

Which of These
7 Costly Mistakes
is Killing Your
Word of Mouth?

Generate an Endless
Supply of Referral
Customers for **FREE!**

by Chuck McKay

7 Costly
Mistakes
That
Kill
Your Word
of Mouth

On March 22, 2014 I stood on a stage at the Columbia Hotel in the center of London, across the street from Hyde Park. I was conducting a marketing workshop for a group of London business people. Training Excellence, Ltd, an approved center for London's prestigious Institute of Leadership and Management, had promoted the workshop would be limited to 30 attendees. At the last minute they squeezed in two more.

I think I was more impressed than the attendees were.

Three years earlier I was a local marketing consultant, helping air conditioning contractors, jewelers, restaurants, banks, vacuum cleaner retailers, mechanics, memorabilia stores, tee shirt printers, lawyers and sporting goods stores, to sell more of their goods and services. Today I was sharing marketing insights with business people in one of the financial centers of the world.

It was word of mouth that got me there.

I met the irrepressible John Cassidy-Rice at a marketing seminar in Austin. Gave him a copy of my first book. He mentioned me to associates in London, and when Training Excellence was looking for a speaker, they thought of me. Several exchanged emails and a few trans-Atlantic phone calls later I was booking a flight on Virgin Air.

That's the power of word of mouth.

We used to call this process building professional reputation. Now we have systems and tools to guide the talk that creates those reputations. You're holding one of them in your hand.

Let's count them down in order of importance from 7th to 1st, shall we?

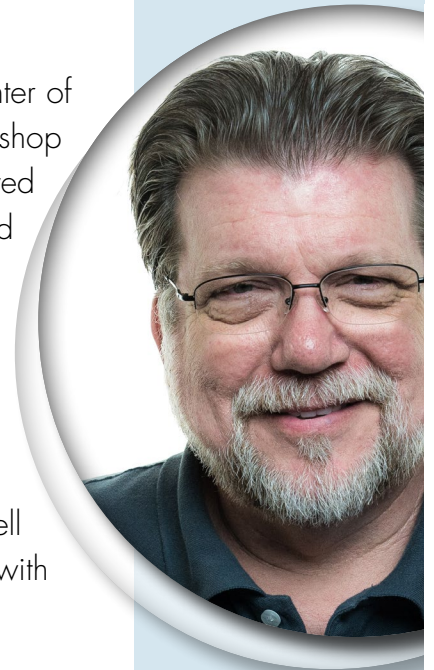
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7 Costly Mistakes That Kill Your Word of Mouth

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Costly Mistake #7: Not Allowing Enough Time

Business people want to believe that they'll please one customer so well he will tell three people of his amazing experience. Then each of them will tell three more people, so that in a matter of days 21,000 people will have heard the story and rush to buy from those businesses.

It's a lovely idea, isn't it? That you simply have to topple the first domino and all that kinetic energy is released and people are excited to tell their friends about your company.

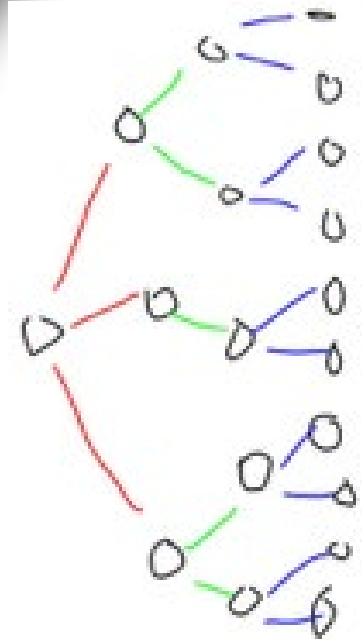
Word of mouth is so s l o o o o o o w .

No matter how well we run our companies, no matter how well we serve our customers, our competitors are doing exactly the same things.

Grocery stores sell the same groceries as other grocery stores.

Accountants prepare the same statements and file the same tax returns as other accountants.

Plumbers use the same snakes to unplug drains.



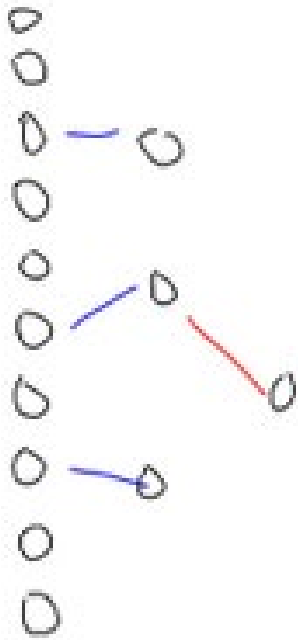
How we wish word-of-mouth worked. One person tells three, who each tell three more.

Within our respective industries we aren't particularly unique. People talk about that which is different, noteworthy, remarkable. And when inertia sets in, people are wrapped up in their own lives and they forget to repeat your story. Maybe it just wasn't that important to them.

So even if you can manage to be exceptional in every customer interaction, it takes an amazing number of face-to-face dealings to create a reputation.

It takes consistent actions over time to build a clear image in the collective public consciousness. Choose your actions carefully, and do them every time for as long as you intend to stay in business.

Word of mouth can be a powerful form of marketing. It's not going to give you quick results.



The way actual word-of-mouth propagates. One person out of three repeats the story until it dies.

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But word of mouth is a slow process.

The problem for most of us is that no matter how well we run our companies, no matter how well we serve our customers, our competitors are doing exactly the same things.

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Costly Mistake #6:

Going for Buzz

"Did you hear? Acme Jewelers was robbed last night."

This particular bit of information is buzz. Buzz is excited talk, rumors, gossip. Urgent or exciting news. If it's exciting enough it will keep people talking for a day or two.

Buzz can be created through publicity stunts. Sometimes the buzz is so strong it spreads like a virus, and is referred to as viral marketing. Sometimes.

But most of the time it's just not that exciting. Eventually, when everyone has heard the story, it burns out.

And that's one of the two big problems in relying on buzz. It can't be sustained. Every few days you have to start all over to try to make people talk about you.

The other problem is, when people are buzzing about you what they say doesn't do much to promote the value of doing business with you. You see, people don't care what you want them to talk about. They discuss what's interesting to them.

According to Mark Hughes, author of *Buzzmarketing*, there are six hot buttons to get people to repeat a story. They are:

- The taboo (sex, lies, bathroom humor)
- The unusual
- The outrageous
- The hilarious
- The remarkable
- The secret (revealed, or unrevealed)



Buzzmarketing: Get People to Talk About Your Stuff by Mark Hughes, Portfolio Trade, 2005.

So, let's include one of these to get people to repeat your story. What will buzz based on these topics do to your professional reputation? Will a story which centers on the taboo or the outrageous convince anyone to hire an attorney?

What secrets does a jeweler protect? Have you ever chosen a jeweler because he can keep a secret?

How hilarious is your painting company? Do people look for a painter that makes them laugh?

Is your oil change center unusual and remarkable? Do your customers think so?

Despite skill, imagination, and persistence, buzz can't be maintained, and we're not sure it helps. Stop trying to make people talk about you all the time.

You don't want buzz.

You want referrals.

We get those by arming our customers with the right compelling reasons to do business with us, and wait for a triggering event – usually someone they know also needs what you sell and talks with them about that need.

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BUZZ

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Costly Mistake #5:

Failure to Influence

Business people largely understand advertising. When they pay for an ad they control exactly what's being said, exactly when it's said, and approximately to whom.

But once a story has left a business, the business owner has zero ownership of it. It's now a publicly traded story and will follow whatever path the conversation takes it. Unlike advertising, you can't set it and forget it.

If you want to influence the word of mouth conversation about your company, you have to join in the conversation.

Gently guide that conversation by:

1. Claiming your business on all of the review sites. Make sure your company's name, address, phone number, and hours of operation are consistent across all of them.
2. Responding to every review, with either a "thank you" or a "please contact me directly so that I can resolve your issue."
3. Asking your loyal customers to leave reviews. Ask them to be specific about their own experiences with your firm. "We love Judy and Al. They're great people" is the next best thing to useless, since it offers a shopper no information about what they can expect when they need your help. "Judy hired a cab and had my purchase delivered so that I could make my deadline" is specific enough to paint a picture of the way you do business.
4. Identifying your strongest promoters and take steps to make them feel included. Give them your direct number, ask their opinions, and treat them as the VIPs they are.

And, of course, make a real commitment to taking good care of customers and communicating with them regularly. Attention primes the conversation in your favor.

Costly Mistake #4: Unfocused Message

When people don't understand what you do, or they have trouble articulating it, you will generate less talk and fewer referrals. But when the service you offer is crystal clear in people's minds it's much easier for them to recommend you to their friends.

The biggest part of defining your image is finding the clarity in that image.

Most companies offer several services or a full catalog of goods for sale. But no one will be impressed with a laundry list of what you offer. No one will repeat it, either.

That clear, focused message that becomes easy for people to remember and repeat when triggered begins with a narrowed focus – choosing to super serve a smaller group of customers. You've probably heard that strategy referred to as "niche marketing." The narrower the niche, the more obvious the solution for people who need your help with that specific problem. And that leads to easier and greater numbers of referrals.

Examples from the restaurant industry.

Can you get a cheeseburger at *iHop*? Certainly you can. Have you ever seen an *iHop* ad featuring cheeseburgers? You have not. *iHop*'s ads focus on breakfast. After all, they are the house of pancakes.

Tony Roma's? They're known for ribs.

Marie Calendars is known for pies.

Red Lobster is known for seafood.

The Old Spaghetti Factory is known for spaghetti.

But here's the most interesting observation about the restaurants we've mentioned. Every one of them serves cheeseburgers, too.

Don't dilute that image by trying to include everything on your menu, or in your inventory.

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When people understand with crystal clarity what you offer they'll repeat your competitive advantage more confidently.

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Costly Mistake #3:

Missing the Short List

People don't become shoppers until they become aware of a problem, a pain, a discontent. And the first thing they do is look to see the range of solutions available to them.

Sam wakes with a backache. A cup of coffee and a hot shower later he's good to go. But three weeks later he recognizes that his backache has been there every morning. He starts paying attention to talk about his options.

- Chiropractic can treat morning backache.
- A new mattress can relieve morning backache.
- Shoe inserts to improve your posture may relieve morning backache.
- Doan's Pills can relieve morning backache.
- Surgery can treat persistent backache.

Consider the options

Sam chooses one as most likely to provide the relief he needs. Perhaps he's convinced it's time for a new mattress.



Should he select Serta, Sealy, Simmons, or go higher tech with Tempurpedic or Sleep Number?

Sam decides he wants a conventional mattress, and narrows down his possibilities to Serta, Sealy, and Simmons. This is Sam's short list. His next step will be to purchase one of them.

We can't expect other people to sell for us. Our goal is to get Sam into the store so we can handle the sale. Our word of mouth campaign doesn't necessarily need to talk about the construction of our mattresses – especially if they aren't the new high tech models. It doesn't need to focus on the manufacturer's status in the industry.

Our word of mouth campaign needs to focus on strong reasons Sam should consider buying from us.

What are the reasons Sam should visit our store?

- 1
- 2
- 3

They will be different for every store.

Word of mouth depends on people making remarks about what you do. Your job is to be remark - able. Do something unique or do it much better than your competitors do.

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Your job is to be remarkable.

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Costly Mistake #2:
Ignoring the Non-Essentials

Does your family dentist's waiting room have current magazines? Is there dust on his framed diploma? Does the florescent light in the hallway flicker? Is the rest room out of paper towels?

Do any of these things affect our confidence in the dentist?

Amazingly, yes. Yes they do.

Most of us don't have the slightest hint as to how to judge this dentist's skill. He uses drills and x-rays, but other dentists use drills and x-rays. He takes about the same amount of time as other dentists. He charges about the same as they do.

Since we don't know how to appraise his dentistry skills we judge him by the things we do know something about.

We know when it's time to replace florescent tubes or paper towels. We recognize that the room needs dusting. We can tell when the 1997 issues of People are the latest reading materials in the lobby.

Patients
confident in
their dentist
refer more.



These are critical non-essentials.

They have nothing to do with the practice of dentistry, but they are critical to patient assessment of the dentist's competence.

And that makes sense, doesn't it? Patients conclude a dentist who doesn't keep his practice equipped and stocked with the basics can't be a very good business person. By extension, he's probably not a very good dentist, either.

This can easily lead not only to reduced referrals, but also to negative word of mouth.

In my role as marketing consultant I use a proprietary list of over 100 points of customer contact, organized by our five senses. What contributes to issues customers will see, hear, or smell? What will they touch? What can they taste?

Clean return air vents are not essential to food service, but they are critical to the customer's assessment of food quality.

Vacuumed carpets and tidy shelves are not essential to fabric sales, but they are critical to customer assessment of fabric quality.

Every business needs a checklist of critical non-essentials. If you don't have a checklist, create one. Do it today. Use it today, and every day, so that customers don't have unvoiced doubts about recommending you.

Mistake

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In my role as marketing consultant I use a proprietary list of over 100 points of customer contact, organized by our five senses

Mistake

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BIGGEST Word of Mouth Mistake:

Having no Plan

Without a plan you're at the mercy of the economy, and of your competitors' actions.

Over the years dozens of business folk have said to marketing consultants and media salespeople, "Word of mouth is my best advertising." But, when asked about their word of mouth plan, they almost always come up blank.

Plan? You mean you don't just have to be nice to people and wait for them to talk about you?

No. You don't. You need to create positive talk about your company. You need to exploit it when it happens.

First, eliminate any skeletons from your own closet. Get ahead of any potentially bad public relations by breaking the news yourself. Do it in such a way that the positives of your story outweigh any negatives.

Word of mouth plan.

Word of mouth planning is not about control. It's about management. It's about preparation. It's about maintaining focus. It's about guidance.

Are people willing to stick their necks out and recommend your company to their friends? That's your objective. Take an inventory of your word of mouth assets, and write down the steps you can take to improve your operation.

This is far from an all-inclusive list, but be sure to include:

- Speak to a very specific problem facing your niche market. Create personas (artificial people) who represent your customers. Make these personas ridiculously specific. Use them to isolate a problem that strikes a chord with your customers and start talking about solving it. Put your personas and your problems / solutions in writing and make them part of your word of mouth plan.

- Create the checklist we discussed in Mistake #2. Make its use part of your plan.
- Know your industry, your services, and your products better than anyone, and make sure your staff knows this information, too. Choose the issues that are important to your industry's customers and take a position. Learn your competitors' issues and positions, too. Write all of this down and make it part of your plan.
- Brainstorm opportunities to piggy-back a story about your company on to a current news item. This one involves preparation and timing. A Dallas based insurance agent was ready when a celebrity was photographed driving with a small child in her lap. The agent called the local TV station with her story, and demonstrated the proper way to fasten a child in a car seat on the six o'clock news. Document these types of story ideas. Put them in your plan.
- Influencers are commonly early adopters and have large followings. As you build a fan base (either face-to-face or online) you'll start noticing who the influencers are among your customers. Introduce yourself to these people. Get them to like you. They will use their reach to help promote your business. Detail the steps you'll take to identify these customers, and what you'll do to befriend them. Put those details in your plan.

Of course, the success of any word-of-mouth plan will always depend on offering great products and exemplary service that people will get behind. And since there's no other business just like yours, there will be no other word of mouth plan like yours either.

Your word of mouth plan is a living document. Personally, I'd loose leaf any plan of this nature. Expect to make changes, adding ideas and occasionally removing those which have proven of minimal value.

My wish for you is that people occasionally talk about you, but also that they always refer their friends who are looking for what you sell.

Mistake

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Are people willing to stick their necks out and recommend your company to their friends? That's your objective.

7 Costly Mistakes That Kill Your Word of Mouth

WHY?

Why is a marketing consultant, one who makes his living guiding his clients' use of mass media and other forms of marketing, freely sharing information about free word of mouth with you?

Frankly, this report is another word of mouth tool. If you find the 7 Biggest Mistakes to be useful you'll probably recognize my name the next time you see one of my articles. I hope that you do, and that you'll read it.

Perhaps you'll subscribe to my free newsletter, The Fish Finder, at FishingforCustomers.com.

Maybe you'll attend a webinar I'm hosting or buy one of my books. You might come to see me speak, or take one of my online courses.

It's my hope you'll apply the techniques I teach, and see a substantial return on the time you invest. Of course, this will catch you up in an ever growing time suck. The faster your business grows from your own word of mouth efforts the more time it will require of you.

Ultimately, you'll find you can't do it all. But by then you'll be familiar with me and the quality of my advice.

This very situation is where clients come from.

My wish? That you become so good at developing positive word of mouth for your firm that you're inundated with new customers, and barely have time to manage the business.

Here's to your success!

Your Fishing for Customers Guide,

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CHUCK MCKAY

I get people to buy more of what you sell.

As a consultant my goal is to make marketing simple for my clients, ranging from South Carolina to California, from Canada to the Cayman Islands, New Zealand, and England.

Summary:

Skilled at helping professional practices and owner operated businesses uncover their unique stories, and tell those stories well.

Former Radio Personality and Newspaper Owner

Author of:

"Fishing for Customers and Reeling Them In,"

"The Net Effect - How to Pull In Netloads of New Retail Customers for FREE With Local Search Marketing"

Co-Author of:

"Mastering the World of Marketing"

"Just in Time Storytelling – a System for Spontaneous Referral"

Featured in:

The Washington Post, Jewelers Circular Keystone, and HQ Magazine.

I speak about marketing to companies and schools, at conventions, and at meetings of Chambers of Commerce and civic organizations.
Invite me to yours.



I've spent two decades attempting to develop the world's perfect barbecue sauce.

I'm getting close.

CLIENTS ARE SAYING

"Chuck's book, "Fishing for Customers" made me a fan. Then I hired him to come on-site and create a marketing plan for my company. The following year was our best ever with sales up nearly 20%. All this without increasing my marketing budget. I was spending enough money, just not in the right places with the right message. Chuck fixed that and I recommend him highly."

— **Steve Beckley**

Owner, Beckley Imports

"Chuck is a talented writer and researcher. I count on Chuck to take the basic concept and run with it. He not only delivers on-time, but he also takes ownership of the project and delivers a product that is excellent and above expectations."

— **Nancy Cline**

Director of Marketing, Get Motivated Seminars

"I've used Chuck's consulting services to focus and articulate my message. He keeps asking "Why?" and "What makes you believe that?" and my personal favorite, "Why would anyone care?" Much as if he were peeling an onion, he uncovers layer underneath layer, until he finally reaches the core of the issue and suddenly the next steps are obvious. Chuck's strength as a consultant is his ability to recognize when we don't yet have the answers. He always knows the questions to ask to get to those answers."

— **Chip Hall**

Owner, Congaree Media

“Chuck’s collaborative process works wonderfully well. He is able to get a solid understanding of the topic and project at hand, and develop excellent copy. He is totally committed to satisfaction, and doesn’t stop until it is exactly what I want. I plan to work with Chuck for as long as he is willing.”

— Cale Bergh

President, Alpha Channel Group

“Chuck’s extensive knowledge of marketing isn’t what makes him such a successful business consultant. It’s that he listens, and asks questions. Lots of questions. He digs until he knows exactly who the customers are and what motivates them. Then he crafts a strategy to attract more customers just like them. He says it’s that simple. In the two decades I’ve been privileged to watch Chuck work his magic, I’ve never seen him miss the target.”

— Steve Varholy

President and General Manager, Gamecock Alumni Broadcasters, Ltd.

“Chuck calls it Fishing for Customers. I’ve spent a lot of money and bought a lot of bait and didn’t have much to show for it. When I started advertising the way Chuck said to do it, people walked in with their wallets open and said ‘Show me what you’re talking about.’ My business increased over fifty percent when I started following Chuck’s advice.”

— Mike Wilson

General Manager, The Vacuum Center
