

33 Keys to Thriving During a Recession

by Marcia Yudkin

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Are you walking around with gloom and doom in your head?

If so, put all the recession talk aside and take a walk down Main Street. Do you see people carrying shopping bags? Going into restaurants? Using cell phones?

"Life goes on."

You see, life goes on. Business goes on. Customers still need you. Yes, they may be more cautious about spending. Some may be in financial trouble. But if you keep your head on straight, you'll ride out the recession just fine.

Three Fundamental Principles of Marketing to Remember

1. Mine your customer list.

Whether the economy is up or down, it costs five times as much to obtain a new customer as it does to sell more to an existing one. So treat current customers as gold, and make sure they know about everything you offer.

2. Repeat, repeat, repeat.

Marketing succeeds with repetition. Do not try to economize by cutting the frequency of your marketing outreach. According to a study by the American Business Press, in past recessions companies that maintained their advertising had increased their sales four times more two years later than companies that had cut their advertising because of the economic downturn.

"Treat customers as gold."

3. Stop marketing, and you soon won't have a business.

I once asked a client of mine who closed down her business to retire how long it took after she halted all of her marketing before the calls stopped. Six months, she said. Too often I've seen consultants become complacent about how well word of mouth was working for them. One day they'd wake up and realize referrals had dried up, and they'd have to begin creating a marketing pipeline, which might not start yielding new clients for months. In both good times and bad, you must market to keep sales humming.

How to Keep the Business Flowing

4. Emphasize the value you provide.

Whenever possible, position your offering as an investment rather than an expense – not necessarily by using the word “invest” but by making it extremely clear how and why the customer will be better off having bought your whosiewhatsit. For instance, suppose you sell a weekly menu service that provides recipes and a shopping list for wholesome family meals. Instead of allowing the consumer to think of this as a luxury (after all, they can do this on their own, without paying for it), explain why subscribers are able to stretch their food budget while serving their families more healthful, delicious and varied meals. Explain the hidden costs of grocery shopping on impulse or with a flawed shopping list.

5. Make sure clients are happy with what you've done.

Create some sort of feedback routine in which you give every buyer the opportunity to tell you what went wrong – or right – with their purchase. If someone gives negative feedback, fix the problem immediately. Do not tolerate shortcuts or shortcomings! Reputation reigns supreme when people are concerned about spending money on something that may not work as advertised.

6. Have a risk-free introductory offer.

For example, 1AutomationWiz.com, the online shopping cart I use, offers a free 30-day trial. You sign up, set up the cart and

*“Reputation
reigns supreme.”*

can use it for real transactions without having to pay until the 30th day. (By then, you're hooked!) As a variation on this theme, Changing Course initially charges just \$13.55 shipping on its \$297 Fast Track Your Dream program. They ship the materials, then begin charging the program fee on day 30. The buyer can ship everything back before day 30, then not be charged. For a non-monthly service, you can get the customer's credit card information or check up front, but promise not to charge the card or to return the check if the customer isn't happy.

7. Develop and sell information products.

Information products offer a low-risk, low-commitment way for new customers to get to know, then trust a vendor company. You can sell them to do-it-yourselfers who might not spring for full service as well as to regular customers who want to learn about a new topic area. Not only do the information products provide an additional stream of revenue during the recession, they will continue to do so after the economy picks up again (as it inevitably will) with no additional work. To get products ready for sale within weeks, see "The Five Easiest-to-Complete Information Products" at www.yudkin.com/easiest.htm.

8. Catch their pulse.

What do your customers need most right now? Put your ear to the ground. Listen in on your target market's complaints, questions and wishes where they hang out on email discussion lists and web-based forums. Based on what you hear, add a new product or service or twist an existing one so it clearly connects with their concerns. Let's say that on the financial forums you see more questions than usual from couples nearing retirement or parents with more than one child in college. You could quickly create seminars, reports or telephone hotline hours specifically for those groups.

9. Create special offers.

Instead of a long "a la carte" menu of products or services, or an indefinite invitation like "call us and we'll figure out how to meet your needs," put together specific packages of what

"Listen in on your target market."

buyers receive with a special price for a limited time. For instance, a spa could promote a Get Ready for Summer Special, good through June 14. The deadline and a clever name for the offer both help motivate customers. To avoid training your clients to hang back and wait for a discount, try adding irresistible bonuses like a free MP3 player or “two for one” coupons at a local restaurant rather than cutting prices.

10. Multiply your freebies.

If you have just one giveaway item you’ve been using to generate leads, develop additional ones and encourage those in your network to tell their friends, colleagues and family members about your new freebies. Not only do such samples help get people over the hump of hiring you for the first time, they enable you to reach out to potential customers who don’t yet know you exist. What you are looking at now is a prime example. Not only did I give it away to my Marketing Minute subscriber list, I invited them (and you!) to send it along to others. Make sure your giveaway item delivers outstanding value and is not a promotion in light disguise. Freebies can include no-cost events and surprise bonus items as well as reports.

11. Contact inactive clients.

According to copywriting guru Bob Bly, simply by calling past clients to say hello and to find out what’s going on in their business, you’ll get an average of one out of ten giving you a new assignment because you showed up in their awareness at an opportune time. “Don’t call up and say, ‘I’m not busy and need work right now; do you have any assignments?’” he warns. If you’re not the “just wanted to chat” type, a good excuse for getting in touch is “I’m calling to get an update on the results you had from the last project we did together. How did that work out?”

“Call inactive clients to say hello.”

12. Pursue a more receptive, ready-to-buy audience.

This might mean targeting more upscale prospects than you have been, reexamining the zip codes to which you mail promotions or going after clients in industries less affected by the economic downturn, such as IT, energy, education and

health care. For your company, the relevant indicator might be the availability of time rather than money. For example, when the economy slows down, people might have more time for scrapbooking projects, do-it-yourself home improvement or finishing a book manuscript.

13. Look for leverage.

If you work with a group rather than individuals, you can earn more in the same amount of time even while each customer pays less. An ingenious implementation of this is a program called “Fitness by Phone” in which personal trainers keep clients motivated for their workouts by telephone rather than in person. Note also that neither the trainers nor the clients have to travel to work together this way – a relevant factor when gas prices are high.

14. Pursue publicity.

Getting media coverage can be as quick as picking up the phone and calling the news desk of your metropolitan newspaper or TV station to explain why you’re the local angle to today’s big story. Invest a little time to understand what constitutes newsworthiness in the eyes of the media, and pitch your company or yourself in pitch letters and press releases. During a recession, you may have a better shot at earning 15 priceless minutes of fame because competitors may have scaled back on the retainer for their PR firm. A cost-effective compromise between writing your own releases and hiring someone to do it for you is the press release makeover service of PressReleaseHelp.com.

*“Understand
newsworthiness.”*

15. Follow up automatically.

Autoresponder technology from companies like Aweber.com, Getresponse.com and some shopping carts enables you to create a sequence of timed messages that gets triggered by a request, purchase or signup. Put this sequence in place once, and it tirelessly continues educating or selling for you from then on. Some shrewd entrepreneur is soon going to enable the same kind of automatic triggering for postcards and other mailed pieces. In the meantime, postcard and lettershop vendors like PostcardBuilder.com let you design a piece

online, then upload your database for sending on a specific date. Be smart and get followup systems working for you now.

“Create a sequence of automated messages.”

16. Collect testimonials.

Here’s something else to take care of if you’re not already doing it: Tell service clients and those who’ve purchased your products that you’re looking for success stories. How have they benefited from your offerings? Ask permission to use a concise, juicy version of their comments on postcards, on your web site and in sales presentations. If you’ve been collecting written testimonials, maybe it’s time to step up to audio and video ones. Testimonials that describe specific results help persuade on-the-fence prospects.

17. Develop “lite” versions.

For example, take your software, reduce the functionality and sell the bare-bones version at a lower price. Extract a chapter from a book and present it as a special report or booklet. In some markets, you can profitably do the same for just your bibliography or up-to-date helpful resources. The travel publisher Lonely Planet pulled all the information relevant to just a city from its longer, more comprehensive country guidebooks and published pocket-sized (and somewhat cheaper) city guides perfect for a weekend visit to Madrid, Florence, Amsterdam and so on.

18. Adapt for a new audience.

Got something you sell to Canadian small businesses? Make the necessary changes so you can sell it in the U.S. or South Africa, or create a version for nonprofits, or for children. One of my clients has an offering consisting of audio CDs, a book and workbook that she’s planning to retarget to a zillion specialized professions simply by redoing her sales material and publicizing the slightly renamed product to professional associations and trade magazines.

19. Become timely.

Refer to the current situation in your marketing. Explicitly relate your expertise and what you do day after day to what’s

most on people's minds. Let's say you run a day care center. These days, you provide a refuge for children from their parents' worries. Or you sell home heating fuel. Explain how you're working hard to help families keep their homes warm this winter.

"Reconnect with colleagues."

20. Add a personal touch.

Call people you would ordinarily just email. Reply cordially and at more length to those who respond to your newsletter or blog. Reconnect with colleagues on a personal level. When you read magazines and come across an article you know would interest a certain client, rip it out and mail it with a sticky note attached. Such thoughtfulness reverberates much more than you might imagine. If you don't already send handwritten thank-you notes for referrals, begin now. Staying top of mind helps channel many different types of opportunities toward you.

21. Inject fun into your marketing.

Which would you rather do business with, a company that at every opportunity reminded you of the dark cloud over your head, or one that made you smile? Forbes.com reports that both in 2008 and in the recession year of 2002, Halloween spending did not go down, even though most people were tightening their purse strings. According to National Association of Theatre Owners president John Fithian, movie box offices took in more money during five of the last seven recession years than during other years. If you're normally a dead-serious company, this might be a good time to lighten up a bit by creating a company mascot or passing along some self-deprecating jokes.

22. Revive past successes.

Chances are, you have something you created or did a while ago that worked but then you dropped it or never repeated the event or special offer. Unearth it, update it if necessary and relaunch it. Dig up your half-successes, too – sometimes with the passage of time, you see exactly how to tweak them to make them work brilliantly now. What you're reading now partly comes from a handout for a seminar I gave in

September 2001 but totally forgot about until I was well into the brainstorming for this report. Likewise, my downloadable report “[Inspired!](#) How to Be More Original, Inspired and Productive in Your Work” is a reworking of a creativity newsletter I had published for two and a half years.

23. Consider complaints and objections.

Steve Harrison, co-owner of Bradley Communications, watched his business tank after the 9/11 attacks. On the verge of shutting down the company, he decided to go through with a repeat speaking engagement that had previously never yielded much business. This time, he realized that audience members didn’t feel ready yet for what he was pitching, so he added several additional components to the product that would get them ready. The tens of thousands of dollars in orders he received that day brought his business back from the brink of collapse. You too might be able to tweak something that hasn’t been working by figuring out what’s been keeping people from buying.

24. Shake up your routines.

List all the constants in the way your organization operates – its “always”s. For instance, you always work Mondays through Fridays. Is it time to work Tuesdays through Saturdays – or just Tuesdays through Thursdays? You always hold your seminars in Chicago. Would they be more appealing in Charlotte? You always focus on one topic in your newsletter. What if you shared a grab bag of useful tips instead?

25. Ask for advice.

If you’re not sure which of these tips to act on or how to implement these suggestions, join a peer group – sometimes known as a Mastermind Group – to help you do so. It’s no more complicated than each member of the group having a turn to pose a question, taking down all the suggestions offered, then sharing your thoughts on which ideas seem most promising so the group can propose additional possibilities. When being offered suggestions, don’t interrupt with “No, that won’t work!” or “Tried that one...” Simply listen and

“Join a peer group for advice.”

identify the ideas you like. Can't rustle up mastermind partners? You get caring colleagues to bounce ideas off of in my [Marketing for More](#) mentoring program.

26. Keep an eagle eye on collections.

Professional debt collectors say that the longer a bill remains unpaid, the more likely it is to become uncollectible. And of course, those who make noise get paid first. Big companies know this. I let my bills sit on the kitchen counter a little too long last month and received automated calls from both the telephone company and the electric company about it, even though the amounts involved were quite small. One tactic that can help your cash flow and prevent worries about uncollectible receivables is to offer a discount – such as 2 to 5 percent – for payment up front.

Manage Your Mood Swings

27. Ration your news watching.

Some say that the unofficial motto of the news media is “If it bleeds, it leads.” In other words, it's their job to forcefully tell you about all the bad news. Television news, in particular, can not only inform you, but infect you with fear from an unbalanced view of what's happening that may not match what's true in the world that most impinges most on you. You may find reading the news in a print newspaper less alarming than listening to the news on radio or TV.

28. Stay positive.

Notice what you're saying to yourself, and develop a positive, feel-good affirmation to replace negative statements. During mid-2008, I had a lean couple of months and noticed I had been saying things like, “I don't really need much money.” I replaced that with an affirmation developed in conversation with my business coach: “I have the luxury of being able to do whatever I like, and money flows to me effortlessly from that.” Was it an accident that my cash flow improved? You decide.

“Develop a feel-good affirmation.”

29. Drop unpleasant customers.

Yes, I mean it! You need all your wits about you to be creative and resourceful. Anger and resentment sap your energy. Refer the disagreeable clients to a colleague who is feeling desperate. And who knows – they may get along just fine.

30. Play.

Spend time doing something that makes you happy – whether that's playing with your kids, riding your Harley, playing your favorite music at full blast or skimming rocks on a nearby pond. Feeling crazily, unreasonably joyful for even a little while helps you attack business problems with an optimistic perspective. According to research by University of California at Davis psychology professor Robert Emmons and others, counting blessings rather than focusing on burdens increases your health and general well being. I wouldn't be surprised if it increases your earnings, too.

"Refer disagreeable clients to a colleague."

How to Prevent a Recession Slowdown Next Time Around

31. Diversify.

Beware of depending too much on one, two or three clients. Never allow your prosperity to get tied too closely to the fortunes of a very few others – no matter how stable and healthy these organizations seem. If they suddenly hit the skids or if they just get sold and their leadership or direction changes, you could be in deep trouble. Protect yourself by keeping at least four active clients at all times. The same goes for your product line and promotions, where an overly narrow focus also puts you at risk. Some years ago, I had a financial planning expert whose whole marketing funnel depended on beating the estate tax. When Congress suddenly changed the estate tax, he had to recreate his business.

32. Stay in touch.

Don't let your customer database lapse or go out of date! (Some businesses just toss paperwork into a shoebox.) Former clients may not need your services right now, but don't let

"Don't let clients forget you."

them forget about you. Send something meaningful and relevant to previous customers twice a year. Postcards are perfect for this – they have just enough space for a tip, a tool or an inspirational case study.

33. Never shut down the marketing pipeline.

Create regular marketing activities that reach out to new customers and keep these going, regardless of whether you're so busy you can't stand it or waiting for the phone to ring. That way, you'll never have to try to get traction from a dead stop.

Recession-Beating Resources

✓ **Become more creative.**

Resourcefulness can be learned! My report "Inspired! How to Be More Original, Inspired and Productive in Your Work" shares exciting, helpful research and practices on heightening your creativity. Read it, then implement new recession-beating ideas with panache. It's an instant download, \$39.95: <http://www.yudkin.com/pinspired.htm>

✓ **Receive free marketing tips.**

Every Wednesday, my free email newsletter "The Marketing Minute" brings you a quick, thought-provoking read. Tips cover marketing, publicity, product creation, productivity and business attitudes. Join its worldwide readership of more than 11,000 people working in organizations or for themselves. Subscribe free: <http://www.yudkin.com/markmin.htm>

✓ **Profit from marketing feedback.**

Through a members-only discussion board and teleseminar feedback sessions, Marketing for More offers as-you-need-it suggestions and resources to put your marketing on track and keep it working. "It's a great combination of mutual support and knife-sharp advice and guidance," says member Jane Sherwin, President of WordDrive Communications. Learn more: <http://www.marketingformore.com>

✓ **Sell information products.**

The “Launch Your Information Empire” course not only provides tips and resources for creating information products that your clients will want, but also advises on pricing, promotion and the overall strategies that bring about high profits. Hear the top questions about creating and selling information products answered in a free recorded Q&A session by filling out the request box near the top of <http://www.yudkin.com/informationempire.htm>

✓ **Obtain publicity.**

Your colleagues will turn green with envy when they see your company featured in industry magazines and gaining the lion’s share of Google traffic. Visit the Press Release Help site to see a free sample press release and sample press release makeover, along with reports that teach you to get your 15 minutes of fame. And it’s just \$195 to have your release transformed from flat and boring to dynamically newsworthy: <http://www.pressreleasehelp.com>

✓ **Share the wisdom!**

You’re invited to pass this PDF report along to your customers, at no charge, as long as you keep the whole file intact. Blog about it, include the URL in your print or email newsletter or add a link on your web site. Print it out and mail it to a key contact with a sticky note on top. When an “Aha!” lights up, you’ll receive their gratitude. Here’s where the report will be available for download indefinitely: <http://www.yudkin.com/recess.htm>

“Pass this report along and receive clients’ gratitude.”