

AN INNER SUCCESS CIRCLE SPECIAL REPORT

Unusual Places to Find Customers



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for Members of
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Introduction

YOU need more customers, yet the traditional avenues you've been using just aren't delivering as many as you'd like. Tweeting and publishing articles in online directories may bring the occasional lead, and those leads sometimes *do* turn into customers. But publishing enough articles to get more than a trickle is a lot of work, and you're starting to have doubts about the effectiveness of that approach.

Another option, submitting press releases, also works to some degree, but the press release sites that bring the best results can be rather expensive. And for most people, even press releases generally just bring in a few leads at a time, unless you hit the jackpot and get covered in the national media.

Obviously, an occasional lead here and there isn't enough to create a thriving business. You need *lots* of leads, and *targeted* leads at that. And you need them fast. But how can you get them?

One way to get leads quickly is paid advertising. However, unless you have plenty of experience and really deep pockets, experimenting with pay-per-click advertising can leave you broke faster than you can say, "Bless my heart!"

But fear not. There are plenty of out-of-the-box ways to connect with potential customers. As you look at the list of possibilities in this report, from online forums to social media to blogs to bookstores and even in-person events, you may think that you're doing most of those things already.

Keep reading anyway! You'll be very surprised. Sure, you may already be blogging and using social media. You may already be visiting bookstores and attending in-person events. You've also likely visited forums and may have even attempted some kind of forum advertising. Yet, no matter what you've done, you're sure to discover a number of new ways to use those familiar avenues and get much improved results. So dig in, pick out your favorites, apply them, and watch your business grow.



Marty

Finding Customers in Unusual Spots #1: Online Forums and Mailing Lists

As an entrepreneur with an online business, you always need more customers. Online forums and mailing lists are among the places where you can find them. Chances are that you're using those venues already. After all, you know they allow you to demonstrate your expertise and to build links back to your website.

But if that's all you do, you're leaving a lot of money on the table. Here's a way to get many more customers from your forum marketing efforts: Instead of just focusing on spreading the word about your expertise, use forums to make contact with your prospects more directly, not to sell to them, but to build relationships.

In fact, the combination of building personal relationships while also establishing your professional expertise can be an excellent way to attract new customers. Here's how to do it:

- 1. Identify forums and lists in your industry.** Head over to Google.com and do a search on "NICHE forums." Be sure to replace NICHE with the name of YOUR niche, such as knitting or breeding guinea pigs. Then go to groups.yahoo.com and groups.google.com and find a few email lists in your industry. Look at both the number of participants and at the frequency of updates. For best results, choose smaller, more active lists or forums over larger, inactive communities.
- 2. For each forum or mailing list, go through the enrollment process to create a profile and register so you'll be eligible to both post and receive messages.** You should also link to your site in your profile signature line if that is permitted, although it's not essential for this particular method.
- 3. Monitor the conversation to get a sense of who the movers and shakers are.** Get familiar with the main topics of interest as well. Join in where appropriate, but remember that your main goal is not just to answer questions. Instead, you want to establish personal relationships with others in the community. Build the level of trust with individual members by sharing and responding to personal information, and by keeping track of what is going on in their lives.
- 4. Once you have established yourself as a community member and feel like you've got a "relationship" with a handful of people, reach out.** Based on their individual preferences or concerns, send them a direct link to a resource that will be of interest to them. This resource could be on your site, or even on someone else's site.

The goal is not to "sell" them anything at this point, but to show them that you are attuned to their wants and needs. Try a simple note saying, "Hey, I know you're interested in watercolor painting.

I'm starting an online class next week that you might be interested in checking out!" This "soft sell" lets them know what you have to offer, without pushing them too hard. If you've done a good job building their trust, they'll be receptive to your suggestions.

Of course, there's an even softer sell... You can offer them free stuff and send them to your opt-in page. That way, they won't even have to buy anything, yet you may be able to get them to join your list, which opens another channel of communication. Once they're subscribed, you can continue to build your relationship, both through your autoresponder sequences and by sending them the occasional personal email.

While this method of finding customers might not seem all that different from the way you may already be using, it differs in one key element from the "common wisdom" about promoting yourself online. Rather than demonstrating your knowledge, expertise, and offerings in a wider, more public setting, you're focusing on creating relationships behind the scenes, with one individual at a time.

While this one-by-one approach may seem effort-intensive and not very efficient, it's actually quite powerful and won't take nearly as much time and effort as you'd expect. Over the course of a month, you can establish strong, personal relationships with a dozen or more contacts, and all it will take is just minutes a day.

Even if you get just a dozen leads from that strategy, consider that these new leads are 12 people who already believe in you, trust your recommendations, and are receptive to your offerings. Bringing pre-sold people into your funnel is much more effective than casting a wide net and gathering a boatload of contacts who may or may not want what you're selling.

Of course, you can always use this method in conjunction with "strutting your stuff" on the wider forum. Give both a try and see how they actually enhance each other. The members you have connected with on a personal level are going to be supportive of you in the more public group or forum, and vice versa. Now that's smart marketing!

Finding Customers in Unusual Spots #2: Social Media

If you've been online for any length of time, you've surely heard that you must include social media in your marketing efforts. In fact, from LinkedIn to Facebook to Twitter to MySpace to Flickr, social media sharing sites offer great opportunities for entrepreneurs to reach their audiences. But many professionals aren't fully leveraging the power of social media and may be missing out on a lot of potential new customers. Here are some highly effective out-of-the-box ways to use social media that will help you find people who need and want what you have to offer:

1. Follow Those Who Follow Those You Follow. Can you say that ten times fast? Basically, we're simply playing the familiar game of Six Degrees of Separation. There is likely a big overlap between your market and the followers of the people you're already following. For instance, if you're in the DIY home remodeling market, and you follow the big names like Ty Pennington and Bob Vila, many of your potential customers are probably among Ty and Bob's followers, friends, and contacts. On most social media sites, it's easy to see the names in your contacts' lists of friends and followers, so go ahead and follow or friend these people. Chances are, a good number of them will return the favor, and you'll grow your potential customer base as a result.

2. Watch What You (and Other People!) Say. You'll find many followers and contacts by watching for chats, conversations, and topics that are related to your niche. For instance, if you're in the personal finance field, you could search for Twitter mentions of words and phrases such as "debt," "frugality," and "home mortgage." If you identify a chat or an ongoing conversation in your field, immediately follow the participants. Again, a large percentage of them will follow you in return.

3. The Writing Is on the Wall. Go to Facebook fan pages, which are now called "Like" pages. Look around for pages that are related to your niche and watch who is writing on the wall. Scoop these people into your funnel by issuing them a friend invitation, or sending them a message about their post or update. If they're complete strangers, include a note in your invitation to let them know why you'd like to make their acquaintance.

4. A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words. Even though online photo sharing sites like Flickr.com and Photobucket.com host millions of images, many people still overlook them as a resource for finding potential customers. But not you! You know that images are powerful, and anyone who is going to go to the trouble of posting, say, a photo of their new Nike running shoes may be a perfect audience member for your site about trail running. You can search photos and images by keywords and tags, and look at groups, too. In addition, you can easily leave comments, ask questions, join groups, and invite people to become your contacts – and hopefully, eventually your customers.

**Think like
a Guerrilla
Marketer...**

Out-of-the-Box

Low-Cost

High-Impact

FREE!

Chances are, you are already active on several online social media sites, though you may not have gotten the results you were hoping for. The key is to approach them a little differently. If you're a specialist in natural health on LinkedIn, think about where you could find some of "your" people. Could they be tucked away in groups for chiropractors, naturopaths, aromatherapists, ayurvedic practitioners or whatever your target audience might be? Think outside the box, and you'll get a lot more out of your social media activities.

Finding Customers in Unusual Spots #3: In-Person Events

Meeting customers and prospects in person gives an added dimension to the relationship. Many people come to the online world with a certain level of skepticism, almost like they're expecting to be ripped off. But if they have met you in person, you've broken through that barrier of distrust and you're that much closer to the coveted "know-like-trust" triumvirate that makes for great customer relationships. Here are five ways to find customers in "the real world":

1. Teach a class in your field. What better way to reassure people of your likeability and trust quotient than by teaching them valuable skills face-to-face? Local recreation departments, senior centers, continuing education programs, gyms, churches, Jewish community centers and similar venues offer ample opportunities for you to strut your stuff. You can teach a one-evening seminar or an on-going class – just make sure to pass out business cards, collect contact information, and follow up!

2. Take a class in your field. You may think you need to TEACH a class to make valuable contacts but that's not the case. Taking a class in your area of expertise can actually give you more time to network and connect with other students. Make sure to circulate before and after class, handing out business cards and meeting as many people as you can. Follow up after class too. You could organize a post-class get-together to discuss what you've learned, or spearhead an email list where you can continue to share ideas and build relationships.

3. Attend lectures and seminars. I recently received a mailing from my alma mater regarding a two-day leadership symposium. My immediate thought – what a great opportunity for a high-level executive coach! He or she could attend and get exposure to hundreds of professionals with a strong interest in leadership – a pre-qualified collection of leads! Whatever your field, make sure you're attending industry events not just for the information, but for the opportunity to connect with possible leads as well.

4. Identify your competitors, and go where they are. Who are your competitors, and where do they "live?" If you're in the fitness field, your competitors will be personal trainers at gyms. They probably frequent health food/vitamin and supplement stores, athletic shoe stores, and gyms. What if you posted a few of your cards on the bulletin board at the running shoe store, or handed them out at the finish line of a foot race? Picking off some of your competitors' customers isn't mean, it's smart marketing.

5. Go to trade shows. You don't have to pay exorbitant fees to exhibit at trade shows in order to take advantage of the traffic. Go as an attendee and strike up conversations with other attendees, exhibitors, and workers. Hand out those cards, and have an upcoming event to tell your new friends about. Walk the floor and "work it" as much as you would if you were exhibiting. You'll have more freedom, and more money left in your pocket at the end of the day.

The whole secret of attending in-person events is to determine where your ideal prospects may be, and then be where they already are. They're ready for you – you just have to find them.

Finding Customers in Unusual Spots #4: Blogs

By now, you know that there are literally millions of blogs already in existence, with new blogs rolling out at a rate of one *per second*. And though you probably have a blog, or have thought about starting one for your business, I bet you haven't fully exhausted other blogs as a source of potential leads and customers. I can help you with that! Here are three ways you can leverage the power of other people's blogs for your business:

1. Industry Bloggers. One of the coolest things about the internet is the way it allows people in even the narrowest of niches to find others who share their passions. And while you may be frequenting industry forums to make your presence known, are you checking out the bloggers in your niche and becoming part of the community there?

Bloggers don't have to have thousands of readers to be powerful – or to be potential customers. Go beyond just the top three or four well-known names and dig deeper for mid-list bloggers. Leave comments, send them an occasional e-mail, and consider sponsoring some sort of giveaway.

The top bloggers in most industries are inundated with attention and love, and your efforts may get lost in the melee. Mid-list bloggers, though, are likely to be quite receptive and responsive. And even the smallest blogger deserves a comment or two from you. Introduce yourself and invite them over to your site. Issuing a couple of invitations like this a week takes only a few minutes and can pay off big.

2. Blog comments. OF COURSE you're paying attention to the folks who send you comments and suggestions directly on your own website or blog. But are you taking a look at what people are saying on other blogs in your industry? Many blogs require anyone who comments to establish profiles or provide their email addresses or websites URLs. You can find out who the commenters are, visit their blogs (see above!), or email them directly if you think they're a good fit for your product or service.

This should be a soft sell with no pressure: "Hey, I saw your comment on great jazz trombonists on so-and-so's blog. I just compiled my list of top five trombonists, and I'd love your input. Check it out here!" The goal is to establish a relationship, not to get a commitment to purchase. Take small, non-threatening steps.

3. Blog rolls. Blog rolls were a huge thing five or so years ago when blogs were fairly novel. Bloggers wanted to show off who they read and who they associated with. Blog rolls are less common now, but they're still out there, and they're like referral lists from your customers! Once you find a blogger who seems to be an ideal prospect, see who else they're associating with, and follow the blog roll links like a trail of breadcrumbs. Hop from blog to blog, seeing who else is a likely prospect and start establishing a relationship. Again, tread softly: "I saw your link on so-and-so's site. I'm a big fan of his, so I thought I'd stop by. Love your post on overhauling your outboard motor; I just wrote a similar post on my blog. Stop by!" That's all it takes.

It can be a little intimidating to just jump onto someone's blog and begin commenting, but most people who publish blogs do so because they want to share their thoughts and ideas with others. You're not butting into a private chat. Instead, you're joining a public conversation with another like-minded individual – and that's where relationships can start.

Finding Customers in Unusual Spots #5: Bookstores

Bookstores aren't just places to find information and entertainment; they're places to find customers! They're so segmented and niched down that it's extremely easy to identify your target market. For instance, if you specialize in helping people get out of debt, you know to go directly to the personal finance section, bypassing Travel, History, and Mysteries. The problem isn't identifying your potential customers — it's finding a way to approach them that won't be seen as offensive or wacky. Here are some of my favorite ways to connect with customers at bookstores (online and off):

- 1. Slip business cards into applicable books.** Are you a professional organizer with an online community and information products? Then your business card belongs in Julie Morgenstern's "Organizing from the Inside Out." Just tuck it in the middle of the book where it will fall out when someone picks it up to leaf through, or takes it home to read in bed at night.
- 2. Go to readings.** And if Ms. Morgenstern just happens to be coming to a store near you to perform a book signing or reading, you should be there in the audience – not to meet her, but to meet as many attendees as possible. After all, everyone's clutter isn't going to go away just because they heard Julie read a chapter from her book. And she'll be leaving on the next plane while you'll still be in town!
- 3. Write – and read – reviews.** Go to Amazon.com or any online bookstore and see how many people take the time to write reviews on the books they've read. Pick a few "bibles" in your niche to see what people have to say – and write your own review. You typically have to create an online profile before you can post, which gives you the means to contact others (and for them to contact you) if they seem like a good match for your business.

4. Go to book clubs. Book clubs aren't just for the hot novel of the month. Many local bookstores have book clubs for finance, kids' books, cookbooks, and more. If there isn't one for your industry or niche, create one!

5. Don't forget about book-centric social media sites. Shelfari.com, Goodreads.com, and WeRead.com are all social media sites where you can see what your "friends" are reading. You can also leave comments, share your suggestions, and otherwise connect with fellow readers. You can even search to see who's reading titles associated with your niche and strike up a conversation.

Books provide easy ways to connect with those who share a common interest. The first step to creating a customer is to establish a common bond, and books makes that simple. You know you have something in common, and that's half the battle!

Conclusion

So what do you think? I bet you got some new ideas you hadn't thought of before. Now here's the important part, your Action Assignment: You've got to put them to use. Ideas in your head won't get you new leads and more customers and clients, only ideas that you put into practice.

Start by deciding which *one* idea you want to implement first, and just do it. Follow the instructions given above and start gathering your contacts. Once your first project is well underway and you have incorporated it into your routine, add another one. Keep adding until you've incorporated enough into your marketing efforts that you get all the leads you want or you've maxed out your time and energy.

If you do that, it won't take long until you'll notice a distinct increase in the number of leads you get — and the sales you make.

Good luck! And don't forget to have fun!



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