

# 10 RECESSION-BUSTING IDEAS TO HELP YOU SURVIVE AND THRIVE IN THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN



## Introduction

This booklet contains suggestions to help you promote your small business during a period of economic instability. Yet ironically marketing is typically one of the first activities to be ditched when a recession bites and companies start looking for ways to cut costs.

However we would like to challenge this conventional wisdom and ask you to consider the downturn as actually an opportunity rather than a threat to your business.

Recessions introduce volatility into existing customer-supplier relationships which smart business-people can exploit. Suppliers which are charging too much or providing poor customer service or outdated products/services tend to get 'found out' as customers, looking to cut their costs, take the opportunity to investigate what they are paying for and whether they are getting value for money.

This period of vulnerability for existing suppliers can be exploited by competitors looking to increase their market share. Customers may be receptive to the idea of switching to an alternative supplier that is offering cheaper, leaner, more applicable or innovative proposition.

However, these opportunities are unlikely to come looking for you. You have to make sure your business is in the right place at the right time. So, there is actually a case for increasing your marketing activity while everyone else seems to be cutting back.

Research seems to back up this premise. Studies suggest that businesses which actually invest in marketing during recessions are the ones that come out of it quicker, in better shape and with increased market share.

So here are some suggestions about how to put your business in the shop-window and make sure you are in the right place at the right time.

Of course, not all of them will be relevant to your business. But, even if you find just two or three of them are useful and decide to implement them then this short read will have been valuable.

Good luck.

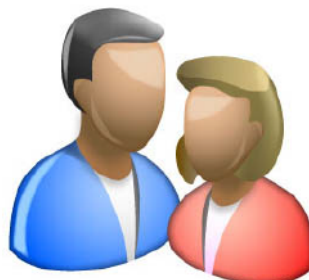


Fergus McCloskey  
Handmade Marketing

# 1 SAFEGUARD YOUR GREATEST ASSETS

**If, like many, you are preparing to hunker-down and ride out the recession you will need a strategy for retaining your most important assets – your customers.**

You may already have lost some orders and should probably expect to haemorrhage a few more before the economy starts moving north again. But if you are to survive you must ensure you don't lose any business unnecessarily.



Treat your customers like your crown jewels - you must protect their business at all costs. Moreover, it makes economic sense as it's said to be six times more costly to acquire a new client than to hold onto an existing one.

So how should you go about shoring-up your customer-base?

Why not pick up the telephone and find out if they are happy with the products or service you provide? Ask them if there is anything more that you could do for them. Even if the answer is 'no' they will appreciate the attention you are giving them - it shows you care about them and makes them feel wanted. It also enables you to identify and deal with any issues or negative perceptions they may have of you that could eventually result in them jumping-ship.

If you have hundreds of customers you probably don't have the resources to give all of them the personal touch so start with the most valuable or profitable of them and work your way down the list.

If you have thousands of customers you will need to take a more structured approach and develop customer relationship management (CRM) systems to effectively implement your customer retention strategy.

If you would like help planning customer retention initiatives or implementing a CRM system please call us on 020 7300 7250 or email [enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk).

## 2 DECLARE WAR ON YOUR COMPETITORS

### Let us look at the customer retention issue from the opposite perspective.

Many of your competitors' clients may not be receiving the service they deserve and may be considering sourcing an alternative supplier. We are guessing you would take enormous satisfaction from stealing their business from under your competitors' noses?

There is a lot of inertia that often keeps unsatisfactory business relationships together.

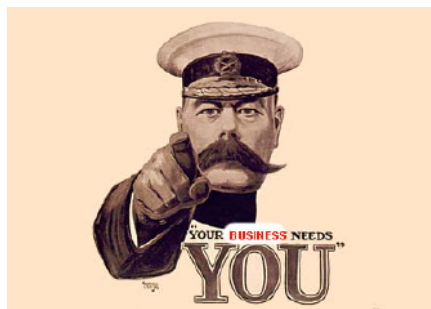
One of the main reasons for this is the time and effort involved in finding a new supplier - which can be prohibitive. However, if you proactively approach a dissatisfied customer offering a better deal you are removing perhaps the biggest barrier that prevents client mobility.

Firstly you need to find out who your competitors' customers are. You will need to invest some time and effort to research this. A good starting point will be their websites - to build credibility many businesses have a 'clients' page which lists their most prestigious customers. Maybe they have a news archive in which they announce new contracts? Google them.

Once you have created your 'hit list' of prospects make contact, preferably by phone, but also follow-up by email or a letter, introducing your organisation and offering them a meeting. You might be surprised how receptive they are.

Try to identify an aspect in which you have the edge over their current supplier. Perhaps you can undercut them on price, offer better service or more reliability? Be ruthless. Treat it like a turf war. In the present economic climate its dog-eat-dog and you can be sure that given the opportunity they would do the same to you.

If you need assistance researching your competitors or approaching their customers please call us on 020 7300 7250 or email [enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk).

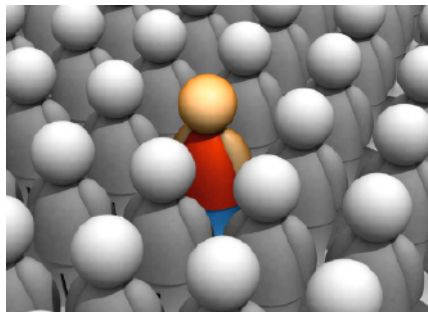


# 3 GET NOTICED!

**Achieving good visibility on search engines is probably the most powerful and cost-effective way of generating new business leads.**

According to research over 90% of surfers in the UK use search engines to find products and services. That includes your prospective customers.

A search engine results page contains two types of listing: organic or natural listings on the left and paid-for listings or 'sponsored links' on the right (and sometimes top left).



The two biggest factors affecting the ranking or position of your website in natural listings are relevancy and popularity. A search engine will find your site relevant if it contains content that matches the term or phrase your potential customers are typing into Google, Yahoo, MSN etc.

Spend time identifying these phrases and incorporating them into your site especially in titles and headings; don't over-use them - search engines will penalise sites which have a keyphrase density exceeding 10%. Also be as specific as possible - it is easier to get good results for a 2, 3 or 4 word phrase and it will attract more relevant traffic.

The popularity of your site is not measured by the amount of traffic it generates but the number of other websites that link to it. Implement a link-building programme to maximise your ranking.

Sponsored links on search engines provide a flexible, measurable and performance-based method of achieving instant visibility and is particularly suitable for promotional offers, seasonal campaigns or for multiple keyphrases. It is cost effective too - you only pay when a visitor clicks through to your site.

Google and Yahoo have step-by-step instructions on how to set-up a Pay-per-Click (PPC) campaign which allow you to set your click-through cost, daily budget, keyphrases and target your audience

If you need help optimising your website for search engines or setting-up a PPC campaign please call us on 020 7300 7250 or email [enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk).

# 4 SPREAD THE WORD...

## Are you fully exploiting the media to raise awareness of your company?

Public relations is often overlooked, especially by SMEs, because it is not designed to deliver instant, tangible results. However, it should be seen as a valuable ingredient in your overall strategy to communicate with your target market.

Editorial is said to be ten times more powerful and persuasive than advertising since it is perceived by the reader to be an impartial, independent endorsement. So what should you be releasing to the media and how?

Believe it or not many of your prospective customers are keen to read interesting stories about you. The important point here though is they must be interesting. New appointments, new promotions, new products/services, new contracts, project completions and survey results all make great content for press releases. Opinion pieces and case studies are better suited as feature articles.

The Internet has made it easier and cheaper than ever to circulate press releases. It takes just minutes to set-up an account with an online PR tool (e.g. [prweb.com](http://prweb.com), [pressbox.co.uk](http://pressbox.co.uk), [pnewswire.co.uk](http://pnewswire.co.uk)) and upload your press release.

Some tips when writing a news release:

- Use eye catching, snappy headlines to attract readers to the story
- Put the whole story in the first sentence or paragraph
- Use short sentences with factual and objective information
- Keep the word count down to 300 words max
- If possible include a quote from a named person as a point of reference
- Include your contact details for feedback
- Include a hyperlink to your website to generate traffic and boost its search engine ranking

One press release is unlikely to generate a flood of new leads but should be seen as part of a cumulative process to raise awareness and credibility in your brand.

If you need help preparing or distributing information about your organisation please call us on 020 7300 7250 or email [enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk).



# 5 GET BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM YOUR..... CUSTOMERS

**Do you know anyone who works in your target market, is on first-name terms with some of your most coveted prospects and has first-hand experience of your products/ services?**

If you have any customers, the answer is YES!

Your existing client-base is probably your most valuable source of warm, of not downright scolding-hot leads.



Not only will they know the right person you should approach, they may often make the introduction for you and should even vouch for you i.e. recommend your products and services. This form of personal endorsement will build instant trust and assurance - barriers which often take time to overcome and hinder or obstruct the sales process.

However, while requesting and receiving referrals from existing customers is considered a routine form of lead generation in the USA our business culture in the UK is not as well disposed to this assertive, confident, even brazen request for 'help'.

But put the boot on the other foot for a minute. How would you react if one of your suppliers asked you for a referral? Would you recoil in horror at their effrontery or be glad to help them out? Your clients will probably react the same way and anyway what's the worst that can happen?

So steal yourself and make that call and experiment with a variety of approaches for example....

"we are looking to expand in your industry - do you know anyone we could approach?"

"do you know anyone that you could introduce us to?"

"would you mind if I used you as a reference?"

If you would like us to help you devise a referrals campaign please call us on 020 7300 7250 or email [enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk).

## 6 EXPLOIT YOUR EMAIL

**Have you ever wondered why people send promotional emails as you are routinely deleting spam from your Inbox every morning? Its because..... IT WORKS!**

Recent research revealed that response rates for email (3-10%) are up to five times greater than traditional direct mail (2%). And other benefits of using the medium are well documented: it is inexpensive (no print, material or postage costs), quick to set up, measurable and viral.



Because of its immediacy and ease-of-use email marketing is particularly suited for developing customer retention/loyalty, brand awareness, promotional campaigns and driving traffic to your website.

There are a variety of ways of building your e-mailing list. A good place to start would be your existing customers, suppliers and other business contacts. You can use your website to harvest email addresses or rent lists from trade associations or direct marketing agencies.

It pays to spend time and effort to make the content of your email compelling. Use of copywriter to prepare the text and a graphic designer to format it. Distribution can be performed using a simple mail merge in MS Outlook. For bulk mailings (>200) you should consider using e-marketing software or outsourcing to an agency.

If you produce a house journal or newsletter have you considered converting it into an e-newsletter? It will almost certainly save you money by removing production costs and you will benefit from the viral nature of email to build your subscriber database.

To make full use of the medium you should track the performance of your e-campaigns. This can range from simply counting replies or visits to a dedicated landing page to more sophisticated analytics now widely available that capture and report open rates, click thru and other respondent behaviour.

If you would like advice on setting-up email marketing campaign please call us on 020 7300 7250 or email [enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk).

# 7 FOCUS YOUR ADVERTISING

**Those of you that can remember the last recession or have experienced hard times will recall that the good old advertising budget is normally the first in line when the cost cutting axe is wielded.**

After all, it's such an easy target - often seen as a luxury item to be slashed to make instant savings that help balance the books when the orders start drying up.

In the initial panic the negative consequences of this tactic are often overlooked. Unless your advertising conveys the wrong message or is hitting the wrong audience, cutting back or terminating it altogether can only reduce your chances of generating new business and will therefore prove to be counter-productive in the long run.



So, how can you decrease your advertising spend without reducing its effectiveness? The answer is, to make it more efficient by shifting your resources to the most productive channels and audiences.

To do this you need to identify which media and campaigns deliver the best results and therefore mechanisms for capturing and analysing performance data i.e. where the leads are coming from and how many are converted into business.

This type of feedback can range from the relatively crude and anecdotal (instructing your receptionist to ask new callers where they heard of you) to very sophisticated systems of data warehousing and customer relationship management. Digital advertising, by its very nature, enables audience behaviour to be captured using access logs and reported e.g. click through rates.

Display and Broadcast advertising is more problematic. However, by routing respondents through identifiable channels e.g dedicated telephone number, website or landing page you will be able to track the effectiveness of a particular medium or campaign and transfer your resources to the most productive.

If you would like ideas on how to capture and analyse data from advertising campaigns please call us on 020 7300 7250 or email [enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk).

## 8 SEEK OUT A PARTNER

**Another potential source of business leads are companies that operate, but do not compete, in your market sector.**

The best way for you to tap-into this rich seam of prospects is to consider forming strategic partnerships with them in which both parties benefit from the additional business which is generated.

The key factors to look for when selecting a partner organisation to approach are:

1. established customer-base in your target market
2. a non-competitive portfolio of products/services
3. established routes to market (i.e. credible brand, sales and marketing capabilities)

The actual arrangement you have with them will vary and should be whatever both parties are comfortable with. They typically range from a loose reciprocal agreement involving a two-way exchange of leads or introductions to more formal arrangements in which you retain your existing 'customer account' but outsource work to your partner in return for a fee or proportion of the sale value (e.g. 10-20%).

If you have e-commerce functionality on your website you may wish to create a network of resellers - a discipline known as affiliate marketing.

Like customer referrals, the leads generated by strategic partnerships should be warm and of good quality. In theory, they should also be easier to close especially if you are given an introduction and an endorsement by your partner.

If you need help identifying or approaching strategic partners please call us on 020 7300 7250 or email [enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk).



## 9 CROSS SELL

**Can you put your hand on your heart and say, with confidence, that your customers are aware of all of the products and services you offer?**

If so, well done and skip to the next tip.

If not, consider for a moment the possibility that you might be able to replace all of the business you may have lost during the downturn or even achieve your targets for growth simply by expanding the amount of revenue you get from your existing clients.



Acquiring a new customer is said to be six times more expensive and time consuming than retaining an existing one. After-all you have already hurdled the credibility barrier that can prevent you from creating a new business relationship. Your existing customers trust you to deliver in at least one area so are far more likely to buy other products or services from you.

Cross-selling is however not a passive discipline. Don't wait for your customers to stumble upon the information about the other products/services in your portfolio sometime in the distant future. You must be pro-active and TELL THEM ABOUT IT.

There are a variety of ways to educate customers from a simple "did you know" email to more sophisticated and systematic approaches. You should first ask your client contact if they are happy for you to 'go-hunting' within their organisation for leads and if so, how we should go about it. Ask them who is responsible for purchasing the other products/services you offer.

Thereafter it will be left to your skill and perseverance to seek the new business opportunities that may be there.

The distribution of a regular e-newsletter featuring stories about or links to your portfolio would also help to raise awareness of the 'other' products/services you provide.

If you would like help creating a plan to cross-sell to your clientbase please call us on 020 7300 7250 or email [enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk).

# 10 PLUG INTO THE NETWORK

**You have heard the expression 'its not what you know, its who you know'.**

It was never more pertinent than when applied to the business world which is held together by personal relationships.

The most successful entrepreneurs and business-people are those that have mastered the art of networking - the practice of forging personal relationships with the intention of generating leads and possible future sales).



While it is viewed by many as a daunting prospect, as in most things in life, the reality is somewhat less frightening. To succeed you just need to be able to talk engagingly about what you do.

Although you could be said to be networking when talking to anyone about your work, the practice is more typically associated with pre-arranged events involving invited participants. These can range from the very casual - chatting at a drinks reception - to more formal events involving short presentations or organised around a particular theme or topic. Networking groups usually meet regularly (e.g. monthly) over breakfast, lunch or after work.

Dedicated organisations exist to facilitate networking - the largest and best known is BNI which has over 500 'chapters' in the UK. You may have been invited to join online business networks such as LinkedIn which take advantage of the viral nature of the Internet to develop and propagate business relationships. Contact your local Chamber of Commerce, Business Link or trade association to discover what business networking organisations are available in your area or industry.

Some tips for attending a networking event:

- psyche yourself up before you go
- remind yourself why you are there
- set yourself specific goals
- take plenty of business cards

Starting up a conversation with a stranger takes a modicum of courage but remember you are unlikely to be cold shouldered as everyone else is there for the same reason as you!

If you would like help identifying or participating in business networking please call us on 020 7300 7250 or email [enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk).





## About Handmade Marketing

Handmade Marketing is a full-service marketing consultancy based in the City of London.

We specialise in devising and implementing lead generation campaigns for our clients using a variety of methods and media from corporate communications to direct and e-marketing, social media and web development.

We take a holistic approach to the discipline of marketing. Our multi-disciplined team will work closely together to distill and create the right message and select the most appropriate techniques and channels to deliver it to your target audience - increasing your visibility, creating awareness and enhancing your credibility.

Our core management team is supplemented by a portfolio of trusted consultants which provide specialist resources such as design, copywriting, development and search marketing.

We provide services to all industry sectors but have particular expertise in B2B and the property and construction industries.

Our services include:



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