



HOW TO STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD

By Janice B Gordon MBA: The Problem Solver

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FROM YOU, YOUR BUSINESS GROWS

So, you've set up in business and perhaps you have been going for a year, two or more. But something is lacking – you are finding it difficult to grow, break even, make a profit or find new customers. Perhaps you are stuck in a rut and don't know how to take your business to the next level.

The good news is that there is a way forward. One way to secure growth for your business – and for you – is to **distinguish yourself from the competition**. In other words, stand out from the crowd, from the tens, hundreds, maybe thousands of other businesses offering the same or similar service or product that you are.

How? This is a subject that I'm passionate about. I advise many business owners on business growth and development strategies and this is one common solution that can be applied to any business of any size or age: **from you, your business grows**. Yes, that's right – it's as much about you as it is about your business.

I will use this e-book to cover the main ways to stand out from the crowd, including building your own business personality, focusing on

your uniqueness, building relationships.



Why fit in when you were born to stand out?

Dr Seuss



The reason why I am so passionate about this subject is that it is fundamental to why some businesses prosper and others fail. It is an area in business that is vastly overlooked. We are all used to corporate brands like Nike or Fairy, but we love or hate personalities like Richard Branson – he is like Marmite (you love him or you hate him) but the important issue here is that we all know what Virgin does and stands for.

What do you stand for? You may not be a Richard Branson now but think back to how he started, and he did not have the benefit of the internet and a connected economy; if he had he could have achieved more in less time. This is your time – how are you going to stand out?





BE YOURSELF

Is your business persona corporate or human? These days, **business is personal**. Companies that hide behind a corporate mask are losing out. The internet has connected customers to businesses like never before and you should be making the most of this.

But to maximise the benefits of social media and technology, you need to show your face. That's right – **lose the corporate mask**. Who are you? You have to know and believe in yourself before you can build a **personal business personality**. Wait! It's not as daunting as that might sound. I'm talking about your passion, your interests, your values, your character. Let it shine through.

How? First, write a summary about yourself and why you set up your business – this could feature on your 'About Us' page. Then, perhaps start a blog about your experiences in business (for example, this one from skincare brand **Merumaya**) or use other social media platforms to reveal a little of your personality. On Twitter I follow @missiecindz, a graphic designer. Her **#cindy365notes** tells you a lot about her personality. I

met her once but I feel I know her and trust what she does. This is a great example of how to engage your customer, existing or potential, by offering information, insights and entertainment.

Let's face it, you'll be more memorable if you engage with your audience in this way, and you're more likely to attract the right type of customer.

If your values and personality are clear, customers will be better able to identify with you. Businesses with **personality** and **integrity** build trust and relationships more easily with their customers. Trust and strong relationships are crucial to building any business, so don't overlook putting your personality into your business.



To give real service you must add something which cannot be bought or measured with money, and that is sincerity and integrity
Douglas Adams



Finally, be accessible – include names, photos and even brief biographies of staff on your website. Show your contact details clearly, including a physical address if possible.

Don't be afraid to show the human side of your business. All this helps to build a picture of you and your business and forms the foundations of your business personality.





WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT YOU?

It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it! In other words, what can or do you do that no one else does *in the way you do it?*

You may be offering the same service as the business next door but how are you delivering it? Is it different to the competition?

To stand out from the crowd, focus on your unique skills, your unique approach, your character even, and make them part of your service standards and brand.

For example, I like massages but only the really deep-tissue ones, so I want to find a no-nonsense masseur who will not give up until they have found my



Strength lies in differences, not in similarities

Stephen Covey



knot. I could find hundreds of masseurs offering the same service but I'm going to opt for the one who is clear about their approach, who has a style that suits me. It's horses for courses and if it's relaxation you want, then that's what you should get.



“

**Today you are You, that
is truer than true. There
is nobody alive who is
You-er than You**

Dr Seuss

”

So you see, it's not what you sell, but how. Remember, business is about building relationships, a big part of which is finding the difference that *makes the difference* for your target market. You need to give your customers a reason to come to you rather than buy a similar product or service from someone else.

Include this point of difference in your marketing and communications so that customers sit up and take notice of you. A great example of this is US start-up Dollar Shave Club, whose quirky, slightly irreverent **YouTube advert** went viral almost immediately after it broadcast in March 2012. The volume of web traffic in response to the ad immediately melted the firm's server and within 48 hours it had received 12,000

orders. The video has had more than 11 million views and Dollar Shave Club has secured millions of dollars of investment.

Why? Because the video is jammed full with personality which very cleverly communicates a simple business model (mail-order razor blades). It shouts: 'We're different!' and that is the key to Dollar Shave Club's success – it's not *what* it sells, but *how* it sells.

OK, so you may not want to take the quirky approach, but your point of difference could be something a bit more conventional. For example, you're a recruitment agency whose staff are all experienced in the sector you're dealing with, and so you can give a personal, more informed service. Or you sell luxury gifts that are manufactured only from ethically sourced materials and you only use environmentally friendly packaging.

Whatever your difference, capitalising on it will help to create a niche for yourself, strengthen your brand and maximise a loyal following.

ENGAGE YOUR CUSTOMERS

As I mentioned in Chapter One, business is personal. Customers don't just buy your product or service – they buy **you and your values**. Think of The Body Shop – Anita Roddick established the business in 1976 and became known as an activist and campaigner on social and environmental change. Although Roddick sold The Body Shop to L'Oréal in 2006, and she sadly passed away in 2007, her legacy remains strong in the business, even today. Anita certainly engaged with people who cared about the environment.

Even if you're no Anita Roddick (yet), **you** are your brand and you must connect and engage with your customers. I'm not suggesting that you monitor all of your customer enquiries and social media interactions personally, but if you've built a strong brand with a clear voice and identity (like Anita), you or your staff will find it easier to convey these values, and build the trust and relationships you need.

People buy people, not a faceless corporate mask. Remember that your staff

are also your customers: they have to buy in to what you stand for, so they can better represent you and your business.

Go the extra mile.

Ensure your processes are streamlined and simplified to make the customer experience as seamless and frictionless as possible.

Having good processes in place will help you to engage and communicate more easily with your customer.

Use content marketing to engage your customers, to offer added value.



Content marketing is creating quality, branded editorial content across all media channels and platforms to help build engaging relationships, consumer value and measurable success. So, it could be blogs and other social media interactions, e-books (like this one) or newsletters, whitepapers or magazines.

When interacting with your existing and potential customers, whether online or offline, tailor your messages and responses to their needs and wants, enquiries, comments or complaints. Don't be afraid to add the personal touch – your customers will appreciate it. And be responsive and prompt with your replies. Finally, surprise your customers. For example, when a builder went to collect his final payment after doing work on a family home, as a gesture of goodwill he took breakfast for the family. As a result, the builder received referral business from extended family members and work colleagues.

“

You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you

Dale Carnegie

”

A WORD ABOUT ONLINE AND OFFLINE RELATIONSHIPS

Building relationships **online** is about sharing something of you – for example, via a blog, where you share your opinions or activities; or via Twitter or Facebook, where you share links and commentary on what interests you. This will allow online connections to get to know your character and helps to establish empathy and build trust.

A Virgin Atlantic customer was complaining on Twitter about poor service due to delays at the airport. The customer got an instant response in the form of an apology and a voucher. The result? The customer became an advocate of Virgin's good service.

A word of caution: use social media in the right way. Don't use it as a blatant marketing tool. You would not normally go up to a stranger and start telling them about what you sell, so don't do it online.

Building relationships **offline** (face to face) is quicker but not easier. You have three seconds to make an impression, so start with a firm handshake, eye contact and a warm smile. You will make firm new friends if you help them and make a connection, exchange information and give genuine compliments.

I met a few of my Twitter connections at a fundraising event. We did not realise we knew one another until we mentioned our Twitter names and then we became instant friends. We sat together and arranged to meet again offline.



STAY FOCUSED

When the going gets tough it's easy to dilute our original offering. You diversify so much that your products or services become too broad, resulting in a weak brand and no real unique identifiable offer.

Resist! Instead, build on and play to your strengths. After all, it's easier to play to our strengths than to labour away at something that isn't our strong point. Turn away from things that are not right for you and, crucially, learn to say no. It may take longer to achieve success this way, but it will strengthen you and your brand and, as a result, your success will be long lived.

Yes, times are tough and no business can be so specialised that it limits its customer base. After all, diversification is no bad thing – we all know that in business it's often necessary to survive in these hard times. Diversification works best when the products or services are related. Perhaps carve out two or three niche markets. But don't diversify so much that you dilute your business



The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing
Stephen Covey



model. Always ask and measure yourself by 'what you stand for' – your values, your uniqueness.

For example, you have a stationery shop on the high street. Sales have taken a pinch, customer footfall is low. So you diversify into online sales, expanding your reach nationally and even globally. You create alliances with other retailers or manufacturers offering products that complement your core offer.

That's good, but remember to keep your eye on the goal – your goal, that is. By all means be flexible and allow for changes along the way – circumstances, conditions and events outside of your control will always be thrown your way.

But if you can be true to your original business

goals and values, stand your ground and try not to buckle under stress, your brand will remain strong and your customers loyal. Your tenacity will pay off.

The skill of business is to be comfortable with being uncomfortable; when it is comfortable you are in trouble – you just do not know it yet! Business is challenging and the fun is in the challenge.

“

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.

Mark Twain

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ABOUT JANICE B GORDON

I have a wealth of business experience, which I now use to help businesses grow through consultancy and as a speaker. As well as having run my own businesses, I have also worked as an advisor to large corporates such as AOL, BP and HSBC.

Although I'm known as 'the problem solver', I focus on the solution, not the problem. As a mentor, my role is to ask my clients the difficult questions, to help create clarity and to provide simple solutions to seemingly complex problems.

I unmask the 'kinks' that are affecting your business and uncover the hidden treasures that may lie undiscovered

within your business. I have what clients have remarked on as a 'fresh, plain-speaking approach', which focuses on one goal: success and what it means to you.

I am a visiting fellow at the Cranfield School of Management, from where I also hold an MBA. My other qualifications are: CIM (Chartered Institute of Marketing) Postgraduate Diploma; BA (Hons) Design and Business; NLP practitioner; and SFEDI (Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative) Enterprise Mentor.

If you want to know more about how to find your unique strength and how



to develop your personal business personality, all this and more is covered in my new book, *The Business Evolution – Essential Strategies to Leverage your Uniqueness and Growth*, which is due to be launched in November 2013. Order your copy at info@theproblem-solver.co.uk



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