

HOW I BUILT MY PRACTICE WHITE PAPER

Special Edition • May 2015

How I Communicate

I have been self-employed since 1997. In the beginning I was just flying by the seat of my pants. To be honest many of my early successes were due more to luck than any sort of plan.

As time passed I realized that my luck was going to run out. I needed to have a proper plan to maintain long term success. Through a lot of trial and error, as well as studying everything I could get my hands on, I came up with a coherent plan for all the marketing and communication I do for my business.

In this guide I am going to explain how I do this.

To be clear, I am not saying that my way is the best or the only way. This is not a prescriptive document but rather a description of what I do and, more importantly, why I do it. Feel free to use the parts that make the most sense for you and your business and dismiss the rest.

First, we'll cover the three fundamentals behind the philosophy of why I do what I do. These ideas underpin inform all of my business decisions. Next we will explore how I execute these today in our ever-changing digital world.

Note: Throughout this guide I will be using the terms audience, customers, and clients. For our purposes here I will define these terms as follows:

- *Audience:* A person who is consuming something you produced such as reading a newsletter, email, tweet, or status update, listening to an audio, or watching a video.
- *Customer:* A person who is in the middle of the buying process.
- *Client:* A person who is currently receiving ongoing services or has a history of buying from you.

I would love your feedback on this approach as I am always wanting to learn more. You can contact me directly at gene@howibuiltmypractice.com.

My Three Fundamentals

1) Always Be Of Service To Your Audience

Every single time I communicate with my audience my primary goal is to serve them. This is true for something as small as a 140 character tweet and as long as a year long program.

Everything I say, write, record, post, or tweet is about my audience.

Every single time!

This is not the natural inclination of many business owners. When we begin it feels like we should be talking about what we do, how we do it, and what makes us qualified to do it.

The truth is our audience doesn't care about us.

OK, that is a little harsh. They may care about us but they care more about their own problems and needs. When they are consuming any information or media they are doing so rooted in their needs. If we are not serving them and helping them with their problems they will move on.

For me there are four fundamental parts to every communication rooted in service.

Copyright © 2015 Gene Monterastelli (the "publisher"). All rights are reserved. Published in the United States of America. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission from the Publisher.

All trademarks and service marks are the properties of their respective owners. All references to these properties are made solely for editorial purposes. Except for marks actually owned by the Author, the Author (as both author and as publisher) does not make any commercial claims to their use, and is not affiliated with them in any way. Unless otherwise expressly noted, none of the individuals or business entities mentioned herein have endorsed the contents of this newsletter.

Facts and information are believed to be accurate at the time they were placed in the newsletter. All data provided in this newsletter is to be used for information purposes only. The information contained within is not intended to provide specific legal, financial or tax advice, or any other professional advice whatsoever, for any individual or company and should not be relied upon in that regard. Products and services described are only offered in jurisdictions where they may be legally offered. Information provided is not all-inclusive, and is limited to information that is made available and such information should not be relied upon as all-inclusive or accurate.

The information available on the Web Site and/or transmitted via e-mail is provided "AS IS" WITHOUT WARRANTY OF ANY KIND, EITHER EXPRESSED OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, THE IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY, FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE, OR NON-INFRINGEMENT. Some jurisdictions do not allow the exclusion of implied warranties, so the above exclusion may not apply to you. The Publisher does not warrant or make any representation regarding the use of the materials contained in this newsletter in terms of correctness, accuracy, reliability or otherwise.

The publisher shall not be held liable for any improper or incorrect use of the information described and/or contained herein and assumes no responsibility for anyone's use of the information. In no event shall the Publisher be liable for any direct, indirect, incidental, special, exemplary, or consequential damages (including, but not limited to, procurement or substitute goods or services; loss of use, data, or profits; or business interruption) however caused and on any theory of liability, whether in contract, strict liability, or tort (including negligence or otherwise) arising in any way out of the use of this information, even if advised of the possibility of such damage.

How I Built My Practice White Paper

1. I know who my audience is.
2. I know what problem I am trying help them solve.
3. I know what action I want them to take.
4. I know what the outcome should be when they take the action.

Let's walk through a few examples to see how this looks.

Example 1: A tweet that reads "5 Things You Must Know Before Doing EFT With Children and Teens: <http://goo.gl/skgMf8>"

1. This is for parents who know how to use the EFT protocol and want to use the tool set with their children.
2. The parents know how to use something that is complicated (EFT) and they need help translating it in a way that their children will understand.
3. Click on the link and read the article.
4. They will have the knowledge and confidence to share EFT with their children so that their children can enjoy the benefits of EFT.

Example 2: An email to my mailing list which shares a funny video about our industry.

1. The people who have opted in to my mailing list.
2. They are having a stressful day and might be taking their work a little too seriously.
3. Watch the video.
4. Laugh and gain some perspective on the day.

Example 3: A six-page sales letter about an eight-month coaching program that helps solopreneurs and small business owners stop self-sabotage in their business.

1. Solopreneurs and small business owners.
2. People who are really good at the service their business provides, but are poor at marketing, productivity, and time management because they lack those skills.
3. Buy the package.
4. They will get the support and training they need to give them a well-run business and allow them to concentrate on serving their clients.

You can see in these examples that there is an entire range of actions that I am asking them to take. Sometimes I am only asking for a few moments of their time while other times I am asking them to make a major time and financial investment.

Here a few points to keep in mind.

How I Built My Practice White Paper

First, not all forms of service are equal. In most cases an eight-month program will provide way more service than an article I share in a tweet. Both are of service. It is a common mistake to believe that every time I serve my audience I have to give them everything they need.

If I share a tip in a newsletter that will make your morning more productive, it is valuable. It's not the same as me helping you to redesign your assembly line to increase productivity.

We need to be of service but we don't need to solve all of our audience's problems every time.

Second, each time we communicate we don't need to be creating something that is useful to the entire world. It doesn't even have to be useful to our entire audience. I know not everyone in my audience is a parent. When I share something that is helpful for parents, those who are not parents will skip past it and that is OK.

I know when I offer an eight-month program it will only be of interest to a small percentage of my audience. Those for whom it is a good fit will dive into it and those who aren't a good fit will skip it.

It is OK to serve a small percentage of your audience with any given item, but it is also important to remember that if you repeatedly serve only a subset, some of your audience may lose interest. For example, it is great that I create tools for parents, but if ten communications in a row are aimed at parents, the non-parent part of my audience will look elsewhere.

Third, note that I listed a sales letter as a form of service. That is because it is.

My friend and business coach Pamela Bruner is always reminding her clients that "Sales is service."

I think this is true in two ways. First, and most obviously, if I bring a product or service to you that makes your life better then I have served you. Yes, there is an exchange of money for that service, but it is service none the less.

For example, I love my Roomba. A Roomba is a robotic vacuum cleaner. At the push of a button it zips around my apartment and vacuums the floor. As I walk out the front door every day I click the on button and it does the rest.

Did I pay for it? Yes. Is it an amazing service in my life? You better believe it! I love it. My place is much cleaner than it might be and it takes me just a few seconds.

Second, and less obviously, sales letters are an opportunity to teach your audience about the details of their problems, what transformation can look like, or how they might get from their current problem to relief. Sometimes in a sales letter we can cover all three.

How I Built My Practice White Paper

Here is a practical example from my own business. Small business owners often fail because they think they don't know what they are supposed to do. It can also be the case that there is a part of them that feels that being successful is dangerous.

One of my clients grew up with a father who gave his whole life to work and never saw his family. My client loves her family and doesn't want her kids to have an absent parent like she had. So it's not surprising that part of her fears success because if she is successful then she will be an absent parent.

In that example, you can see her lack of success is less about not knowing what to do than wanting to keep herself from the same fate as her father.

If you read this story in a sales letter you would understand the problem of not taking action in a new way without buying a thing. I would have served you. Even if you don't buy this time I have built credibility with you by serving you.

If I ensure I am acting from a place of service every time I communicate then I will be useful to my audience. The more useful I am in their life the more indispensable I become to them. And when I become indispensable to them then sooner or later they will stop being part of my audience and turn into a customer.

I know I am doing this well when I receive notes of thanks from my list for sending them a sales letter. You read that right. Instead of unsubscribe, my readers thank me for trying to sell something.

By making sure that every time I communicate I cover the four parts listed above it is easy to become indispensable to my audience.

2) Control The Conversation

Inbound sales are the best type of sales. An inbound sale is when someone finds you on their own and they want to buy. They might find you by searching Google or they may have been referred to you by a friend. You have not gone out to sell but they have come to you.

Inbound sales are the best because they are so easy. Someone has shown up motivated to have a problem solved and they think you have the solution. In cases like this it is not a matter of making a sale, but more of making sure you don't screw up the sale.

As I continue to grow and expand my business I am always working towards 100% of my customers being inbound sales BUT I plan as if 0% of my customers will come from inbound sales.

How I Built My Practice White Paper

The reason for this is that it's hard to plan for inbound sales. Since it is something out of my control, I put a great deal of energy into what I can control, which is how I serve and sell to my audience.

In this process it is important to be the one controlling the conversation. If you are not controlling the conversation then your audience will only buy from you when they think it is time and not when they might actually need it.

As an example, think about the sales letter I referred to in the previous section. At first the small business owner thinks their problem is that they just don't know how to run a business successfully. If they think this is the problem then they will be searching for tools to help them to run their business better.

By describing their problem in these terms they would not be looking for information about how their family history around work impacts the way they work today.

They will only understand what their real problem is if I am educating them about that.

The only way I can do that is by controlling the conversation.

In my case the way I do this through a regular email newsletter.

I know many people believe that social media is the best way to meet and connect with others. The problem with using social media for an on-going sales process is that you are dependent both on your audience looking at social media at the exact moment you are making an offer and also to be looking for exactly what you are offering at that time.

It's great when that happens but it requires an amazing convergence of factors.

[Note: A recent McKinsey & Co. report showed email was 40 times more effective for sales than social media. <http://goo.gl/k9u3VA>]

The reason I say that I am controlling the conversation through email is because when I send you an email I have the opportunity to interrupt your day by sticking my message in a place that you spend a lot of time, your email inbox.

I don't control the exact moment we connect but I am making sure it happens about the time I want it to happen.

This does not mean that I don't use social media or any other type of marketing, but instead almost all of my non-email marketing has just one goal: to get you to subscribe to my email newsletter.

In the second half of this guide I will share exactly how I do this. What is important for now is recognizing that when I control the conversation then I am no longer dependent on you looking for me. This gives me the opportunity to serve and educate you on my schedule and help you realize that you need me.

3) Control The Platform

I recently re-read Chris Anderson's seminal book "Free: The Future of a Radical Price". It is a masterpiece that I go back to every few years because I need to be reminded of the fundamentals taught in the book.

On my most recent re-reading I noticed a few things that are now outdated and quaint because the book was written in 2009. In the book he refers to digital storage in terms of MB and not GB because GB were unimaginable back then and he also talks about the importance and power of MySpace.

A book that is less than 10 years old is talking about technology and platforms that feel like they are from a completely different era.

It is so important that we understand the rapid pace of technological change. What is the norm today will be outdated in 18 months. These changes provide amazing opportunities but can also cause us problems.

For example, in 2013 and much of 2014 many small businesses were finding that using Facebook was a great way to market and grow. Every time they had a new article to share or an offer to make they would simply put it on their Facebook business wall which would show up in the feeds of their followers.

It was the perfect system. It didn't cost anything and everyone seemed to be on Facebook. To that end many businesses built their marketing strategies around getting people to like their Facebook business page.

Then it all changed...

Facebook decided that they were no longer going to share Facebook posts on business pages to all their followers, but instead it would only be shared with 5%-10% of the followers. If a business wanted their posts to be seen by more people they would have to pay.

All of a sudden business reach was cut by 90%. If businesses wanted more of what was once free they were now required to pay for *every time they posted*.

By putting most of their marketing effort into a platform they didn't control businesses became vulnerable to a change they couldn't predict.

That is why it is so important to control your own platform. When you control the platform you can build your marketing on a predictable foundation.

This is not to say that we avoid the platforms that we don't control. But, much like our aim is to control the conversation, we aim bring our audience from other platforms to our own platform where we are in control so that we can share our message in the most useful way.

Serve Through Conversations You Control On Platforms You Control

I hope you can see how these three principles are useful in framing the way you communicate with your audience. If you keep these three things in mind you will ensure that you will be able to maintain a long term profitable conversation with your audience.

In Part Two I'll explain exactly how I am currently doing this.

Come To Jamaica

Sometime in the last decade the Jamaican tourist board ran series of television commercials. Like most tourist commercials it was filled with images of tourists and locals alike enjoying all that the island of Jamaica has to offer.

At the end of the commercial a local with a wide grin and a beautifully thick Jamaican accent looked directly into the camera and said "Come to Jamaica!"

The phrase "Come to Jamaica!" from those commercials has come to embody my marketing strategy, which can be understood through the analogy of a tourist board inviting you to a foreign country.

Seem like a stretch? Read on...

Your Home Country = Your Website

As stated above, having a platform that you control is key. Just like the government of a country, you get to set the rules on your own website.

Do you want to have a forum? Do you want to turn off the comments to exclude unproductive or distracting chatter? Do you want content to be free? Do you want to have some content behind a paywall? Do you want your audience to give you their email address in order to gain access to content? Do you want one color? Lots of colors? No pictures? Only pictures?

Whatever you want you can have because it is your country.

How I Built My Practice White Paper

Now we must remember, if we want people to visit our home country we must make sure it is a desirable place to visit. Just because you can have anything you want on your website, doesn't mean you should have anything you want.

You will need to find a balance between your voice and esthetic and your audience's needs.

But you are in control. No one is going to tell you what to do. Nobody will remove functionality. There will be no surprises.

All of my marketing efforts come down to one basic driver: to get you to "come to Jamaica".

The State Run Media = Your Email Newsletter

Living in a country that has always believed (to one degree or another) in a free press, the idea of a state-run press has a negative connotation. But from the government's point of view, a state-run media is a powerful tool. It allows them to put out the exact message that they want.

And that is what my email newsletter is: the exact message that I want my audience to hear. It is my point of view, in my voice.

As stated above, everything I produce needs to be of service to my audience. Just because it is the state-run media doesn't mean the people have to pay attention to it. There are lots of new sources out there. My audience will only pay attention to mine if it is useful.

Because controlling the conversation is so important, the main goal of my website when you visit it is to get you on my mailing list. As an example of this I use a popover window to encourage you to sign up for my mailing list.

I know it is ugly. I know people complain about it. AND I know that it is seven times more effective in getting people to sign up for my mailing list.

So, once you "come to Jamaica" and subscribe to the state-run media I know I have permission to keep contacting you. And if I do this well you will go from a tourist to someone who wants to do business in my country.

Other Countries = Other Platforms And Networks

The other countries in this analogy are all the networks and platforms we don't control. These include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, discussion boards, YouTube, iTunes, and whatever new platform is the next big thing that started while I was typing this paragraph.

It is important to keep a few things in mind with these other countries.

How I Built My Practice White Paper

First, no two countries are alike. Just because something works in one place doesn't mean that it will work in another. People go to different platforms to have different needs met. People go to Twitter to talk, to Facebook to have conversations, to YouTube to watch, and iTunes to listen.

If you are going to engage in the community of another country you need take due note of the customs and mores of that country or you will find it hard going.

Second, remember that the leaders of any of these countries can change their minds at any time for any reason. Once Facebook went from being a privately held company to a publicly held company their strategy changed because they were now answerable to shareholders.

A community which was operating one way can all of a sudden have a whole new way of operating. It is great to take advantage of other networks and platforms, but keep in mind that you are not building your business on stone, but sand. It could change at a moment's notice and you need to be prepared for that.

Third, one of my main goals of spending time in these other countries is to get them to "come to Jamaica". Not all interaction will be about this and you can be very successful creating an audience and customers on many platforms without them ever coming over to your website, but it will be easier to do that if you are controlling the conversation on your platform.

Setting Up A Consulate

(In a perfect world) when one country starts to make connections with another country they are doing it terms of mutual respect. First, they will send a small group of people to the new country to start conducting business, but mostly there are there to just learn.

The same thing applies when we enter a new network or platform. Each platform has its own customs and ways of communicating. For example, in some networks you are encouraged to market your services and events, whereas in other networks it is so frowned upon that they will kick you out for doing it even once.

When you enter a new platform it is best just to observe. Figure out who is getting the most out of the network and who is the pariah. This will help you to figure out if it is the right network for you, how much time you want to invest there, and how you can leverage it.

Setting Up An Embassy

After you have spent enough time figuring out the cultural norms and customs of a particular country it is now time to set up your embassy. This is a statement that you are going to engage in the other country in a serious way.

When you do this it is important that you do a number of things.

How I Built My Practice White Paper

First, you need to have a plan. What are you looking for? Are you trying to learn something new, find business partners, or find customers? Just because the network might be useful doesn't mean that it will be useful for you.

By having a plan for what you want to gain from the new platform you are much more likely to get what you are looking for and you can do it in the most efficient manner.

I know you would never do this, but there are people out there who spend hours and hours on Facebook as a "marketing activity" but have no clear plan or goals so their activity doesn't equate to marketing. Just watching cat videos and getting into flame wars in comment threads will not advance your business goals.

When I join a new network generally have three goals: make connections with people I can learn from and work with, share knowledge and information as a service to the community, and to get people to "come to Jamaica" i.e. drive people towards my website.

Second, you need to behave like a good citizen. If you don't act like a good citizen not only can you get thrown out, but you can also damage your reputation in the world as a whole.

The Problem With Trying To Conquer The World Too Fast

A mistake that many new businesses make (as well as more mature businesses) is they spread themselves too thinly and try and expand too fast.

If you don't have things together on the homefront and lack a good infrastructure for your state-run media, it makes little sense to be running all over the world. Also, it is time consuming to learn the customs and norms of a network.

It is important to expand what you do it in a thoughtful and deliberate way. Even after being in business for close to 10 years I still barely have a consulate set up in Twitter and Facebook. I am a part of those communities. I spend a lot of time listening and learning and that is it.

The only true embassy that I have set up is in iTunes with my podcasts.

The goal is not to gain Twitter followers or Facebook likes. The goal is to grow your audience and your influence with that audience. I find that I am most successful when I am getting people to "come to Jamaica" and subscribe to the state-run media.

World Tour = Guest Speaking and Guest Posting

It is one thing to show up to another country and demonstrate that you are an expert in your field. It is a completely different thing to have the local government invite you in and use the state-run media to speak to their citizens and bill you as an expert.

That is exactly what happens when we are invited in to speak in person, or as a podcast guest, or write a guest post on someone else's site. The person in charge of that platform is turning to their audience that trusts them and saying, "Listen to this person; they have something important to share!"

When this happens, like all marketing opportunities, just participating in the opportunity isn't enough. You need to have a plan. You need to make sure they don't simply understand that you know your stuff, but also how to find you.

Conclusion

To sum it up, if I am going to be successful in my business I need to doing a few things:

- I need to be serving people in such a way that they can see the value in work that I am doing.
- I need to be growing my audience.
- I need to continue the conversation with my audience so that they come to realize that I am indispensable to their success.

It really is that simple. If I do those things then my business will be successful and will continue to grow.

But as with so much in life, just because they are simple does not mean they are easy. Simply understanding these concepts isn't enough. You need to have services that are desirable, you need to know where your potential customers gather, and you need to know how to sell effectively to them.

These are all skills that you can learn. As you learn those skills I hope the principles that are laid out above are helpful in helping you to craft a plan to use those skills in a meaningful way. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, but these principles will help you to create a plan that will work.

As I said at the beginning, I would love to hear your thoughts on this point of view. I am always wanting to learn more. You can email me directly at gene@howibuiltmypractice.com.