



# Back to Basics

**30 tips to market your  
small business and  
establish your expert  
status in the industry.**

**Deborah Chaddock Brown**

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## INTRODUCTION

Not long ago I received a phone call from the Executive Director of the Twinsburg Chamber of Commerce, Doug Johnson.

"How are you?" he innocently asked.

"What do you want?" I wisely countered.

I've known Doug for almost four years and we've worked together on the chamber's program planning committee for the last three of those years. I admire, respect and genuinely like Doug. However, I also know he usually has something up his sleeve to promote the businesses of Twinsburg and the surrounding towns which can require volunteers.

"You know that business expo we are planning with the Solon and Aurora Chambers?"

"Yes," I replied. It was a first time the three chambers had planned to collaborate on an event like this and I was excited. The focus of the expo was businesses connecting with other businesses and I had every intention of sponsoring a booth.

"We plan on having a few breakout sessions and I wondered if you would run one of them," he asked.

"Sure!" I love to speak. Put a microphone in my hand and look out! "What do you want me to talk about?"

"Each session will last thirty minutes so how about something like 30 marketing tips in 30 minutes."

Challenging. How do you clearly explain a marketing tip in 60 seconds or less and did I really have 30 tips up my sleeve? Never one to shy away from a challenge I agreed to the task and began thinking about my message.

As the owner of a home-based, freelance writing business I have tried a variety of marketing venues; some successful and some – well the less spoken about those, the better. Prior to opening AllWrite Ink in 2004 I spent almost 20 years with Pearle Vision, the optical retailer.

Starting as a store manager and working my way up the ranks to director of stores and ultimately Director of Communication for the parent company, I had learned many things about effectively connecting with a target prospect.

While as field manager for New England franchise locations I recall an owner telling me:

“If you just get them in the door, I can sell them.”

Isn't that what marketing is all about: driving foot traffic – or in today's electronic world – driving traffic to your website? True, but consumers have so many choices and the marketing canvas is so cluttered with messages of “quality” and “experience” and “choice” that we have to find some way to stand out.

People buy from those they like and trust and it's nearly impossible to build a relationship of trust with the type of marketing strategy you may have found successful ten years ago.

So how can you reach your target customer? Hopefully in these pages you will find a variety of suggestions that will work for your business. Whether you have a business of your own or work as a manufacturing representative in the field and want to grow your sales; the 30 tips I'm about to share will help keep your name in front of your target prospect.

I've separated the tips into three categories:

- Laying a Marketing Foundation
- General Marketing Efforts
- Expert Status

Like the layers of a golden brown Bloomin' Onion, each of the tips within the three categories relies on the other. You don't have to do everything at once, but as you create your strategy, slowly peel back one layer at a time.

**DISCLAIMER:** There are no silver bullets to be found within these words. There isn't a magic marketing pill you can take to immediately dominate the marketplace. Marketing your brand takes time, patience, a willingness to try new things and consistent effort.

That being said: start the clock because here comes 30 Marketing Tips in 30 Minutes – the long version.

One more thing – periodically throughout the book I'll suggest that you complete an exercise or fill out a form. This being the age of technology, rather than include the forms in the book you'll find them on my website. Visit [Websites People Read](#) and click on the page for BACK TO BASICS. You'll find all the forms and exercises discussed in this book.

### **Access the Live Links**

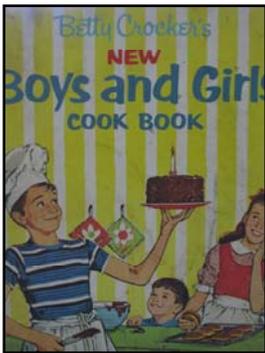
For those of you who have purchased the paperback version of *Back to Basics*, you will also find a Bibliography of all of the links that are mentioned in this book. Visit [Websites People Read](#) and click on the Back to Basics Link file. Every article, website and blog referenced is listed on that file for your convenience.

## CHAPTER ONE: A Picture Paints Clearer Meaning

For those of you that have been in the military you may be familiar with the adage “hurry up and wait.” That’s what we have here. Before we get started I’d like to paint a couple pictures for you that I’ll refer back to as we move forward.

As the mother of two children, Ben and Emily, I have learned that when they ask tough questions, sometimes it helps to find a way of answering by using examples to which they can relate. Not that I’m suggesting you are a child asking the nearly impossible question that Bill Cosby once tried to answer “Why is there air?” but finding the right combination of marketing components to drive sales can be a challenge.

Let’s start in the kitchen. I have the classic Betty Crocker Cookbook for Boys and Girls circa 1967.



I received it as a gift when I was 10 and have used it faithfully ever since. Now it isn’t the only cookbook I have, but I still refer to it because it takes the basic points of cooking and provides all the necessary foundational steps.

Take the task of cooking a can of vegetables. You may just open the can, dump it in a pot and turn up the heat. But Betty Crocker tells us to first drain the liquid from the can into a pot, add seasonings and perhaps a dab of Smart Balance (I’ve modernized for you South Beach fans) and heat to boiling before adding the vegetables.

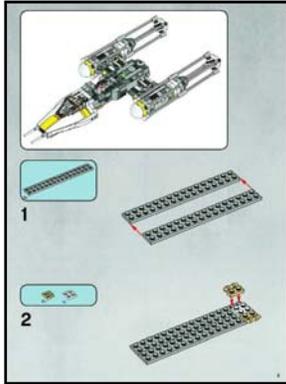
Extra work? Yep.

Better taste? As a matter of fact – yes. Why? I have no clue – perhaps the scientists reading can email me and let me know, but the point is – taking the time to add an extra step makes a difference in the end product.

As adults we forget some of the individual steps to creating dinner in our haste to get the food on the table. We may skip over some piece of the instruction that appears frivolous or unnecessary or too time consuming. Yet it is in the little details, that something extra that creates a wonderful meal.

Marketing is the same. It is a combination of ingredients mixed together in a planned manner that create a great marketing strategy.

Let's move to the play room. Lego<sup>®</sup>. How many have played with or watched their kids play with Legos? You may remember that every Lego kit, even the simplest, comes with colorful



instructions that begin by putting two pieces together and building on a foundation piece. From there each additional piece is added in the right way, at the right time to create the finished product pictured on the box.

Marketing works the same way. You follow the instructions and build from a foundation to create an overall plan. Putting all your marketing dollars in one basket is a strategy but perhaps not one that will consistently reach your target customer.

Unlike Lego's, the pieces of your marketing plan will change over time. What you found to be successful ten years ago won't be the same today because options change, the needs of customers change and your focus may have changed. Look at McDonald's. Although they still offer fast food at an affordable price, they've added salads and apples and wraps to their menu options. Their business has changed with the needs of their customer and so will yours.

However one fact remains the same – the marketing strategy will need to contain more than one component; more than one Lego piece put together to effectively reach your target prospect.

So now we know that there are many pieces to our strategy and each step adds value, let's get started.

## CHAPTER TWO: Two Basic Assumptions

Oops, not quite yet. I need to ask two questions before we can begin.

*"Have you determined your unique value in the marketplace?"*

*"Is your target prospect clearly defined?"*

When I first opened my doors and people asked what I did I would say, "I'm a writer."

"What do you write?"

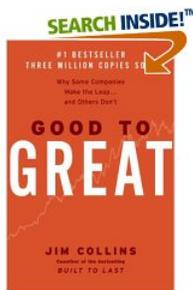
"Anything except resumes," I would respond. Customer content, internal communications, speeches, or manuals, if it had words, I would write it.

"Who is your customer?"

"Anyone," I'd say. "If they need words – I've got 'em."

Well, how do you think that worked for my business? Terrible. People I met at networking venues had no clear understanding of what I did or how to refer me. When I'd talk to prospects, I would overwhelm them with so many options it was easier to say "no thank-you" than to determine if I could in fact provide value.

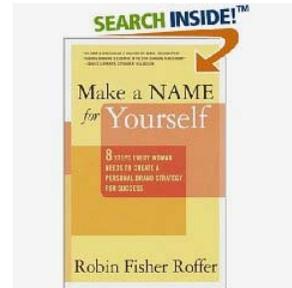
It wasn't until a year later when I narrowed my focus to the Internet and focused on small business owners looking to connect with target prospects on the web that my business began to grow. All of a sudden I was the "web writer" and people knew how to refer me. Need a blog? You need Deborah. Looking to update your website content? Call Deborah, she can help.



So before you start down the path of marketing your business, make sure you have first determined your unique value – the specific result you offer customers. Check out the book [Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't](#) by Jim Collins and his hedgehog analogy. You want to be the hedgehog, totally focused on doing one thing better than anyone else. You need to find the sweet

spot where what you care deeply about intersects with what you can be the best at and what people are willing to buy.

Another great book is [Make a Name for Yourself: Eight Steps Every Woman Needs to Create a Personal Brand Strategy](#) by Robin Fisher Roffer. She walks you through a series of exercises to help you clearly identify what you want to be known for and shows how to communicate that message consistently.



Okay. We know our niche and our audience. Let's get the word out!

## CHAPTER THREE: Laying a Marketing Foundation

The first set of tips will help you lay the foundation of your marketing strategy. Just like the instructions in a Lego kit, you want to create a firm foundation from which to build your brand.

Whether you are just starting out in business or have been in business a long time, ensuring your marketing and branding efforts are based upon a solid foundation is critical. Too many small business owners try this and then that and flit from idea to idea confusing not only themselves but their potential customers.

In this first section of tips we'll talk about the basics – picking colors and images to represent your brand, making a plan and putting it on the calendar. However, always keep this one important fact in mind:

You are in the business to make money, not to design the best business card in the industry.

The point being; it is better to focus your efforts on getting a customer rather than waiting until you have the perfect marketing kit. Use [Vista Print](#) or another inexpensive service to create a few hundred cards and start making calls.

I once attended a meeting in which a woman was hesitant to start making calls to advertise her business until she had the perfect company name, business card and website. When you are just getting started you can't afford to wait. Do the best you can and then pick up the phone.

That being said, whether you have the perfect business card or not – the first step in marketing your business is having a plan. So let's get started!

## TIP ONE: Create a Marketing Plan

You need a plan. As I said – you can put all your eggs in one basket but that is not the definition of an effective marketing plan. Your target prospects gather their buying information from a variety of sources; word of mouth, billboards, newspaper, Internet, their own experiences, direct mail, cable television, radio, networking events, etc.

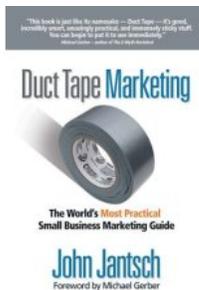
Through trial and error, you'll begin to develop a plan that includes the components that are most successful for your industry and to find your target prospects where they live.

### Start with six marketing buckets:

- Traditional marketing (coupons/newspaper/radio/spot television)
- Press releases
- Direct marketing (e-mail/postcards)
- Newsletters
- Article writing
- Speaking

**Have a plan** which includes a variety of traditional, guerilla and Internet components. Here is an article which provides [5 easy steps to creating a marketing plan](#).

Make a list of all the marketing efforts you currently employ, those that you've tried in the past that worked and those you are considering. Assign each a marketing bucket.

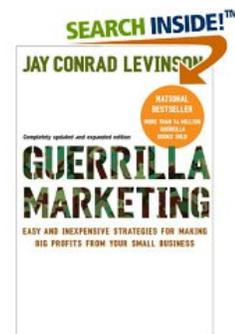


Just getting started and don't know what to put in each bucket? Check out John Jantsch's book for small business owners Duct Tape Marketing: The World's Most Practical Small Business Marketing Guide. Jay Conrad Levinson's series of Guerilla Marketing books are also a valuable source for keeping your

name in the marketplace.

### Identify your audience:

If your business has more than one audience, create a strategy based on each target prospect. For my business I target end-users, the actual business that requires help with their Internet presence. However I also consider web developers to be a very valuable



customer. They are already working with customers creating websites and most often need assistance with the content. I'll market differently to web developers than I will end-users.

Look at your target prospects. Should you marketing to them differently? Keep that in mind as you create your plan.

**Not sure who your target prospect is? Complete this exercise:**



You'll need a piece of paper and a pencil. Think of your existing customers and single out those that have been the best for your business: they have purchased from you more than once, they are enjoyable to work with, the product/service they purchase is a high profit margin, whatever it is that makes them your favorite customer. Once you have those favorite customers in mind, write down the following:

- Where did you meet them?
  - Did they respond to an ad? What type of ad, when did it run and where did you place it?
  - Did you meet them at a function? What type of function – networking event, chamber meeting, convention, on the street corner?
  - Were they referred to you by someone else? How did they hear of you?
  - Did they find your website and then call or email? How did they find your site – organic search, if so, what key words did they use? Pay-per-click? Saw your URL somewhere and just typed it in?
- What service/product do they purchase from you? How often have they returned? How profitable is that service? How easy it is to provide? Is it custom-made or boiler-plate?
- Describe the working relationship. Do you work directly together, or is it decision by committee? Do you work over the phone, via email or in-person visits? Do you work directly with the decision-maker or is there a step between your contact and the person who can say "yes?"

- Describe the customer:
  - Industry
  - Annual sales
  - Number of employees
  - Number of locations
  - Home-based
  - Individual or group
  - End-user or business to business
  
- If you had to answer in one sentence: why are they your favorite?

Once you have the answers to the above questions, you'll begin to formulate the vision of your target prospect. Now where can you find more just like those you already have a relationship with? Incorporate this information into your plan so you increase the likelihood of your target prospect finding your brand message.



**One final word on having a plan.** Would you get in the car and travel across country without a map (or GPS navigator)? Would you build a house without a blueprint? Planning out your marketing strategy ensures that you create map by which you'll navigate the journey of reaching your target prospect.

## TIP TWO: Marketing Calendar



Once you have a plan, you'll need to put it down on the calendar. Whether you are planning one month, 2 quarters, or a full year, you need to lay the components of your plan out on the calendar. Just like you don't want all the eggs of your marketing budget in one basket, you don't want all of the gems of your marketing plan in one week. Picture the Lego's instruction booklet. Each piece is placed on the foundation in a specific spot at a particular time.

Marketing isn't just when business slows down – it is a constant effort of branding your business. When your business is busy – you still need to keep your name in front of your prospects in order to keep the sales pipeline constantly flowing. After all, isn't that the name of the game: consistency? I'm sure you've experience this: slammed with business one month and then dry as a desert the next. It is human nature to say we don't have time to market our business when we are in the throws of filling orders or serving our customers; that's why having a marketing calendar is so valuable. If you plan a consistent stream of marketing initiatives throughout the year, you'll be less inclined to back off when business is booming.

[Create a marketing calendar](#) and schedule when each marketing component will reach the intended audience.

Using the Marketing Calendar, that you'll find at [Websites People Read](#), plot out the components of your marketing plan onto the calendar making sure to have at least one item every month. The bigger your budget, the more involved the plan but if you are a small business owner you'll need to be more creative with your marketing plan and that's where some of the guerilla marketing techniques come into play.

If you are new to creating a marketing plan and plotting it on the calendar, you may be asking yourself, "Just what do I put on the calendar and when is a good time to do it?"

Good questions. First, let's answer the what. In the previous chapter we talked about the different buckets of small business marketing:

- Traditional marketing (coupons/newspaper/radio/spot television)
- Press releases

- Direct marketing (e-mail/postcards)
- Newsletters
- Article writing
- Speaking

First ask yourself if you are currently doing any of the afore mentioned. If so – when do you usually do it? Example: if you faithfully use ValPac – when will those direct mail pieces drop? Put that on the calendar.

If you place an ad in the local paper, use Pay-per-Click or send out postcards – then put them on the calendar as well. If you haven't done anything to market your business except attend the monthly chamber luncheon – don't fret – but pick something to start with.

If cost is an issue – and when isn't it? – then consider e-marketing with a newsletter or email campaign. There are a variety of resources that will help you get started for as little as a penny an email or \$15 a month.

Start by putting one thing on the calendar for each month. Press releases are also free – so perhaps in the first month you'll write and email a newsletter, in month two you'll submit a press release and in month three you'll send an e-mail sales message.

The more you work on your marketing calendar the easier it will be to fill out. Remember: sponsoring a chamber event or speaking at a luncheon can also be considered marketing efforts worthy of plotting on the calendar.

Another reason to plot out your marketing efforts is to help you effectively measure the results. If you don't have the marketing initiatives on a calendar then when people start calling, visiting your site or coming to purchase – you'll be hard pressed to remember what marketing effort was the most effective in driving traffic to your business.



**One final word on creating a marketing calendar.** If you put your marketing plan on the calendar you can easily see where you have overlaps and gaps. The goal is for a consistent stream of measures to reach your target audience so that no matter when they are in the mood to buy; you are there inviting them in.

### TIP THREE: Measure Marketing

Just like in cooking – you want to measure your effectiveness. None of this “gut feel.” At Pearle Vision I’d ask my franchise owners what additional marketing programs they had in place to



promote their business aside from the national message. I’d hear things like: coupons on the local diner placemat, advertising on the back of the grocery store register tapes, full size ads in the Movie Theater, and ValPac direct mail. When I asked how their marketing efforts were working they would say, “Oh, great.”

However when I asked “So how do you know that it is working great?” most would say “Oh, I just know.”

Did they really? Can you really pinpoint the return on your marketing investment if you don’t calculate the dollars and cents of the results? Marketing dollars are precious. Measure the effectiveness to know if the results out perform the dollars it cost to bring them in. You may find

Check out this article on how to [Measure the effectiveness](#) of your marketing plan.

that advertising on the back of a grocery store register tape cost \$1000 but brings in \$10,000 in business. Compare that to a 30-second cable television spot that costs \$10,000 to produce. A television commercial’s results are difficult to measure because the customer isn’t bringing in a coupon and so you have to ask: Which is most effective? You won’t know unless you track the results.

### How do you track the results of television and radio advertising?

Television is primarily used as a branding tool; a vehicle to keep your name in front of a wide audience. Using spot television on targeted stations will help narrow the field of recipients but it really isn’t a vehicle that pinpoints your exact target prospect. Therefore, it is generally used as a foundation tool to keep your name in front of the general public. Tags at the end of the commercial can highlight a sale that you are currently running, “and come in before the 30<sup>th</sup> to receive an additional 10% off.” Larger department stores rely on television to get the word out about a moonlight madness sale or inventory clearance, but the small business owner usually can’t afford the cost of producing and running such time specific ads.

Radio can work if you have a specific target audience you’d like to reach. One summer at Pearle Vision the local Boston franchise owners advertised during the Boston Red Sox games on the

local AM station. We thought our prospects would be listening during the game and remember our name. We included an incentive in the script to encourage listeners to come into their local Pearle Vision. Some of the stores closest to the field benefited but for the most part, our radio campaign was primarily another vehicle used to create brand awareness – not necessarily a tool to drive specific traffic.

### **Consider an Incentive**

However the use of an incentive – mention you heard about us on the radio and receive xyz, is an effective way to measure a radio commercial. If you feel strongly that your target prospect is a regular radio listener, then by all means, give radio a try.

When adding radio to your marketing strategy, partner with your radio sales person to determine the best time and frequency. Sadly, unlike a direct mail coupon that can be sent once and have a return of some sort – running one radio commercial will not have the same effect. Radio requires repeat impressions to cut through the clutter and inspire the listener to take action.

No matter what vehicles you choose to reach your target prospect set up a measuring system. It can be as simple as tally marks at the cash register or a spreadsheet on your computer. With print coupons you can place a numerical code in one of the bottom corners so when the coupon is redeemed the venue can be easily traced.

On line direct mail options also track the effectiveness of your campaigns. Mail Chimp allows you to create a mailing with two different subject lines and will send a sample batch using both subject lines to see which is more effective. Once the race has been won – the bulk of your mailing is sent using the most effective subject line.

After the fact, the on line marketing options also gather valuable information: who opened, who clicked on links, who forwarded the message. Review the statistics – compare with prior months. What worked and what didn't? It is with this type of simple analysis that you hone your marketing message to reach more and more readers each time.

However, if you go by gut feel – “yeah, that worked, I just KNOW” – your marketing investment is being gambled away without rhyme or reason.

**One final word on measuring the effectiveness.** If you don't measure, how do you really know it worked? Check out this [ROI marketing calculator](#).



Thanks so much for downloading the first few tips of my latest book 30 Marketing Tips for Small Business Owners. The complete e-book is due out September 27, 2008. To preorder your copy, just send me an email: [Deborah@allwriteink.com](mailto:Deborah@allwriteink.com).