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The Shift

Finding Those Eyeballs and Big Mouths

Imagine that you have the greatest product ever. (And maybe you do!) Perhaps it's some kind of software. Or a product line. Or maybe it's simply your own expertise. You have developed it whatever it is—and now you need to *sell it*, one way or another.

To be successful, you need eyeballs—which are attached to people, who buy things (simple, right?). People have the tools to make their big mouths heard. The more passionate of these will not only know, like, trust, and purchase from you—but will also tell everyone *they* know about you. As one of these people myself, I can attest to the effectiveness of this method. If I get excited about something, I try to spread it like wildfire.

But not all eyeballs are created equal as far as your business is concerned. You want to reach folks who are genuinely interested in what you are marketing—right? You are probably aware of the more traditional ways of capturing eyeballs:

TV, radio, print (newspapers and magazines), billboards (seriously?), and setting up booths at trade shows. But are these the most effective?

The location of your customers' eyeballs is changing. Whether your customer is an 8-year-old schoolgirl or a 77-year-old retiree, eyeballs are increasingly moving online. It is no secret that consumers of all ages are shifting their attention from mainstream, traditional media to the far more active and evolving world full of blogs, social media (what I like to call the social Web), search engines, online video, and other appealing places.

Even more importantly—people are becoming more social and interactive. Social media usage is up and the social Web—offering the ability to connect one-to-one with friends, businesses, and so on—is here to stay. Sure, not everyone is taking part quite yet—but I would bet that a growing percentage of your target market is (especially if your marketing is skewing toward Generations Y and X). The point here is that the social subset of your market—the people who spread interesting stuff and open their big mouths—are a key component to smarter, faster, cheaper marketing.

Furthermore, there is no online marketing versus offline marketing today; it is both. The Internet has become a platform that amplifies what any one person could do in real life and these efforts build on one another. And it isn't just folks with zillions of friends, followers, and authority who are influencing opinions. These social tools allow nearly everyone—including me and you—to have *some* form of influence over our friends and connections and also become a trusted resource: the go-to person. The friendly and approachable expert. When you reach the passionate few, they spread the word for you.

Take, for example, mediapreneur Peter Shankman's HARO (Help A Reporter Out), a free service that sends multiple e-mails a day to anyone who subscribes with a list of reporters/journalists looking for experts and trusted resources. If you feel you are the right fit, you can respond and pitch the reporter. HARO has over 100,000 subscribers and has turned over a million dollars in profit . . . in less than a year (and recently sold). It is an incredible free resource whose popularity caught on because of people being social and interactive. What happened was pretty simple—when you break it down.

1. Peter started HARO as a Facebook group. He had connections with reporters and simply shared stories they were looking for with others. In essence, he created high-value content for people and gave it away.
2. The group grew organically as people told their friends about it. For example, if you saw that a reporter was looking for a “cat expert” for a story, you might forward that query on to your friend who knows everything in the world about cats.
3. The group eventually got too big for Facebook and is now an e-mail service. Revenue comes from sponsorships, and Peter has been propelled to stardom—all for being nice and helping people by doing something he liked to do and turning it into a business model.
4. Peter has become a sought-after speaker, expert, and consultant based around his experiences. When he talks, people listen. This has opened up all kinds of incredible opportunities for him.
5. Possibly the most important thing here is Peter isn't a jerk face. He is approachable, and, while he is an expert, he doesn't pretend to be better than anyone else or act

like some kind of closed-off person that you can never get a hold of. He is a smarter, faster, cheaper trusted resource who connects with people one-on-one online and in real life.

A key part of the story takes place in the early days with that first group of people who helped spread the word. The social Web made it easy for them to do it, and by getting the word out about HARO, these people become even more well liked and trusted by THEIR friends. Why? Because they used their big mouths to help other people. It created a perfect triangular marketing and promotion situation. HARO was beneficial to people who were quoted in the media because of it. They told their friends who appreciated the tip as it could help them. And each time it got passed on, it grew. People were being helped, a profitable business was created, and Peter became an influential, trusted resource. I bet that you can create your own group—big or small—of similarly super-passionate people who spread things YOU create that help both them and others. The Internet has evolved to allow this to happen.

Of course, the Internet is not just confined to computers anymore. As we all know, mobile phones have become a significant hub for many people. Just how many is “many”? According to a report by Futuresource Consulting Senior Market Analyst David Luu called *Handheld Device Convergence*, within the next three years more than 1 billion people will have Internet access on their phones—and that number is expected to continue to rise. Tablet computing—using tools like the newly introduced iPad from Apple, which reportedly sold two million of the devices in just the first two months—is another option for the other-than-computer Internet user. Even

our old forgotten friend the television is streaming shows from online via set-top boxes and through the TVs themselves. In essence, the Internet has become a syndicated platform that's spreading widely and deeply to nearly every demographic.

And with this shift and the evolution of the Internet, the one-way conversation has developed into a two-way conversation. Consumers have become mini-media sources who interact online and spread both positive and negative impressions and observations to their network in a variety of ways. Marketing has become a dialogue—one filled with personality and fun. Yes, believe it or not—business can be (and should be) fun.

This is somewhat of a frightening idea for companies that are obsessed with control and maintaining the status quo—the Goliaths of the business world. But for scrappy entrepreneurs, business owners, and passionate folks like us, this shift is amazing. It's allowing marketing to grow as a collective, interactive, and experimental medium as opposed to a tightly controlled message or “campaign.” Now you can create your own media (video, audio, text, photos) and focus on one-on-one relationships with customers, your community, and new media sources.

The playing field has finally been leveled. Entrepreneurs, small businesses, and freelancers have the same tools available to them as multimillion-dollar corporations. Lean companies are at a distinct advantage in the new world of business building, marketing, and promoting, because they aren't required to ask a board of 739 people before posting something online (or going to the bathroom). Finally, David has been given a slingshot and can outmaneuver Goliath.

You don't have to be an *über*nerd-techie to maximize your position in this new era of business and marketing. It really

doesn't matter if you don't know the difference between a megabyte and a spider bite—because the tools are there to help you grab those eyeballs, make connections, and market your business successfully.

Which begs the question: How has this new Internet-crazed era shifted entrepreneurship, marketing, and promotion? What has really changed?

Old School versus New School

These are the principles and practices that used to matter or were universally perceived to be true:

Mass appeal. Everyone was a potential customer or client.

Experience and credentials (master's degree, PhD, anyone?) mattered more than **passion and creativity**.

Big start-up bucks were a requirement—groveling before banks and investors mandatory.

Ginormous marketing budget and team were key. The more people hustling and dollars spent, the more dollars earned, right?

You were **only a trusted expert or resource if you had 50 years of experience**, wrote 30 books on the subject, and lived on a secluded mountain. And **these experts were not approachable or social** (they had no interest in interacting with plebeians like you and me). In fact, they were often downright mean and pretentious.

Only a **polished individual** with the look of a runway model should be the company's spokesperson. Or professional actors. (Personally, I would rather watch a sock puppet promote a product.)

Jerks and bullies dominated the business game.

Throw enough people under the bus for your personal gain and you win.

High-budget productions created by a crew of 17 union workers was the only way to tell your story through video. Television commercials and (just kill me now) infomercials also got the job done.

The **entrepreneur's personality** was never the center of the approach. Why did it matter? Face of the entrepreneur? Who cared?

Geeks with their shiny gadgets and new toys were considered to be a **waste of time**, a flash in the pan, and people to avoid.

Websites that were either one-way, boring tech or corporate speak—or offered lots of flash but no content—were the accepted norm.

Experimenting and failing was a bad idea. Really, really bad and expensive. And if you did try something new, you never, *ever* talked about failures.

The world was considered a sinister place, with **competitors lurking everywhere**, plotting to steal or destroy your business. You had to be smart and suspect everyone. All competitors must be destroyed (insert evil laughter).

Social media was for kids with a minimum of three piercings. Or for huge, international brands that had the major bucks to maximize it.

Advertising was confined to 30-second radio and TV spots and static ads—print, online banner ads, billboards, the occasional bus stop. The company controlled the message—whether the customer was listening, watching, or even interested.

The ability to **suck up to traditional media for coverage** would make or break a business (yikes—where’s the dignity in that?).

Blogs were for bragging about a company, sending out press releases, or for existential 20-somethings to tell the world about their relationship breakups and favorite music.

Businesses were conducted either online OR offline. Mixing the two? Insane! More important, offline businesses were for old-school corporate folks; online businesses were for the tech kids.

Big brands were the best teachers. We were to study how they were marketed and learn from them. Copy them. *Worship* them. Long live Goliath!

And a final old-school philosophy.

Never give away ANYTHING for free. Ideas, advice, products, and so forth. After all—we make these things so that people will *buy them*. How dumb can you be?

The Game Changer

The Internet. It has changed how and where people spend their time and money. It’s shifted eyeballs from traditional media like print and television to the wondrous, wacky world of online content, full of niche (not mass) blogs, video, and new media with an emphasis on passion first. And with this change come new business models, new ways to market and promote—and a new way of thinking about entrepreneurship and business as a whole.

There has NEVER been a better opportunity to build, market, and promote a successful business. The tools are available to just about everyone. There's never been a better time to market like an entrepreneur and be the David and outhustle Goliath—no matter what your business is.

However—this doesn't mean that it takes any less work, passion, drive, and chutzpah. It doesn't mean suddenly you will be an overnight success just because you have an amazing idea and a website; and it also doesn't mean that face-to-face relationships are a thing of the past. A virtual handshake still can't replace a real-life one, and human connections are just as important as they ever were.

It *does* mean that opportunities—to create, to market, to reach and attract the right customers and clients, to build a like-minded community and audience—has been democratized. It means that increasingly more people have the chance to be interactive, social, and experimental, and to be successful on new terms—*our* terms.

The good news is that it takes far less money to reach infinitely more people than it did in the days of Henry Ford. But it takes MORE creativity, MORE passion, and much MORE speed and nimbleness. It takes an entrepreneurial approach to communicating in a focused, productive way.

Now, here are the NEW ways to market and promote your business:

Niche matters. The goal is to appeal to a specific, passionate, subset of people. We don't need to sell to everyone. In fact, if we do—we might want to rethink our game plan. We don't need millions of customers and clients to have a successful business. Instead, we can focus on the RIGHT customers and clients.

Money follows passion—not the other way around.

Think about that for a second. Opportunity matters, but if we don't love what we're doing to earn a buck, the chance of financial failure is much greater.

We are **media sources**, not product pushers. You have the right to spread your message through whatever means you'd like—and unlike with traditional media, you can do so in a social and interactive manner. We can write like a magazine, create audio like a radio show, and even have our own TV channel if we want to—all for a fraction of the cost of traditional media. It's even better if we manage to gain full control of the creation of our content.

Expertise is relative and you don't have to be discovered or be a jackass to become a trusted resource. There is a new realm of trusted resources who are friendly, knowledgeable, and create their own media. They are approachable and not afraid to show their flaws. Perfection is overrated.

Genuine relationships matter—both online and offline. Who we know and who knows us (and how) is a giant piece of the entrepreneurial puzzle.

New media sources (bloggers, video bloggers, online content providers) in your niche can have a more substantial effect than the traditional kinds. Not only do they have passionate audiences, but they're able to reach people all over the planet ... and can attract traditional media coverage.

In the increasing transparent business world, **nice, helpful people win**. Uncaring jerks are exposed either by Google or other people.

Passion trumps age. Whether they're 14 or 94, entrepreneurs who *care* all have an equal shot at marketing their businesses smarter, faster, and cheaper.

We are savvy, **and we listen to those geeks** when we want to know about the newest techie stuff. We know when to consult someone who knows more about a subject than we do.

Content is king. Marketing is the queen. Our website is our throne.

Experimenting with marketing ideas is now far less expensive. While trying and failing used to mean losing major dollars—or even your reputation—a bad blog post or idea are now just cheap learning tools. Get over it and move on!

Creativity wins. As Daniel Pink says in his book, *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*, and as *Linchpin* author Seth Godin claims: Those who can think like artists are becoming the best entrepreneurs.

Your **unique personality** and presence matters. Forget the expensive spokesperson with the \$200 hairstyle. We want to hear from *you*. The entrepreneur. The creator. It doesn't matter what you look like as long as you're genuine and passionate—and know what you're talking about.

Video is a great way to tell your story—no Hollywood budget or professional actors required. All you need nowadays is an idea, a platform, and a pocket camera costing a hundredth of the price of traditional fancy cameras to get you started. You might even want to start your own online show.

Understanding and participating in the social Web is vital. The tools are going to change; that is a fact.

But online, two-way communication between you and your customers, your clients, your partners, media sources, bloggers, and each other (entrepreneurs have to stick together, after all) are only going to keep growing.

Don't get me wrong; there are many fundamental business principles that have been around for decades that still hold true. For example, word of mouth has been around since early caveman recommended his club over his friend's hunting stick. **The Internet didn't invent word of mouth.** But it sure has amplified it! There are **innovative solutions to advertising**—approaches that live, breathe, and spread like a 30-second or static ad never could. The rise of sponsored content is continuing to impact the advertising world—for a fraction of the cost of traditional campaigns.

We no longer solely control the message. Our consumers, clients, new media sources, and bloggers do, too. We become as much participants as we are creators.

The two-way website is replacing the one-way snoozefest. It's social, interactive, and filled with useful content (perhaps a mix of text, audio, and video). It's focused on educating, entertaining, and inspiring—not just selling, bragging, and showcasing.

Web design matters. A good design sets you apart from the pack.

Overnight success? When does that happen, really? But by marketing your business smarter, faster, cheaper, you're going to get there quicker. But, it takes time, effort, and patience.

Big brands might actually be the WORST companies to learn from. In fact, they have a thing or two to learn from us, the hustling entrepreneur!

The more we give away—whether it’s content, education, or inspiration—**the more we get back over time.** But you have to know when to give and when to charge for your product or service. After all, you *do* want to make a profit, right?

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