customers and prospects is to distrust your business, successfully growing your business becomes a monumental challenge. "The strategic imperative for most companies is to do what they can to regain the trust of stakeholders and to more effectively manage relationships with them," stated a *Harvard Business Review* article.⁵

³Edelman Digital. 2010 Edelman Trust Barometer, www.edelman.com/trust/2010/docs/2010_Trust_Barometer_Executive_Summary.pdf.

⁴As cited in Hughes, M. "Business Must Help Us Restore Trust," *Evening Gazette*, November 8, 2010. www.nebusiness.co.uk/business-news/latest-business-news/2010/11/08/business-must-help-us-restore-trust-51140-27619359/.

⁵Beinhocker, E., Davis, I., & Mendonca, L. "The 10 Trends You Have to Watch," *Harvard Business Review* (July–August, 2009). hbr.org/hbr-main/resources/pdfs/comm/fmglobal/the-ten-trends-you-have-to-watch.pdf.

The Edelman report also found that people value guidance from credentialed experts significantly more than peers. This is one bright spot in an otherwise murky outlook for businesses.

Is there a way to establish your business as a trusted authority in your industry?

Introducing the Elevation Principle

Whether you're launching a new business, releasing a new product, or you need to transform your company, the elevation principle will quickly help improve your reputation, marketplace standing, and, yes, revenues.

I want to assure you that no matter what stage your business is at—from just getting under way to being grounded in decades of prior success—the techniques and tactics I reveal here will help transform your business. They'll prepare you for change. They'll help you grow.

The foundation for the elevation principle comes directly from the school of hard knocks (from which I graduated magna cum laude). I was never taught these concepts in graduate school. Rather, through 15 years of trial, error, tests, and failures, these principles were born and refined.

Simply defined, the *elevation principle* is the process of meeting the core desires of prospects and customers by helping them solve their basic problems *at no cost*.

The elevation principle helps businesses gain the trust and attention of people by providing them highly desirable content that lacks any obvious marketing message or motive. Rather than ending every message with a blatant sales pitch, lighten up on the marketing messages.

The right content is highly sharable and can quickly draw important people to your business, enabling you to achieve rapid growth and soar beyond the competition, without the traditional costs of marketing.

START BY HELPING PEOPLE

Here's the premise: *If your marketing strategy centers on helping people with their smaller problems, many will seek your help to solve*

8

Launch

their bigger issues. If you can multiply free assistance to hundreds, thousands, or millions of people, they'll help rapidly grow your business, elevating you beyond the competition, and enabling you to become an unstoppable industry force.

Why? Because *people's core desires don't change.* Everyone wants access to great insight and to knowledgeable people who can help them. You meet this desire by producing engaging and interesting content that meets people's insatiable demand for how-to information and assistance.

Your goal should be to trigger this thought in the minds of people: "If their content is this good, how much more valuable would their products or services be?" Triggering the "how much more?" question is *highly desirable* and will help turn lurkers into customers.

Whether you're selling consulting services, information products, events, expensive products, or low-cost commodities, you can use these techniques to break through the channel overload syndrome and establish lasting trust, all without traditional marketing efforts.

If you lift people up, they'll help lift you up.

GET OTHERS INVOLVED

Applying the elevation principle propels your business growth when *you shine the spotlight on people*, rather than focusing on yourself, your products, or your services. Those people should include successful peers outside your company, industry experts, and customers.

When you combine great content with great people, you quickly stand apart from others in your industry, attracting large numbers of prospective customers. Down the road, it will be those people who will propel your business beyond your competitors'.

Here are three quick examples of other-focused content efforts:

- ◆ If you offer consulting services, you could interview the author of a hot, new, and relevant book. This shares new insight with your readers and helps the author gain exposure. It could also lead to collaboration down the road between the author and your company.
- ◆ If you manufacture cooking products, you could showcase a popular chef's unique cooking tips. This provides to your base

useful ideas that might be implemented using your company's products, and helps the chef gain exposure to your audience.

- ◆ If you run a new private elementary school, you could showcase graduates from similar programs around the country. This helps prospective parents visualize what their children might achieve at your school. It also helps promote the graduates.

When you get other people involved with your content, you not only provide value to your audience, you also forge relationships that can result in long-term benefits to your business.

THE ELEVATION PRINCIPLE FORMULA

Here's the elevation principle in a simple formula:

$$GC + OP - MM = G$$

Spelled out, the formula reads: "Great Content" plus "Other People" minus "Marketing Messages" equals "Growth" (see Figure 1.1).

When you offer great content—such as detailed how-to articles, expert interviews, case studies, and videos—that focuses on helping other people solve their problems, you'll experience growth. The "other people" component transcends your reader base and involves reaching out to people outside your company, such as industry experts. All of this transpires in a marketing-free zone.

Once the marketing messages are caged, the focus of your company shifts from "What can we sell you?" to "How can we help you?" You shift from pitching products to boosting people. *Instead of investing in ad space, you invest in creating content, experiences, gathering points, and communities where people who need help can find it.*

You have the chance to *own* the place people go to for help, eliminating your reliance on traditional marketing channels. You can become the center of your industry, niche, or local market. And when that happens, you're launched on an unstoppable trajectory that will take you places you never imagined possible.

The result: You no longer need to sell! Instead, *you demonstrate your expertise by the content you produce, the ideas you showcase, the*

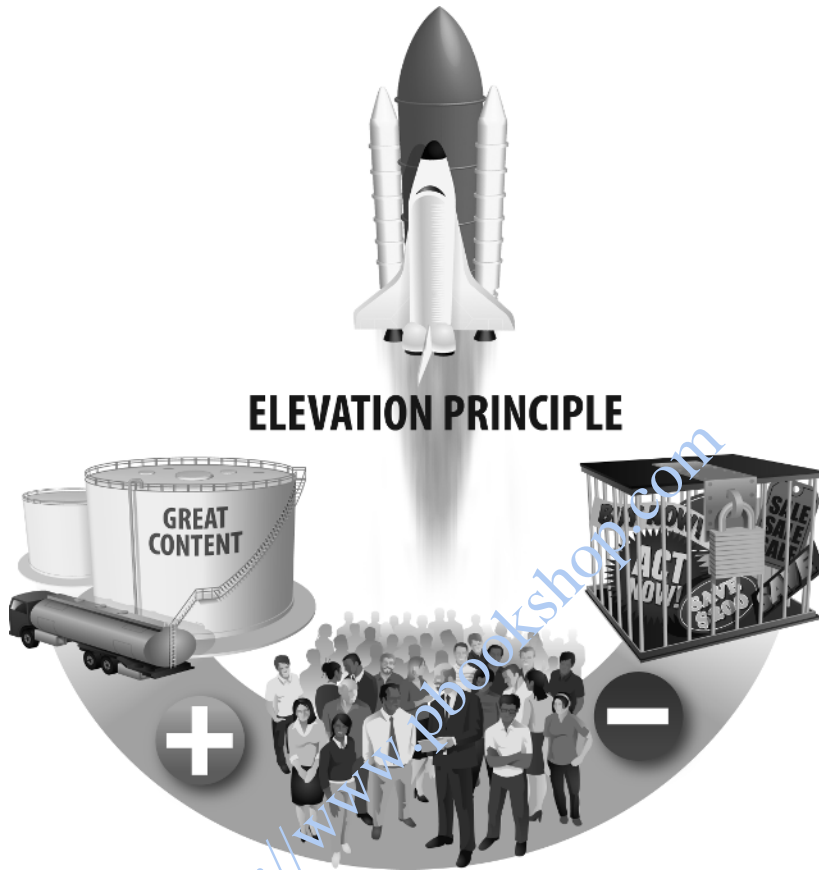


FIGURE 1.1 The elevation principle says that great content plus other people minus marketing messages results in growth.

stories you share, and the people you attract. By creating a platform for others, you can also build strategic alliances, quickly grow a large following, and dominate your industry.

EXAMPLES

Here are two examples of the elevation principle in practice, one from an established \$20-million business, and the other from a newer start-up.

HubSpot HubSpot is an inbound marketing software company that helps small businesses generate leads and close sales.

Since its launch in 2006, HubSpot has grown to 200 employees, received \$33 million in venture capital funding, and is on track to sell \$20 million in services in 2011, a 350 percent growth from 2010.

What's unique about HubSpot is that its entire growth has been tied to content marketing efforts that focus on providing great value to others with few marketing messages.

"It's interesting that with a lot of these newer marketing techniques, you can really beat the big guys in a huge way, because they're usually tied to their older methods of doing marketing," said Mike Volpe, HubSpot's vice president of marketing.

Volpe, the company's fifth employee, has overseen the content marketing activities of HubSpot from the beginning. In the early years, the company had two primary content objectives: its blog and a special online tool called Website Grader (see WebsiteGrader.com).

Website Grader is a free tool that evaluates a Web site's marketing effectiveness by analyzing its content, search engine optimization, social media integration, and lead capture capabilities. The tool is very light on marketing messages and very heavy on valuable feedback, and has caught the attention of people like Guy Kawasaki, who promoted the product without solicitation.

More than 3 million people have evaluated their Web sites using Website Grader. It has also become one of the top two sources of quality leads for the company. "Once they've run a Website Grader report, they [prospects] become extremely interested in HubSpot," said Volpe.

HubSpot uses its blog as a powerful marketing tool. *Advertising Age* ranks the site as one of the top 25 marketing blogs on the planet. HubSpot's strategy is to publish multiple educational articles daily, with a focus on quality marketing-related content.

Webinars are also part of HubSpot's content marketing strategy. Each month, the company holds as many as 10 free webinars. One had 13,000 registrants. In addition, HubSpot has created 200 original videos and a weekly live Web TV show called "HubSpot TV," and regularly publishes ebooks.

"I think for the vast majority of companies, they add way too much of the marketing message in their content," said Volpe. "I think you need a little bit. But it's like a drop or two for every gallon of content. Most people try to cram as much of it in there as they can, and it totally devalues their content and makes it not interesting," he added.

HubSpot generates 25,000 leads per month for its 60-person sales team. One hundred percent of those leads come from its content marketing efforts.

Social Media Examiner On October 12, 2009, I launched SocialMediaExaminer.com. Our slogan was “Your Guide to the Social Media Jungle.” The objective was to grow 10,000 e-mail subscribers before we sold anything. We were targeting business owners and marketers.

Prior to the launch of this site, my company had almost zero standing in the social media industry. It was mostly an unknown entity trying to compete in a quickly growing and already large marketplace—a market full of experts who were likely 10 times smarter than I was.

All the odds were against us.

On opening day, we held interactive live video broadcasts with four industry experts (see Figure 1.2).

We also recruited high-profile professionals to pen one article a month on our site. In the beginning, our goal was to publish three

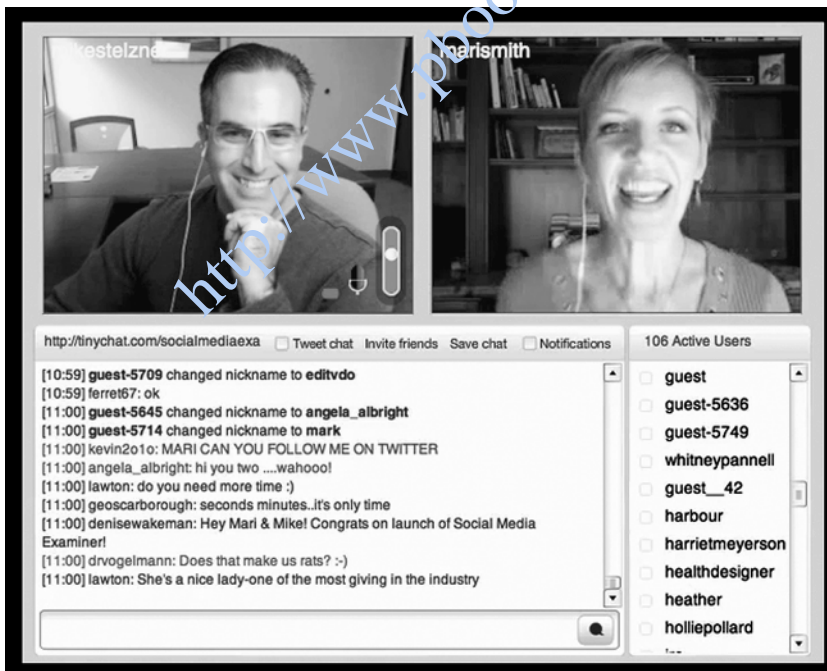


FIGURE 1.2 This is an example of a live video broadcast Social Media Examiner did on its opening day, with Facebook expert Mari Smith.

how-to articles each week that covered the hot topics of the time. We regularly interviewed industry gurus, and shared success stories from other businesses, revealing how they did what they did. Our goal was to provide other people's tips, ideas, and results to our readers. They loved it, and the professionals loved the exposure.

We didn't talk about what we were selling, and we didn't talk about ourselves at all. Instead, we identified the areas where our readers needed the most help and, simply, helped them. Our goal was to become a trusted resource by tapping the power of trusted resources.

Here were the results: Within 12 months, we went from zero to more than 40,000 e-mail subscribers, received 450,000 monthly page views, and acquired 20,000 Facebook fans. SocialMediaExaminer.com became one of the world's top 25 business blogs, according to *Advertising Age* and Technorati. Amazingly, according to Alexa, our site was also one of the top 1,700 Web sites in the United States.

In our niche, we became one of the world's top two social media blogs—nearly overnight. We also earned more than a million dollars in our first 12 months, directly attributed to our efforts—well beyond our little company's expectations.

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These two success stories illustrate that when you elevate your message above the typical marketing hype and focus on helping people, you can achieve amazing results.

Elements of the Elevation Principle

The elevation principle combines great content and a focus on others while removing obvious marketing messages. *Think of content as the fuel for your rocket, and people as what ignites the fuel and directs the rocket.* Think of marketing as friction that slows your rocket's progress.

Here's an overview of the core components of the elevation principle:

GREAT CONTENT

Content comes in many forms. It's like highly refined rocket fuel that can take you places quickly.



FIGURE 1.3 Primary fuel is what keeps your business moving.

There are two different types of content. First there's **primary fuel**: It's easy to produce and is what makes your business move.

Primary Fuel You'll need the most of this type of content to achieve success. Without it, you'll have fits and false starts, likely sending your rocket ship in circles, or causing frequent stalls (see Figure 1.3).

There's a wide array of primary fuel available. Here's a brief overview of some of the options:

- ◆ *Comprehensive how-to articles*: Detailed in nature, this type of content is typically at least 1,000 words. It should show your readers how to do something they're interested in. For example, at SocialMediaExaminer.com, we target marketers. Mari Smith, one of our contributing writers, crafted a piece

called “21 Creative Ways to Increase Your Facebook Fanbase.” This type of content is typically widely shared, referenced, and commented on.

- ◆ *Expert interviews*: Every industry has its experts. These are the people who are frequently cited, speak at events, maintain popular blogs, or author books. Conducting interviews with these experts helps keep your audience informed of new trends and innovative ideas. Interviews can be in the form of video, audio recordings, or text-based articles. For an excellent example of video interviews, visit David Garland’s TheRiseToTheTop.com site.
- ◆ *Reviews of books, products, and Web sites*: Most industries have experts who are regularly releasing books, new products, and online resources. By turning your readers onto good books, interesting noncompeting products, and useful sites, you become a valued asset for them. For example, WhitePaperSource.com puts out a monthly newsletter that often highlights studies showing the value of white papers for businesses. This type of content helps readers discover new ideas and resources.
- ◆ *Case studies*: Also known as *success stories*, case studies reveal people and/or businesses that are achieving success. The simple formula here involves revealing the challenges faced by a company, examining the action steps taken to overcome the challenges, and then showing the results. This type of content is very important because it showcases how others are achieving success, enabling readers to see how they might try similar tactics. An example from SocialMediaExaminer.com is “How Social Media Helped Cisco Shave \$100,000+ Off a Product Launch,” crafted by case study expert Casey Hibbard.
- ◆ *News stories*: If your industry is constantly breaking news, you could become the *source* that informs people of new products or services. The goal with this type of content is to quickly break a story before it goes mainstream. If you accomplish this, you can receive large spikes in traffic. For example, MacRumors.com does a great job of predicting what’s coming next from Apple by scouring patent applications and leveraging informants.
- ◆ *Contrarian stories*: Examining the opposing view of a widely held idea can often be very effective. For example, I crafted an

article for MarketingProfs.com entitled “The Dark Side of Twitter: What Businesses Need to Know,” in February of 2009—at the peak of Twitter’s frenzied growth. The article was the company’s top-performing one for the year and brought enormous traffic to MarketingProfs.com.

Primary fuel can be used in many different places. Ideally, it’s stored on a Web site under your control. It can also be distributed via e-mail, print, or video. If you don’t have a large audience, primary content can be strategically published in places where your audience resides (like other people’s blogs).

You can mix together different types of primary fuel or just focus on one type. For example, at SocialMediaExaminer.com we focus on how-to articles, expert interviews, and case studies.

Primary fuel provides the steady upward movement that your rocket ship needs. For quicker progress you’ll need advanced fuel.

Nuclear Fuel The most powerful type of business propellant is called *nuclear fuel*. This highly advanced superfuel is more difficult to produce. But if you have nuclear fuel, your rocket can achieve powerful boost, rapidly propelling you through different areas of space (see Figure 1.4). You’ll do just fine using only primary fuel, but you won’t move as fast or as far as you could.

You should, however, consider using nuclear fuel infrequently and only under carefully timed and executed strategies. When your business employs this type of content, you can move quickly, because it often attracts the attention of many people.

Most businesses never employ nuclear fuel. However, businesses that use this type of content often find themselves quickly standing out from their competitors.

There are fewer types of this fuel available. Here’s a brief overview of some of the options:

- ◆ *Reports based on surveys*: This is perhaps the most powerful form of nuclear fuel. When you release free reports based on comprehensive research, you can achieve amazing benefits. By surveying people in your industry and presenting the results in an easy-to-read report, you can become a thought leader very



FIGURE 1.4 Nuclear fuel quickly moves your business toward its destinations.

quickly. SocialMediaExaminer.com releases a free annual *Social Media Marketing Industry Report* that is typically read by 40,000 people in a matter of days.

- ◆ *Top 10 contests*: Remember, people crave recognition. Top 10 contests typically seek nominations and ask people to vote for their favorite company, blog, book, or any other category. Conducting a well-executed top 10 contest can attract power players to your company and lead to remarkable exposure. Back when I started SocialMediaExaminer.com, we conducted a Top 10 Social Media Blogs contest that helped get our name on the map in a major way.
- ◆ *White papers*: These are educational documents designed to help persuade people about a concept, product, or service. They tend to average 6 to 10 pages in length and address trends, problems, and solutions. Unique from other forms of nuclear

fuel, white papers can have a very long propulsion period. For example, a white paper I wrote in 2006 has brought in more than 85,000 leads and is still delivering 30 each day.

- ◆ *Micro events*: Webinars, teleclasses, social media events, and live video broadcasts are examples of micro events. These free events typically are one hour in duration and bring an expert of some kind live to your audience. They are more powerful than expert interviews because they are live, rotate around a space and time, and attract many people. They also provide excellent exposure to the expert. A great example is Sam Rosen's "The Influencer Project." He invited 60 thought leaders to deliver 60-second messages over one hour; 5,500 people attended the live event.

Generating nuclear fuel does, however, require a major effort. But using only a few nuclear bursts will help differentiate your company from the competition in a dramatic way.

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Using primary and nuclear fuel—the great content that will propel your business—is absolutely essential to helping your rocket gain forward momentum. In later chapters in this book, I will reveal precisely how to create these types of content, and what to avoid, ensuring your business ongoing success.

OTHER PEOPLE

Fuel gets your rocket ship moving, but people determine where it goes.

A key distinction of the elevation principle involves doing great things for people *outside of your business*, many of whom will likely never become customers. Simply said, give to others—constantly—and your business will quickly grow.

This idea may seem counterintuitive. Perhaps you're thinking, "Why should I waste energy on people who have no interest in my success?" Or maybe you're wondering, "Why should I help someone who's never done anything for me?" These are good questions to ask, questions I've also chewed on.

Over the years I've realized that *most people couldn't care less about my business*. They don't walk around all day wondering how

they can help me. In fact, they're so caught up in their daily activities that I'm not even on their radar.

I learned this the hard way. At first I figured people would be willing to do things just because I asked. I also thought they'd buy my products just because I crafted a good sales page.

My first paid job was delivering a weekly newspaper as a young kid in Wisconsin. Each month my boss asked me to go door-to-door and sell people a small yellow card with two coupons on it. Yes, he asked me to sell coupons!

So I went knocking. Occasionally I'd get the "Oh, you're such a nice young boy—here's a few dollars for your coupons." But most people slammed the door in my face. I knew they couldn't care less about the cheesy coupons.

Frankly, that job didn't last very long. But I learned an important lesson: that *asking people for money often results in repeated rejection*.

Many, many years later, the revelation came. Long after I had cut my teeth in sales and marketing, I discovered a better way to sell. I realized that *if I simply did great things for other people, I didn't really need to ask for their help*. If I did for others precisely what I wanted them to do for me, perhaps something might change.

I discovered that *most people find great value when others help them solve their problems* and when they achieve recognition for their accomplishments.

My thinking was all backward: *Rather than looking for people who would bend to my will, I needed to bend my will to people*. Instead of asking, "What have you done for me lately?," I needed to ask myself, "What have I done for you lately?"

This marked a paradigm shift in my thinking.

People love receiving genuine gifts. They love it when others recognize their hard work, help promote their content, or reach out to help without asking for anything in return. So I shifted my mind-set to: "Who can I help?" Then things took off.

Here are the different types of people who can play into your business growth:

- ◆ *Your base*: Your objective should be to build a base of people on which you can build your business. These are readers of your blog, subscribers to your content, fans of your social media

sites, and so on. Your gift to these people is the continuous delivery of great content that helps them solve their problems, with no strings attached. You can also give gifts by promptly answering their many questions and recognizing those individuals who exhibit exemplary participation with others in your base.

- ◆ *Outside experts:* Seek out people that your base would be interested in and shine the spotlight on them. This could include book authors, successful peers, or known industry experts. Activities you could perform for experts might include an interview, a case study of their businesses, or a review of their books, products, or services. Your gift to the experts is exposure to your base. Your gift to your base is sharing tips from the experts and showing them what success can look like.
- ◆ *Fire starters:* These are superexperts who have raving fan bases. Often their actions can ignite a domino effect that can take your business to new heights. Just being associated with these people can have a positive impact on your brand.

So how does helping others propel your business?

- ◆ It *eliminates the perception of the pitch*. People have very advanced sales-pitch detectors. When you provide value to other people, they'll see your business in a different light.
- ◆ When you're close with people, *you'll see trends*. Helping people with their problems provides valuable market research, enables you to anticipate trends, and helps you manage change.
- ◆ Providing genuine gifts to others also *expands your base*. People love sharing great content and love propping up businesses that they find truly helpful.
- ◆ Carefully targeting experts also *leads to strategic partnerships*. If you target the right people with access to a much larger base than your own, you could find yourself partnering in a way that benefits both of your businesses.
- ◆ Helping others *greatly reduces rejection*. Oftentimes, people I've helped have turned the tables on me and asked me how they could help me—unsolicited. And when the time came when I needed help, they nearly always were willing to assist.

- ◆ Helping people *ensures your business will stand out from the competition*. While the rest of your industry is focused on taking money from people, you'll be focused on enriching people who can become evangelists for your business, and many will gladly give you their money down the road.

The American Express OPEN Forum provides a platform for small business owners. Many high-profile experts pen original content on the OpenForum.com site. By combining great content and other people, American Express is able to attract many people to its site with the hope that some will decide to sign up for an American Express card.

To build a base and engage other experts, you'll need a strategy to ensure your content is getting in front of the right people, that you're retaining and growing your base, and that you know how to build relationships that lead to strong partnerships. In later chapters of this book, I will show you precisely how to do this.

Once you have fuel and a base of people, the next step is to tone down your sales and marketing efforts.

NO OBVIOUS MARKETING MESSAGES—AT FIRST

I was at a large trade show in Las Vegas. I had just wrapped up an on-camera interview with a rather well-known marketing executive. After thanking me for the interview, he asked, "How can I help you?"

I thought to myself, "Wow, this guy gets it. What a brilliant first question to ask me." After I replied, "I can't think of anything off the top of my head, but thank you," he said something else—which, unfortunately fully erased the goodwill of his previous gesture.

He proceeded to spout a litany of things he wanted from me, including a book review, promotional activities, and so on. I politely smiled and said to myself, "No way."

His tactical error was revealing his cards too early. He chose the road of efficiency and—unknown to him—he hit a dead end. I had just given him a gift (the interview) and he asked for much more—almost immediately.

Now, in his defense, I admit I've done the same thing before. I just didn't know any better back then. Perhaps you've done this as well?

This story demonstrates how many businesses get marketing wrong. To use a hunter analogy, *businesses are going for the quick*

kill because the target is in sight. But if the hunter owns the land where the deer live, there'll be another day to bag the prey. Simply said, they'll be back and they'll be bigger. Marketers need to stop hunting and start focusing on building places customers want to frequent.

The final component in the elevation principle is to *eliminate your marketing messages*—or at least the perception of them.

Your goal should be to grow your base and your relationships with experts *before* you worry about cranking up the sales and marketing engines.

Think of marketing like friction: The more you use it, the slower your rocket ship will move. If you overdo it, you'll experience no forward momentum—and that can be disastrous (see Figure 1.5).

Less marketing makes your rocket ship much larger by growing your base.



FIGURE 1.5 Businesses that overemphasize marketing messages rarely leave the atmosphere. Those that focus on great content and other people travel at warp speed.

In the context of great content, *blatant or frequent marketing messages simply say to people you're all about the sale*. It changes their opinion. It engages their distrust engines. And when those engines rev up, your future customers are gone.

Too much marketing is like endless flashing neon lights that shout "Buy Now." People see those signs and ignore them. They also distrust businesses that overload them with marketing messages. In contrast, *when you remove most or all marketing messages, you can come across as a very valuable resource and begin forward momentum*.

Let me illustrate this from my own experience. When I launched SocialMediaExaminer.com I made the decision not to advertise or sell any products or services until we had at least 10,000 e-mail subscribers. Some might argue this was a costly and shortsighted decision. "You're leaving money on the table," others have said. But I knew it was the right thing to do.

My goal was to recruit valuable experts to contribute original content to the site. I knew that if it *appeared I was financially profiting from other people's content, it could deter their commitment*.

I also knew that when new people came to our site, and saw the great content authored by knowledgeable experts, they'd be more impressed if there was absolutely nothing for sale.

So I made the strategic decision to make SocialMediaExaminer.com a *movement*, something people wanted to be part of. I greatly deemphasized my role. Instead, I gave a commercial-free stage to other experts. And people rushed in by the tens of thousands.

After only a few weeks, Technorati ranked us as one of the world's top 5 small business blogs. Six months into the launch, we had more than 100,000 people visiting the site monthly and 20,000 e-mail subscribers.

When we finally turned on the marketing engines, we had a blockbuster experience, generating nearly a million dollars from a single event.

By eliminating all perceptions of marketing, our rocket ship—propelled by tons of people—shot into outer space. We did slow down the growth of our base to do some marketing when the time was right—and that was always the plan. Had we been marketing from the beginning, we would have been much smaller and much less successful.

There's always a place for some marketing. It's just not so obvious.

You should be constantly employing what I call “*under-the-radar*” forms of marketing. These techniques involve ensuring your great content shows up in front of the right people, capturing the names and e-mails of people, and growing your following, while leaving selling for some time in the future.

There's also a time and place for traditional marketing. Your business needs to sell to survive, so don't forgo marketing forever. When intense marketing is employed, you'll experience a stall in the growth of your base, and typically your content production (your fuel) will be hindered. The keys to success involve knowing *when to flip the marketing levers fully on* and *when to shut them off*. Later in the book I will explore these concepts in detail.

When the right content is supported by the right people, and the marketing engines are off (eliminating drag), the elevation principle can propel your business to new heights.

Why the Formula Works

Why does great content matter? Do you really need great people? And can you get by with the marketing engines always on? Why must these three ideas work together?

Let me use the movie industry as an example. An incredible movie with a really stellar storyline may never make it to your town because it lacks the name recognition of a known actor and support of a major studio. It might be seen in a few random places, but will likely never become the blockbuster it could have been.

Similarly, you might be able to produce outstanding content. But if the right people do not see that content, what impact is it having on your business?

Back in 2006, I was a new blogger focused on empowering other writers by sharing tips on how to craft content and market it. I had a rather small following. The biggest blog in my world was Copyblogger.com, run by Brian Clark. I reached out to Brian and asked if he'd be willing to let me write an article for his site. He said sure.

I put together a nice post and it went live on Copyblogger.com. The response from Brian's audience was off the charts. It led to me landing a nice gig from one of his readers, and it opened my eyes.

I learned that *good content really does matter*. But *where the content resides* is just as important. Because Copyblogger had a huge base of people who matched my ideal readers, writing for Brian's site was a wise move for my business. I gained the exposure and the support of a power player. Thus, great content in front of the right people is essential.

Why? Because *good content is often shared*, giving you further exposure. It is e-mailed, printed, bookmarked, tweeted, and shared on Facebook. If you can *expand the size of your reachable audience, you can increase the share factor*. More of the right people reading your content and sharing it will help you achieve great success.

In a perfect world, you own the platform where your content resides, but that's not necessary, as the Copyblogger.com example illustrates.

The power of great people goes much further. In the case of Copyblogger.com, I continued to write for Brian's site. I gave him a gift in the process, as well. My writing was popular and helped attract more people to the site.

Eventually, I asked Brian if he'd be willing to participate in an event I was organizing. He said yes without hesitation. Having his big name associated with my event brought in a lot more sales. It led to a good relationship that has been very profitable for both of our businesses.

Great content in front of a great audience and with the support of experts can really go places, opening many opportunities for your business. But do you really need to tone down the marketing messages?

To address this, I'm going to take a page from my white paper playbook. I've written for many of the world's largest companies. I faced strenuous objections when crafting persuasive white papers. My clients often asked why I was so insistent on not mentioning the name of the company until the last page. I often heard objections like, "We need this piece to produce sales," or "That's not how we've always done it."

Here's what I told businesses the likes of FedEx, Dow Jones, and Microsoft. *The moment you stop mentioning your products and services by name is the moment you shift from being a salesperson to being an advocate.*

Remember, everyone wants access to great insight and great people, *before* they want great products and services.

By simply abstracting out the brand, a business can move the mental bar in people's brains from "I'm being sold," to "I'm being educated."

In the same way, when businesses can move the marketing messages to the background, they can help ensure their content is *fully received and valued by people*.

When outstanding content is coupled with great people, and decoupled from marketing messages, your business can quickly attract a larger base, more partnership opportunities, and significantly more sales.

■ ■ ■

Now that you understand the core underpinnings of the elevation principle and how it can be used, it's important to spend some time examining how to get your business flying. You have a lot of competition. To ensure your rocket ship is headed in the right direction, you need a mission plan. The next chapter reveals precisely how to map out your flight plan.

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