

“ The mind boggles at just how many things there are to distract us. We used to have a TV station or two, a few radio stations, newspapers and magazines. Pretty much everybody read and watched the same things and it was much easier to get people’s attention. These days no two people are alike – with social media, many TV channels, radio stations, magazines, newsletters, streaming options, not to mention websites, apps, and more. All these distractions means it’s harder for us to pay attention to anything. So if you’re trying to get your business noticed, be prepared to try a combination of channels to reach your customers... ”



What’s this ‘content marketing’ thing?

In the good old days, if you could afford to place a TV ad in the news you could sit back and watch the customers roll in. These days less people watch the ‘blockbuster’ shows than used to watch the daytime soaps! So it can be much harder to make an impact.

However you don’t need to convince all of the country to use your services, the key is to focus on repeat business from your existing customers, and hopefully, if your service is good quality and good value, those customers will refer you onto friends and family which will help grow your customer base. And to help this along, it pays to keep in touch with your existing customers.

One way to set yourself apart from others, is to create content (e.g. articles, information, newsletters etc) that provides useful information and suggestions to customers, rather than just straight advertising. Many customers will be more receptive to receiving this information than they would being advertised to.

You can do this via social media, an email newsletter or a good old printed newsletter in their mailbox or a combination of these to suit the customer. Typically younger customers may prefer digital contact, older customers may prefer a printed newsletter.

Once you have a useful article or information to share, you can adjust it to suit your channels. On Facebook you might break a long article into multiple tips and post it with images over a number of days or weeks. In a printed newsletter you are more likely to include the whole article.

There is no limit to what you can cover, but it’s generally best to stick to topics that relate to what your business does. And a good place to start is sharing recent projects you have been involved in and helpful tips and tricks that the owners or you learnt through that project that would help someone else considering the same project.

If you are confident writing, you may even want to approach local media such as newspapers and local magazines to see if they are interested in you providing content for their publication – e.g. free content in exchange for you gaining exposure to their audience. Over time, you can become known as someone with expertise that customers will turn to when they need advice.

Content marketing isn’t the right answer for everyone. It takes time to find, write and distribute your content. If you’re a confident writer this can be easier, otherwise you may be best to find someone to interview you and then write the content for you.

As with anything else, it pays not to put all your eggs in one basket, so if you decide to give content marketing a go, try adding it to your existing marketing activities for a few months to see if it has ongoing potential for you.

Kids and paint don’t mix

There’s something about wet paint that can attract small children like bees to honey. You can pretty much guarantee if there is wet paint around a child will have stepped in it, gotten it on their clothes, or worse, within minutes.

So before you start any painting project, the first step is to make sure any children are busily engaged doing something else before, during and after you have finished painting, before you end up with a project like Tracey (aka ‘the old painter lady’ in this decorating story) where the pristinely painted room didn’t last that way for long. Thanks to Tracey for sharing this story...

“You boys, you’ll get covered in paint if you come in here,” yelled the old painter lady. She was painting Johnny’s bedroom walls in a creamy colour with matching skirting boards, windows and doors.

Johnny said to the painter, “Tonight I have to sleep in the lounge room, because Mum said that the smell of the oil paint will give me a headache.” The painter didn’t say anything. >>



>> Johnny stood in the hallway and watched the painter pack up her things and head toward her car.

"Come on Johnny, she's gone now. Let's go and get some of the toys in my wardrobe."

"Okay Johnny" says Tommy. He meekly followed Johnny back into the bedroom. Hand out he stretched his pudgy little fingers brushing along the walls. "It feels yucky Johnny, look!" Johnny puts his little finger in a wet patch of paint in the corner of the room walls.

"No, Tommy, that's what you call 'Tacky' see!" Tommy fingered the sticky

spot rubbing his finger and thumb together with his face screwed up in a squinty frown. "Hey Tommy, feel this," Johnny had his whole hand out-stretched along the newly painted door.

"Look Tommy, feel this, it really sticks!" Tommy lifted Johnny's hand off the door which was covered in white paint.

"Ooh that stinks Johnny. Look it won't come off properly when you rub it on the carpet!" Johnny tried harder to remove the paint from his hands.

"Hey Johnny let's get out of here before that painted lady comes back because look at what you've done to the carpet."

Keeping track of key metrics

Monitoring your key performance indicators, numbers and metrics are an important part of running a successful business. It's not all about measuring profit and loss either.

You don't need to get caught up in the figures, but knowing which metrics to follow, and why, will help you spot problems and keep track of how you're growing.

There isn't a 'one size fits all' approach to tracking some of these metrics and KPIs. You'll need to decide the best ways to do this based on your business model. A business advisor will be able to help you do this.

Revenue

How much money your business has made.

Expenses aren't included in this figure – just your income. Your revenue is all the money you make from your products or services, as well as any other income you earn, eg interest on savings and income from investments.

Revenue is one of the most important numbers you'll keep track of to make sure you're covering your costs and remaining viable. It is different from cash flow.

Net profit

Your revenue minus your expenses, or the bottom line.

While profit is almost always a good thing, loss isn't always bad. It's about context – it's common to operate at a loss if you're just starting out or if you've made an investment with a plan for it to pay off later. But you'll need to make some changes if your business is continuously losing more money than it's making.

Net profit margin

Your net profit as a percentage of your revenue, year to date. This figure will tell you how successful you've been at making a profit vs covering costs.

Operating costs

How much it costs to run your business each month.

This is the amount of money you spend on keeping your doors open. It includes everything from staff salaries and rent, to the money spent on topping up coffee supplies.

Tracking this figure will help you stay within your budget.

Utilisation rate

The level to which your people and big assets, eg machinery, are in use.

There are a couple of ways to calculate this metric. A common way to measure the utilisation rate of your employees is as the percentage of billable hours each person clocks compared to the total number of hours they work.

TIP Think carefully about what level of utilisation you actually want for different people and assets. For example, employees in sales or admin will have a low rate.

Case study:

Nick owns a small painting firm. Justin, one of the full-time employees, works 40 hours a week but only spends 30 hours on work Nick can charge his clients for. This means Justin's utilisation rate is 75%.

For your assets, it's the percentage of how much each asset is in use compared to its full capacity – or the percentage of how much revenue each asset actually earns vs its maximum earning potential.

Keeping track of your utilisation rates will help your business work towards its potential. But it's important to understand that no person or asset can be expected to give you a 100% return.

Employee engagement

The level to which your people are engaged with their job and the business.

Engaged and enthusiastic employees are more productive, while unhappy staff often have a negative impact on the bottom line. It can be difficult to get a specific measurement of engagement, but it's important to check in with your people on how satisfied they are with their job and the business. HR advisors can help you if you aren't sure how to best gauge engagement.

Net promoter score

How likely your customers are to recommend you.

A net promoter score is a simple way to calculate customer loyalty based on responses to a single question: "On a scale from 0-10, how likely is it that you would recommend our company/product/service to a friend or colleague?" Customers who rate you 9 or 10 are the ones who are likely to enthusiastically refer your services to others.

Word-of-mouth marketing is one of the most important ways to grow your business. Your net promoter score will tell you how valued your business is, how recommendable you are, and who your most valuable current customers are.

Current customers

The number and value of your customers.

It's a good idea to keep track of how many customers you have, and how often and how much money they spend. The more you know about your customers, the more you will be able to maintain good relationships, create great customer experiences and drive your marketing. Keep in mind that as your business grows, the kinds of information you keep on your customers will most likely change and grow too.

Excerpt of article thanks to business.govt.nz; case study adjusted to painting industry.



Catch you next month!

TwoCan, Editor.

