



LIFECYCLE MARKETING ESSENTIALS



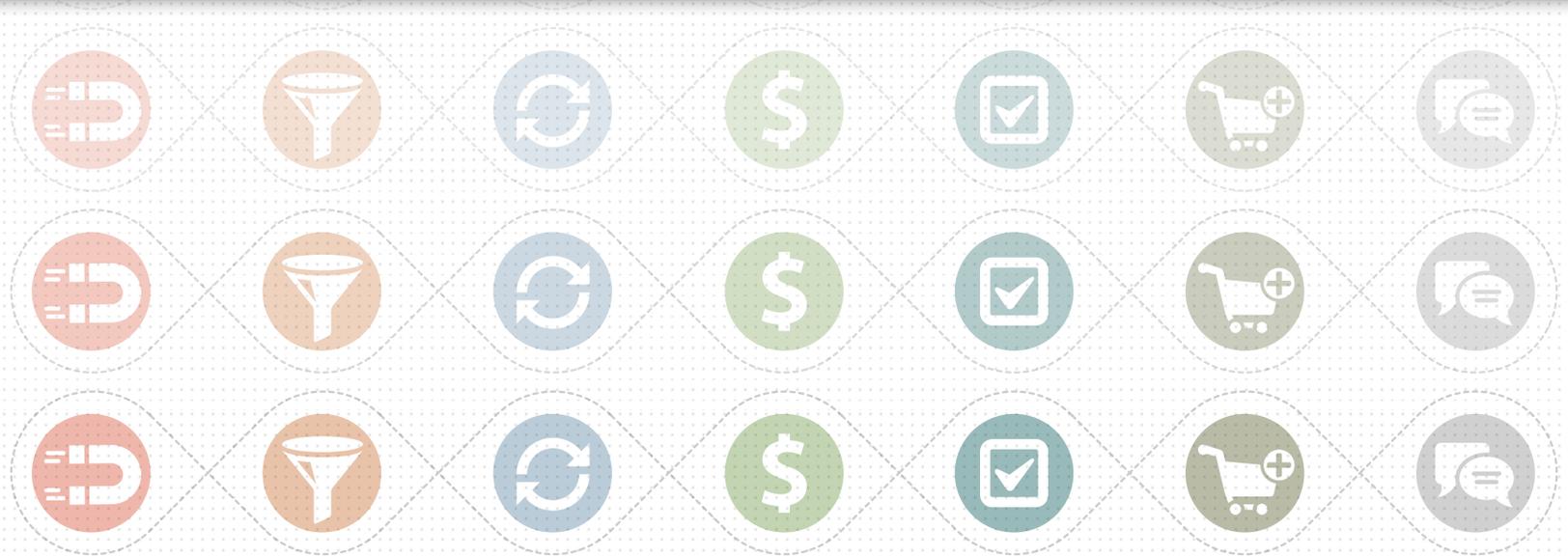
GOT TO BE REAL

How to Attract Leads and Win Trust with Customer Stories

By Andrea Parker



TRAINER'S BOX®





At the core of great marketing content is a great story, and at the core of a great story is a compelling truth.

In a September 2012 [National Public Radio](#) interview discussing his book *The Dangerous Animals Club*, accomplished character actor and memoirist Stephen Tobolowsky reflected on how true personal stories will always connect with audiences better than narratives artificially crafted to make a point.

“True trumps clever any day of the week. So I really try to make sure that all of my stories in the book are 1) true, and 2) that they happened to me,” Tobolowsky said. “It’s far more important to tell a true story even if it’s not perfect in all the details than to make up a clever lie.”





“Where there’s truth, there’s life.... Aristotle talked about something called techne.... There is a little jolt that we get when we recognize the truth, and it gives us a little burst of pleasure. Aristotle said it is the basis of comedy and it is the basis of all drama, is trying to find techne. I think that’s helped me in my comedic acting, and it’s certainly helped me in writing my book, in that I have to have faith in what really happened, and I hope that techne is created in people’s brains as either they read or if they watch me on screen.... **When we see truth in someone else’s story, we recognize it as part of a universal story.**”

- Stephen Tobolowsky





How To Attract Leads with Moments of Truth

Because small business owners are directly involved in all aspects of their business and have personal connections with customers, there is a wealth of powerful stories at their disposal. Grab attention and connect with **potential customers** through true stories, authentically told.





Celebrate the Ordinary

Don't you hate it when businesses brag while obviously trying to look like they're not? In the age of [social proof](#), authenticity is one of the most important qualities to cultivate in content marketing for small business. Customer stories — especially videos — are the new building blocks of sales and marketing. But if you're just replacing company pitchmen and paid actors with creepily jazzed customers in your content, you're still missing the mark.

It's tempting to pack your promotional mix with your most remarkable and enthusiastic customer testimonials. But a mix of ordinary and extraordinary user-generated content, case studies and customer profiles is more believable and helps your content pass through today's hypersensitive marketing hype filter.





How to Create Content That Customers Believe

It's human nature to connect most strongly when we see our own truth in someone else's story. Following a few simple guidelines on "keeping it real" can produce stories that potential customers embrace, not keep at arm's length:

Success Takes Many Forms. Celebrate Them All

Results vary — we all know that. A select group of exceptional results only grab attention, but stories about the experiences of typical customers carry more authority and weight.





Think Conversations, Not Ads

More likely than not, your customers are not actors nor professional marketers. Don't expect them to speak in tidy sound bites. Conversations are more appealing than declarations, so when you're interviewing customers encourage them to speak freely and naturally instead of trying to get it "just right." Great customer stories are a little unkempt.

Don't Script

If it looks memorized, it looks fake. Resist the temptation to [get customers](#) to use key phrases or lists of points you'd like them to make. Getting the meaning across is far more impactful than using exact words.

Ask For Stories, Not Testimonials

If you approach customers for a recommendation, you're putting them on the spot and their typical first response is to ask you what you want them to say. But if you [ask them to tell you a story](#) about themselves and their experience with your product or service, you're starting a conversation.



Channel Your Customers' Truth

I can't stress this enough: A testimonial is not a customer story. It's your story told by a customer. So the typical video testimonial comes across like an ad — maybe even a paid ad — and doesn't connect with audiences as strongly as personal customer success stories where the storyteller, not your company or product, is the star.

In May 2012, Infusionsoft marked National Small Business Week with a series of customer story videos under the heading "What's Your Story?" and it became a weekly feature. In the process of capturing dozens of videos for the series, we've learned a lot about how to create customer stories that connect with audiences.





Get Subjects Excited to Share Their Story

When we ask our small business customers if they'd like to share their story with us, the typical response is "What would you like me to say?"

We make it clear up front that we're not looking for a testimonial for Infusionsoft. Instead, we'd like to hear their own story in their own words — topics like when, why and how they started their business, what they love about being an entrepreneur and what makes them passionate about their product or service. In this way the "testimonial" aspects become organic and emerge naturally in the conversation.





Coax out authentic,
relatable stories every time with a
standard interview framework.





Warm Up

With the camera on, begin the conversation with brief, basic questions that will help the subject get comfortable being interviewed:

- >>> How long have you been a customer?
- >>> Have you done a customer story video before?
- >>> Do you have any questions or concerns?

Reassure them that they shouldn't get flustered by little flubs, pauses and stammers and should keep going. Everything will be fixed in editing. But they are free to stop and restart or repeat/rephrase whenever they'd like.

Segue

When you feel the subject is ready to begin, walk him/her through the standard self-intro:

"My name is _____ and I'm from _____.
I am [TITLE] [COMPANY] [COMPANY DESCRIPTION]."



Interview

In order to provide consistency among the interviews but still elicit a range of comments, we've developed an ordered list of questions to follow in each interview. The interview starts with general questions about the subject and his/her business and then progresses toward more specific product and business problem/solution questions.

Based on the subject's demeanor and responses to the early questions, we identify at least one line of inquiry to focus on:

- >>> Inspirational (e.g. stories about entrepreneurial passions and aspirations – How do you define success?)
- >>> Instructional (e.g. stories about how they solved a specific business problem with the product/service)
- >>> Case study (e.g. specific product/service experiences, results and overall impressions)





Our interview script includes questions like:

1. Tell us about your business. Why did you start it?
What makes it unique?
2. What do you love most about being an entrepreneur?
3. When you think about success, what do you see? More time? More income? Early retirement? Building a legacy for your family? Going public?
4. How did you make the decision to invest in an all-in-one sales and marketing system? Was it a gradual process, or was there a specific tipping point or “Ah ha!” moment?
5. How did you hear about Infusionsoft. What motivated you to make that first contact?
6. How has Infusionsoft helped you succeed?
7. Which capabilities stand out in your mind?
8. What would you tell a friend about Infusionsoft?

What's your “customer story” story?



Encourage Customer Ratings and Reviews

Small businesses waste an inordinate amount of time fretting about how to avoid/combat [negative customer reviews](#) when they could be leveraging that public feedback — the good and the bad — to build their business.

Shane Bryant, founder and owner of HVAC service company [Smart Air](#) in Austin, Texas, didn't seek referral business through [Yelp](#) — it found him. A scant two years since Shane launched his company and the first five-star reviews started appearing on the local business ratings and reviews site, more than 70 percent of Smart Air's leads are directly attributable to Yelp.

Shane was a social media skeptic then and wasn't familiar with Yelp until that initial string of rave reviews prompted the site's ad sales department to contact him.

Even now he's not an active social media marketer. He's tried SEO optimization ("\$600/month for nothing") and other local business review sites ("They can be manipulated"). He's tried a sponsorship in a local radio station's concert series and a booth in a home and garden show (no lift from either).



Nothing so far
has performed as well
as user-generated content
on Yelp – his self-sustaining
marketing engine.





So What's the Secret?

Having worked at several high-end Austin restaurants (The Four Seasons Hotel, Fonda San Miguel, Jeffrey's) in a previous incarnation, Shane consciously patterns his service delivery model on their examples of quality, responsiveness, attention to detail and consistency. "A Four Seasons guest can always tell you exactly why they chose to stay there – an exceptional experience every time."

Shane reasons that Yelp reviewers and visitors are members of that same demographic group: Not price-driven, and they recognize and reward great customer experiences – his brand's sweet spot.

Being honest in this field seems pretty effective. We do a quality job and we're honorable. Yes, we make mistakes, but how we handle mistakes helps define us.





What's Next?

Encouraged by his WOM momentum, Shane's now exploring ways to raise awareness of and generate more leads for his new system installation and weatherization services.

He is in the process of revising his website design and content strategy to better communicate the company's services portfolio, as well as his vision and values as an Austin-based business engaged in community and environmental issues.

The new site will incorporate video and downloadable content.





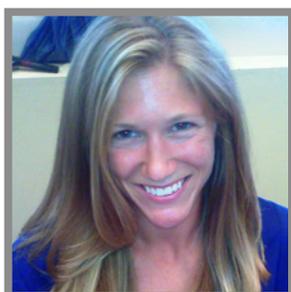
Shane's Tips for Small Business Success on Yelp

- >>> Focus on providing an exceptional customer experience, and the reviews will take care of themselves.
- >>> Don't try to game the system. Unlike other local ratings and reviews sites, Yelp's system **filters reviews** based on factors like previous site participation. Filtered reviews are still available for viewing, but they don't appear on the main reviews page, and the corresponding ratings are not included in the overall calculation.
- >>> Invest in training. The customer experience should be the same whether the owner is on site or not.
- >>> Monitor and learn from your competitors' reviews.
- >>> Share your Yelp success stories when speaking with customers. It can lead to interesting new opportunities (like this blog post).

With these actionable tips on authentic marketing, your small business should position itself to absorb and leverage the truth provided in customer stories. Fabricated "moments of truth" will be transparent to audiences, so embrace the genuine responses, and share them; it speaks honest volumes about your small business.



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Andrea Parker

Andrea Parker is a Brand Journalist at Infusionsoft, and helps small businesses succeed by creating original content for and managing the Big Ideas Blog, as well as creating e-books and infographics for small business consumption. Andrea is an award-winning writer and former professional steeplechaser with a penchant for reading, tutoring and baked goods. You can follow Andrea on the [Big Ideas Blog](#) and on Twitter [@BigIdeasBlog](#).

What is Lifecycle Marketing?

Lifecycle Marketing is a seven-step system devised specifically for small businesses to help them transform their sales and marketing. By combining proven strategies and tactics with affordable, easy-to-master automation technology, small businesses that implement Lifecycle Marketing are in the best position to grow, nurture and retain valuable customers. Watch an online [Lifecycle Marketing workshop](#) to learn more.

About

Infusionsoft®

Infusionsoft is the only all-in-one sales and marketing software built for small businesses.

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