

Lessons from Australia's top entrepreneurs

40

Entrepreneurs
Share Their
Real Life Sales &
Marketing Tips



SmartCompany's Top 40 Sales & Marketing Tips

Entrepreneurs prefer to do, not sell.

Yet Australia's leading entrepreneurs are brilliant at selling and marketing and in creating the strategy that supports these key functions.

As the current downturn kicks in, we took a trip around SmartCompany.com.au pulling together the tips and tricks that our fast growing entrepreneurs have used to boost their sales and reach their target customers.

Of special note is the huge role the internet is now playing in the sales and marketing process. Many entrepreneurs are being forced to outsource their internet sales and marketing and it is being run completely separately to the inhouse sales function.

What's next then? Salespeople who are a wiz at the internet and a natural at pressing the flesh. Now that's an interesting mix of skills.

So get inspired and go sell!

Amanda Gome
Publisher, SmartCompany.com.au

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1 ON DEVELOPING LEVERAGE OPTIONS AND ONGOING CHANNELS FOR SALES

One key message came from the early days of Microsoft. There were presentations where Bill Gates would stand up and talk about partner channels and reseller channels and those sort of things, and the word that came out was “leverage”.

And that’s something that we applied in the WebCentral business where we developed strong partner programs. In any business that I’ve been involved with, you can have say X amount of sales people, but you need the ability to create channels that can in turn leverage your sales people on to more customers.

Lloyd Ernst, WebCentral

2 ON USING “LEFT-FIELD” CREDENTIALS TO ELICIT EXPOSURE

In the beginning we had no money for advertising. I went to a bank and some venture capitalists, but it was not the right fit. We thought it was better to get others talking about us than us talking about ourselves. We always had lots of interest from editors of fashion magazines. We are always trying to do things differently and they like that. We stay in contact with the editors of home magazines and fashion magazines and when they need something they come to us and we respond quickly.

Kristina Karlsson, kikki.K

3 ON THE BENEFITS OF TRANSPARENCY WITH CUSTOMERS

If you struggle at first to get clients, use the time to get your systems and back-office operations right. Be transparent. If your clients completely understand what you are doing for them, they are more likely to stick by you.

Peter Bray, Clear Blue Day

4 ON ESTABLISHING A BRAND IN A NEW MARKET

Having Waverley representatives on the ground in China is critical. The next step is to open a sales office in China with sales and marketing representatives, but there needs to be that first line of contact for distributors.

Our priority is to educate consumers and build the Waratah brand in China. People aren’t going to fork out top dollar for a brand they don’t know, so we’re working with our distributors to come up with a marketing strategy that everyone will pay for. We have a story on our side – consumers love hearing the 130-year old Tasmanian woollen mill story.

Bruce Grant, Waverley Australia

5 ON ‘PRESSING THE FLESH’ TO SECURE RETAIL BUYER DEALS

I remember going to conferences to hear speakers I thought could help the business. After the speeches I’d wait up at the podium, give my “elevator pitch” about Imagination and try and get a meeting. That’s how I met the creative director of Disney. In 2005, Imagination signed a three-year, \$50-million deal with Disney, and I now employs that creative director. Cracking Wal-Mart was tough. I would befriend the right buyer only to find he had moved on to the luggage category. Then I’d have to start from scratch again to try and arrange meetings. In the end, the evolution of the category and a bigger product range helped us win orders from this world’s biggest retailer.

Shane Yeend, Imagination Entertainment

6 ON NOT LETTING YOUR SMALLER SIZE STAND IN THE WAY

Don’t be shy to compete with the biggest companies in the world. Because they are so big means they’re slow, they’re cumbersome, they make bad decisions and they’re not innovative.

Adrian Di Marco, TechnologyOne

7 ON USING THE BIG ONLINE SEARCH OPTIONS

I discovered Google marketing made a huge impact on my sales, pushing inquiries up from five to 50 a week. It took me a while to choose the right words to advertise alongside, and I now spend more on Google and rely on it for marketing.

Jeanette Darbyshire, Inspiro Bags

8 ON THE BENEFITS OF A WIDER OFFERING

Dailydeals.com is a department store selling many of the products promoted on TV, and a few extras. The other site, catchoftheday.com.au, posts a new product at midday each day for a bargain price. Variety is quite big. We don't just focus on one category – manchester one day, perfume the next, IT or jewellery. It is part of the mystery of 12 o'clock rollover. There are 100,000 registered members on the site, and it's becoming an addiction for customers.

Hezi Leibovitch, dailydeals.com

9 ON PITCHING THE OFFER IN TERMS THAT CLICK WITH CUSTOMERS

The key to it all is recurring revenue. Four years ago we moved away from selling the software for \$4000 per copy to having this bright idea of 'hey, why don't we rent it for \$200 a month'. We actually had it called 'rental' first and no one liked the idea, so we changed the word to subscription and 90% of the people went that way.

Neil Bolton, Recruitment Systems

10 ON GENERATING SALES VIA ONLINE NEWSLETTER

Our newsletter database is increasing by 20,000 a month. At every possible touchpoint, we encourage people to sign up for special offers. People who sign up and existing customers who update their contact information go into the running to win a holiday. The trick is to make it as simple as possible for customers to sign up.

Paul Fisher, TotalTravel.com.au

11 ON USING MAINSTREAM PROFILE-BUILDING

High profile mainstream advertising has been part of the campaign. We put ads on prime time television (during Grey's Anatomy). It was important for us to be seen. Grey's Anatomy was going to have more impact than a morning television slot.

Katie May, Kidspot

12 ON TURNING SMALL SIZE INTO AN ADVANTAGE

We can be small and nimble where Telstra can't, so Telstra's size can also be an advantage for us because it lets us do things differently. We focus on selling our network as an alternative to Telstra by trying to be more flexible and easy to deal with for our channel partners, carriers and ISPs.

Jason Ashton, Big Air

13 ON IMPROVEMENT IN SALES BY LISTENING TO FEEDBACK

Leap on every bit of customer feedback, and continuously improve software product based on feedback. Use highly personalised responses to customers through emails, blogs, and avoid "robotic" interaction with clients through intelligent, personalised email programs. Sell products that make your customers look good, and cultivate word of mouth. Write great content for the web, including interesting, practical articles that fit with customer's needs.

David Greiner, Freshview

14 ON TARGETING ONLINE CUSTOMERS

We used word-of-mouth on the web – like visiting seminars and live online forums where eBay sellers learn about effective selling techniques. We targeted online exchange sites; favourable comments on feedback pages are the life blood of online exchange sites. Once one customer [in a category] uses us, we see an avalanche of other users.

Michael Paul, Pack & Send

15 ON BACKING YOUR PRODUCT

We came up with the concept to make a better cushion for safety shoes that would reduce the stress to the knees, feet, legs and lower back. I was so confident the safety boots were a winner, I took a risk and offered a 30-day money-back guarantee, or a promise to buy a customer a pair of our competitors' shoes! It took a bit of time to pay off, but it has paid off.

Peter Nichols, Steel Blue

16 ON TARGETED ADVERTISING

Do not follow big established brands down the media advertising path. It's too expensive and you will be lost in clutter. A great website is essential.

Geoff Harris, Flight Centre

17 ON KEEPING CUSTOMERS ON BOARD

I have used email newsletters to build strong relationships with existing customers, and to build my database of new customers very efficiently. The trick is to send an email newsletter often – but not too often – and to make it informative and relevant. I have a database of about 5000 [customers], and everything I do as an online business is by email.

Jane Thom, Partykids.com.au

18 ON EFFECTIVE DATABASE MANAGEMENT

The database software has more than paid for itself in the efficiency gains made by our sales team, which in turn has certainly led to more property listings than would have been the case without it. It's flexible so we've been able to add our own touches to it. The [software] is networked through our server so our agents have access to all the data whenever they want and can use all its functions. We used to have triple the work before this system came along.

Sue Clyde-Smith, PRDnationwide

19 ON MAINTAINING A TOP WEB SITE

I like to think that our work speaks for itself, and our own website is a good showcase of our work. Our website receives quite a bit of traffic, and we receive about five to six inquiries per week. Our largest client (Honda) found us via a Google search, which is great evidence of the importance of a good web presence with search engine optimisation. It's testament to our work and approach that our site is still so valuable to our business after six years.

David Trewern, DTDesign

20 ON GAINING NEW CUSTOMERS

Listen to the marketplace and keep your name out there. Do not go too hard as you will look desperate and people really do get turned off. On the other hand, do not be arrogant.

James Willson, CRE8IVE

21 ON DRAWING CONSUMERS TO YOUR OFFERING

Focus on quality, and remove as much risk as possible from the purchase. If you can give away for free something that demonstrates your offering but doesn't cost you a whole lot, and you try to up-sell users to a premium offering that adds unprecedented value, you'll do very well.

Mark Harbottle, sitepoint.com

22 ON THE POWER OF WORD-OF-MOUTH, EVEN OFFLINE

The majority of our customers come from search engine marketing and word-of-mouth. Word-of-mouth has been very powerful. Don't lose sight of the fact that your customers will spread the word offline, even for an online business!

Delia Timms, FindABabysitter.com.au

23 ON CONSISTENCY OF APPROACH

In many ways our sales and marketing approach has stayed the same from the time we had just one store and I was behind the counter. That's the simplicity of our business – keeping giving customers what they want and keep innovating. The best advertising for any business is word-of-mouth, and Crazy John's knows that if we always offer our customers the best service and product possible, then customers will come back.

John Ilhan, Crazy John's

24 ON TURNING CUSTOMERS INTO 'RAVING FANS'

We restructured our team to create an additional role in response to client feedback around the ongoing support they were seeking. You need to be conscious of the training required for staff to have the knowledge to perform at an exceptional level. Internal training is an area we are constantly improving and investing in, and we seek regular feedback from the staff to help us deploy the best training – always work to do on creating 'raving fans'.

Karen Cariss, Page Up

25 ON SELLING THROUGH THE BACKDOOR

What people miss is that you can sell to all levels of the organisation, not just the CTO, or the CIO. We often sell to a departmental level, and then because the software is so useful, so easy to use, that it spreads throughout the organisation. If you don't have a large direct sales force, try getting in through the back-door, and have a way of scaling up to company wide.

Scott Farquhar, Atlassian

26 ON USING ONLINE AS AN ALTERNATIVE REVENUE SOURCE

None of the big retailers have done online seriously – they have just put up a catalogue. They don't see it as a major source of revenue. But overseas retailers do: look at GAP and other stores that not only have all the range online but also offer special products that you can only get online.

Alfred Milgrom, Zazz.com.au

27 ON HOW TO MARKET AND DRUM UP CONTRACTS

Like any innovative start up – we pounded the boards and lined up people and talked to them. We also forwarded details of every previous contract. In some cases it is just the surgical teams. In others it is the whole management, including planning and logistics.

Glenn Keys, Aspen Medical

28 ON REFRESHING THE BRAND

Too many brands are ‘refreshed’ for refreshment’s sake. For example, I would argue the change from “National” to “NAB” was pretty irrelevant for the bank – the customer experience didn’t change at all. But a brand like Nudie, a challenger brand known for innovation, needs to continually refresh to continue to be relevant and to grow.

To crank it up it starts with an understanding that it is required (you can’t fix a problem if you don’t admit it) but then you need to build it into the brand DNA. Sometimes it is a little thing – in Nudie’s case it might be a change to the stories on the labels which are the same now as they were at launch – but it can equally be something large – for example, what is Nudie’s point of view on the environment or climate change? There are ways Nudie could take an active position in relation to these issues and therefore become more relevant and fresh.

Tim Pethick, Nudie founder

29 ON PERSONALISING THE OFFER

A basic example: you’re an Australian company; you’ve got customers in NSW, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia, Well, how about you recognise that in your emails. I get emails from companies in Sydney telling me about some promotion or launch in Sydney – and I’m really not that interested; I live in Melbourne and I’m not going to go to Sydney for it.

Why bother sending it to me? How incredibly easy is it to go through your database and say, “5000 people live in Victoria – let’s email them about things in Victoria”. Arts Hub does this. We have customers in 60-something countries around the world; why on earth would we tell an arts manager in Singapore about a job that’s available in Dorset in the south of England?

Having said that there’s an argument that says they might be interested in moving to Dorset, but the point is to try to make it relevant. So on Arts Hub we do a lot of work to customise and personalise the information.

David Eedle, collectzing.com (ex-Arts Hub)

30 ON THE BENEFITS OF HAVING MORE FEET ON THE GROUND

If you want to sell more, get more sales people. And so get independent reps, you franchise, you hire some sales people, you partner with a larger organisation that can distribute your products or services.

Verne Harnish, Gazelle

31 ON FOCUSING ON CORE STRENGTH TO BOOST SALES

I’d say to any entrepreneur out there, whose natural instinct is to chase down every dollar that they see or smell – don’t. Focus on really what it is that you’re about. Do it very, very well and you’ll be amazed at how it creates even greater profits for you.

Guy Sigston, Lloyd Morgan

32 ON TURNING 'COMMUNITY' DATA INTO USABLE METRICS

One of the mistakes that a lot of people make is that they are always going out cold. They're advertising or they're trying to do PR but they don't have a community, a database of clients who already want their product. It's really only the very large corporations who can really afford to do institutional or brand-building exercises with their marketing dollars. The rest of us must have direct response. There must be a way to measure every single thing that we do because if we're not measuring it we don't know what's really working.

Suzi Dafnis, Pow Wow Events

33 ON THE ENTREPRENEUR'S ROLE IN SALES AND SELLING

A sales leader's job – and if you're the entrepreneur owner of the business, I would suggest that you're the sales leader – a sales leader's job is not to grow sales; it is to grow sales people in quantity and quality so they in turn will grow your sales. So one of the areas I think that mistakes are made is that the sales person who became entrepreneurial in their business is too intimately involved in the deal making and in selling. What they should really focus on is finding other sales people to join their enterprise and growing them once they've got there.

Jack Daly, sales guru

34 ON A GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS

You need to have an integrated approach and it needs to be consistent because what you'll find is that different people respond to different methods. You might have one person that loves advertising and they respond to that message.

Some people read it in the paper and that's how they get their message. If you knock on the door and say hello they might. Another person responds another way, so it's important that, in whatever service area you're in, you're covering all parts with a mix rather than trying to sell what you think you can make money out of.

William Scott, founder of Smart Group

35 ON REPUTATION AS A SALES TOOL

It's all kind of word-of-mouth and referral and organic growth for us, especially in the first few years. The real essence to the growth and success of the business has been around referrals and its been around recognising what the real [long term] value of the client is and making sure that we do what we can in order to get through the short-term hurdles and challenges that pop up with clients from time to time, and just making sure that we lose very few clients. We have a very referenceable client base that they're happy to refer us on to other clients, which they do regularly, and it's just meant really good profitable growth for us.

Dave Stevens, Brennan IT and Secure Telecom

36 ON TARGETING CONSUMER WANTS AND NEEDS

By using the internet we're able to better understand who our customers are so we can ensure that the content that we push to them is content that they are interested in and the advertising that we push to them is also advertising that they're interested in. There's no point showing me advertisements on handbags because I'm not interested in handbags. So that's the kind of targeted profiling system that we're building which allows content and advertising to be targeted towards individuals.

Dominic Carosa, Destra

37 ON STARTING UP THE HARD WAY

I had no idea how to sell anything. I've never sold anything in my life and when I had this green goo in a jar I didn't know what to do with it. I knocked on the doors of everyone and the doors were slammed in my face. I had no selling skills whatsoever but I started at the local markets and I demonstrated the product there.

When there was obvious success, I tried the shopping centres and then I ended up on television presenting the product on national television. It was an instant hit and that was the turning point. I advertised the Nad's brand for four years on national television in Australia, selling direct to the public. People picked up the phone and ordered the product and I sent it to them wherever they were, and then we entered the retail sector in 1997.

Sue Ismiel, Nad's

38 ON GENERATING BOOK SALES OUT OF ONLINE FORUMS

The forum's fabulous. People love it and we just watch and make sure that people aren't being abusive or whatever, but really I'm into free speech. It's a very very successful website for orders and I'm really looking forward to the new website. We're also producing new products this year. The next 12 months there's some big things that are on the agenda for Symply Too Good To Be True. My goal is to go on Oprah so if anyone knows Oprah...

Annette Sym, Symply Too Good To Be True

39 ON BOOSTING SALES VIA A COMPELLING CONSUMER BENEFIT

Going back 20 years, the Trading Post introduced this concept of pay only if you sell. I thought that was a pretty compelling consumer message, and online what we did was we introduced \$10 total cost, so we basically backed ourselves and said "we'll only ask for money once" because we believe what we do works. So it was simply \$10 total cost, no more to pay, and it was a compelling consumer message. And I think that what happened was we were able to grow our inventory and more importantly grow the fact that consumers were getting a result and happy to tell their friends.

Greg Roebuck, carsales.com.au

40 ON THE VALUE OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

We were investigating a couple of sales channels for markets where we had challenges to get into, so we negotiated with a group in Japan and in Korea who have a large sales force, and we don't have Japanese or Korean language abilities so it makes sense to use channel partners into those countries for both the language and the existing contacts that they have.

Justin Simpson, PCT Filer