

Better Business Focus

Expert Inspiration for a Better Business

January 2011

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Better Business Focus is the essential key for business owners and managers. It achieves that by focusing on the way in which successful businesses compete and manage their organisations.

It focuses on how people are recruited, coached and developed; on how marketing and selling is undertaken in professional markets as well as in markets with intense competition; on how technology and the Internet is reshaping the face of domestic and home business; and on how people are being equipped with new skills and techniques. In short, it offers expert inspiration for a better business.



How self esteem can affect your success

By Sally Asling

Sally Asling, inspirational author, speaker, mumpreneur and voice for young women tells of how self esteem plays a huge part in women's lives and their chances of success and how their teen experiences can contribute to their lack of self esteem.

Since launching my own business, writing a book and breaking away from the corporate world, I have been actively promoting women in business and writing about how women can "have it all" in life, their career, their family, their dreams, by doing things on their own terms. The hurdle most women have? It's a poor sense of self esteem. When we discuss it, it's something that's plagued them all their life.

When I was a teen, I had a loving family and came from a good background with a good education. However, background and education disappear when bowing into peer pressure. My first sexual experience, in those critical teen years was a drunken fumble that turned into a sexual encounter I had anticipated, but not understood. Far too late the word "no" was futile and unbelievable. Later to only be called names by those in my peer group my self esteem fell into tatters; I became anorexic, which in itself is a mind altering disease that tears your confidence to shreds in one way or another.

I went through university then into the corporate business world, met a great man and got married and now have a family, however the search to find that inner self confidence and self esteem took almost a decade to repair and heal itself.

People confuse quite easily external confidence to inner self esteem. Having great self esteem and confidence doesn't mean you have the loudest voice in the room. Real self esteem is how you feel about yourself, about liking yourself and being confident about who you are, and radiating this positivity from within.

But where do we get that from? How or when is it taught? If we have it, what happens when a life changing event takes the wind out of our sails and pulls the rug from under us? How do we build it back up?

It is a fact that for a child to develop positive self esteem they need to feel appreciated loved and wanted, to have a sense of achievement and be encouraged to make choices of which they are supported within. This is the same for adults regaining self esteem. A positive self esteem is pivotal to a positive mental attitude towards life. Self esteem affects how you think, how you act and how you relate to other people; it also has a direct impact on your happiness and wellbeing. Without a positive self esteem the road to success in all aspects of life will be hindered.

In 2009 I met a girl called Sarah whose story is told in my book ***Appreciating Angels: Sarah's Story***. Sarah was viciously attacked after being a victim of peer pressure and that evening alone left her with no self esteem. I could relate to this on a much lesser scale; however Sarah's story demonstrates how poor self esteem led Sarah through eating disorders, promiscuous behavior and resulted in self harming and suicide attempts.

A year after it was written I created a series of workshops to accompany the book dealing with self esteem and exploring the issues that are raised. In addition I am launching a national campaign 'EsteenN' to make PSHE education in schools compulsory, and that PSHE should make one if its focuses on self esteem.

With a positive self esteem and PSHE our teens should be shown how to differentiate between what is "real" and what is not. Teens learn about sex mostly from their peers and learn from magazines from as young as 13 years old. Good PSHE education should be building self esteem, discussing Sex Education as an emotional journey and not just as biology. STD's and peer pressure should be equally accessible along with open discussions on self image separating what we see in the media and what is real, so that our Teens have a clear sense of self when dealing with events in the real world.

So what a breakthrough it will be to take active steps in getting our schools to start installing a positive self esteem into our youth today. A positive self esteem that will give them the confidence to handle themselves with the respect they truly deserve.

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About the author:

Sally Asling is an inspiring mumpreneur, author, speaker and founder of teen awareness campaign EsteenN.



Having graduated with an Honours degree in Drama and Combined Studies, Sally spent several years working in corporate life before deciding to set up her own business and create a better work/life balance for her family.

www.appreciatingangels.co.uk

Best Business Advice* Imparting confidence

Sir Anthony Parsons was one of the great British Ambassadors to the United Nations. As a callow young diplomat newly appointed to his staff, I expected him to impress his authority and instructions on me at our introductory meeting.

Instead, he said: "You must be reasonably intelligent if they sent you to work with me. So go off and do your job and come back to me if you need advice".

I left his office with a new confidence in myself, and a new determination not to let him down – and like to think that, as a result of this experience of mine, a few others have left my office with the same.

Richard Fursland was a diplomat, a New York-based PR consultant, and is now Chief Executive of British American Business.

*Taken from Best Business Advice.

A book which includes 75 examples of memorable business advice recounted by leading practitioners in the UK public relations industry.

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Tweak your system to improve service

By Ron Kaufman

The Disneyland Hotel recently tarnished Mickey's reputation with an influential customer from Seattle. Mark stayed at a hotel inside the park with his family for three days. He attended a legal seminar while his family enjoyed Disney rides, ate Disney meals and spent at Disney plenty! His seminar ended at noon on the third day, but hotel checkout was 11:00 a.m.

On the second night Mark asked for a late check-out until 1:00 or 2:00 p.m. the following day. Staff at the front desk refused to give him an answer and failed to improve customer experience. They said it was too late and he would have to ask again at 7:00 a.m.

Mark was in the lobby promptly at 7:00 a.m. But when he asked for a short check-out extension, the front office manager flatly refused and failed to improve customer experience. He said, "If I give you a late check out, others will want one, too."

Mark appealed for just two hours to complete his seminar and get his family with small children safely packed and out of the room. The manager replied, "If you leave late, you'll mess up the schedule for our cleaners."

Ouch! So much for customer service when leaving the House of the Mouse. Too bad the front office manager didn't know that last impressions are lasting impressions and that failing to improve customer experience can cost more in the long run.

In contrast...

Raffles Hotel now has a policy of flexible check-in and check-out so their valued guests may enjoy a full 24-hour stay, no matter what time they check in, or out. Now that's convenient. That's hospitality. That's impeccable value and

does much to improve customer experience.

"Raffles 24" is now available in all Raffles hotels and resorts. No wonder they are among the fastest-growing and most-admired brands in the world.

Note: Implementing this policy requires more communication between various teams and departments. But what are your staff and systems really for? Scheduling cleaners or taking care of customers?

Key learning point to improve customer experience

The purpose of your staff and system is to serve your customers better. When customers make requests outside normal procedures, your job is to tweak the system, not the customer to improve customer experience.

Action steps to improve customer experience

When customers ask for service outside your normal procedures, you have a choice: either teach your customers to follow procedures (through advance advice and information) or adapt your procedures to please your customers (through innovation and continuous improvement). To improve customer experience it often pays to tweak the system.

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About the author:

Ron Kaufman is the world's leading educator and motivator for upgrading customer service and uplifting service culture. He is author of the bestselling "UP Your Service!" books and founder of UP Your Service! College. To enjoy more customer service training and service culture articles, visit UpYourService.com.



The marketing secret for 2011

By John Stanley

Marketing has gone through a revolution over the last few years and months. It seems like every month a new idea hits the market place. Gone are the days when it was as simple as writing a newspaper advert and the job was done. The retailer of today has to consider the social media, conventional promotions, word of mouth marketing, loyalty schemes and a host of other ideas to develop their business.

All these new ways of developing and growing your business have been proven to work by retailers and small business, but the real challenge is implementation in your own business.

The down turn and uncertainty in the market place due to the financial meltdown in 2008 has resulted in most small businesses considering downsizing and either shedding staff or not recruiting more staff.

In 2010 many economies around the world are still "soft" with governments bringing in stricter governing regulations and as a result retailers are still nervous about growth in the economy. This really came home to me when I had a conversation with my local travel agent. We were having a conversation about marketing and she mentioned that the challenge was not developing new ideas, but having the time to implement those ideas. She was confident that if she had the time she could develop her business and spread

the message about how good her service was helping her customers.

She is aware of the marketing secret for 2011...it is time. Those businesses that can find time to develop their marketing strategy are those that will prosper in 2011.

I was recently working with a client and his reaction was very similar. His comment was "I am too busy to do marketing, I need all my time to just keep the business afloat, when the business is going well I will give myself more time to do the marketing".

The extra pressure that retailers and small business are feeling at present is resulting in less people doing more work and as a result they are not having time to develop their business. This strategy will work in the short term, but in the long term it will result in a reduction in customers as other businesses gear up to develop their marketing strategies and attract customers away from your business.

Time savers

The key to developing your business in the next few months is going back to the basics of management and looking at how you can use time more effectively to allow you and your team to develop marketing strategies for the business in 2011.

My top 7 tips as follows

1. Write down your goals as far as marketing is concerned. What do you want to achieve

and by when. I think the key is to write them down rather than just think about them and to put a date to the time you will have achieved these goals.

2. When travelling give yourself a target to achieve. I am a typical "Road Warrior" and use the time at airports and on flights to achieve work goals, you may not be an air traveller, but travel time can still be a valuable time to catch up and research what marketing you need to develop.

3. Do not procrastinate. Set a deadline, write it down and do it. Tell work colleagues and family members what you are doing so they can help you develop your goals.

4. Balance your time between traditional marketing and social media marketing. It is easy to get engrossed in one at the expense of the other. You will need both techniques in your tool kit for 2011.

5. Is there something that you can delegate to allow you to invest more time in the things that will make a difference in your business? For some of us it may be worth delegating the marketing, for others it may mean delegating other areas of work.

6. Measure the success of marketing. Measure how you are achieving more customers and the increase in the average

sale per customer. This will give you the motivation and confidence to develop your marketing skills.

7. Reward yourself when you have achieved your goals in marketing.

I am confident that 2011 will result in more unique marketing ideas being presented to all of us and it will be easy to feel swamped by all these ideas. My advice is to keep it as simple as you can, set some goals and make sure you achieve them.

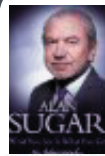
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About the author:

John Stanley (CSP) is one of the top 10% of speakers in the world today, an acclaimed retail consultant and WA Entrepreneur of the Year 2009. The author of several marketing, customer service and retail books including the best seller "Just About Everything a Retail Manager Needs to Know", his company is WA Small Business Champion 2009 – Educational Services and WA Small Business of the Year 2010 for Export Services. John was voted one of the "Power 100" in 2010 by the UK Horticultural Press. Visit his website www.johnstanley.com.au or e-mail linda@johnstanley.com.au to see how he can help you grow your business

“The difference between perseverance and obstinacy is that one often comes with a strong will and the other from a strong won't.”
Henry Ward Beecher

Bestsellers



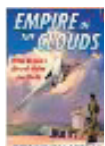
- 1 What You See is What You Get**
(Hardback) By Alan Sugar
Macmillan (30 Sep 2010)
Price: £17.00



- 2 Memoirs of a Fruitcake**
(Hardback) By Chris Evans
HarperCollins; First Edition edition (14 Oct 2010)
Price: £14.00



- 3 The Secret**
(Hardback) By Rhonda Byrne
Simon & Schuster Ltd (4 Dec 2006)
Price: £8.44



- 4 Empire of the Clouds: When Britain's Aircraft Ruled the World**
(Paperback) By James Hamilton-Paterson
Faber and Faber (7 Oct 2010)
Price: £14.00



- 5 Beyond the Crash: Overcoming the First Crisis of Globalisation**
(Hardback) By Gordon Brown
Simon & Schuster Ltd (7 Dec 2010)
Price: £14.00



BOOK OF THE MONTH

More With Less

The new performance challenges for the UK public sector (2011 and beyond)

By Bernard Marr and James Creelman

Published by Palgrave Macmillan

Price £25.00 plus P&P

Public sector organisations in the UK are presented with the most demanding performance challenges in living memory.

The recent comprehensive spending review reflected the poor state of the public finances and therefore imposed an era of financial cuts and constraints onto public sector organisations.

"One day a week is wasted by mindlessly collecting and reporting data that is never or rarely used. The core focus of most public sector organisations going forward is to improve (or at least maintain) performance levels while substantially reducing costs."

To buy the book of the month online from the Better Business Focus bookshop for just £25.00 plus P&P, or for further information please call: (01730) 233 870 and quote BBF Bookshop. Source: <http://www.global-investor.com/bbf>



Twitter users get busy with your brand

By Julian Hall

Still the argument exists why businesses should bother being on Twitter. Julian Hall CEO of Pure Online Genius tells how tweeting good quality, value-added content can make a huge impact on whether people get busy with your brand or your competitors.

royalty free content out there. But what does that say about you and your brand...not much really.

In today's competitive marketplace people want the best in their niche and are prepared to talk about it. Share it with their peers and become evangelists to products or services they've had good experiences with.

Twitter is a rich source of instant information. Stay updated. Keep others updated. The sweetheart of the social media space, Twitter has grown in popularity from housewife to celebrity at a rapid pace. Brought to fame by names such as Stephen Fry, Barack Obama, Ashton Kutcher and Oprah Winfrey, experts clamoured through the platform to find out how to leverage this real time engine for business use. Did they find it? Certainly! The successes of big names such as Dell netting \$3M in two years down to local bakeries have presented a compelling argument for being involved in the 140 character network.

Profile – Well, unlike the members of its social peer group, Twitter doesn't give you much but enough to state your name, location, website, picture and 160 character bio (why not 140 chars?). Your bio stands out so ensure that this is a little more interesting than run of the mill or risk being "passed over"

Wallpaper - It didn't take Twitter members too long to realise that by creatively designing your own wallpaper that you can add sufficient branding and additional

information to subsidise the lack of options on your profile. Do use this to your advantage and include your contact details, strap-line, discount codes, featured promotions etc.

Tweets - These are the famed 140 character messages that you're allowed create and keep the world informed of what you're up to. Framed in a "What's happening?" box you share your thoughts, offers, videos, articles, blog posts, loves, hates - you name it. These micro-blogs are to be interesting enough to entice your community peers into following you, republishing your tweets (called retweeting) or DM (direct messaging) you to build up a dialogue.

Search - Twitter has been dubbed a real-time search engine where you're able to punch in a search term and have returned relevant tweets that in many cases are updating every few seconds if not quicker. It's indeed amazing to watch this feed come, in especially if it's about a product or service your company offers. It gives you insight into what customers are saying about you, the market or even about what they want there and then. At which point you can be there to respond with recommendations or indeed your own offering to satisfy their need.

Ah the summits of old that used to wield their mighty marketing plans and advertising campaigns from ivory towers. I mean, if we didn't like something, a product, service, whatever – we we're

Taking a look at the ExactTarget table above reinforces what many marketers have thought for a long time. Twitter users get busy not just on Twitter, but on forums, video sites, articles, wikis, blogs, photo sharing and news websites.

So given that fact, what are they getting busy with? Content of course! This begs the question however, who's providing that content. Is it you or your competition?

The caveat here though is that the content needs to be good quality, value added content. Too many times I hear business people suggesting that they'll just use

Monthly Online Social Activities, April 2010
% of US daily Twitter users vs. general internet users

	Twitter users	General internet users
Comment on photos or videos	80%	38%
Upload photos	76%	27%
Post to forums	75%	25%
Blog	72%	14%
Comment on blogs	70%	23%
Post ratings and reviews	61%	20%
Comment on news	61%	15%
Update own site	59%	13%
Upload articles	56%	10%
Upload video	53%	10%
Upload audio	50%	12%
Post to wikis	50%	7%
Sell online	49%	14%
Post coupons	48%	10%

Source: ExactTarget, "Subscribers Fans and Followers: Twitter X-Factors," Aug 3, 2010

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www.eMarketer.com

told 'write into our complaints department' (like that was going to fix anything). Nowadays good ole British Telecom have twitter.com/btcare, a bold move methinks, one to be applauded.

But be careful, when a UK based home furnishings brand decided to jump on the Twitter bandwagon using hash tags (which are simply a way for people to search for tweets that have a common topic. For example, if you search on #LOST or #Lost or #lost, because it's not case-sensitive, you'll get a list of tweets related to the TV show. What you won't get are tweets that say "I lost my wallet yesterday" because "lost" isn't preceded by the hash tag.) Now this brand spotted what they thought would be a great way of appearing in popular search – by adding #hashtags at the beginning of their Tweets...that had absolutely nothing to do with them! Even inserting keywords linked to the current state of unrest in the middle east?

What was their response when they were found out? (Set your face to shock) They deleted the offending Tweets and released a statement blaming an intern a few days later. Poor intern...Ouch.

"The hashtags were uploaded without authorisation by an overenthusiastic intern who did not fully understand the ramifications of his actions" a spokesman said.

A good example of a small business doing very well on Twitter is [Woot.com](https://www.woot.com). They are known to have one of the 100 most-followed accounts on Twitter, with over 1.6M followers. Woot offers one product per day until its stock of that item is sold out or the product is replaced at midnight.

Think about how you can tweak your business model to appeal to the fast moving, friendly nature of social media.

Useful Twitter tools include:
Schedule your tweets in advance and get some great analytics:

[Ping.fm](https://ping.fm)
[Hootsuite.com](https://hootsuite.com)
[Hellotxt.com](https://hellotxt.com)

Control your tweets from your desktop:

[Seismic.com](https://seismic.com)
[DigiTweet](https://digiTweet.com)
[Twhirl.com](https://twhirl.com)
[Tweetdeck.com](https://tweetdeck.com)

Manage your Twitter contacts:

[ReFollow.com](https://refollow.com)
[Buzzom.com](https://buzzom.com)
[Twerpscan.com](https://twerpscan.com)
[TwitterCounter.com](https://twittercounter.com)
[Tweepi.com](https://tweepi.com)
[Twubble.com](https://twubble.com)

Collaborative or Group Tweeting:

[MediaFunnel.com](https://mediafunnel.com)
[TweetGuru](https://tweetguru.com)
[SplitTweet.com](https://splittweet.com)
[GroupTweet.com](https://grouptweet.com)
[Cotweet.com](https://cotweet.com)

Twitter search tools:

[Search.Twitter.com](https://search.twitter.com)
[Twazzup.com](https://twazzup.com)
[Twellow.com](https://twellow.com)
[Tweefind.com](https://tweefind.com)
[WeFollow.com](https://wefollow.com)
[TwitterSearch.com](https://twittersearch.com)
[Twitterholic.com](https://twitterholic.com)
[TwitterSearch.flaptor.com](https://twittersearch.flaptor.com)

Twitter Backgrounds:

[FreeTwitterDesigner.com](https://freetwitterdesigner.com)
[Twtbg.me](https://twtbg.me)
[Twitlay.com](https://twitlay.com)
[Twiback.com](https://twiback.com)
[CustomTweets.com](https://customtweets.com)

Twitter Statistics:

[TweetStats.com](https://tweetstats.com)
[TwitterGrader.com](https://twittergrader.com)
[TwitterRank.com](https://twitterrank.com)
[TwitterRatio.com](https://twitterratio.com)
[TweetValue.com](https://tweetvalue.com)

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About the author:

Julian Hall is the director and co-founder of online consultancy Pure Online Genius Ltd ([PureOnlineGenius.com](https://pureonlinegenius.com)) and community news portal You Report

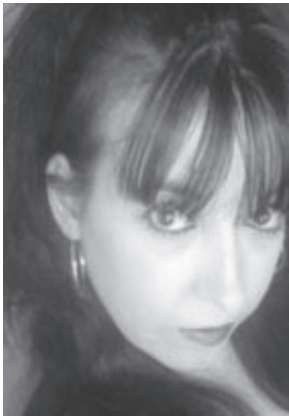
TV Ltd ([YouReportTV.com](https://youreporttv.com)). Prior to his directorships he has consulted in the City of London & Canary Wharf for major financial corporations, such as Morgan Stanley, Société Générale, Schroders, Schlumberger Sema, Siemens & General Electric.

For more information please visit:
www.pureonlinegenius.com

Don't worry if you don't know what the word **Credit default swap** mean, here's an explanation:

This is a specific kind of counterparty agreement allowing the transfer of third party credit risk from one party to the other. One party in the swap is a lender and faces credit risk from a third party, and the counterparty in the credit default swap agrees to insure this risk in exchange of regular periodic payments (essentially an insurance premium). If the third party defaults, the party providing insurance will have to purchase from the insured party the defaulted asset. In turn, the insurer pays the insured the remaining interest on the debt, as well as the principal. The buyer of a credit swap receives credit protection, whereas the seller of the swap guarantees the credit worthiness of the product. By doing this, the risk of default is transferred from the holder of the fixed income security to the seller of the swap. Unlike insurance, however, CDSs are unregulated. This means that, when the bond defaults, there is no regulator to make sure the seller of the CDS actually has the money to pay the holder.

Source: Bizezia's Glossary of Financial Investment and Business Terms and Ratios available through Bizezia's Online Business Library the UK's leading online business library with 750+ publications.



7 ways to get bloggers to review your products or services

By Nikki Pilkington

As a blogger with a good amount of followers I often get approached by people to review their products or services. I have no problems doing reviews, whether it be for books, products or services – but I want to share with you a few of the rules *I* think are important when pitching your products to bloggers in order to get reviews.

1. Make sure it's relevant

This is obvious to a lot of people, but not so obvious to so many more! Think about it; I'm a Mum, I work in Internet marketing and you could probably pick up from my various social media profiles that I love my Wii Fit, am trying to lose weight, live in France and love movies and jewellery (oh and handbags – I'm a woman after all!)

Therefore I'm happy to review baby stuff, marketing books, products and services, stuff to do with losing weight or keeping fit and products or services to do with films, and have done across various blogs and review sites (some as me, some anonymously as requested).

In my business life I promote websites in various ways – so ebooks and services related to marketing and online marketing are always good, online courses and training that I can recommend even better.

The PR Company that approached me to review a football DVD could easily have found out I don't like sport. The person who approached me to review his series of ebooks on the Law of

Attraction should have known it doesn't fit in with what I do.

I'm not saying that you have to know the ins and outs of the bloggers you're asking to review things, but it does help to do a little research. If your product isn't relevant, then even if the blogger does agree to review it, it's probably pretty pointless as the people reading their blog probably won't be interested too.

2. Ask nicely

This may seem obvious, but I get a lot of pitches telling me how good it would be for me if I review this or that product. Let's be honest here, if a blogger reviews your product, they are doing you a favour. Yes, they get a free product or service, but at the end of the day, the blogger is the one sharing details of your company with his/her audience – which could be considerably large. A personal review from someone a person 'follows' will often hold more sway than any PR piece.

Ask nicely, and don't badger if the person doesn't get back to you within an hour.

3. Establish where your blogger is based

If your product is physical, this could be quite important. I'm based in France, a fact that I don't hide, and is easily found out by looking at my website and most of my social media profiles. Yet I get asked quite frequently to review something physical and when I mention I am in France, the PR company (it's usually a PR company, sorry!) suddenly realises

that having to send this item to France is a bit of a hassle and perhaps they'll not bother.

So, be aware of costs if you have to ship something to someone.

4. Accept that a review can be good or bad

This is the one that seems the hardest to get across. See, you're not 'paying' (as some people see it when giving a product or service for review) for a good review, you're offering your product or service in the hope that you'll get a good review.

In order to remain true to their followers, most bloggers will give an honest review of what you have sent to them – this doesn't always mean glowing praise. Accept that a blogger will flag up the good and the bad of your product. Personally if a product is really bad then I will let the person know and ask them if they would rather I don't review it – other bloggers would print the bad review as that is their agreement with you – an honest review.

5. Realise that full disclosure must be given

FTC guidelines for bloggers state that full disclosure should be given for gifts or items received for review. Most bloggers will abide by this and you should expect that they will say in their blog post that you gave them the product or service, for free, to review.

They're not going to pretend it's a service they've bought and are

just sharing with their readers, or that this fab product was a gift from a friend – the majority of bloggers will either open or close their blog with the disclosure that they were given the item in return for a review. Don't insult them by asking them to hide this fact.

6. Agree the rules

If you want a review of a specific length, or a specific part or function of your item to be talked about, agree this in advance with your bloggers. It's not the start of a beautiful friendship if your blogger lovingly crafts a 1000 word review and all you wanted was 400 words, or reviews your service in general but you wanted them to focus on a specific part.

Also, agree whether you get to approve the review before it goes live – although you won't be able to change it, there may be some things that the blogger hasn't understood, and you could straighten them out. And of course if it's a bad review you could agree in advance that you get approval and can ditch it if it's negative.

7. Send the product in good time (and, send the product)

I get asked to review a fair amount of baby stuff for various sites, but as well as that, I obviously buy a fair amount of baby stuff for Baby O. In the case of actual items that I would have bought anyway, there's nothing more annoying than being asked to review something, waiting for it to arrive, and... nothing. I've also been asked to review cameras, business card scanners (yeah, that was a while ago), graphics tablets, gardening stuff, some fitflops, and jewellery, all of which I was happy to review on various blogs, but never turned up. It's not the blogger's job to chase you for the item – if you change your mind, or can't be bothered, be polite and let them know.

Incidentally this doesn't just go for physical products; I've also been offered ebooks, subscription services, marketing services and more 'non-physical' products /

services that haven't materialised. I'm not moaning, because if they don't get to me I don't have to review them, but it is something to be aware of.

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About the author:

Whether you're a PR company looking for 'blogger outreach' for your clients, or a company hoping to get reviews from bloggers, and whether it is a product or a service, the above points should help you.

Nikki Pilkington is an internet and social media marketing expert and founder of Nikkipilkington.com. Her company is renowned across Europe for its team of innovative and experienced team. Nikki since starting her company has worked with the likes of The Boss Corporation, Interactive Ideas Ltd and The Savvy Club. For more information please visit: www.nikkipilkington.com

“We bet on people, not strategies. The world changes so fast, it's difficult to see around corners. Things don't always work. And when they don't work, what you can fall back on is talent.”

Larry Bossidy, CEO
Allied Signal

Personal computer timeline

1975: Microsoft founded by Bill Gates and Paul Allen, who offer BASIC computer language for the now-extinct Altair computer.

1976: Apple founded by Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak. They begin selling Apple I computer boards.

1981: IBM introduces the \$1,500 IBM PC; Microsoft DOS available as an option.

1984: Apple introduces Apple Macintosh, with “windowing” interface.

1985: Microsoft ships Windows 1.0

1992: Microsoft ships Windows 3.1.

1993: Total of 3 million people in the US connected to the net.

1995: Microsoft ships Windows 95, which sells 1m copies in four days.

1997: 100 million people worldwide connected to the net.

1998: Microsoft becomes world's most valuable company, by market capitalisation

1999: Microsoft found guilty of antitrust behaviour over the browser market

2001: Microsoft introduces Tablet PC format. It doesn't sell. It introduces Windows XP, which sells by the million.

2001: Number of PCs sold between 1981 and 2000 totals 835m.

2003: 1bn PCs shipped

2004: Microsoft found guilty of monopoly behaviour by European Commission.

2006: Intel estimates 1bn PCs connected to the net worldwide.

2009: PC sales fall for the first time since 2001.

2010: January – Apple launches iPad. May – overtakes Microsoft in market capitalisation.

Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2010/nov/29/apple-ipad-cannibalising-pc-sales>



Are you LinkedIn? Part Two

By David Batup

In part two, I will explore how to use LinkedIn effectively within the sales process; in market research and prospecting for new opportunities, for identifying relationships that can help influence and close, and for building partnerships and strategic relationships.

Part one of my LinkedIn article (published in Better Business Focus magazine - November 2010) covered 'brand me' - how to effectively develop and manage your personal on-line presence through your LinkedIn profile.

Since the publication of part one, LinkedIn has grown by another 5 million users and continues to attract over 1 million new users per month. In this article I'll look at how LinkedIn can support prospecting, selling and account management. In this article I am using facilities which are not available to the basic free membership. I upgraded a long time ago to the next level up from the free, but basic, version and the difference, from a sales perspective, is outstanding. Click on "Upgrade my account" to find out more and for details of costs.

The old adage of "if you're not talking to your customers, someone else is" is similar to the one I'd use for LinkedIn - "if you're not using LinkedIn for competitive advantage, then the chances are that your competitors will be". Sooner rather than later you'll feel the pain, either in terms of taking longer to discover key facts or by being out manoeuvred.

The disappointing fact is that not too many people are that good at driving competitive advantage

through LinkedIn. Those who are would prefer that you didn't read this article, as it is fairly easy to establish an approach that makes the best use of LinkedIn for you and the markets you sell into.

Like everything else, LinkedIn is a classic example of "you get out what you put in". Invest a little time and effort and the rewards are there to be taken. The good news is this only has to be 15 to 20 minutes, three times a week. Personally, I spend 15 minutes a day and have got into a little routine that I explain towards the end of this article.

Throughout this article I'll use a fictional company 'HRS' that markets HR solutions, focused on 'Employee Engagement', to small and medium sized companies, and a sales executive I'll call Anna. Let's assume Anna has a profile that matches her professionalism, the company she works for (see LinkedIn part one article) and she is in the camp of working smarter to maintain her successful track record.

So let's make a start on using LinkedIn to raise your company presence before looking at supporting the sales process. From a company perspective this is important as there are a number of opportunities to promote and market what you do as well as to support the all important sales function. Typically this would be the responsibility of your marketing team, but it might be down to you. The basics for your company presence should include the following:

Company profile - as a minimum

set this up with the company basics but better to use it as an opportunity to help people find you by including the key words e.g. 'HR Software', that describe what you do.

Links to company web site - In everyone's profile there is the ability to add two web links, one of these should be the company web site e.g. 'HRS'. The other could be to a subject expert blog from within your company, for example.

Slide share - Use this to post presentations that you have given and let everyone know where they are. It will take people to your profile and on to the company profile. Others will find the presentation, so be sure to add your contact details in the footer. You could start to be seen as a subject expert.

Groups - I discussed groups in part one. By way of a reminder, groups are great; do join groups and respond to questions where you can add value. Again there is a good chance you will be associated with the subject area and get noticed.

Blog - subject experts in the company should be blogging. If this is not the case then encourage those who are experts. Everyone loves an expert and if you can point a prospect to one of your company's subject blogs then it helps to position the company as thought leaders.

Now you and your company profile has been built up on LinkedIn, what about closing some business? To provide some sales

focus I have structured this next section into three high level sales phases:

1. Prospecting to leads to opportunities
2. Developing opportunities into contracts, then customers
3. Building customers into key accounts

1. Prospecting to leads to opportunities

The help LinkedIn can offer at this stage is very strong. Who to approach, research and referrals are just three aspects that can help at this stage. Being able to use the advanced search facility that comes with the premium level of membership is invaluable. Especially in terms of your ability to find key contacts and to understand a bit about them before you call or meet them. Here is how LinkedIn can make a significant difference during this stage.

Finding a contact

Remember Anna at HRS? She would like to find all the HR Directors working for companies within 100 miles of Reading where she is based. Using the advanced search function with these criteria she found 2,721 individuals. HRS is particularly strong in the IT and Telecoms market sectors so she fine tunes the search for these market sectors and finds 252. Looking through the search results the majority of the individuals have more than enough information on their profile to turn a cold call into a warm call or approach. Anna can now cherry pick through this list and at the same time add details to her own contact data base for future use.

Approaching LinkedIn members

Once you have identified the individual you would like to contact, look at their profile for mutual contacts; people in your network who know the individual. You can ask your contact to give you a warm introduction or at least some background information. LinkedIn 'Inmails' are

great as they imply a level of trust and have a far higher response rate than an e-mail.

With any approach, it is good if you can help in some way. From this perspective the 'questions and answers' facility is a strong connector. Let's just say Anna has seen a question posted to which she has good insights. The subject area is 'Employee Engagement' and she contributes to the answers. Then she has created what I would call a 'soft connection' that can be followed up later with any of the individuals who have responded.

Developing a lead into an opportunity

Several of the HR Directors have responded to Anna's Inmail and have agreed to a short initial meeting. It's reasonable to assume that they have visited her profile and looked at the profile of HRS. Anna can check this through "Who's viewed my profile" on her home page. Anna can prepare for her meeting using the profile of the individual she is meeting to:

Find mutual contacts that could provide a talking point or referral

Understand the background of the individual

See who has given them a reference for the work they have done and why

See who else works in the company that could be useful or that you have a connection to.

All of this is valuable information and has taken Anna very little time to assemble. However there is a slight down side in that the person Anna is meeting knows this and would expect Anna to have done this work and more, if she doesn't then this will be seen as negative.

2. Developing opportunities into contracts, then customers

All through this phase LinkedIn

provides opportunities to support the sale. The obvious ones, such as researching all of the customer's buying team, and making it very easy for them to see your background and experience are supplemented by functionality that allow you to stay top-of-mind and demonstrate value. The examples I use below assume a co-ordinated campaign that could be targeted on one or more companies in the same target group. In Anna's case IT and Telecoms companies with between 200 and 500 employees.

Keeping tabs on your top opportunities

"Follow" is a relatively new function in LinkedIn but during a sales campaign it can give you up to the minute information about a specific company or individuals.

In Anna's case she has five companies that have progressed to the opportunity stage and she has used the 'follow' function to receive updates as and when they occur on LinkedIn. This could be anything from a new hire joining to an update or a new post in. To use this, lookup the company or individual and click on follow. You then have the option to configure the type and frequency of the updates. For Anna this is another useful way of staying in touch with what is happening in the prospects she is chasing.

Staying in the forefront of your prospect's mind

It's useful to have another way of being in your prospects mind to supplement the calls and contacts you make. One way of doing this is to use a collection of functions within LinkedIn, I suggest these could be useful:

Share – "Share an update" can be used to share relevant content through a link to a document, slide set or url. The function gives you the opportunity to make this available to everyone or just to your network. In Anna's case she posts a slide set on the business

benefits of Employee Engagement and uses the “share” function to ensure a wide distribution.

Groups – these have been mentioned above but also play a role in keeping you visible. Anna is a member of four Employee Engagement groups (there are around 100 related groups on LinkedIn) one of which is Employee Engagement UK and she knows that three of the four HR Directors she is selling to are also members of this group. Anna’s contribution to these groups will be noticed as the HR Directors are notified of any group activity. There is a slight health warning here; if Anna’s contribution is not seen as helpful then it could reflect badly. Otherwise this is a powerful way to remain visible in a positive way.

Status – this is the same function as “share an update” but can be used very effectively to post information that your connections would find useful or interesting. Your status updates can be linked to your twitter account but please be very careful in doing this if you use your twitter account for social updates, see my LinkedIn Part1 article ([link here](#)). Anna uses the status box to highlight interesting aspects of what she is doing, details of new wins and events her company are running. Again it’s good if these posts add value to the community at which they are targeted.

Demonstrating value at the closing stages

Always a difficult stage and one where reassurance that you are the right company to go with is sought by the buying team. At the end of the day the decision will be made as much on emotion as it is on fact.

Recommendations – these are particularly powerful if they come from previous customers and solution partners and position you as an individual in a good light. Having the same strength of recommendations on the profiles of the key members of the solution delivery team is equally beneficial. The delivery team is often overlooked in terms of closing, but at this stage the customer is

looking hard and beyond the words that have been spoken to establish “can you really deliver the promised benefits”.

Reinforcing capability
– Status updates on successful implementations and customer quotes linked with a well timed circulation of a white paper will help to confirm a strong track record.

Staying ahead of the market
– market understanding and leadership can be assisted by the judicious use of the LinkedIn Polls. This is a free survey tool and allows you to test market thinking and understanding. The secret of poll success is to make the poll easy to understand and topical in the context of your market focus. The results can then also be fed back through LinkedIn “Share” function with, maybe, a link to a short presentation on your SlideShare application.

3. Building customers into key accounts

Not all customers will become Key Accounts but the process of developing or growing Key Accounts can be helped through LinkedIn. The approach now is a cocktail of the above mixed specifically for each Key Account. As minimum I suggest the following:

Stay close – Now is a good time to ask each of the main decision makers and influencers in the account if they would link up with you. These customer contacts are invaluable as they have bought from you before and if they move there is a good chance they will buy from you again. Also if they move job within the organisation, their new position could provide you with an opportunity.

Continue to follow – Watch the activity within the account through the “Follow” function and monitor carefully for additional opportunities to help up or cross sell. It’s great to be able to call congratulating someone on a promotion or to be able to offer useful insights as a result of a

posting in their “Status Update” or a “Question” almost as soon as it is posted.

Seek their public approval - Ask for a “Recommendation” for you and the value your company has added through the solution they bought from you. These are gems on your profile and, as mentioned above, make a powerful statement about you, your approach and your company. I know some sales professionals who offer to write the recommendation as it is hard for a busy executive to start from a blank page. This is a great offer if you know the person well or have you have agreed you will do this with them before hand. Otherwise don’t assume this is OK.

In part one I focused on ‘brand me’, the professionalism of your profile and your investment in time. This has a very significant bearing on the approaches described above and if you have not already done so I would urge you to read Part 1 before utilising any of the recommendations above. The reason for this is that LinkedIn focuses on you first, and your company second. As such it is all about your profile (‘brand me’), your contacts, your network and your relationships.

In terms of investment of time try to get into the habit of using LinkedIn daily and go through a little routine. This is the one I use: Check LinkedIn network updates, follow-up any sent requests to linkup, send three ‘update/how are?’ you e-mails to people on my contact list, check the ‘questions’ section of the groups I belong to, to see if I can contribute and update my status weekly.

LinkedIn is a tool and it is one of many that a sales executive has available to them. As a Social Business Networking (SBN) tool to support sales and business development I believe it is almost second to none. One of the interesting facts I read recently is that over half of all LinkedIn members are under 35. It looks

It's about: Disorganised people
It applies to: Business Owner/Managers

Main slant: Look for a simple solution
that a disorganised person simply can't see



like the next generation have already engaged with LinkedIn and they are the next generation of buyers and key influencers.

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Isn't it frustrating when you have everything planned out and then some disorganised person puts a spanner in the works and what should have been a simple process to complete turns into chaos?

Recently we settled on an investment property. The day prior to settlement everything seemed to be running along smoothly with all the paperwork in order. I had even double-checked with the people concerned to confirm we had everything ready.

On the morning of the settlement I received a phone call from the conveyancer. She was panicking about an e-mail she had just received from the bank who were funding the loan saying there was a shortfall of funds in our account for the deal to be done. 'Someone' had stuffed up. The loaning bank blamed the conveyancer and the conveyancer blamed the bank. However, I had already experienced a couple of other mistakes this person had made so I naturally thought it was the conveyancer's disorganisation that caused this situation.

To ensure settlement occurred that day, the conveyancer told me I would need to run off to my bank immediately, get a bank cheque and then take it to the bank which was lending us the money. Sounds simple, except the nearest branch of my bank was in the city, around 30 minutes away. The whole process would probably take at least a couple of hours. Not only that, my daughter had taken my car and was out for the day plus I had coaching calls booked all morning.

Stop people wasting your time

By Lorraine Pirihi

There was no way I would have rushed off anyway and done what the conveyancer had requested. There just had to be an easier solution... and of course there was. A quick phone call to my own bank asking for an express transfer and the problem was solved.

How often do you experience similar situations whereby you have reacted to someone else's lack of organisation? Disorganised people are always under the pump and creating chaos around them.

The next time something like this happens to you, don't panic. Take a deep breathe and take a few minutes to consider other options before racing off. Often in their state of chaos, disorganised people are so cluttered in their thinking that they can't see simple solutions to fix the problem.

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About the author:

Lorraine Pirihi, The Productivity Queen is Australia's Leading Productivity Specialist. She's committed to helping small business owners and entrepreneurs work less, earn more and have a life!

She's also a powerful speaker and her dynamic presentations are ideal for conferences and business events.

You can learn more about Lorraine a www.productivityqueen.com

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Tips to increase your sales right now

By Andy Preston

In this article, leading sales expert Andy Preston explains that if you want more sales, there are things you can do ...right now...to increase your sales - fast.

Get more new customers

One of the easiest ways to increase your sales is to increase your number of new customers. Increase your prospecting activities to bring in the right sort of new customers to see a quick improvement in your sales.

In order to make sure they're the 'right' sort of customers, why not look at the profile of your existing customer base? Look at ones that are the easiest to deal with, complain the least, pay you the most money and seem to appreciate what you do more than some others do. And then set out to win more of those sort of customers.

Sell an additional product to your existing customer base

Here's a second idea that you can use to increase your sales right now. Think about what additional product (or products) you can sell into your existing customer base. This may mean introducing a 'new' product, or simply looking at which customers are not buying every product line you offer, and looking to increase the range of items you sell to each account.

Often when I talk to business owners or salespeople about this and look at their product set more closely they're actually shocked how few customers buy

multiple product lines from them. Make sure you don't fall into the same trap.

Increase your prices

Now whenever I mention the third way, I can almost 'hear' an intake of breath amongst the seminar attendees, and I can imagine you thinking a similar thing, right now! Plenty of people tell me 'Oh but Andy, I can't do that. My customers wouldn't accept it'.

Yet when I show them the potential figures, they suddenly change their viewpoint in the majority of cases! By increasing your prices slightly, the total price will only slightly increase, but depending on your profit margin, you could see an immediate impact in your profits – particularly if you implement it across your entire customer base, or lots of people buy regularly from you. Well worth considering.

Increase your number of incoming 'sales enquiries'

Another way to increase your sales quickly is to take steps to increase your number of incoming sales enquiries. In order to do this, you need to understand what is driving your incoming sales enquiries currently – Advertising? Marketing? Networking? Online and Social Media? The activity of your Sales Team?

Whatever it is, increasing what is working will quickly increase your sales figures. Of course you may need to invest some money in that activity first, but depending on the length of your sales cycle,

you'll see a quick return on your investment.

Improve your conversion rates

A further way to increase your sales figures fast is to look at improving your conversion rates. Most people don't track these accurately, so if you're not doing so, make sure you start to do this straightaway!

The key conversion rates to look at here are enquiries to meetings, meetings to quotes, and quotes to orders for example (I'm keeping this to 3 to keep it simple for now).

Once you have worked out what your conversion rates are, the next step is to improve them - by better qualification of the opportunity in the first place, better needs analysis and better management of the sales process.

Look at a 'joint venture'

Another way to increase your sales figures quickly is to look at a 'joint venture' with another organisation that is non-competitive with you, but is prospecting the same market. The advantage of this is that it needs little additional sales and marketing effort, and you can 'tap into' an already-trusted customer base of your Joint Venture partner. Good examples would be an office furniture company with a printing company (they'll both know when customers are moving), and an office supplies company and a commercial temps recruitment agency (as they will both know administrative decision makers).



Improve your sales skills

Sales skills are vital to the success of any organisation – whether it's the business owner themselves that has to sell as part of their role, or they have a sales team in place to do it for them.

Most professional salespeople don't receive enough sales skills training, let alone business owners. Some business owners I've met have never had any sales skills training – and that's scary!

A lack of good sales skills training will mean people continually losing out on business to their competition – often business they could have won! If you're up against professional salespeople as your competitors, you better get good training – and fast.

You can ask any questions about this article or sales in general, by contacting Andy here.

Follow the tips above and watch your sales soar. I look forward to hearing how you get on.

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About the author:

Andy Preston is a leading expert on Sales and Selling, and helps individuals and companies increase their sales. You can see more about Andy at www.andy-preston.com

“Education is a wonderful thing, provided you always remember that nothing worth knowing can ever be taught.”
 Oscar Wilde



It's a simple formula: if your company closes sales faster, you'll ramp up your revenues without spending as much time doing marketing or making sales calls. Turning a lead into a sale is the critical purpose of marketing. And although techniques differ for various types of businesses, basic marketing rules apply to everyone. Here are five of the most important basic rules of Marketing:

1. Stay in touch

First, be sure you are staying in touch with prospective clients or customers on a frequent, consistent basis. Don't spam them every week, or even every month. But if you want to keep their mindshare, it is critical to stay in touch monthly or quarterly - on a regular schedule with clear, concise communications.

Studies show we are subjected to 10-20,000 promotional messages each and every day. From toothpaste that guarantees “whiter teeth” in the morning to TV spots that tell you how to lower your cholesterol during the late-night newscast, we're all barraged with messages. Thus, if yours doesn't stay in front of those you want as clients (called “prospects” in market-speak), you're very likely to lose the business you would have had if you'd kept the lines of communication open.

2. Stay a step ahead of your competitors

One of the most common mistakes I find is that business owners simply do not believe that they have any competition. Sure, no one provides the exact service or sells the exact product that you do. But I've yet to find

Five basic marketing rules

By Allison Bliss

a business that doesn't have a competitor that your target market perceives to be pretty much just like you.

Face it: your competitors probably have their information in front of your prospects already. Worse still, the prospects you thought really wanted and needed what you have could easily have forgotten your name, misplaced your phone or e-mail address, or otherwise can't find you when they need you. Consider what happened the last time your roof was leaking: you'd met a great roofer five months before, but had lost his card, you had no idea how to reach him, nor could you remember his name (even though you were quite impressed with him when you'd first met). Just like the roofer, you'd be doing people a favor by periodically reminding them you're still available to help them out.

3. Create an editorial calendar

If you plan the messages you need to deliver to your prospects over the next year, know exactly how to write marketing materials that bring response, and know which form of communications works best to get their attention, it will be very easy to stay in touch with every one of them. This process is called planning an “editorial calendar”.

You can try this yourself, or you can hire a marketing expert to help you understand how many calls to make, what messages work at different times of the year, and how to avoid the most common marketing mistakes.

4. Marketing supports sales

Many companies don't have a large sales force that can meet with prospects, or call them on

a regular basis to close a sale. Entrepreneurial owners usually have great intentions of making these calls. But, due to the countless distractions inherent in running a business, they often don't stay on top of following up with their leads.

Keep this rule in mind: "The follow-up is what gets you the sale."

The most successful companies keep their sales pipeline active by staying in touch via email, advertising, articles, brochures, or other promotional pieces. And yes, it is important to pick up the phone to check in with prospects. You must ask for the sale in order to close it!

5. Before you waste time or money, ask for help.

Hiring a marketing firm do your marketing right the first time can save you spending needless hours or dollars. (In fact, seeing so many businesses doing it wrong is what motivated us to start our business!) A good firm will offer the right strategy for you, as well as a talented staff of award-winning writers, designers, web teams, publicists, and even film, event, or television production professionals to communicate your message.

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About the author:

Allison Bliss is the Founder and CEO of Allison Bliss Consulting, one of the top full service marketing & communications firms in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her company rebels against misleading, pushy, spam-filled marketing offering Fortune 500 companies and entrepreneurs customised business and marketing services which clients say brings incredible, measurable results.

<http://www.allisonbliss.com>

African women in business need more visible role models

Young African women have very few 'visible' role models, says Nigerian author and entrepreneur, Ogo Ogbata, who is planning a number of initiatives that will enable more African born women to be recognised as thought leaders and people of influence in the 21st Century. As October marked the 50th anniversary of Nigeria's independence from British rule as well as the globally recognised Black History Month, Ogo, author of the inspiring novel "Egg-Larva-Pupa-Woman", is urging more African women to come forward and demonstrate the successes they've achieved via creativity and entrepreneurship.

Inspired by her novel, Ogo has organised 'Inspiring Women in Business' Event in London. The event allowed credible business women (and men) from Africa and the UK to celebrate the women who have inspired their success. Set in the politically charged colloquial and post-independent Nigeria, "Egg-Larva-Pupa-Woman," tells the story of a privileged Nigerian girl whose life is disrupted by a series of mysterious events whilst living during a politically explosive time in her homeland. And yet this girl defies the odds to achieve greatness and make peace with her past.

Ogo, who is a regular speaker on business topics, creativity and inspiration, believes that the book's main character is symbolic of the entrepreneurial spirit inherent in many young African women despite the hardships that life throws at them. "Through my book and the inspiring and educative events I deliver, I am sending a message loud and clear that young women across the world, even in the developing countries and ethnic minority communities, have the ability to achieve against all odds." She says.

"Black History Month was a time to honour the achievements of thought leaders and inspirational men and women over time, but equally," Ogo continues, "it is also about celebrating the 21st Century thought leaders and people of influence too. Oftentimes, it takes the good examples set by others to demonstrate what we are truly capable of. African born women are achieving in the UK, they just need to become more visible in order to give the next generation of entrepreneurs real hope and create prosperity in Africa and the rest of the world in years to come."

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Ogo Ogbata is a dynamic writer, speaker and consultant living in Northamptonshire, UK. To find out more about this exciting talent, please go to: www.ogoogbata.com

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